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# TO CAST STONES

By Hope Sawyer Buyukmihci

**"The Only Sin is Ignorance."**

**Anonymous**

**T**houghts about tolerance and ignorance came to me during the past deer season when I was forced to confront people engaged in activities which I abhor, but which they look upon as sport.

As usual, Unexpected Wildlife Refuge, here in southern New Jersey, was besieged by hordes of hunters who declared that by keeping them out of our woods we denied them their right to kill.

Some of our dedicated volunteers gave voice to feelings of outrage, aroused by the sight of red-coated men lined up next to the refuge while others drove deer toward them. It was neither fun for the deer nor for us, who tried to protect them. Still, when our people said, "I'd like to line them up and shoot them," or, "Why don't they shoot each other? It would only be fair," I winced. These hunters did not know what they were doing. They didn't need to be shot; they needed to be educated. Not by us, necessarily. Education comes at odd times, and in different ways.

I remember when I used to lift pet rabbits by the ears, out of ignorance. There was a time when I ate meat. During that time I met several vegetarians to whom

meat-eating was anathema. They did not condemn me, but steadfastly provided an example. Later, when a hunter pointed out the hypocrisy of my claiming to love animals while eating them, I became a vegetarian. I believe that the example of my vegetarian

friends had paved the way to new understanding, clinched by the hunter's words.

**S**everal wildlife photographers who take photos here at the refuge were once enthusiastic hunters with guns. It took sad experiences to teach them a better way.



photo by Edward Abbott

Two of them, for instance, after watching a deer they had shot die, switched from guns to cameras. What if I had shot them as criminals in the days when they were ignorant?

For more than 30 years I have maintained our wildlife refuge, dealing year after year with obscene language, hatred and threats. Now things have changed. Recently a game warden remarked, "People used to think you folks were kooks. Now they respect you."

I try to see their side. Though I heartily disagree with them, I know that they believe they are right, and believing thus, they naturally resent my stand.

Last fall one bowhunter, preparing to abandon his post just outside the refuge (because my presence inside would keep deer away), said, "I hope you lose something you like. Like your refuge." He walked away. No obscenity, no threats. He showed admirable restraint, setting me an example I would do well to follow when I'm tempted to explode. While contending with the faults of others, I must contend with my own faults. Not being without sin, I am in no position to cast stones. □ □