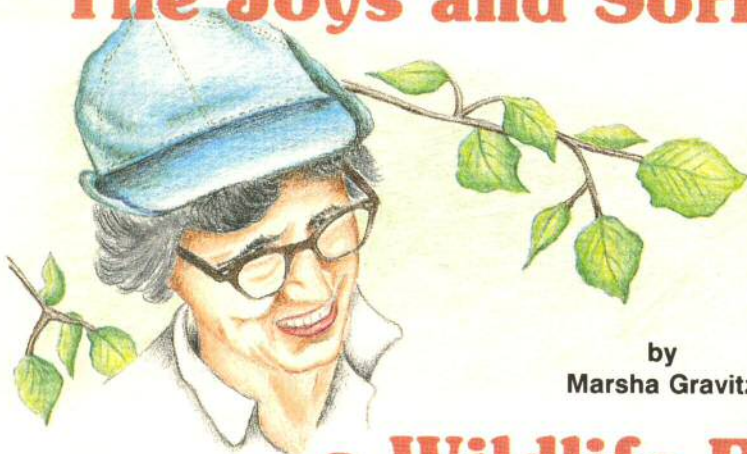


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The Joys and Sorrows of Owning



by
Marsha Gravitz

a Wildlife Refuge



Wiry and wary, Hope Sawyer Buyukmihci (pronounced approximately Bew-yewk-MUTCHA), a petite yet commanding figure, was patrolling her Unexpected Wildlife Refuge for trespassing poachers. Suddenly the serenity of the clear, crisp autumn day was pierced by a gunshot.

"I got one. Don't let it get away," shouted a boy. Racing toward the voice, Hope peered through tree branches and saw one boy grab the wounded quail while his companion knifed the bird.

"The bird won't die," the boy laughed, as he attempted to stuff a still-struggling bird into his bag.

As the boys walked on, Hope stayed hidden. She had no power to stop hunters in their legal pursuit of game outside the borders of her refuge. Her only recourse was enforcement of the "No Trespass" law, and she knew that if she patrolled openly, trespassers would enter boldly whenever she had passed by.

The foregoing incident illustrates the grief and frustration of owning a wildlife refuge.

"During the five months of the year when there are hunting seasons — from goose season in October through raccoon and fox season in March — our refuge is besieged by hordes of hunters who tear down our 'No Trespassing' signs and sometimes threaten to kill us," says Hope.

"We have been shot at, our woods have been set afire, and our mailbox obliterated. All this, not because we have interfered with anyone else's rights, but because we have tried to maintain our own rights, and the protection of the animals that live on our land. Hunters call us 'bleeding hearts,' and torment us by hanging rabbit entrails upon our fence, stuffing butchered fawns in our mailbox, and scattering headless quail beside our driveway."

Why don't Hope and her husband, Cavit, a metallurgist, seek the help of law enforcement officials?

"We try. Sometimes legal authorities tell us we don't have enough evidence. Even when we gather sufficient evidence, such as hunting license numbers, judges frequently decline to convict trespassers," says Hope.

In spite of the grief, Hope, agile and fit at 74, claims there are many joys in owning a wildlife refuge.

"Our refuge is a place of enchantment. The sight of a rabbit sitting up to wash his face on a dew-drenched morning fills me with joy," says Hope of the 450-acre refuge of swampy woodland and meadow she and Cavit purchased in 1961, and which became, in 1965, a nonprofit organization.

"Our land harbors nearly every animal indigenous to south New Jersey. It is peopled with fascinating creatures: raccoons and 'possums, chipmunks and squirrels, beavers and muskrats, foxes, rabbits, and deer. Marsh birds nest along the edges of the pond and a host of other birds inhabit the woods and fields."

Hope vigorously works to make life better for the animals who live on her refuge. She plants poplar sprouts for beavers, provides housing for bluebirds, clears trails, and frequently uses these trails to check for trespassers and other problems.

Where does Hope get her vigor? "I'm fueled by enthusiasm, love, and a vegan lifestyle," she explains. (Vegans abstain from meat, eggs, dairy products, leather, and other animal products.)

When asked how she and her family became vegans, Hope says, "During the early 60's, a neighbor in an adjoining field watched tolerantly as I was replacing shot-up 'No Trespassing' signs. He asked, 'You eat meat don't you? Cows and chickens? I eat deer and quail. What's the difference?' I tried to explain, but my arguments crumbled. It was not so much that I could not convince him, but that I could not convince myself. We eventually became vegetarians, then vegans."

Love of nature and animals has been in three generations of Hope's family. Her father, Edmund J. Sawyer, a wildlife artist and naturalist, established a reputation as the "dean of American bird artists." Her Turkish-born husband Cavit, in 1979, founded and still chairs the New Jersey Congress for Animals, a coalition which lobbies local and state governments for legislation to protect the area's fauna. Hope and Cavit are two reasons why New

Jersey outlawed in 1984 (effective in 1985) the steel-jaw leghold trap.

The Buyukmihci's son, Nedim, whose question at age 8, "What is a bluebird?" prompted the family to purchase the refuge, became a veterinarian in 1972. Dr. Ned Buyukmihci, API's advisor on institutional veterinary medicine, is associate professor of surgery/ophthalmology at the University of California, Davis, where he developed one of the first veterinary school courses on the ethics of animal use. In 1981, he co-founded, with Dr. Neil C. Wolff, the Association of Veterinarians for Animal Rights (see the Summer 1983 *Mainstream*). Sharing his parents' desire to outlaw the leghold trap, Dr. Buyukmihci testified, in August, 1984, on behalf of API at hearings on the federal anti-leghold trap bill, which did not pass in 1984.

Daughters Linda and Nermin are also active in the animal rights movement.

Although Hope champions the rights of all animals, she is especially devoted to beavers. With the motto, "They Shall Never Be Trapped Anymore," she founded in 1970, the Beaver Defenders, and edits the newsletter of this organization, which denounces the trapping of beavers for their fur and castoreum, used as a perfume fixative. Through this newsletter and Hope's three published books — *Unexpected Treasure* (1968), *Hour of the Beaver* (1970), and *Beaversprite* (co-authored with Dorothy Richards in 1977) — readers learn about beavers, as a species and as individuals.

An example of a real individualist was Chopper, an orphan beaver who came to live with the Buyukmihcis in 1974.

Having long dreamed of sharing their home with a beaver, the Buyukmihcis excavated a subterranean passage from the pond into their cellar 60 feet away, then built a ramp from the cellar into their living room, which was equipped with a wading pool, so that Chopper could enjoy human comforts and companionship, occasionally gnaw furniture legs, and still come and go freely.

"Everyone loved him and he loved everyone," says Hope.

In the end, though, Chopper's trusting nature proved to be his tragic flaw. He took to visiting a Girl Scout camp a few miles away, performing swimming stunts for a spell-bound audience. But one day, thinking a fisherman was another "friendly fellow," Chopper swam near his boat. Misunderstanding Chopper's intentions, the fisherman clubbed the little beaver to death with an oar while the horrified Girl Scouts shrieked on shore.

Just as this fisherman misunderstood Chopper, so do many people misunderstand beavers, according to Hope. That's why she uses every means possible to inform folks, especially those who complain about beaver dams causing flooding and property damage, that beavers are vital to ecological balance.

"Beavers encourage a high water table and the prevention of flood followed by drought. They also control soil erosion because the reservoirs created by beaver dams

slow the flow of water. I have observed that beavers spend much time shoring up the banks of streams by dredging mud and debris from the bottom," she explains.

Because of her special dedication to beavers, *The Philadelphia Inquirer/TODAY* (May 6, 1979) compared Hope to other women who have championed the rights of a particular species, such as the late Velma B. Johnston, more colorfully known as "Wild Horse Annie" because of her role in establishing the Wild Horse Act of 1971; and Beula Edmiston, the chairperson of the Save the Tule Elk Committee, who has worked fearlessly to establish an elk preserve.

Through writing, photography, and drawing, Hope helps people learn about wildlife, and at the same time gain insight into the needs and feelings of animals. She awed seven million readers with her true account of a father beaver who braved frigid currents to gnaw the ice which threatened his dam and family, published in *Family Circle* (January 1983).

Another technique she uses, which has become her trademark, is "chalk-talk," in popular demand by schools, libraries, and organizations. While describing true-life adventures of animals, Hope illustrates her words with vivid chalk drawings.

Cleveland Amory, founder and president of The Fund for Animals, refers to Hope as his "dear friend." He details her devotion to animals in *Man Kind?* (1974): "Hope found that not even thorough NO TRAPPING signs did any good. She had to thread the trails on her property. Then, even at night, she had to patrol, and when she found a thread broken, she knew she had to find the trapper or his traps before one of her semi-tame beavers found them."

Others have also recognized Hope's devotion to animals. In 1971 she won the Humanitarian of the Year award from the New Jersey Branch of the Humane Society of the United States. In 1984, Hope and Cavit won API's Founder's Medal for their "lifelong work on behalf of animals."

Although Hope admits that animals may not gain rights during her lifetime, she is not discouraged.

"Many who worked to abolish slavery did not live to reach their goal," she explains. "That goal was reached. Now other goals lead us on. How soon they will be reached depends on how many people will work toward that future where no creature will be a scapegoat for humans."

Visits to Unexpected Wildlife Refuge can be arranged by appointment. Also available are educational materials and membership information. Send stamped, self-addressed envelope — business size — to: Hope Sawyer Buyukmihci, Unexpected Wildlife Refuge, Newfield, NJ 08344.



Marsha Gravitz is a widely published freelance journalist and former associate editor of The Animals' Agenda. She has known and respected Hope Sawyer Buyukmihci for 21 years.