

CHOPPER

HOPE SAWYER BUYUKMIHCI

Chopper, a beaver kitten, was only two weeks old when his lodge and dam were dynamited by a man. Chopper's parents, brothers and sisters were killed. He was brought to a humane society where he was nursed with baby bottles and love until he was two months old. He was then brought to the Unexpected Wildlife Refuge in Newfield, NJ.

Our first thought was to raise Chopper to be wild and free. We tried to introduce him to October, a wild mother beaver who knew us, but she did not accept him. We dug a tunnel from our cellar 60 feet to the lake and lined it with culvert pipe. We cut a hole in our living room floor, made a ramp down to the cellar and built a lodge there where he could sleep. We made a place in the living room where he could play and sleep as he wanted. It had a den, a play area and a mortar pan with plumbing.

Chopper watched curiously as we installed the mortar pan and filled it with water. Then he jumped right in and drank, played and defecated. Next, he pulled the rubber stopper and drained the tub. One night after he flushed the water, he ate the stopper. We bought a marine drain with a screwed-in metal plug which he could not remove.

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Chopper did a lot of amazing things and delighted hundreds of people during his stay with us. He especially loved children. He used to wrestle with them and never got tired. He would swim in our lake, and come home to eat and play, and then go to sleep in his den. Sometimes he came through the cellar, other times he came home overland. We cut a trap door in the front porch and put a cowbell on the door. When he rang the bell my husband opened the door, knelt and let Chopper smell his face. Chopper always gave a high-pitched greeting.

He loved to play in the cove. With one hand I would flip him over in the water. He'd roll over and over, streak away under water and pop up elsewhere to dash back for more. We played this game many an afternoon among the waterlilies and loosestrife, while a pair of catbirds looked on from above, and a water snake swam in the shallows.

Chopper endeared himself to each of us, and to everyone who met him; his furry face with childish eagerness, his enthusiasm for food and play, his need for love at bedtime.

One day when I called to him to play in the cove, he did not come. I found him huddled in his den down in the cellar. When he came into the living room, he acted subdued. Had loneliness caught up with him? Was he ill? He ate little and slept a lot. Was Chopper pining?

Then one morning he dragged himself out from the ramp. I leaned to pet him. As he raised his hands to me, he whimpered and tears came to his eyes. I ran my hand down over his back. Beyond his left leg my fingers found a rough place in his fur. He winced and gave a cry. I discovered a gash nearly two inches long and a half inch deep.

The doctor came. He said it was too late to sew the wound, infection had set in. He was confident, however, that it would heal. "Put this medication on three times a day" he ordered, "and don't let water or dirt get in the wound."

"Personality Profile"

Each year we present a personality profile of a nonhuman animal to call attention to individuality within a species.

Discovery of animals as individuals can be the crucial step in appreciating them as feeling and thinking beings.

We closed off the ramp, put in a kennel and a small pool, and I devoted myself to keeping him clean and dry. A bit tricky, since a beaver defecates in water and slides himself along the floor like a dust mop. An inch of water, changed often, and a floor kept mopped with clean towels solved the problem. In two weeks he had recovered, and once more we let him free.

Chopper was with us a year and a half. For his Christmas we decorated a pine branch with goodies and watched as he devoured them one by one and finished by eating the branch - needles and all. When spring came, he began to spend more time in the lake where he often accompanied us as we paddled in the canoe. He liked to swim ahead, dive, and come up under the canoe or beside it.



Late in August, when Chopper was almost a year and a half old, we received a phone call from Camp Sacajawea, a girl scout camp three miles away. The director told us that a friendly beaver was trying to swim with the kids. Could it be Chopper? I went over and found Chopper in the camp pond and he rushed to the beach to greet me. As I knelt, he put his paws on my knee and started to eat from my hand, to the delight of the youngsters. I thought he had gone there by mistake, so I took him back home, where he fell asleep in

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his pen. Before my husband went to bed that night, he put fresh poplar and a dish of fruit in his pen. During the night, he heard Chopper eating and making rustling noises. At 5:30 the next morning, Chopper was gone.



That day, the girl scouts called again. They said Chopper was there once more, playing and swimming with the girls. To go to the camp, he must have travelled a mile downstream, through a neighbor's land; crossed a road; gone another half mile; veered to follow another stream for a mile and a half; crossed another road; climbed a dike; and then swam in the lake for a quarter mile to the girl scout beach. This time we let him stay.

Three days later, girl scout leaders, in tears, brought



Cavit Buyukmihci feeding beaver.

Chopper's body home. They told us he had played with the girls the day before and the camp director had gone in the water to get pictures of him, when the little beaver grabbed his legs and urged him to swim. The next morning the campers, who were due to leave camp, came to shore to say goodbye to Chopper only to witness a trespassing fisherman beat the beaver to death with an oar. The man threw Chopper's body on shore, saying "This thing tried to climb in my boat."

My husband wrote: "All I can do is try and visualize his last moments. He might have thought it was me in the boat. He might have come to greet me, and was met with a blow over the head. He could not understand; kept coming back over and over to say 'I am Chopper, your son, why are you hitting me?' Until he died, he showed his friendship."

AUTHORS NOTE:

Since that time, camp Sacajawea personnel have fenced and posted the grounds, including the pond, and are enforcing a No Trespassing rule. They have seen evidence of beavers around the pond and are hoping that they will decide to stay.

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See "Dealing Humanely with Problem Wildlife"
for Hope's biographical sketch.