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**A**s a teenager I didn't know what I wanted to do. My mind was full of romantic notions. Brought up in the country, I loved nature, but fled from it to find work in big cities—Pittsburgh, Philadelphia and Minneapolis. When I married a foreign student I was thrilled with the prospect of going with him to his native Turkey. Pictures of shaggy donkeys, veiled women and minareted mosques filled my mind.

In Turkey, however, it didn't take long for the repressive culture to cure me of illusions. The scenery was beautiful, but donkeys were beaten in the streets. The minarets, so graceful to look at, signaled devotion to a tradition which sacrificed animals and kept women down. Veiled women, although picturesque, lived by the old proverb: Happiness for a woman is under her husband's foot.

I was expected to sit behind lace curtains, looking into the street without being seen. All of the exotic things I had expected to explore were forbidden.

During long months of trying to adjust, my mind filled itself with different pictures—less romantic but more down to earth. My dream now was of a house with a garden, and a yard where the children could have a dog, and space to play. My husband and I saved

## A SON'S QUESTION

By Hope Sawyer Buyukmihci

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money, and after five years returned to the United States. The children had their dog, and with my longing for far places cured, I could appreciate simple things. On our suburban acres I felt content—until one day my son, then eight years old, asked me: "What's a bluebird, Mom?"

Shocked, I realized that he and his sisters had never seen a bluebird, that small member of the thrush family called Harbinger of

Spring and The Bluebird of Happiness. In my childhood, bluebirds flitting in and out of holes in gnarled apple trees were part of every springtime.

**M**y son's question jolted me, and I said to my husband, "Let's buy wild land with a stream, and put up birdhouses. Our kids can't grow up without bluebirds."

It took almost two years to find suitable

land—several acres with a stream and woods, bordered by open land. Bluebirds are birds of the woods' edge; they like the open, but need nearby trees in which to perch and find insects for food. Old orchards where no poison sprays are used and where rotted trunks provide nesting cavities, are ideal habitat.

We put up a dozen birdhouses with 1½-inch entrance holes, and waited. It wasn't long before a pair of bluebirds arrived and built their nest in one of the houses.

That first small acreage was the nucleus of Unexpected Wildlife Refuge (off Unexpected Road in southern New Jersey). It is now over 500 acres of wild land, where the children have grown up knowing bluebirds as well as many other forms of native wildlife. Thanks to my son's fateful question when he was eight, I've found my special place, close to nature with all its mystery and fascination. □ □

(Ed. Note: Unexpected Wildlife Refuge, Inc. was founded in 1968 and is a non-profit organization. It is supported financially by private funds and maintained by the dedicated commitment of Hope Sawyer Buyukmihci and her group of volunteers. Contributions would be welcome and can be sent to PO Box 765, Newfield, NJ 08344.)

