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NEIGHBORS



WITH WOOD THAT SHE CUT stacked behind her, Hope Buyukmihci sits on a stump at the Unexpected Wildlife Refuge. The 400-acre site in

Franklin Township, which Buyukmihci and her husband started 30 years ago, is especially devoted to protecting beavers. Story on Page 4.

Special to The Inquirer / BOB HILL

Providing a refuge for beavers

NEIGHBORS IN THE NEWS / Page 18



DISTINGUISHED TEACHING has won this Temple professor a \$1,000 award.

POLICE REPORT / Page 6

Lawn sheep back in folds

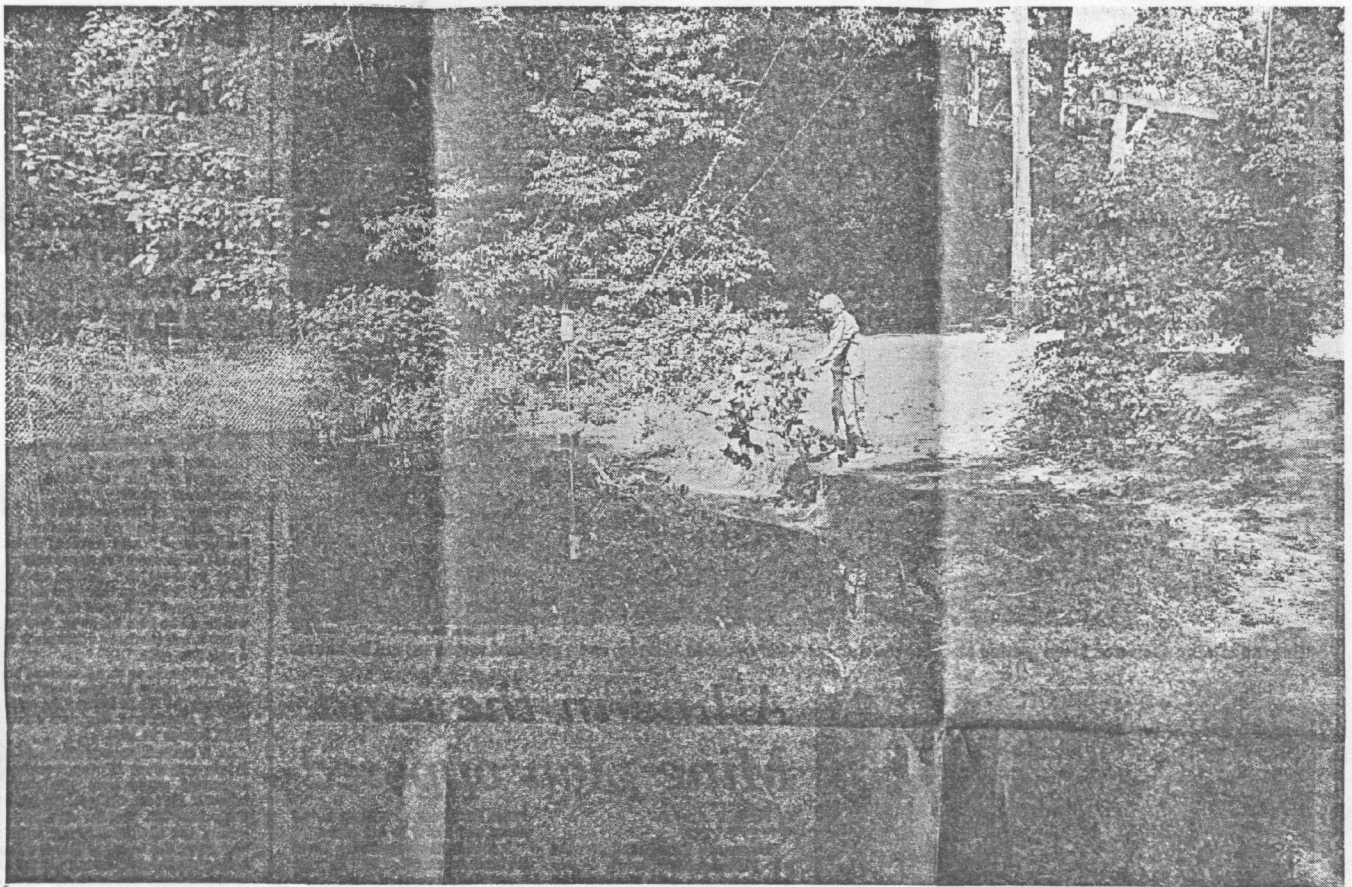
EDUCATION / Page 8

State college could face cuts

LIVING / Page 28

Taking a plunge with tubing

COVER STORY



At Unexpected Wildlife Refuge, Hope Buyukmihci tosses some tasty branches with leaves for the beavers protected on the 400-acre site in Franklin Township. Special to The Inquirer / BOB HILL



Buyukmihci has written three books on the refuge and about beavers.

Deep in the dark, green Pinelands, a place of refuge for the beaver

By Douglas A. Campbell
Inquirer Staff Writer

It was not a typical day at Unexpected Wildlife Refuge, although it began as one, deep in these 400 acres of Franklin Township.

When, at 5:20 a.m., she had finished washing the dishes left from the night before, Hope Buyukmihci turned off the kitchen light. Leaving her Pinelands home darkened, she pushed open the aluminum storm door decorated with a "Beaver Defenders" bumper sticker. In the sand yard past the door, night had lost its inky-black, deep-woods grip on the sky, the air smelled of warm rain and one bird was beginning to raise its voice from a treetop.

She carried a few scoops of dried corn in an aluminum pot. She went past the tulip tree — as big around as an oil drum — that rises by the picture window of her lime-green cottage, and she crossed a place where, four feet below the sand, a 15-inch pipe tunnels from the cottage basement, directly under the tulip tree and into a 40-acre pond — a 60-foot pipe whose mouth opens under the pond's surface and

A lifelong love of animals has led Hope Buyukmihci to this place in the woods where the creatures are invited indoors.

which was installed so beavers could, if they wished, stay indoors with the Buyukmihcis.

She put some handfuls of corn into a bird feeder near the east corner of her house, once the shack of a cranberry bog caretaker. Then she turned toward the pond. A flock of Canada geese waddled up the bank toward her. Buyukmihci — her name is Turkish (Byoo-YOOK-MUH-chuh) for big blacksmith — cast several handfuls of corn across the sand driveway, down the bank and onto the part of the pond's surface that was not covered with lilies.

The corn pelted the water like large raindrops.

The geese scrambled, their heads darting to peck the corn and each other.

Buyukmihci noticed that the poplar boughs she had left on the bank the night before were gone. The beavers had visited.

She left the pond, scattering corn past a Toyota pickup with a decal of a beaver on its side and up near the lime green outhouse with a vent hole the shape of a beaver in its door. Then she took the pot of corn back into the house.

It was not a typical morning. In the darkened house deep in the woods 35 miles east of Philadelphia, she had guests.

Buyukmihci, a slight woman with hazel eyes and gray hair chopped off below her ears is slightly hunched after 78 years, but her moves are as quick and fluid as a young mother's. She moved quietly to the door of a bedroom and, in a cheerily lackadaisical voice, announced the morning to her older brother, Laurance Sawyer and his wife, Adelaide, visiting from Ring-

gold, Ga.

This would be a day of sibling revelry, of reminiscences of their childhood in the Adirondack foothills, of the parents who, through divergent paths, taught them to care for the lives around them.

It would also be a day of good-natured sibling rivalry. Laurance had reported the nesting of bluebirds in one of the refuge birdhouses. Hope thought the occupants were flycatchers. Before this day was done, she would find out which of them was the fraudulent ornithologist.

But at 5:30 a.m., there were chores to be done. Far through the woods, along a sand road and mossy trails, there were wood ducks and ruffed grouse to be fed, and Buyukmihci still had a bag of corn in her pocket.

Buyukmihci and her late husband, Cavit (JAH-vit), a native of Turkey, started the refuge in 1961, hoping to teach their three children about nature. Now, the refuge has 10 miles of trails, some consisting of reinforced concrete "planks" poured by Cavit and laid across swamps and streams to form an elevated walkway about one foot wide. The refuge has more than 100 birdhouses, several photography blinds, regular visitors, and 200 members in the United States and Canada who pay \$10 a year for a newsletter and who volunteer to patrol the refuge during hunting season. Once Buyukmihci's private property, the refuge is now owned by a nonprofit foundation.

The Beaver Defenders is the name of the refuge's newsletter, produced quarterly by Hope Buyukmihci in her studio in the southeast corner of the cottage. There is a large stained-glass picture of a beaver in one window of the studio, and the desk, a file cabinet and a small table are piled high with books and papers.

(The studio is a nook off the living room, where there is a hole in the floor, a door for beavers that have crawled through the tunnel into the cellar and want to climb into Buyukmihci's home. There is also a filling-station bell on the wall, attached to an outdoor hose — an alarm that awakens the beaver defender if vandals or hunters are prowling.)

From her studio, Buyukmihci has written three commercially published books, two about her refuge and a third that she co-authored with another woman who owned a beaver sanctuary. (Her favorite writers include Steinbeck, deMaupassant and Thoreau.)

"It was always my dream to be an artist and writer," she said. Now, "my main concern is saving animals, not just painting pictures of them." So her writing now includes responses to letters she gets "almost every day saying, 'Help! How do I stop beavers from flooding the road or cutting trees?'"

People "start hating beavers because they interfere with their plans," Buyukmihci says. "Also, beavers have a bad name because they're rodents. Some people think any rodents are bad."

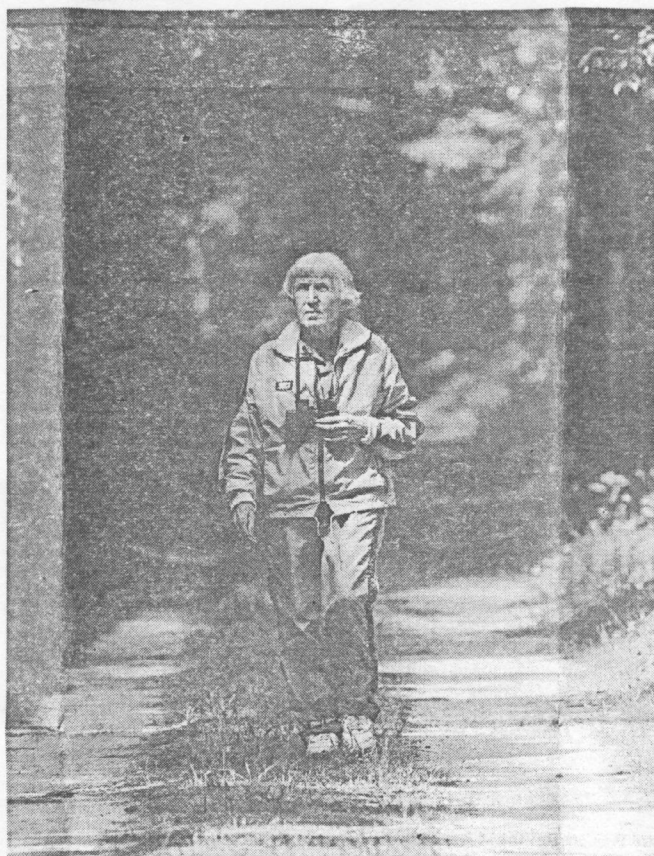
In a leaflet that she sends to people who inquire, Buyukmihci lists the reasons to protect the lard-bellied mammals with the chisel-like teeth, a paddle for a tail and a propensity for building dams, sometimes hundreds of feet long, that can flood vast valleys.

In their work to find food and safety, the beavers conserve water, prevent flood and drought, control soil erosion, keep waterways open, control aquatic growth, thin tree stands, help prevent forest fires, enhance habitat for other wildlife and help keep water tables high, the leaflet explains.

Beavers also "provide mankind with an unparalleled opportunity for study and companionship," Buyukmihci says.

A few days before her guests arrived, Buyukmihci stood kneading a big ball of wheat bread dough in a bowl on her kitchen table and explained how she became a self-appointed warden who fearlessly patrols her land for poachers.

The story, which brother Laurance would tell later, begins when her father, Edmund Joseph Sawyer, was in the fifth grade. The teacher told the class they had 20 minutes to



Buyukmihci writes a refuge newsletter that seeks to improve the beaver's image.

list all the birds they could and to write as much as they could about each one. Young Edmund loved birds, so he started with the robin and wrote copiously about its physique, habitat, diet, mating habits ... until the 20 minutes had expired.

The teacher held up Edmund's paper to the class as an example of an uninformed student. He had listed only one bird in 20 minutes.

Edmund left his Michigan school that day never to return. He became a renowned ornithologist and bird artist.

Then he met Ellen May Town, a classically trained pianist from the Adirondack foothills in New York and a woman with a passion for religion. They fell in love.

"When you fall in love, you lose all perspective," Buyukmihci said, after she had divided the dough ball into seven lumps and placed them in seven small baking tins sitting on the table's oilcloth.

Edmund Sawyer, spending his time in the forest watching birds, earned little money, not enough to support his growing family. There was no birth control, and Ellen Sawyer, who had three children in quick succession, feared the deepening poverty into which she was sinking, and so the marriage ended.

"We were very poor," Buyukmihci said. "My mother supported us by selling baked goods door to door." She also hung wallpaper and gave piano lessons in the rural Adirondacks town where they lived.

Edmund expressed his love for his children by sending them bird books and drawings and some art supplies.

Ellen contributed some raw art materials: the paper from used flour bags, tracing paper

made by soaking paper in kerosene. And she taught her children to love animals. But "my mother was mostly concerned about my future soul," Buyukmihci said.

"I loved what my father loved," Buyukmihci said.

Buyukmihci's formal education was in the parochial schools of her mother's religion. She spent two years at a college run by the church. But she could not afford to stay, and her father, who had connections at Cornell University's ornithology department, arranged for her to work there part time as an illustrator. To make ends meet, she worked as a waitress, as well.

One day during World War II, Cavit Buyukmihci, who had been sent by the Turkish government to learn engineering in the United States, came to the restaurant. And Hope, who had left her church, fell in love with the Muslim who could speak little English.

Apparently, they did not lose perspective. Hope and Cavit had three children and spent five years in Turkey before returning to the United States to make their home on three acres in Franklin. Cavit found work as a metallurgist. Hope raised the children.

"I wasn't a born mother. The babies happened. I didn't like them when they were little. I liked them when they were old enough to reason," she said. Still, she said, she had a nurturing instinct toward both her children and animals. "My great joy in having children was in encouraging them in their love for animals and helping animals."

When she discovered that her children did not know what a bluebird was, Hope wanted to move the family deeper into the forest, closer to nature. She and Cavit found an 85-acre

abandoned cranberry bog off of Unexpected Road. The price was \$40 an acre. The cottage was a shack. They took the deal.

Cavit added a bathroom and two bedrooms, and the family moved in, ready to observe nature.

What Hope saw was evidence of beavers. "I had never seen a beaver before," she said, after checking to see how the little bread loaves were rising. "I determined to make friends with them."

At first, she saw only a place where beavers had been eating. As an offering of friendship, she cut poplar branches that she left for the beavers.

"One morning when I went there, a beaver was still there," Buyukmihci recalled. It was a nursing female, and in time the animal became certain enough of the human that she brought her "kittens" with her.

Buyukmihci was able to lure the kittens into her lap with poplar boughs, and the mother would sit near her, unthreatened. After several years, even the timid father beaver, having swum within 10 feet and gazed into the woman's eyes, allowed Buyukmihci to babysit the kittens while he and his mate went upstream to feed.

Buyukmihci watched the beavers in all seasons. In the winter moonlight, she watched a pair of foxes dancing atop the snow-covered beaver lodge, "twittering" a love song.

She sat atop the lodge and listened through its vent hole as the beaver kittens sang inside "like the humming of a barbershop quartet," their voices rising in harmony.

She saw the father gnaw ice to form a hole in the dam so that water would not back up into the lodge and drown the family.

She watched a beaver kitten swim through a group of adult otters, supposedly its natural enemy.

And when beavers were sick or injured, she and her family took them into their cottage to nurse them to health.

All this time, Cavit was becoming an amateur naturalist.

"He would do anything to protect his family, and when we got the refuge, it was like his extended family," Buyukmihci said.

Cavit retired in 1987 to spend more time at the refuge to which, over the years, the family had added more than 300 acres. But he soon died. Buyukmihci's son, Nedim, 43, is a professor of veterinary science in California. Daughter Linda, 41, is married and living in Allentown, Pa. Daughter Nermin, 39, is single and works in a Pennsylvania factory.

Only Hope is left to oversee Unexpected, a job that takes from dawn to dusk.

After making her first rounds of the refuge, Hope Buyukmihci heated water for tea and toasted some wheat bread. Breakfast was at 6:30 a.m., and at the table, Hope questioned her brother, a nationally known builder of bluebird houses, about the birdhouse where he had said there were bluebirds.

It was raining now, so they sat and talked for a couple of hours. They spoke frequently about their father, whose work inspired that of some current wildlife artists. "I wish I had asked Dad more" about his life, said Edmund Sawyer's octogenarian son, sitting below a two-by-four-foot painting of wood ducks by his father.

The rain eased, and Hope and Laurance took a walk to settle the issue: bluebird vs. flycatcher. On the pathway, Hope chided her brother about his trick photography. (One picture shows his wife wearing a bluebird nest on her head.)

Laurance reminded Hope that a magazine editor had rejected as "fantasy" her story, based on her observation, about seeing a stag traveling with a fawn.

When Laurance inadvertently walked through a patch of wildflowers, she derided him as an "amateur naturalist."

Arriving at the disputed bluebird house, they lifted it from atop its pipe stand, then removed the top of the house to peer inside.

Huddled in the bottom of the house were three tiny, gray flycatcher babies.

Hope Buyukmihci smiled the superior smile of a sibling with the upper hand.