

PROFILES

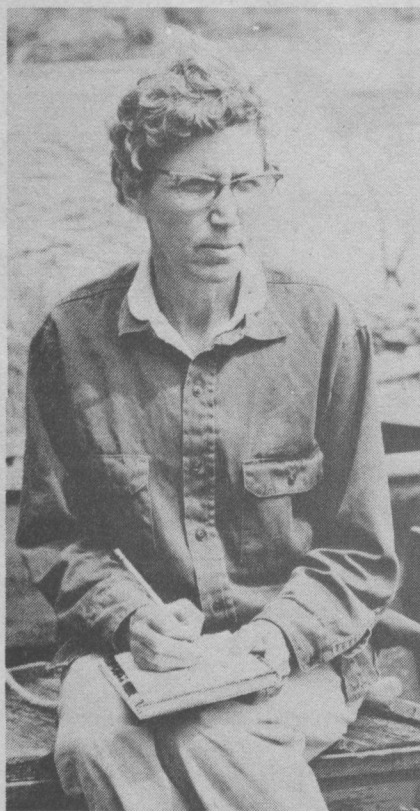
PROVIDING SANCTUARY FOR ANIMALS AGENDA PROFILES BY MARSHA GRAVITZ

UNEXPECTED WILDLIFE REFUGE

Tension mounts in the courtroom as two men approach the judge. One man, Cavit Buyukmihci, stands straight and attentive before the judge. The other man, Cavit's neighbor, shifts nervously from one foot to the other.

"It is unfortunate that you cannot live in harmony as neighbors," the judge says, "I've decided not to fine or jail either of you. But if you appear in my court again, I will be severe in my judgment."

Being in court is not new for the Buyukmihcis. Nor is being harassed by neighbors and poachers. They were considered outsiders when they purchased Unexpected Wildlife Refuge in 1961, and they are still considered outsiders by a number of area residents, mostly because of their belief that animals have rights.



Hope Buyukmihci

"We have had to post our land, replace torn down or shot up signs, mend cut fences, and patrol to keep out trespassers," says Hope. "We have been shot at, and 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 rights of the animals who live on our land."

"Compared to other experiences we've had in court, this was a victory," says Hope, a slender, agile woman of 69, whose voice is soft, but determined. "I've hidden in my own woods and watched for hunters, caught them and brought them to court, and then watched as a judge acted as a lawyer for the defense."

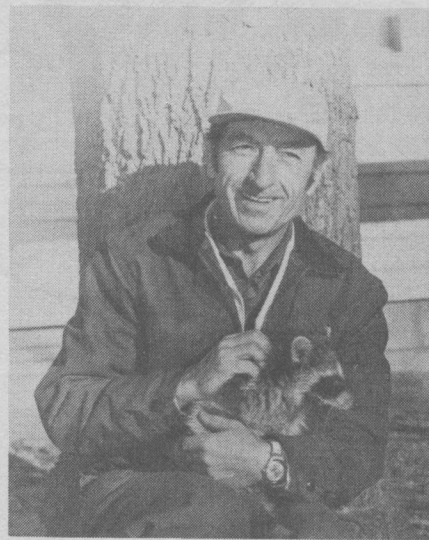
"Doesn't this make you despair that justice will never prevail?" I ask.

"I try my best to be fair and just," answers Hope. "I do not let myself feel despair. That would destroy me and accomplish nothing."

Turning to Cavit, I ask, "You have been beaten and threatened while patrolling your refuge. How do you endure such treatment on your own property?"

"Unfortunately, the hunters and trappers do not comprehend our feelings toward animals," answers Cavit, an athletic man of 59, who frequently places first in his age division in races for runners. "They feel that animals are created for the benefit of people. To them, there is no such thing as animals' rights. They are raised with this doctrine and when someone prevents them from enjoying their so-called sport, they become abusive to that person. We endure beatings and abuse to show poachers we are sincere about upholding the rights of animals. We hope to make a dent in their thinking."

Cavit and Hope met when they were both attending Cornell Univer-



Cavit Buyukmihci with a wounded raccoon about to be released.

sity. In 1953, they returned to Cavit's native Turkey. There, Hope noted how men regarded themselves as masters of both women and animals.

After five years, the Buyukmihcis returned to the United States. They eventually purchased 300 acres of marshland in New Jersey, which became Unexpected Wildlife Refuge. Their refuge is home to beavers, deer, songbirds, and many other varieties of wildlife.

The Buyukmihcis raised their three children, Nedim, Linda, and Nermin, on their refuge. "Cavit and I developed a greater respect for animals as we raised our children," says Hope. "Instead of squelching their concern for animals, we fostered it, and let them lead us to better things."

Now that their children are adults and no longer live at Unexpected, Hope and Cavit maintain the refuge through their own relentless efforts, and through the help of others who support their work. "We spend many hours mowing and trimming trails," says Cavit. "We use these trails to observe nature and to patrol for poachers."

What do the Buyukmihcis emphasize to those who visit their refuge?

Hope answers, "I emphasize respect for all life, and refraining from disturbing either the animals or their environment. I call attention to the intricate system of nature, and how each is part of all." Cavit answers, "I emphasize wildlife as my equal. I tell visitors that a wild animal caring for young reminds me of my efforts to raise my own kids."

Although the Buyukmihcis care for injured and orphaned wildlife, they release these animals as soon as they are able to care for themselves. "Although I would like to cuddle every animal, I suppress this feeling and treat them as neighbors, with respect," says Cavit.

After enjoying several delicious vegan meals at the Buyukmihcis', I ask how they became vegans. "During our second hunting season, in the early '60s, a neighbor in an adjoining field watched tolerantly as I replaced shot-up 'No Trespassing' signs," Hope begins. "The neighbor 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."

Cavit's mother came to live with the Buyukmihcis in 1975. Although she had eaten meat all her life, she too adopted the vegan diet. "My mother's attitudes toward animals have changed, as have mine," says Cavit.

Although Hope and Cavit devote much of their time to their refuge, they each have other areas of interest. Cavit is president of the New Jersey Congress for Animals and second Vice-President of the American Vegan Society. Hope uses her talents for writing, drawing and photography to encourage animal rights. Her work has appeared in various publications, and she has had three books published.

Hope and Cavit believe that humane education should be a top priority of the animal rights movement. "Nearly without exception, children have a natural fondness and genuine sympathy for animals, and appreciate animals' beauty and joy of living," says Hope. Cavit adds, "Legislation is only necessary during the education period. If we make people aware that meat and other animal products are not necessary to our well-being, and that the animals have just as much right to live as people, we will minimize cruelty to animals."

their fear of people," she told me, "once they have faith in someone, they give their trust completely." Dorothy sat on the bank of the beaver pond and waited until the animals knew her and trusted her enough to eat apples from her hand. Each beaver, she found, was an individual with a special personality. She came to love them, and to realize that she would dedicate her life to saving them from merciless killing.

Although Dorothy has earned the trust of many of the beavers who have lived on her land, she does not attempt to tame them. She wishes that the beavers would stay within the boundaries of her sanctuary to avoid being trapped. But their avoidance of incest makes them travel in search of mates.

Dorothy emphasizes to the thousands of people who visit Beaversprite: "I try to make visitors aware of the beaver's important place in the ecosystem." She adds, "I tell them that floods are prevented wherever beavers are allowed to inhabit the headwaters of streams. Also that beaver ponds conserve water by forcing it to seep into the surrounding land rather than running off in torrents, thereby benefitting the land in times of drought. Most of all, I try to make them aware of the abundance of other creatures who profit by a source of water in which to drink, swim, feed and live."

Dorothy laments the lack of people with compassion and empathy, "We need humane education that will overcome long-established negative attitudes." At 89, Dorothy is still going strong. She contemplates the future of Beaversprite, "My work has been only a beginning. Young hands are growing up and taking hold, and they'll go on when I leave. I hope that the rolling, wooded acres of Beaversprite will always be a sanctuary."

Editor's note: Marsha Gravit writes about animal rights issues for International Eco Features Syndicate. She has had articles published in leading education, health and alternative magazines.

BEAVERSPRITE SANCTUARY'S DOROTHY RICHARDS

Dorothy Richards has dedicated almost 50 years to making Beaversprite a refuge for animals.

Born in 1895, Dorothy grew up in the Mohawk Valley of New York State. Before marrying, Dorothy and her husband, Al, decided not to bring more children into an already overpopulated world. "Our species had taken to ravishing the land to feed billions of people and poisoning the earth and the animals to make room for overcrowded humans and their insatiable desires," explains Dorothy.

The Richards resided in the foothills of the Adirondacks. It was a perfect place for beavers, and yet there were none in the state of New York.

They had been killed for their fur and castoreum, a glandular secretion used in perfumes. Then, in 1953, the Richards were given a pair of beavers imported from Pennsylvania by the State Department of Environmental Protection.

The Richards' devotion to beavers began with that one pair, whom they named Samson and Delilah. They simply protected them and let them live. The beavers dammed the spring that the Richards called Middlesprite, and then lived naturally, producing litter after litter of kits.

As Dorothy observed this pair, she learned to respect them. "Although beavers take a long time to overcome