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By FRANK ROSSI



### Paying price for animals' sake

If you've ever seen what a shotgun slug can do to flesh — it makes a hole the size of a nickel going in and an opening as big as a cantaloupe on its way out — you might have some small understanding of what Hope Buyukmihci has faced in 23 years.

Men have pointed guns at her, they have threatened to kill her, they have called her filthy names. One fired a round at the feet of Hope's husband, Cavit. Hope Buyukmihci has incurred violence from men who under other circumstances are moral and ethical, family men who praise God on Sunday and threaten to kill defenseless people the opening day of hunting season.

Hope and Cavit Buyukmihci own 350 acres in Newfield, South Jersey. The land is mostly swamp, but there is a pond and some forest, and the Buyukmihcis' greatest desire has always been that their land be a safe place for animals.

To make it work, they have put their safety on the line.

#### A kind soul

It was early in the morning and a little cold in Hope's house. Too early in the year to start the wood stove. She had a sweater on against the chill. She is thin and wiry and over 50; her straw-colored hair is turning gray.

Rarely can a person be described as kind, but that seems to be the only way to describe her. She has no interest in anger and hate. Maybe because she has looked at the problem from her adversaries' point of view and she understands.

She believes what she believes, and it nourishes her. Her tolerance runs deep.

"My father was a naturalist almost to the exclusion of everything else. But he couldn't help falling in love and getting married. He couldn't hold a 9-to-5 job. He wanted to be out in the woods painting. He couldn't stand the kids crying."

Hope's mother was a musician and a music teacher who had to give the best of it up when she married Hope's father. Birth control was mostly a myth in those times, and Hope's mother gave birth or miscarried every year until she finally left her husband.

Her mother resented her husband, and she tried to pass it on to her children. But in the end Hope loved her mother and her father.

#### Common ground

Hope met Cavit Buyukmihci when he was an engineering student at Cornell. He was a Muslim from Turkey; she was a Christian. They explored each other's beliefs and came to the common ground of both teachings: the golden rule.

Led by Hope, they grew into the way they now live. First they bought an old cranberry bog, 85 acres, because Hope was interested in bird watching. From the start she posted the land and fenced it to keep out hunters.

But they always came, and she always was there to ask them to leave. One season she met a hunter. They talked. "You don't believe in hunting?" he said.

"No," she answered.

"You eat meat? You wear leather shoes?" he said. That was true, she said.

Then the hunter said, "I eat deer and quail and you eat cows and chickens. What's the difference?"

She knew he had her. That day Hope Buyukmihci stopped eating meat. To Hope, that was a big part of her growth.

#### A refuge

The Buyukmihci wildlife refuge has grown to 350 acres and contains every species native to New Jersey except bobcat and black bear.

Hope bundled up and tied a babushka around her head, and we walked down a path over solid ground and through swamp.

"We didn't envision what was coming," she said. "It's like raising a child. It has its rewards. And that's the way with this refuge. It's like a growing child. You don't know what it's gonna be like. You have it, you love it and then you protect it."

"Like I said, when we first put the signs up, they were all torn down. Then people would come and threaten to kill us."

The day and her brisk pace warmed her, and she removed the babushka. She talked about the baby Canada geese that were born deformed on her pond and how they could not fly and how they lived their whole lives there. She talked about the red foxes and the gray foxes, the flying squirrel and her beavers.

Some hunting season was going to begin in a few days, and Hope was getting ready to patrol. Cavit was in Turkey visiting his family and probably wouldn't be around for the start.

"Why didn't you go with him?" I asked.

"I've traveled," Hope Buyukmihci said. "I don't ever want to leave here. One lifetime isn't enough to see what's here."