A SON'S QUESTION

By Hope Sawyer Buyukmihci

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As 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 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.

My 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.)

ALTERNATIVES USED IN LASER SURGERY TRAINING

At the Annual Otolaryngic (having to do with the ear and larynx) Conference, alternatives to the use of live animals were promoted in a workshop for physicians who perform laser surgery. The workshop provided doctors with the opportunity to get hands-on, clinical experience with soft tissue application of laser technology. In place of live animals, isolated tissues from human and animal cadavers, as well as inanimate objects, were used to demonstrate different techniques and models of laser surgery.

Physicians were able to use human and animal tissues for assessing target sites in surgery and to perform practice procedures. While the non-animate models demonstrated the different actions of the laser on moist and non-moist surfaces, both the inanimate objects and cadaver tissue samples illustrated the degree of "burns" that can be expected from different topical conditions during laser surgery.

In addition to practical benefits, the decision to use alternatives came from an understanding of economic advantages those methods hold. The coordinators of the workshop stated that significant cost reduction was realized by using alternative methods for the procedural training. For instance, the costs of housing and caring for animals, as well as prolonged experimental preparations, were eliminated by using alternate methods.

While the workshop coordinators were happy with the methods used in the training workshop, it was the participants who gave the strongest indication that the alternatives were useful. At the end of the workshop, they were asked to assess the experience in a number of areas. The overall reaction was that the laboratory "materials" were good to excellent. The physicians also felt that the information and practice they received would enhance their future performance.

The use of human and animal tissue is becoming more widespread as those in the research community look toward alternatives for practical and financial benefits. While the burden of *using* human tissue falls on the research community, the burden of *supplying* it falls on our shoulders. (Readers can receive a humane research donor card from The AAVS which can be used to indicate that their tissues be used for research.) ■

THE HUMANE RESEARCH Donor Card

I would like to spare animals from suffering in scientific and medical research after my death.

The burden of supplying human tissue falls on our shoulders.

SAO PAULO, BRAZIL: BULLFIGHTS AND RODEOS BANNED

Mayor Paulo Salim Maluf passed a bill in May banning bullfights and rodeos in the city of Sao Paulo. More than 100 of these events were held in 1992. WSPA has been lobbying for more than a year to see them come to an end.

Now let's hope this ban spreads throughout Brazil. ■

ANIMAL WELFARE ACT VIOLATIONS

At the close of fiscal year June 1992, USDA-APHIS disclosed that fines in the amount of $213,350 had been assessed against violators of the Animal Welfare Act.

APHIS is responsible for enforcing the Act which encompasses the humane care and treatment of animals that are transported commercially, sold as pets, used in research facilities or exhibited for commercial gain. Violations of the Act were found in the standards established for housing, transportation, record keeping, veterinary care, shelter and food. While this was an increase in violations of 187 percent over 1991, much more must be done. ■