

*MY MEMORIES OF GREY OWL*

Grey Owl became famous internationally. He lectured on the threat to wildlife, forests and to the native people. He believed that someday the forests would be disappearing and animals killed when it wasn't necessary. And this was in the 1930's. Grey Owl lectured in Great Britain, Canada and the United States to very large audiences. During all this fame, he claimed to be an Indian. It had been a childhood dream of his to be an Indian.

Grey Owl was born Archibald Stansfeld Belaney, in Hastings, England in 1888. His father was originally from Scotland, and his mother was from England. His father was an alcoholic, and could never hold down a job, and his mother was a teenager. So his Grandmother and his two aunts brought him up in their home. When Archie was only five, his father left for the United States to work, and he never saw him again. His father died in Mexico. His mother lived in London, and he didn't see her very often.

Archie went to school in Hastings and was a very good pupil. But he was a very lonely boy, and spent all the time he could in the woods behind his home, playing cowboys and Indians with friends. He was always the Indian. He often just went out there alone, and brought home little live things, like snakes and mice. He kept them in the attic of their home, and quite often took a snake to school in his pocket. I am sure the teachers loved this. He had a very strict home life living with three older women. They taught him to play the piano, his favorite music being classical.

When Archie was 17, he talked his aunts into letting him come to Canada, as it was a dream of his to see the wild of Canada in the North. In March of 1906, he arrived in Toronto and worked in Eatons store until he had saved enough money to go North.

He arrived in Timagami and lived with the Ojibway Indians on

Bear Island. He was tutored by the elders and trappers, and he learned the Indian language. I think because he learned the Indian language, he eventually lost his English Accent. When I knew him he had no English accent whatever. They taught him to trap and to paddle a canoe, and was able to be a guide to tourists, mainly American that came North to trap and hunt. Archie went trapping with the Indians to help provide food for the people on the Island. He got along well with the Indians there, and met a young girl, Angele Eugenia. They were married in 1910, and had a daughter called Agnes. But Archie, at 22, was not ready to settle down with a family. He left there and went to Temiskaming for awhile. He then heard that his Grandmother was ill, and he loved her very much, so went to England to visit her. They found it hard to accept the change in Archie, and he was not ready to go back to that life in Hastings. So he returned to Canada to Temiskaming and Biscotasing in the North.

When the first world war broke out, Archie went to Digby, N.S. and joined the Canadian Army. He was stationed in France and was wounded in the foot. He was sent back to London to a hospital there, where they removed one toe. His Mother visited him at the hospital, and he was then sent to a convalescent hospital in Hastings. While there he met a childhood sweetheart, and they got married in 1917. When he told her he was returning to his life in Canada, she decided it wasn't for her, so they soon got a divorce. Fortunately, because he was already married to Angele.

He returned to Canada and to Bisco and his rather wild life there, He would get on some wild drinking parties, and start shooting at things, and was also very good at throwing knives, usually into a tree. Then he started doing some writing and trapping, and met another pretty young Iroquois Indian girl who lived with her widowed father. They were married by an Indian Chief in Indian style in 1925. Legal in their eyes.

Her name was Gertrude Bernard, and he soon gave her an Indian name of Anahareo. Her father had called her Pony and Gertie, so she went by several names. Archie had her join him on Winter



trapping, and when she saw animals killed in traps, or having to be killed when they were still alive and suffering, she was very upset. As the trapping was getting little money in for them, and his disability pension was not very much, he turned to his writing. He sent an article to his mother in England to give to Country Life. They liked it so much they wanted more articles or even a book. He then went by the name of Grey Owl, and also had another Indian name, Wa-Sha-Quon-Asin, meaning "He who walks by night".

Archie was still doing some trapping, and he caught a Mother Beaver that had two little babies, called MawWees. Both Archie and Gertie were sad at seeing these little beaver, so they took them home and fed them with a syringe. They called them McGinty and McGinnis. When they were grown beaver, they left them and went off to build a house somewhere. They couldn't find them again, and missed them so much, that before long Archie found another little Beaver and they took it home and fed it too. They called it Jelly Roll. Grey Owl was out near a lake and a little beaver came over to where he was, and he saw no mother around anywhere, so he took it home to be with Jelly Roll. It was called Rawhide. That definitely ended his trapping of Beaver.

They travelled with the Beaver to places nearby, and Grey Owl would give a lecture on conservation of the Forest and Wild life and show the two Beaver, and what beautiful animals they were and so friendly. They were becoming quite scarce in Quebec and Ontario, and needed to be preserved, as after all it was Canada's National Emblem. He wrote in one of his books, Pilgrims of the Wild, "They seemed to be almost like little folk from some other planet, whose language we could not yet quite understand. To kill such creatures seemed monstrous. I would do no more of it. Instead of persecuting them further, I would study them, see just what there really was to them. I perhaps could start a colony of my own; these animals could not be permitted to pass completely from the face of this wilderness."

With Grey Owl writing for months on a book, Men of the last Frontier, Anahareo couldn't stand the quiet any longer. She had

been there for five months and he told her it would be another two months before he would be finished the writing. So she left and got a job driving a dog team for tourists at a very exclusive club in the Ottawa Valley, between Ottawa and Montreal.

An Editor of Canadian Forest and Outdoors was quite excited about the articles being written by an Indian, and brought it to the attention of the Parks Branch Commission, which by then had opened quite a few National Parks. He was interested in the conservation of the Beaver. From this a film was made of Grey Owl and Rawhide. They then asked him to speak in Windsor at a Forestry Convention, this was in 1930. Anahareo went with him to give him support. By this time, the Canadian Parks Branch were so interested in Grey Owl's work, they asked him to be a Caretaker of Park Animals in Riding Mountain Park in Manitoba. They moved the two Beaver in special tanks. But they didn't stay long there, as the lake was too shallow for the beaver to live through the winter. So they transferred him to Prince Albert National Park in early summer of 1931.

He was located on a lake North of Waskesiu Lake, which is where the main headquarters of the Park is located. He went to a beautiful lake called Ajawaan. The Parks Dept. Built him a cabin on the shore of the lake and a little later built another on a hill just behind the first cabin. His cabin was just one room and not that large, and by this time Anahareo was pregnant and they would need a place for her and the baby. Grey Owl's cabin was right on the edge of the lake, so the beavers built their house part inside his cabin and part outside, with the main part being under the cabin and the lake. It was quite large.

The beaver would come in and out of his cabin with loads of mud and sticks. There was a ramp from the water to the door, and the door had the bottom half that swung freely. They would just push in and out quite freely, making a great mess of the cabin. But they had to get their house built. Once the house was built, they would only have to do repair work on the inside part of their house, but the outside demanded constant work and repair, so they were always



busy, as they say "busy as a Beaver".

In 1932, our family, the Winters, moved to Prince Albert. This was when the depression hit the South. I remember the dust storms that just blew the crops away, and caused drifts of fine soil right over the tops of the fences. You couldn't keep it out of the house.. No one could grow gardens either. So we moved North to Prince Albert, where there is heavy forest and no dust to blow. My Mother ran a Boarding House for awhile, and the people staying there were mostly Park Wardens from Waskesiu and the area around there in the National Park. They would have a break in the city.

When Anahareo was expecting her baby, Grey Owl wondered where she would stay. The Wardens told him about my Mother, Mrs. Etta Winters. Mom went to see Gertie in the hospital and found she hadn't had a chance to buy the baby any clothes. So Mom went out and got everything that the baby needed. The liked each other immediately. My brothers and I were visiting our Grandparents until School was to start, so were due home and excited to think we were going to see an Indian woman and her baby, as we had never seen one where we lived.

Shirley Dawn was born on August 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1932. We arrived home just when they came to our house. We had a real surprise when we saw this beautiful slim lady with her baby come in the door. She was wearing a nice black dress, with her hair all permed. As she had been waiting at a Hotel until the birth, she went shopping for a dress and got her hair done. Well it was the last time we were to see Gertie in a dress. She was very uncomfortable she said. She always wore breeches and high laced boots and nice silk shirts. And the next day, we found her with the ironing board up, and her head down, trying to iron out the perm. Her hair was straight and cut with bangs and always neat, once the perm grew out.

The baby won the hearts of all our family and the boarders too. We were teenagers, so were able to help out with the baby. Anahareo was called Gertie by all of us, and we found her to be a warm and

charming person that got along very well with everyone. She stayed with us until Grey Owl, or Archie, came down to see his new daughter and take them home with him. They went back with him until the weather was colder and there is a period when the lakes are freezing, that you wouldn't be able to travel. So with a new baby they decided she should come back to our place. We were all delighted to have them. Gertie had a great sense of humor, and we had a lot of fun with her.

Anahareo was 17 years younger than Grey Owl, so she enjoyed being out with activity around her. She taught me how to knit that winter, and I was very proud of the finished product, but it needed to be washed before I could wear it. And I was very anxious to show it off, so I put it on the oven door to dry quicker, and before long we could smell the burning wool. It had a hole in it, and I was devastated, but Gertie said, "Don't worry", and she knit a patch right into it. That was something else I learned to do. I have never forgotten that incident.

Gertie and Little Dawn, as we called her, went back to Ajawaan in the Spring. But Grey Owl was still busy with his writing and she had to be quiet and with a baby it was pretty difficult. So she rented a place at Waskesiu, what they then called shack tents. Wooden walls, and a tarp on the roof and it would be divided off into a bedroom and living area.

We went up to visit her there during school holidays. And Grey Owl was also able to go down and visit them. So the summer wasn't too bad for her. She took a trip or two up to visit him, and he would meet her at the end of the lake with his canoe. He didn't allow any boats with motors on his lake, as it would pollute it, and he wanted the wildlife to be safe, and especially his beaver, Jelly Roll and Rawhide.

By the next fall, Gertie decided to go North and do prospecting, so the Grey Owls wondered if we would keep Dawn. That was no problem with three teenagers to look after her. We all loved her like one of our own family. We had moved by this time to another



place, and didn't have boarders anymore, only the Grey Owl family. We had become very good friends by then, and they could come and stay and visit with Dawn whenever they wanted.

In the winter of 1934, Grey Owl was writing a book called Pilgrims of the Wild. He needed help typing, so he had my Dad go up there for 2 months, February and March, and he typed with his 2 finger method on a little portable typewriter. Dad said they got along very well working on the book until it was completed. They were the same age, being only 2 days apart, that probably helped make them more compatible. My Dad then would help put the manuscript together, and when he came back to Prince Albert, he had sketches or pictures printed at a Studio called Voldengs. He would then get it mailed off to the publisher for him

In 1935 Grey Owl was to go on a speaking tour in Great Britain to promote his books and films that had been made of the beaver with him. His editor was Lovat Dickson, who arranged the trip overseas. He came into our place and my mother helped him buy a trunk and a suit and anything else he needed for his trip. He also wanted his hair dyed as it had some grey showing. Not that Indians don't have grey hair. But he decided they would expect him to have it black.

Archie was in the city for a few days, getting ready for this trip, and decided to go for a few drinks. Because he was posing as an Indian, he wasn't allowed into the bars, as Indians couldn't go into them. So he had to go to a bootlegger, as they were called. Once they would get him into their place, they would make sure he spent all the money he had on him.

If he didn't come home to our place at a certain time, my mother, being a strong and determined woman, would get a taxi and go to 59 ½ on River Street in Prince Albert. She would tell the taxi driver to go up to the room and get Grey Owl, and to tell them if he wasn't right down, she would be up there. Sometimes that didn't work, and she would go in and he would come with her. Because

of the injury to his foot during the war, he couldn't walk without his moccasins on. So she would bring him home, get him on a bed, and take his footwear away. He would be there until morning. She was very strict with either Archie or Gertie causing any problems in our house. At times it could get pretty unruly. My Dad got along very well with Archie, and he would just say, "Archie. Settle down." And he did what he was told.

Before leaving on that trip to the UK he asked me what I would like him to bring back for me. I was 17 then, and I jokingly said that since he wouldn't be returning until 1936, that it would be leap year, and he could bring me back the Prince of Wales. Dawn was about 3 then, and I would write letters for her. He sent us Christmas presents, and I received a lovely English wool sweater. When I wrote to thank him, I also wrote one for Dawn, holding her hand to sign it to her Dad. I received a letter from him in answer to mine, and it is as follows:

Letter

The letter was written on his letterhead for his tour in England. The tour was from October 20<sup>th</sup>, 1935 to January 31<sup>st</sup>, 1936.

Dear Margaret:

Thanks so much for your letter. I am glad you liked the sweater so much; it is something typically English, & their woolens are good. But I am more glad that you are up and around & once more having a good time & enjoying yourself, after having to sit by and watch others having their fun.

And so it's Leap Year. Well, thank goodness I'm nor good-looking, so I won't have to hide myself under a bushel basket or anything, when the ladies are around. And by the way, your beau, the Prince of Wales, has got himself to be king now, so I did not deliver your message to him.

I am getting pretty lonesome now for my own country, & although this tour has been such a success, will be glad when I can come back to my old friends once more.



Gee but I was glad to get Dawn's letter. Can she really write that good? Am enclosing one for her, if you'll please help her to read it; am wondering just what she looks like & am so anxious to see her again, and all of you. There is so much work that I hardly know where I stand, — pictures to be made, books to write, lecture tours to come & everything. It is all rather confusing, & while there is nothing definite, it is all waiting my attention during the next few years.

I sail from Liverpool on Feb. 15<sup>th</sup> on C.P.R. Boat "Duchess of Bedford", so will be seeing you all before long.

. Am writing your Mother and Father as well.

Very sincerely Grey Owl Archie.

Grey Owl spoke in 63 different halls or towns on his tour, and found it very tiring. The publishers also wanted another book from him, one he had started. It was called, Tales of an Empty Cabin. When he arrived back in the early spring, he asked my parents if they would let me go up to type his manuscript, and my brother Stanley to go to, so he could do meals and help with the beaver. They told him I couldn't type and he said he would pay for me to take a typing course at the Business College. So I took a crash course just in typing so by early July, we were able to go up to Ajawaan.

My brother and I lived in the upper cabin, and Grey Owl had a tent behind his cabin for summer sleeping. Grey Owl worked all night, so he would be up with the beaver. Beavers work all night and sleep in the daytime, so Grey Owl did likewise. He slept in the tent, and we were able to go into the cabin and have our meals when he was asleep. We always had our dinner together.

When I first arrived there, it was quite a scary experience to be sitting at the table and have big Jelly Roll come padding through the door and look us over. Grey Owl would say softly - Just be still and don't move quickly. It wasn't hard to do that when you are scared stiff. She would go to Grey Owl and get a treat of a potato or an

apple , and then go back out again. But after a week they got used to us and would come and stand up to our knee for a treat. We could give them a potato.

When the young ones came in, he called them Mawee - they would come up to you, and they would hold an apple and would eat around the core as you turned it. Another little treat was a bit of a Jersey Milk bar. They also had a dish of rice with Carnation Milk on it, for Jelly Roll because she was nursing her young, and of course Rawhide would take a share too sometimes. If a beaver takes a dislike to anyone, they can give a very bad bite, as their teeth are very sharp. If you see them cut down a tree and strip the branches, you know they are sharp.

The Beaver would come out about dinner time while we were eating, and sometimes we would dawdle over our tea and be talking about the book or what went on during the day, when we would see the tourists arriving a little way along the path. We would have time to get our dishes cleared out of the way before they got to the cabin. They had to walk about a mile from the portage near the other end of the lake.

When they arrived, they would be told to get up on the bunk and be quiet, and not make any fast moves. They could watch the beaver come in and out working on their house, and getting some treats. Then they could sit out on a clearing and watch them from there, and Grey Owl would talk to them for awhile

. Sometimes he went of to write some of his chapters, and we would entertain them. If they were interesting we stayed up later but usually got to bed before it got too dark, about 10 o'clock so we didn't have to bother lighting the lamps and attracting bugs. The tourists would stay until dawn, which up North was about 4 AM. Grey Owl did his writing in the night while the beaver were up, and then leave it on the table for me to type the next day. There were times it was difficult to read a word, as his writing was very bad.



Stanley and I would try to figure it out, but sometimes I would have to wait until he got up. Working on an ordinary Underwood Typewriter and doing three copies, was not easy to erase with carbon paper between each sheet.

I remember when he did the story called The Tree, in the Tales of an Empty Cabin, that we were looking through what material there was there to find a picture of a tree. We were able to visit the warden's cabin, on Kingsmere Lake where the Warden, called Roy Hubbel lived, and his wife was very good to us. She would give us baking and fresh fish to take back. So we went through their magazines for a picture too. We finally found one that was suitable. The book was finally finished.

To celebrate the end of the book, we had a treat. We had a can of Eagle Brand Sweetened Condensed Milk in our food supply, so we boiled it in water for an hour, and when we opened it, we had a delicious butterscotch pudding, sweet, but good. We all sat down and had our dessert, and enjoyed it. We then assembled the book, and I took it into Prince Albert to my Dad to get it mailed off to the publisher.

Grey Owl was invited to Carlton, a town south of Prince Albert, to attend a celebration with the Indians who were governed by Treaty Six, and were paying respects to His Excellency Lord Tweedsmuir, Governor General of Canada. Grey Owl asked me to go along as his secretary, and my girl friend and I stayed with a family friend in a tent for the celebrations for three days. We met the Governor General, but he only spent a short while there. But one night when they were having their bonfire, and were dancing around the fire, they invited Ella and I to join in the dance with the Indian Chiefs. We were quite honored to be invited to do that. It was a lot of fun, but very dusty.

A lady from England came over to visit Grey Owl, and I went up with her on the trip. Gertie and Dawn arrived the next day, and I

went back down to Prince Albert. But that is when Grey Owl and Gertie parted ways. It wasn't the life for her. They were still very fond of each other and good friends. So Dawn stayed with us pretty well all the time after that, with short visits with her Mother.

Grey Owl took a trip to Ottawa and Montreal that winter, and met a French Canadian woman in Montreal, and married her, Yvonne Perrier. He called her Silver Moon. They travelled around in Ontario and Quebec for awhile, and then came back to Ajawaan. We didn't see too much of Yvonne, as Gertie used to be at our place to see Dawn, and she did come first.

Grey Owl took a second tour to England, and it was even more strenuous than the first one. Silver Moon went with him this time. He had a lecture at Buckingham Palace with King George VI and the Queen and Princesses, one our present Queen. He was well received there, and asked to stay longer so they could talk to him after he finished his lecture. He also did a lecture in Hastings to a big audience. His two Aunts were in attendance there, and he did go to see them after the lecture, and visited his old home.

He arrived back in Canada in February, and then toured the United States, and Eastern Canada. He arrived in Prince Albert, very tired, and went up to Ajawaan. The next day he called the Warden that he was sick, and they took him into Prince Albert to the Hospital. He had developed pneumonia, and had no energy to fight it, and he passed away very suddenly on April 13<sup>th</sup>, 1938 in his 50<sup>th</sup> year. The day after he died the North Bay Nuggett broke the story of his true identity. The papers were full of pictures and accounts of his busy life, but a short one.

. Yvonne had to stop in Regina for an emergency surgery so wasn't there when he died or for his funeral. Gertie was at our place, and took Dawn to the Funeral Home to see her Dad and have her realize what had happened. But she didn't go to the funeral She was at our place feeling very sad at the loss. Our family went to the funeral



with Dawn. There was a picture in the Toronto Star Weekend of my Mother and I on each side of Dawn, watching the hearse drive away. It was a very sad for all of us, because we lost a very good friend, and it was a shock. The news of his heritage didn't bother us so much as losing him. I don't think it matters whether he was Indian or White, the work he did was a great legacy for him to leave behind.

Dawn stayed with us, and went to school from our home. She was one of our family, and like a sister to me. When she was a teenager, she developed diabetes, and had to have two injections a day. She was very good about keeping up with her diet. She went to Business College, and worked in an Office in Prince Albert. She was in Saskatoon for awhile too. She married, and had two children, Glaze and Sandra Dean. But she had a bad time with her eyes, and had to have surgery, and her heart, and then her kidneys.

She travelled around keeping up the stories of her Dad and telling all he did for Conservation. She visited schools in Ontario, and Quebec. We were living in Ottawa, and she would stay with us whenever she was in the area, and her husband travelled with her. We went to see them in their home in Kamloops. While we were there we also visited Anahareo, who lived there with another daughter. We had a nice time visiting with her, as it had been a long time since we had seen her.

Anahareo, continued her work on conservation of animals, and of getting rid of leg traps for hunting. She was Honored for her conservation work when Governor General Edward Schreyer and his wife, went to Kamloops and presented her with the Order of Canada. She wasn't able to go to Ottawa, so they went to her. She was 77 then, and suffered with arthritis. The City of Kamloops had a reception for her on the occasion. Anahareo died in 1986, and her ashes are buried beside Grey Owl and Dawns Graves.

Dawn and her husband, Bob Richardson, went to England to show

her husbands art work on Grey Owl, and for Dawn to visit the birthplace of her father, and to speak to the people there. While in Hastings, she took sick, as it was time for her kidney dialysis, so they went into London to the Hospital. They had just removed the machine, when she had a cardiac arrest, and died very suddenly. They brought her ashes back, and they are up at Ajawaan with her Mother and Dad. That was in 1984, and she was 52 years old. That was another loss to us all.

Grey Owl wrote four books, that were published in 12 languages, and are still in circulation. They are:

The Men of the Last Frontier:

Pilgrims of the Wild:

Sajo and her Beaver People, and

Tales of an Empty Cabin, the book I typed.,

He gave me a copy of Tales of an Empty Cabin, and in the front of it has written:

Always remember, be kind to all animals, for they are defenceless. Be good to all people, kindness is never lost. As you are kind to others, so you will receive consideration. Fair play is a religion all by itself. (Signed) Your friend, Grey Owl

Tourists are still making trips to his cabins in both Riding Mountain Park, and at Ajawaan, in the Prince Albert National Park.

There is a Society that has been started in Hastings England, called the Grey Owl Society, and the members are from all over the world. They have made me an Honorary Member. I was very delighted to visit Hastings in September, 1998, and the Grey Owl Society had a barbecue in my honor. My daughter was with me, and we were made most welcome. We toured all around Hastings to where he was born and went to school. They have a museum with a lot of his things collected there..



Last summer, there was a movie filmed in Ontario and Quebec, called Grey Owl. Pierce Brosnan played the part of Grey Owl, and it was directed by Sir Attenborough. It is supposed to be out in the fall.

The Duncan Productions in Vancouver, were at our home in the summer of 1998 to do a filmed documentary of My Memories of Grey Owl, and it was shown on the History Channel several times.

Later in the fall of 1998, I was in Ottawa for another Documentary that was filmed by the BBC from London, England. It has only been shown in the United Kingdom so far.

The Movie "Grey Owl" has been released in Canada. My husband and I went to Toronto to see the Premiere on September 23<sup>rd</sup>. I was an honored guest and was used Royally. It was very interesting to meet the Star who played Grey Owl, Pierce Brosnan. He is a very warm person and was very interested in the fact that I knew Grey Owl and Gertie so well. Ron took several pictures of me talking with him. . We also met Lord Attenborough, who was the Producer and Director , with Jake Eberts. Attenborough was also very interested in my knowing the Grey Owl family so well. I have a very nice picture with him. He is a real charmer.

We have a book on the Making of the Movie, that both Pierce Brosnan and Lord Attenborough signed for me. We had a nice cocktail party and were able to meet many people, who were also interested in Grey Owl. Barbara Morningstar did a wonderful job of organizing the Premieres, and in taking me to meet each of these people, and getting us to special seats in the Theater. It was held in the Royal Ontario Museum.

The movie was well done, and the message of Conservation came across very well. Pierce Brosnan did a very good portrayal of Grey Owl, I thought. There were two little beavers in a lot of the film, and it showed how lovable they are when small. It is a very good

nature film, and we enjoyed it. Saw it again in Tillsonburg, and really got more out of it, and enjoyed it just as much.

I will end all this with the same way Grey Owl ended his lectures:

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“Remember, you belong to nature, not it to you.”

Margaret (Winters) Charko.

November 1<sup>st</sup>, 1999.