

Grey Owl
The Grey Owl Family and the Winters Family
1932 ---1984

This story starts in 1932 when there was a depression and a drought that hit Southern Saskatchewan and forced many to find work elsewhere. My Dad was one of those unfortunate people, so we moved North to Prince Albert. My Mother heard of a boarding house with several boarders, and the woman died suddenly leaving no one to take over. So she went down and took over immediately. Some of the boarders were Park Wardens from Prince Albert National Park. They took turns having holidays in the city and stayed at our place. Grey Owl was a Park Warden living at Ajawaan Lake and stayed at the boarding house too.

Grey Owl and Annahareo had been living at the Lake for nearly two years then, and she was expecting their first child. So he brought her to our place to wait until the baby was born. When my brothers and I first saw Annahareo and the baby coming from the hospital, we were very surprised at seeing this slim, beautiful woman and the baby wrapped in a nice white shawl, coming in the door. Not how we imagined an Indian woman would look. The baby was a treasure to all of us. She was named Shirley Dawn Grey Owl.

By now, Grey Owl and Annahareo were known to us as Archie and Gertie. Grey Owl took on that name when he was writing short stories for magazines and then went on to writing books. He and Gertie had been living in Quebec and Ontario, and had lived as many Indians did and still do, by hunting and trapping. But when they killed a beaver mother - leaving the babies, they changed to being conservationists. I won't go into that now as many books have been written on that stage of their lives, and it was before we knew them. From that time, he became an author, lecturer, conservationist and a lover of the beaver people.

Grey Owl lived at Ajawaan in a cabin near the lake so the beaver were able to live partly inside the cabin and partly under water. He had two Beaver there called Jelly Roll and Rawhide. Each year they had young ones that stayed a year and then moved on to start another colony.

Because his cabin was quite far North of Waskesiu in the Prince Albert National Park, they didn't think it wise to take a baby up there in the winter. So Gertie and the baby stayed at our place that winter. We all grew very fond of both of them, and Gertie had a good sense of humor. She spent time knitting booties for the baby, sometimes in red, and made rompers for the baby in flowered pink flannelette. She was a good mother to her baby. She also taught me to knit that winter too.

In the summer, Gertie would get a place at Waskesiu where she and Dawn would stay, and Grey Owl could come down to visit, and they weren't that far to take a trip up to visit him. In that way, they were able to become acquainted with the beaver.

In February and March of 1934, my Dad went up to Beaver Lodge and lived with Grey Owl and typed the manuscript for the book, Pilgrims of the Wild. They had a good winter together as they were the same age, only two days apart.

When Grey Owl was in Prince Albert at our place, he would entertain us with playing our piano, and reading some of his manuscript to us. It sounded quite different when he read it to us in his soft manner, than when we read it ourselves.

Gertie had a great desire to go prospecting for gold in the North. Grey Owl was busy writing, so he gave her the money and equipment to go for a few months with a group of prospectors. Dawn stayed with us and Grey Owl paid my Mother for her expenses. She became one of our family and called my parents, Mom and Dad. She called Gertie, Mother. Dawn and I grew up as sisters, and stayed that way until her death in England on June 3rd, 1984.

When Grey Owl left for his first lecture tour in England, my Mother helped him buy his trunk and get packed for the trip. He went over October 20th, 1935 to January 31st, 1936. While there, he wrote me a letter and I have kept it. I used to write to him for Dawn, holding her hand to sign it and put kisses in it. When Grey Owl left he wondered what he could bring me, and I said that 1936 was leap year, which meant I could ask a man to marry me. So I told him he could bring me the Prince of Wales. In the letter he wrote me, he said he couldn't do that as he went and had himself made King. And then he abdicated.

On the back of the letter that he wrote to me, is a list of all the places he was touring, which were 63 in all. He sailed back to Canada on Feb. 15th on the "Duchess of Bedford." When he arrived back, he had to get a book finished that summer, and needed the manuscript typed. He wondered if I could consider doing this for him. He paid my tuition to go to Business School and take a quick course in typing so I could go up and do the typing for him. He asked my parents for permission for me to do this. I wasn't too fast, but kept up to his writing. My brother, Stan, went up in the spring and looked after the beaver and meals, so Grey Owl could get at his writing.

There was a cabin built on the hill above his cabin, which was where Gertie and Dawn slept when they were up there. So my brother and I had the use of that cabin. It had a bed, and a pull out couch. There was a large tank in it, that had been used to transport the beaver, and we used it to store food so nothing could get into it. There was a desk sitting under the windows overlooking the lower cabin, called Beaver Lodge, and a view of the beautiful and peaceful Lake Ajawaan. Grey Owl slept in a tent that was half way between the cabins.

I spent nearly two months up there while typing the manuscript for the book, "Tales of an Empty Cabin." Stanley was 19 and I was 18, and it was certainly a highlight of our lives. Grey Owl spent the nights working on his book, as that is when the beaver are active at building and chewing. They had great holes eaten out of the table side and legs, and could be quite destructive. They were busy getting their winter food gathered. They made a raft from branches, and then kept building up on it until it would sink below the ice in the winter, and provide them with food.

In our leisure time, Grey Owl would take us out in the canoe and put a ramp made of wood, up to the side of the canoe, and the beaver would come up the ramp and into the canoe. That was only for Jelly Roll or Rawhide to take the ride with us, and have a treat too. This was a bit frightening

at first, but we soon became used to the beaver and were not afraid of them at all. Grey Owl paddled the canoe from one side only, and did it very quietly so as not to scare the beaver. Sometimes he would take us to the end of the lake where there was a portage to Kingsmere Lake, where we would visit the Park Warden that lived there. We often were invited for a meal, and would fish there, and bring back fresh fish for a change of diet. Grey Owl did not allow fishing in his Lake, in case the beaver would get caught.

Mealtime at night was always interesting for us. The other meals, Stanley and I usually had alone, as that was when Grey Owl was sleeping. We had our evening meal at the table under a window in the main cabin. Sometimes when eating, Jelly Roll and Rawhide would join us, and we would give them a treat. They liked apples and chocolate bars. When one of the young ones came in, we held the apple and they ate all around the core as we turned the apple for them. Peanuts was another treat, shelled of course. They were really quite spoiled, and I am sure would not last long out in the wild. When we first arrived there, we sat and held our breath when they came into the cabin. Archie would talk softly to them, until they were used to us being there. Jelly Roll had special treatment when she had her young ones, we called them Mawee, because it was like the sound they made. Stanley would cook great amounts of rice every day, and then poured cans of Carnation Milk over it. There was a special dish down near the water that was fastened down, and that was where they ate the rice. She ate with her front paws, using them like hands. It was quite an experience for us to be so close to the beaver and feed them and have them stand up to your knee while you gave them the treats. It makes the beaver, and our National Emblem very special.

When the weather was nice, we would be sitting with our tea and see a group of tourists coming over the hill. We would quickly get tidied up and be ready to welcome them. Since the beaver came out at night, the tourists would arrive in the evening and sit up on the bunk and watch them come and go. They would stay until dawn, which in the north is very early. It would be daylight between 3 A.M. and 4 A.M. and didn't get dark until 10:30 or 11:00 P.M. If it seemed like an interesting group, Stanley and I would spend some time with them.

In the morning after we had our breakfast, I would go back up to the upper cabin and start my work. I typed four copies, and in those days on an ordinary typewriter, a mistake was a time consuming correction doing each page separately. At times it was very difficult to read grey owls writing, which was not the best, and I would have to leave a space until he woke up. He was sometimes quite amazed that I couldn't read it. Then he had inserts that would often go right around the page. My Dad had found it quite a challenge too. It took me six weeks to type the manuscript, plus a few letters to his publisher. It was all a very enjoyable experience, and I was doing it for someone who was a very good family friend.

Later that summer, Grey Owl was invited to attend a gathering in Carlton, Sask. Where Indians governed by Treaty No.6 paid their respect to His Excellency Lord Tweedsmuir, our Governor General at that time. He asked me to go along as his secretary, and take my girl friend Ella Johnson- Shruballs, with me. She now lives in Hamilton, Ont. They had a special tent for him, and one for Ella and ^{me} I, with a woman from Prince Albert.

The Governor General wore Grey Owls headdress of feathers that he wore on his tour in England.

One night the Indians had a Dance around the fire and invited Grey Owl to join, and to bring Ella and I to dance with them. It was quite an honor for us to be allowed to dance with the Chiefs. We have pictures taken with Chief Swimmer and Chief Tootosis. The teepees were very colorful, but that was before color film, so you see the designs they drew, but in black and white.

My mother was driven out from Prince Albert one day to bring Dawn to take part and see all the Indians. She was only about three then. She was very popular with all the people there, and also met the Governor General. She talked about that for some time.

In the early fall, that same year, a lady that Grey Owl met while on his tour in England, came over for a visit and to see the Beaver, while her husband was doing business in Canada. Her name was Betty Sommervell, and she had driven Grey Owl on part of his tour when his driver ~~was~~ ill. Her family had Grey Owl stay at their home to rest whenever possible. When she arrived in Prince Albert in 1936- I went up to Ajawaan with her, and Gertie and Dawn followed a little later. She brought us wonderful treats from England of chocolates and jams. She had a gift for me, a silver chain bracelet with a little padlock on it, and on that was engraved her motto. "Enter stranger, stay forever friend." She was a most delightful lady and enjoyed the beaver and the lake so very much. We ate out in the yard beside Beaver Lodge, and one time I was sitting on one of Dawns little chairs, and Grey Owl laughed at me for being like the city folk. I have pictures of that time up there. He was enjoying having company before starting his long winter alone. Twenty-four years later, my family enjoyed a visit to England and went to see Mrs. Somervell. We saw the fireplace mantle with her motto engraved in it, and also had Grey Owls name on it.

Grey Owl wrote in an autograph book of mine, which was the in-thing in those days, and I have that page in the front of my copy of the book I typed, Tales of an Empty Cabin. This is what he wrote. "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. Your friend, Grey Owl."

Near the end of that year- he and Anahareo parted. She was an active person, and younger and loved to go up North on prospecting trips. His life was writing and tours, and not the type of life she enjoyed. Grey Owl went out to Toronto and Ottawa on business with his publisher. He met Yvonne Perrier and they were married. She spent that summer at Beaver Lodge and went with him on his second tour of England in the fall of 1937. We didn't see too much of them before they left, but Grey Owl made trips in to see Dawn. We had Gertie with us a lot, as we had Dawn living with us and Grey Owl paid my Mother to look after her. He came back from that tour in March of 1938, and when he came to see us, we thought he looked very tired and his face quite puffy. Yvonne had taken sick in Regina, and was in the Hospital there, so wasn't with him. He went up to Ajawaan, but a few days later, they called us to say that he was in the hospital in Prince Albert, and very ill. It was late so was decided we could go up in the morning, but they phoned us at 8 A.M. that he had died. We were all very shocked at the news.

Gertie came from Saskatoon to our place, and took Dawn to the Funeral Home to see her Dad. ~~She~~ She didn't attend the funeral, but stayed at our place. Our family all went and took Dawn with us. They took his body up to Ajawaan and buried him beside the upper cabin. That was April 13th,

Gertie

6

the Order of Canada. She was 77 at the time, and unable to travel to Ottawa, so he took it to her. There was a large Reception for her then, with a lot of her family attending. I have pictures of the event. She died at the age of 80, and one of her remarks before she died, on her thoughts of Grey Owl, was: "To me he was an Indian, and one of the best men I've met." She wrote a book on her life with Grey Owl, called "Devil in Deerskins". She was cremated, and her ashes are buried beside Grey Owl's grave, and where their daughter Dawn's ashes are also buried. There are three Cairns in their memory at the gravesite.

Dawn was a great believer of her Father's work and travelled and spoke to groups of the work he did. When she was a teenager, she became quite ill and was admitted to the hospital in Prince Albert. They found she was diabetic and had to have two injections of insulin each day, and keep a very strict diet. My Mother bought scales and they weighed all her food. She had to be very careful because she would go into a coma. It made her days at school very difficult, because she tried to cover up what she was doing. She later married and had two children, Glaze and Sandra, but had a very difficult time having them. She was a very devoted Mother to them. In time, the disease took its toll on her health. She had a bad heart and was on medication for that, and then it was her eyes. She was nearly blind and they did surgery on her eyes and when they removed the bandages, she was so excited she phoned to tell me, she was in B.C. then. Next problem was her kidneys, and she was on a dialysis machine.

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It was at this stage of her illness, that she and her husband Bob Richardson, went to England. Bob is an artist and had several paintings of Grey Owl and the Beaver, and Dawn gave talks and was promoting her book, "Smoke". They went to Hastings where the Grey Owl Society has been formed to Honor the birthplace of Grey Owl. They gave their presentations there, but during that time, Dawn became ill and had to go to London and be put on the dialysis machine. She seemed to be doing well, and they took her off the machine, but she had a cardiac arrest and died very suddenly. But I am sure she was happy with the work she had been doing with the help of Bob. She was cremated and Bob brought her ashes back and buried them at Ajawaan. That was in June, 1984 and she was 52 years old. Then Gertie, her Mother, died in 1986.

And that ended the relationship of our families. ~~I'm afraid I am the lone survivor now.~~

~~Dawn~~

Margaret (Winters) Charko