

Still Bucking The Wind

Anahareo made Grey Owl change his ways.
Many people have apt to learn her lesson.

There have been several times in the last five years, says Anahareo, widow of the famous naturalist Grey Owl, when she has felt "to hell with living." Her eyes are cloudy from cataracts, and her hands ache with the pain of arthritis.

And then, last November, Anahareo (accent on the last "a") started a campaign to save two pesky beaver. Only two, but the cause was a clarion call to everything she had stood for in the past, and her afflictions were forgotten on the spot. "I've got something to live for now," she declared at the time. "I can get my teeth into something — because I'm going to save those beaver."

The beaver had been accused of damaging trees and a wharf in the Kamloops, British Columbia suburb of Dallas. The beaver were causing the damage so they could build their lodge more efficiently, said the critics, who were all in favor of having the pair done away with. Nonsense, Anahareo replied; and in a flurry of letters to the Kamloops city council, the Kamloops News and other B.C. newspapers, she enlarged: "I'm appalled that the city council has given permission to trap the beaver on the Thompson River in Dallas ... I strongly submit that killing these two beaver is not the humane answer ... why close the door to the barn now? Leave the lodge till spring, the beaver then will move on their own accord, or the Fish and Wildlife department can step in and relocate them."

Thanks to Anahareo's letters and the support they provoked, the Kamloops council decided to withhold permission to trap the beaver, and when last sighted the pair was still there.

A tiny woman, Anahareo can be as scrappy as a heavyweight, and issues like the Kamloops beaver send her flying out of her corner punching. "She has run into the wind all her life; she is still bucking the wind," observes Dawn Richardson, the 47-year-old daughter of Grey Owl and Anahareo.

Anahareo's scrappiness is tempered by an unmistakable air of dignity. She hesitates to take any credit for the role she played in converting Grey Owl, a trapper, into a dedicated defender of wildlife, but she was the little noticed spark that sent him spiralling to fame. Through his lectures and books on wildlife, Grey Owl brought to many a



better understanding of the need to preserve our wilderness.

Only recently has Anahareo begun to come into her own. Last October the Paris-based International League of Animal Rights admitted her into its Order of Nature — primarily for her influence on Grey Owl. She is only the second person so honored by the league. The first was Dr. Albert Schweitzer, the humanitarian, and he received his honor posthumously.

Born in Mattawa, Ontario in 1906, Anahareo is a direct descendant of Iroquois chiefs. At the age of 4 she lost her mother to tuberculosis. Shaken by his wife's death, her father shuttled her sister and two brothers off to other relatives. Anahareo was given to her 95-year-old "Big Grandma." "She took the devil out of me," Anahareo grins. She also gave her granddaughter her first lesson in Indian history and in how to tell right from wrong and why. But by the time Big Grandma was 99 and Anahareo was 9, a shrewish aunt and her family had moved in. To counteract her aunt's domineering

"There was always something extraordinary about him," says Anahareo of Grey Owl, whom she married in 1926. Top: Their cabin at Ajawaan Lake. Above: Anahareo with Dawn, their daughter, in the mid-'30s. Left: Grey Owl (Archie Belaney), about 1936

ways, Anahareo's devil returned. Often she would crawl out of her bedroom window and escape for a day in the woods. She still laughs when she remembers the time her uncle caught her playing hooky. "He was 6-foot-4 — big and mad and coming at me." Not knowing what was going to happen next, she grabbed a nearby axe and flung it at him, screaming, "You big, black s.o.b.!"

Eventually her father gathered his wayward daughter and the rest of his brood under one roof. To fill her youthful summers, Anahareo worked as a helper at various resorts. In the summer of 1925, when she was 19, she met the 36-year-old Grey Owl, a tall, long-haired, buckskin-clad guide, at a resort on Lake Temagami