



A Paradise Lost

*Helen Hoover
and Gunflint Lake*

David R. Hakensen

MINNESOTA IS FORTUNATE to have a rich heritage of nature writers who drew inspiration from the region's history and beauty. Perhaps most famous is Sigurd Olson, whose meditations on wilderness have remained popular to this day. Grace Lee Nute recounted the travels of voyageurs through northern waterways, and Calvin Rutstrum wrote several how-to books on canoeing and wilderness survival as well as keenly worded essays on the allure of wilderness. Although each different in style and approach, all have added their unique voices to the nature-writing canon.

During the 1960s and early 1970s, Helen Hoover

was a best-selling Minnesota nature writer who found an admiring audience for her stories about living in the wilderness on Gunflint Lake. In four books, she described in an unpretentious and warm style the natural beauty surrounding her log cabin, told tales of the animals she and her husband came to know through close observation, and shared stories of the challenges of moving from the city to the north woods in the early 1950s.

The road to being a successful writer was not easy for Hoover. In 1954 she and her artist husband, Ade

Helen and Adrian Hoover at their cabin on Gunflint Lake

(Adrian), were both 44-year-old Chicago professionals following a long-held dream of escaping harsh urban life. Helen was an accomplished metallurgist and Ade an art director for a textbook publisher.¹ Like most back-to-the-woods dreamers, they little knew that the idyll they sought would be more difficult to attain than they ever imagined, and they would endure several years of hardship and near poverty to achieve it. They persevered, however, overcoming many obstacles and, in the process, recognizing the wonder and beauty of the nature surrounding them.

HELEN DRUSILLA BLACKBURN was born on January 20, 1910, in Greenfield, Ohio, the only child of Thomas and Hannah Blackburn. The family lived in a 12-room brick Victorian house, and Thomas's status as a factory manager gave the family a position of privilege in town. Helen's interest in writing came at an early age; she was nine when she discovered *The Circular Staircase* and *Tarzan of the Apes*. Her mother was constantly chasing her outside to play with other children, but Helen preferred reading and scribbling in notebooks. Introverted and highly intelligent, she was also near-sighted, making her unsuccessful at outdoor games. As she remembered later, "This was no disappointment because I liked to read and write and think."²

During high school, Helen was busy with many activities. A member of the newspaper staff, she was also yearbook editor and good in debate. She became one of the first National Honor Society members when her school's chapter was established in her senior year.³

In the fall of 1927, Helen went off to Ohio University in Athens. She had decided to specialize in languages and obtain a teaching certificate qualifying her for a high-school position, the preferred profession for women at the time. But tragedy struck in the summer of 1928 when her father died suddenly of a heart attack, leaving no will. He had no retirement benefits and had let his life-insurance policy lapse. The house was heavily mortgaged, and it was learned that unsuccessful stock market ventures had drained most of the Blackburns' money. There was just enough to live on for a year, allowing Helen to return to college.

In hopes of finding work after college that would pay more than a teaching position, Helen changed her major to chemistry; she would need to support herself and her mother. When she returned home after her sophomore year, Hannah informed her that they were broke. They



Blackburn family, early 1910s (above) and Helen Blackburn, high-school student, 1926

would rent the house, move to Cincinnati, and live with Hannah's brothers. Helen could go to secretarial school, and they would return to Greenfield later.⁴

Helen refused this course of action. She did not want to become an "old maid" daughter and could not bear the idea of being dependent on relatives. She proposed selling the house, leaving Greenfield behind, and starting over in another place. Her mother was furious at this suggestion. Helen then encouraged her to go live with her brothers; she was going to Chicago. Hannah did not like the thought of her only daughter alone in the big city, so they both moved to Chicago.⁵ Even at this young age, Helen showed the pluckiness that would serve her well in her career and in Minnesota's north woods.

ALTHOUGH HELEN HAD GROWN UP in a Victorian environment with parents who had had their only child later in life, she came of age in the 1920s. Flappers were asserting their independence, looking for work, smoking cigarettes, and voting. Young women felt the

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rigidity of their upbringing loosening, and they sought more freedoms. At the same time, Americans were moving from rural areas and smaller communities to larger urban areas in search of jobs and other opportunities.⁶

It was March 1930, with the country reeling from the stock market crash of 1929, when the Blackburns found an apartment in Chicago and Helen began to look for a job. After considerable searching, she found work in a mailroom, stuffing circulars into envelopes. Eventually she was asked to run the machine that imprinted addresses onto envelopes.⁷

On a double-date that fall, Helen met Adrian Hoover, who worked at a service station. They had an enjoyable evening and began dating on weekends, much to Hannah's disapproval. Adrian had grown up in St. Louis. When his parents divorced, his mother was unable to support him and left him in orphanages while she attended secretarial school. He eventually made his way to Chicago in search of work.⁸

Helen soon started looking for a better-paying job and landed one as a proofreader. Reading printer's proofs gave her new skills, and she was paid twenty dollars a week, seven dollars more than she made in the mailroom. But it was grueling work for a nearsighted person. Meanwhile, Hannah became overly protective of Helen and criticized her efforts to provide for them. She intercepted Helen's mail, fearing that if her daughter corresponded with people from Greenfield, they might visit and see the family's diminished circumstances. She was critical of Helen's clothes and worried endlessly when Helen was a few minutes late coming home from work. And she did not believe that Adrian was good enough for her daughter.⁹

In September 1931, on the anniversary of their first date, Ade and Helen drove to White Pines Forest State Park about 100 miles west of Chicago. Years later, the bliss of the day remained with Helen. They wandered through the pines, ate lunch by a stream, and took in the beautiful scenery. She told Ade that for a seventh-grade report she had read about trees like the ones they were seeing. Ade replied that he once stayed with an aunt and uncle who homesteaded near Seattle and had seen large evergreens. "I thought then that I'd like to live in the woods for awhile," Ade said. Helen agreed. "Well, why don't we . . . someday?" Ade then proposed marriage to Helen.¹⁰

It would take decades to realize their dream. Ade was laid off the following week. While working odd jobs, he was offered a position as an apprentice in an art de-

partment, doing newspaper layouts. It paid only three dollars week, but Helen urged him to take the job to get experience. He began attending evening art classes and received a diploma. He also took advantage of free art lessons offered by the Works Progress Administration. His salary increased to five dollars a week.¹¹

Helen and Ade finally married in February 1937, six-and-a-half years after their first date. They moved into a larger apartment in the same building as Helen's mother. Ade bought a secondhand car and, for entertainment, the couple explored Chicago's many neighborhoods. Helen started writing sketches and short stories based on those experiences. Through a mutual acquaintance, she met an editor from the *Chicago Daily News* who was willing to look at her writing. She sold her first short story in 1937 to the Chicago Daily News Syndicate for five dollars.¹²

For the next several years, Helen and Ade spent their summer vacations driving into northern Wisconsin and upper Michigan in search of a cabin in virgin pines like the ones they had seen the day Ade proposed. But World War II intervened, putting their plans and dreams on hold. In 1943 Ade headed off to war in the Pacific.¹³

Helen started taking night courses in organic chemistry at DePaul University, thinking that additional skills would help her get a better job now that men were serving in the armed forces. In 1943 she found work in the analytical lab at Pittsburgh Testing Laboratories, and in 1945 moved to Ahlberg Bearing Company, where she conducted chemical and metallurgical tests and monitored quality control of steel bearing-races.¹⁴

After the war, many women lost their jobs to returning servicemen, but Helen was asked to stay on at Ahlberg. In 1948 a call to an acquaintance at International Harvester led to a job in that company's new suburban manufacturing research facility. There, Helen had to prove herself to her male colleagues, not only because she was a woman but also because she had no college degree, unlike all of her coworkers. What she offered was practical experience and skill at operating testing equipment. Ade got a job with a textbook publisher as art director.¹⁵

In 1948 the Hoovers took an early spring vacation, resuming their north-bound search for the pines. Oddly for that time of year, they headed to the Arrowhead region of Minnesota and, ultimately, to resorts on Gunflint Lake—where most lodges were not yet open for the season. Here they found the virgin forest and solitude they sought and began looking for a place they might call their own. A local resort owner directed them to a cabin for sale on

Local residents placed bets on whether this odd couple from Chicago would stay the winter.

the lakefront. It was exactly what they were looking for: a small, two-room log structure secluded in the woods, with a beautiful view of the lake and the Canadian shore beyond. Rather suddenly, they successfully negotiated to buy the cabin from the owner, who had built it. Now they had a place where they could enjoy the wilderness.¹⁶

By 1950 Helen was working on a long-standing problem regarding the manufacture of discs for farm implements. She had learned about a new process for tempering steel at Ahlberg Bearing and successfully applied it at International Harvester, first in the laboratory and then in the field. Helen's stubbornness, experience, scientific ability, and intelligence all contributed to this breakthrough. Meanwhile, Hannah Blackburn's health deteriorated, and she died in October 1953. Without children or close relatives, Helen and Ade were no longer tethered to Chicago. They could travel and do as they wished.¹⁷

IN APRIL 1954 THE HOOVERS took an early vacation, spending a week at their cabin on Gunflint Lake. Ade developed a sore throat that required minor surgery upon his return to Chicago, and recovery took much longer than anticipated. Helen was concerned and thought that a summer at the cabin, with fresh air and warm weather, would bring him back to health. She requested a year's leave of absence and was granted two months.¹⁸

They returned to the cabin in July and soon realized it would need extensive work in order to be suitable for longer stays. They began fixing it up, patching leaks, replacing a stove, cleaning grimy walls. In September, after a restful leave, they began to head back to Chicago, reluctantly making the drive down the Gunflint Trail. As Helen later related in *A Place in the Woods*, she wanted to stay and immerse herself in the changes of the forest. She was certain that Ade felt the same. They talked as they drove and spontaneously decided not to return to Chi-

cago. Helen called from Grand Marais and told her boss that she was quitting. Rather than return to Chicago and settle their affairs, they had everything shipped to them.

Whether motivated by a midlife crisis or the realization of freedom following Hannah's death, the Hoovers' choice was unequivocal. They did not return to their urban life. The challenges of being a woman in a largely male environment were taking their toll on Helen. She told a friend years later that she had been "dodging a nervous collapse . . . brought on by interruptions to my research work at Harvester."¹⁹ Real or imagined, these challenges influenced her willingness to quit her job abruptly.

The Hoovers had no plan for making a living, nor had they thought about how they would subsist at the cabin year-round. Neither one hunted or fished—or had any desire to—so living off the land was not an option. The nearest grocery store was more than 50 miles away, in Grand Marais. By September, most cabin owners had left; it was rare for seasonal residents to remain during the harsh winters. They did have neighbors—resort owners—who looked after them; however, being independent, hard-working individuals accustomed to fending for themselves, Helen and Ade did not seek help.



Rooms with a view: the cabin in the woods near the lakeshore.



They went to town and bought food, staples, cigarettes (both were smokers), heavy wool clothes, jackets, and boots. They learned by doing. Local residents placed bets on whether this odd couple from Chicago would stay the winter.²⁰

The series of calamities that befell them became the basis for Helen's book, *A Place in the Woods*. The basement wall caved in during a rainstorm, and a bear that was trapped in it tried to rip up the flooring to get into the dry cabin. On a trip to town in a November snowstorm, a head-on collision on the Gunflint Trail totaled their car but caused them only minor injuries. The cabin roof leaked, the furnace stopped working, the electric power plant that came with the cabin was beyond repair, and the barrel heating stove had holes in it, rendering it useless. The cabin did not have indoor plumbing, and water had to be hauled from the lake. It was indeed a difficult existence. Fortunately, Ade was a capable handyman.²¹

In between challenges, the Hoovers started to enjoy the animals in their yard, feeding them leftover food

Ade often based his illustrations on photos he or Helen had taken. At left is one of their many shots of visiting deer; at right, Ade at his makeshift board, drawing their visitor.

and graham crackers before getting a supply of corn and seeds from town. This excited Helen tremendously, as she could observe the birds and animals in their natural environment and learn about their behavior.²² Her years of observation and research in laboratories, her organic chemistry coursework during World War II, and her natural curiosity would soon prove useful.

Meanwhile, for income, Ade started woodworking, making toys and other small items to sell by mail to friends in Chicago. Helen sold a set of metallurgical reference books, bringing in additional money. The Hoovers agreed to record rain and snowfall amounts for the U.S. Weather Bureau, which set up gauges in their yard. That job paid a monthly stipend.²³

Ade also started putting his illustration skills to use, creating notepaper with simple line drawings of forest animals, birds, and trees. While looking at nature mag-

azines at nearby lodges, Helen realized that they could sell Ade's notepaper and wooden items by mail to a larger audience than their friends. Having worked with office equipment in her earliest jobs, she ordered a secondhand mimeograph machine in 1955 so that they could make quantities of notepaper. Using some of the money they had pulled together, they placed an ad in *Audubon* magazine and started to receive orders. They also produced a small catalog and sent it to gift shops on Lake Superior. The venture provided modest income. More important, Helen also saw another opportunity. She had plenty of material for stories right outside of her window.²⁴

Helen sent queries to the editors of several nature magazines. She sold her first story, "Weasels are Wonderful," to *Audubon* in 1957. Others soon followed in publications including *Frontiers*, *Defenders of Wildlife News*, and *The Living Wilderness*. She also started to write short nature pieces for the juvenile market, publishing in *Humpty Dumpty*. These stories supplemented the couple's income, and they were able to forge a living.²⁵

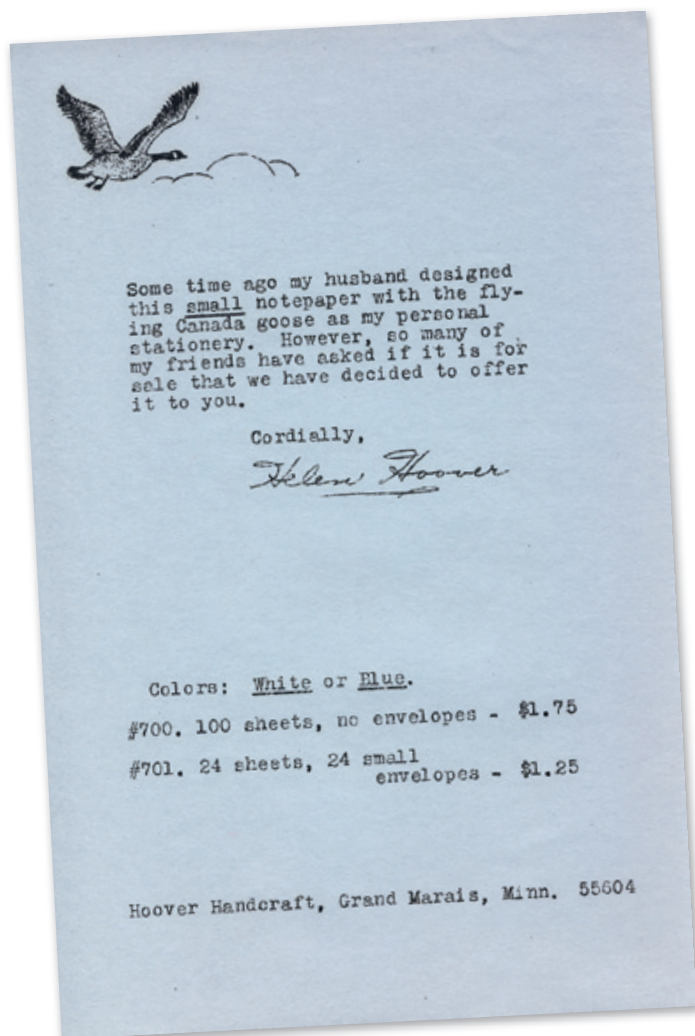
ON CHRISTMAS DAY 1958, an emaciated buck found its way into the Hoovers' yard. Helen felt sorry for the deer and wanted to feed it, so Ade cut cedar boughs, which deer browse on, and provided some leftover food from their holiday meal. The next day a neighbor brought them some corn. Thus began the Hoovers' befriending of Peter the buck (as they named him) and Helen's close and careful observation of the lives of several generations of deer that came to their yard.²⁶

While continuing to write magazine articles, Helen also contacted several prominent presses about publishing a book for adults. In 1961 an editor at Thomas Y. Crowell offered her a contract. "I hope to show the wilderness as it can look to anyone with a couple of guidebooks and a high-school idea of natural history, provided they look at it with reason and common sense. Most of the books I've read are either too sentimental or go all out the other way," she wrote to a friend.²⁷

Helen began work on the manuscript, putting in long days detailing her observations and making sure her words were precise. The book was organized by chapters pertaining to plants, trees, insects, birds, and mammals. She included a bibliography and an index and consulted with several experts on various topics to ensure that her observations and assumptions were accurate. She also recycled stories from her magazine submissions, such as the tale of an ermine the Hoovers named Walter and the nursing of a deer mouse she had rescued from outside the cabin, only to have it killed by a vole that found it in its box by the cookstove.²⁸

She submitted the manuscript in early 1963, and thus began a battle of wills with the publisher. Extremely intelligent, well read, and trained as a scientist, Helen did not appreciate the pickiness of her copy editor. All of their work was conducted by mail—the Hoovers did not yet have a telephone—making edits, challenges to accuracy, and discussion of word choices a frustrating back-and-forth affair. But Helen pushed on, knowing she was going to realize her dream of being a book author.²⁹ *The Long-Shadowed Forest* was published in the fall of 1963, just in time for the holiday sales season. It was beautifully illustrated by Ade, with line drawings of plants, flowers, trees, and the many animals that populated their yard.

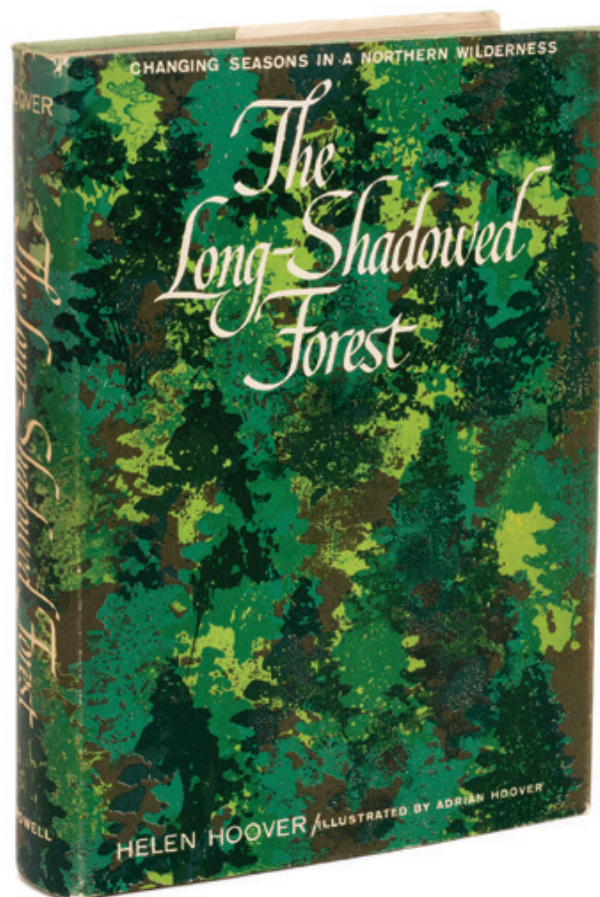
Helen did not anticipate the accolades she received for this book. An immediate critical and popular success, it debuted at a time of rising public interest in nature and conservation. Sigurd Olson had already published *The*



Singing Wilderness (1956) and *Listening Point* (1958), and attention to the environment greatly increased following the 1962 publication of biologist Rachel Carson's path-breaking *Silent Spring*. Helen's precise yet lyrical writing style communicated her awe of nature.

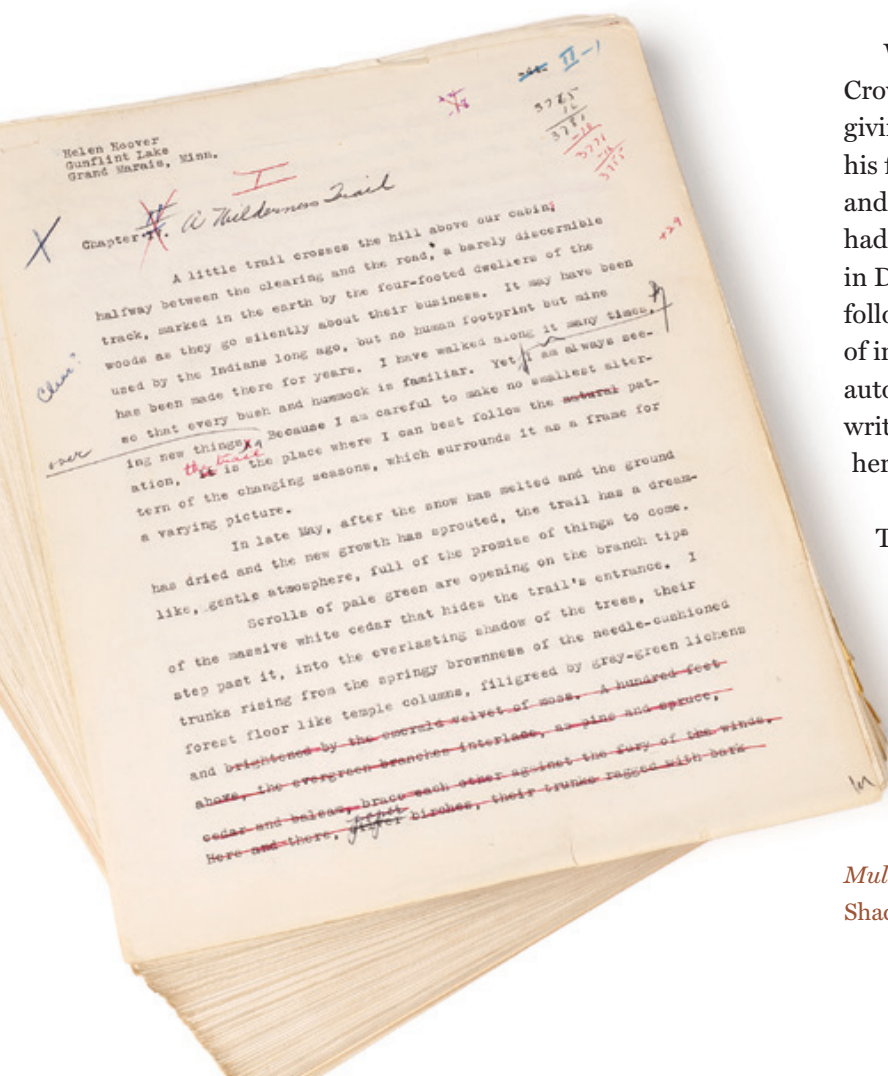
By night the fisher is as fearfully exquisite as a creature out of dreams. Moving about in the cold light of the stars, moon, or aurora borealis, it is a mysterious, fluid part of the half-dark. The frosty hairs that give it daytime fluffiness are invisible and, smooth and sleek and sinuous, it flows and poses, a shadow darker than all other shadows, its eyes like emeralds exploding into flame. It glides in the unearthly beauty that belongs to the untamed land and its children.³⁰

Gladys Taber, a well-known author and columnist for *Family Circle* magazine, wrote a glowing review. The *Minneapolis Tribune* ran a photo essay about the Hoovers in its Sunday magazine. Even Minnesota native Harrison E. Salisbury, a distinguished *New York Times* correspondent, gave Helen a favorable notice. The book sold more than 20,000 copies—no small feat at the time for a nature book.³¹



With the success of *The Long-Shadowed Forest*, Crowell was anxious for another book. Helen had been giving consideration to the story of Peter the buck and his family. Writing this would be particularly personal and painful, as hunters had shot some of the deer they had grown fond of. She signed a contract with Crowell in December 1964 but asked to be released from it the following October. The summer of 1965 had been one of increased development in the area and of visits from autograph-seekers wanting to see where the nature writer lived. The activity left Helen agitated, preventing her from concentrating on writing.³²

Clearly frustrated, in early 1966 she asked Gladys Taber for advice. Taber suggested that Helen contact her own agent. In February Helen wrote to Carol Brandt in New York and pitched her now-completed book about the deer, which included Ade's line drawings of Peter, Mama, and their offspring. Brandt, a personal friend of publisher Alfred A. Knopf, sent the manuscript to him. Knopf re-



Multicolored markings on manuscript pages, *The Long-Shadowed Forest*, attesting to the editorial process

membered *The Long-Shadowed Forest* and regretted that his firm had not published it, particularly since Knopf was Sigurd Olson's publisher. Angus Cameron, Olson's editor, was given Hoover's manuscript to review, liked it immediately, and recommended accepting it.³³

The Gift of the Deer tells the story of the starving buck and how the Hoovers nursed him back to health. As they grew attached to him and other deer in the herd, they gave them all names, fed them, observed their activity, and recorded their behavior. The story followed the deer for several years as they came and went, relating the behavior of various individuals. It also showed the brutal reality of hunting and the loss of several deer to road accidents.

To Helen, the deer that returned each year to feed in their yard were graceful, beautiful animals. Her writing about two bucks captures her powers of observation.

They glided, curved, circled, raced, with first one, then the other leading. They flashed across the yard in front of me, their leaps so long and effortless that their hoofs seemed hardly to skim the ground. They cleared a brush pile as though riding a wave. They flowed like liquid, soared like winged creatures, seemed to hover in mid-leap as their lithe young bodies stretched through the exciting air of spring.³⁴

Published in the fall of 1966, *The Gift of the Deer* was a huge success, selling more than 45,000 copies in hardcover and nearly two million more as a Reader's Digest Condensed Book—and changing the Hoovers'

Success led to continued intrusions by fans, preventing Helen from focusing on her writing.

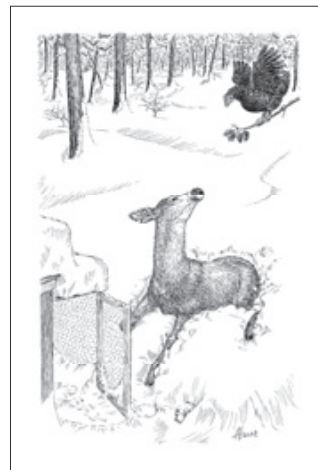
lives forever. Knopf had paid Helen \$10,000, and Reader's Digest purchased the rights for \$20,000. Even more people sought out Helen, dropping in at the cabin and asking her to autograph books.³⁵

The Hoovers, each 57 years old, were now comfortably well-off. After 13 years at the cabin, they decided it was time for a much-needed, long-overdue vacation. In the fall of 1967, driving a new car purchased in town, they headed to the Southwest to explore and did not return to their cabin until the following summer.³⁶

Knopf, meanwhile, was anxious for a follow-up book, and Helen's readers wanted to know more about how the Hoovers had come to live in the wilderness. She had the framework of their early years in the manuscript "A Little Place in the Woods," written in the late 1950s, and a trove of magazine submissions she could adapt and add for variety and color. *A Place in the Woods* was prepared while the Hoovers traveled; Ade again provided illustrations.³⁷

This book, published in 1969, chronicles the Hoovers' first 15 months living at Gunflint Lake. It begins in the summer of 1954 and includes a storm that dropped a tree on the cabin, their interactions with animals large and small, the car accident, and all of the hard work that went into fixing up the cabin, surviving on meager food stores, and making a living selling notepaper and wooden items. It, too, received favorable reviews and publicity and sold nearly as well as *The Gift of the Deer*. It was also selected for the Reader's Digest Condensed Books series.³⁸

Illustrations for Gift of the Deer, 1966



Success led to continued intrusions by fans, preventing Helen from focusing on her writing. More development, not only on the Gunflint Trail but also in the immediate vicinity of the cabin, made feeding animals in their yard increasingly difficult. Because of the publicity, people throughout the area—including hunters—knew that the Hoovers fed a large number of deer. After many of them were killed near the Hoovers' land in the early 1960s, Helen and Ade began leaving their property during hunting season, fearing for their own safety as well as for the deer attracted to their yard.³⁹

ALL OF THESE FACTORS CONTRIBUTED to the Hoovers' decision to leave their Gunflint home for good. They had the financial means to travel, and their advancing age likely contributed to reluctance to return to the hard life at the cabin. Helen and Ade began to travel extensively. They spent winters with friends in Florida and then purchased a home in Ranchos de Taos, New Mexico. The climate was warm, and they were unknown in that community of artists. They paid their last visit to Gunflint Lake in 1971.⁴⁰

In 1970 Helen had started to work on her next book. Knowing that her readers were still inspired by their move to the wilderness, she was compelled to pick up where *A Place in the Woods* left off. *The Years of the Forest* provides a chronological account of the Hoovers' subsequent 16 years on Gunflint Lake. For this work, Helen relied on the generosity of several friends who returned her earlier letters so she could cull stories. This book's readers thought she was still living happily on Gunflint Lake, when she was actually in Ranchos de Taos. Writing it was a cathartic process, as Helen tried to put the years into perspective while recounting this special time. The

book is a lively and engaging read chronicling the ups and downs of their life in the wilderness, but it is also a wistful story that tries to reconcile the many changes that had occurred in the area. *The Years of the Forest*, published in 1973, was well received. Gerald Carson's review in the *New York Times* called Helen "a compassionate observer of the fauna . . . and a sensitive poetic chronicler of what she saw and felt."⁴¹

Helen now struggled to find a topic for her next book, believing that she had finished telling about her life in the north woods. She thought about writing what she called an "ambience-lifestyle" story about the changes she had witnessed in her lifetime. Her publisher was intrigued and encouraged this effort, but the words were slow to come. She also considered a book about the desert, but that did not materialize, either. Helen was not sure that her readers would accept her writing about anything other than the north woods.⁴²

The Hoovers abruptly left Ranchos de Taos for Laramie, Wyoming, in 1977, primarily because they were keeping a large number of cats in violation of city rules. The couple had stayed in a Laramie hotel in 1968 when Helen was finishing *A Place in the Woods*. Helen had liked the innkeeper and the fact she was left alone while completing the manuscript, and they enjoyed Wyoming's open spaces. They found a place outside of town and added a large building to house the 30-odd cats they had



Cozy cabin living by lamplight, October 1963. Helen reads Ian Fleming's Thunderball, a copy of Macbeth sits on the table (foreground), and the Mona Lisa smiles down on Ade.

They paid their last visit to Gunflint Lake in 1971.

accumulated. Helen pondered writing a story about her growing collection of cats but did not think her readers would be interested.⁴³

By the late 1970s, with some encouragement from her agent and editor, she decided to revisit the lifestyle topic. She started to write what she called the “Chicago” manuscript, a look at her life through the time the Hoovers moved to Gunflint Lake. She eventually submitted it to Knopf, but it was ultimately rejected as lacking the focus of her other books.⁴⁴

During the years in Laramie, Helen stayed in touch with people by mail and telephone. She kept up with a few friends from Gunflint Lake, assuring them that she and Ade would return. They never did. They sold the property in 1980 and, as in their 1954 move from Chicago to Minnesota, had their few remaining personal effects at the cabin shipped to them. Both Helen and Ade were in their 70s, and they began to experience a series of health problems. Helen alluded to these in her letters, attributing some of her maladies to the years of hard manual labor at Gunflint Lake. But she did not disclose her obesity and general decline in health. They both continued to smoke, and Ade suffered from bouts of neuralgia and emphysema.⁴⁵

Helen died of peritonitis in a Fort Collins, Colorado, hospital on June 30, 1984. She was cremated, per her wishes, and Ade had her ashes spread not on Gunflint Lake but in Taos. Ade was lonely, but he remained in Laramie. He died two years later and was buried in a veterans’ cemetery in Denver.⁴⁶

HELEN HOOVER WAS A PERSON of contradictions. Her very popular books covered a range of topics, from observing nature and interacting with animals to recounting the couple’s efforts to survive and make a living in the wilderness. As a writer, Helen is a friendly, interesting person, qualities that endeared her to readers. Her correspondence maintains that same friendliness. But Helen did not cultivate many close relationships with neighbors. Perhaps because she and Ade were from Chicago or had worked as professionals, they felt like outsiders. Although the Hoovers often received help from others, they were wary of their neighbors, many of whom

participated in activities they disfavored—hunting, fishing and, in many cases, poaching. To people in the north woods who rely on the land for subsistence and look after each other, the Hoovers were indeed odd neighbors.

During the 1950s when she and Ade first moved to Gunflint Lake, the area was still considered remote, particularly after the tourist season. But electricity was coming in, the Gunflint Trail was being expanded and paved, and more and more people were attracted to the region. Ade had said the wilderness and privacy would not last; they should buy when they did and enjoy it while they could.⁴⁷

As Helen became a successful author, she was genuinely surprised that people were interested enough to seek her out in person. Readers had a visceral connection to her writing and thought nothing of stopping by for a visit, books in hand. Fan mail overwhelmed her, and she felt compelled to reply to as many letters as she could, a trait instilled by her mother. And though she was not pleased with fans dropping in at Gunflint Lake, she loved the attention she and Ade received at Powers Department Store in the Twin Cities during book signings for *The Gift of the Deer* and *A Place in the Woods*.⁴⁸

Helen was never able to duplicate the success she had while living and writing at Gunflint Lake. Her books captured the paradise she and Ade were able to create for 17 years—one they knew would eventually be lost. After *The Years of the Forest* she published no more books, and she soon gave up writing magazine columns.

All of Helen’s books remain in print today and continue to be popular regionally. They present the innocence of a time in northern Minnesota that no longer exists, the idyll of the north woods that readers hold in their imagination. Helen, through her charming prose, and Ade, through his endearing pen-and-ink drawings, captured that story for the ages.

Helen said it best in the epilogue to *The Years of the Forest*, when she and Ade returned to Gunflint Lake for the last time in early 1971.

I knew at that moment that this was still, and always would be, our place, too. No amount of surrounding changes would take it away, because such a place is more than a piece of earth, and its environment may be anything from the tallest trees to the highest towers. It is where you find the fulfillment of your deepest needs, and you find it only once, if you are lucky enough to find it at all. But once you find it, you never leave entirely and you never lose it, because it has become a part of you.⁴⁹ □

Notes

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1. *Something About the Author* (Detroit: Gale Publishing, 1977), 12: 101.

2. Florence Hart Carr, "Helen Blackburn Hoover: Scientist, Naturalist, Writer," 1993, manuscript, 8, Florence Hart Carr Papers, private collection; *Something About the Author*, 12: 101. Carr did extensive research on Hoover for her master's degree and wrote this biography, never published. An abbreviated version is available at the Minnesota Historical Society library.

3. Here and below, Carr, "Helen Hoover," 7–8, 11; *Something About the Author*, 12: 101; Helen Hoover, "Chicago," 4, manuscript, Carr papers. Carr typed and paginated this version of "Chicago," working from the original typed and handwritten manuscript, box 11, Helen and Adrian Hoover Papers, Kathryn A. Martin Library Archives, University of Minnesota Duluth.

4. Hoover, "Chicago," 4.

5. Carr, "Helen Hoover," 20.

6. Frederick Lewis Allen, *Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the 1920's* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1997), 70–73; David E. Kyvig, *Daily Life in the United States, 1920–1940* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2002), 12.

7. Hoover, "Chicago," 11.

8. Carr, "Helen Hoover," 29.

9. Helen Hoover, "Chicago," 13, 41, 76. This manuscript contains many instances of Hannah behaving cruelly toward Helen. Written 25 years after Hannah's death, it appears to be Helen's attempt to reconcile her feelings about her mother.

10. Hoover, "Chicago," 55.

11. Hoover, "Chicago," 71.

12. Hoover, "Chicago," 82–83.

13. Hoover, "Chicago," 91–92.

14. *Something About the Author*, 12: 101.

15. William H. Chafe, *The American Woman: Her Changing Social, Economic, and Political Roles, 1920–1970* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 175–80; Hoover, "Chicago," 112.

16. Helen Hoover, *A Place in the Woods* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969), 11.

17. Helen Hoover, *The Years of The For-*

est (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973), 120–21; Carr, "Helen Hoover," 54.

18. Here and below, Hoover, *A Place in the Woods*, 43–48, 57, 72–79.

19. Helen Hoover to Winnifred Hopkins, May 7, 1959, box 2, Hoover papers.

20. Hoover, *A Place in the Woods*, 116.

21. Hoover, *A Place in the Woods*, 26–33, 107–10.

22. Helen Hoover, *The Long-Shadowed Forest* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1963), 105–06.

23. Hoover, *A Place in the Woods*, 234–35.

24. Hoover, *A Place in the Woods*, 175–76, 252; samples of mailers and notepaper, box 13, Hoover papers.

25. Helen Hoover to Carol Brandt, Mar. 13, 1966, box 2, Hoover papers; scrapbook of clippings and tear sheets of published articles, box 18, Hoover papers. Hoover authored three books for the juvenile market: *Animals at My Doorstep* (1966) and *Animals Near and Far* (1970), both compilations of her *Humpty Dumpty* columns, and *Great Wolf and the Good Woodsman* (1967). All were published by Parents Magazine Press.

26. Carr, "Helen Hoover," 68.

27. Helen Hoover to Winnifred Hopkins, Dec. 29, 1961, box 2, Hoover papers.

28. Carr, "Helen Hoover," 73.

29. Edward Tripp, Thomas Y. Crowell Co., to Helen Hoover, May 8, May 15, 1963; Hoover to Tripp, May 18, 1963, box 16, Hoover papers.

30. Hoover, *The Long-Shadowed Forest*, 174.

31. "The Editorial Trail," *Audubon*, Mar.–Apr. 1965, box 10, Hoover papers. Hoover kept scrapbooks of all of her reviews, now archived in this box.

32. Hoover, *The Years of the Forest*, 247, 266–68; Helen Hoover to Robert L. Crowell, Oct. 29, 1965, box 16, Hoover papers.

33. Helen Hoover to Carol Brandt, Feb. 9, 1966 (pitch), and other letters between them, early 1966, box 2, Hoover papers.

34. Helen Hoover, *The Gift of the Deer* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966), 109.

35. Once Knopf accepted the manuscript, the schedule was accelerated to ac-

commodate simultaneous publication with Reader's Digest. Carol Brandt to Helen Hoover, May 4, 1966; Reader's Digest to Helen Hoover, June 6, 1966—both box 2, Hoover papers; Ashbel Green, Alfred A. Knopf, to Florence Carr, Dec. 1, 1989, Carr papers.

36. Hoover, *The Years of the Forest*, 306.

37. "A Little Place in the Woods," box 14, Hoover papers.

38. William Koshland, Alfred A. Knopf, to John Henricksson, Apr. 7, 1987, copy in author's possession, stating that *A Place in the Woods* sold nearly 40,000 copies.

39. Helen Hoover to Angus Cameron, Jan. 12, 1967, General Correspondence: 1278.2-3, Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., Records, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas, Austin.

40. *Something About the Author*, 12: 102.

41. Hoover, *The Years of the Forest*, ix; *Something About the Author*, 12: 102; *New York Times*, Oct. 4, 1969.

42. Helen Hoover to Angus Cameron, July 31, 1978, box 2, and to Peg Miller, May 20, 1973, box 4, both Hoover papers.

43. Carr, "Helen Hoover," 110.

44. Carr, "Helen Hoover," 112; Barbara Bristol, Alfred A. Knopf, to Helen Hoover, May 21, 1982, box 2, Hoover papers.

45. Helen Hoover to Peg Miller, Mar. 11, 1980, box 4, Hoover papers; Carr, "Helen Hoover," 113–14.

46. *New York Times*, July 7, 1984 (obituary); Carr, "Helen Hoover," 115.

47. Hoover, *A Place in the Woods*, 10–11.

48. Carr, "Helen Hoover," 99; Helen Hoover to Carol Brandt, Nov. 11, 1966, box 2, Hoover papers.

49. Hoover, *The Years of the Forest*, 318.

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