

Alaska History Oral History Project  
Interview with Martha Randolph  
Subject: Women in Competitive Shooting Sports  
Interviewed by Cathy Tallino  
Wednesday, December 1, 1993  
Kodiak, Alaska

CT: Today is December 1st, 1993, and this is Cathy Tallino. I am interviewing Martha Randolph. Our subject is competitive shooting history here in Kodiak and we're leaning toward the role of women in competitive shooting. I met Martha when I first came to Kodiak. She's been someone I have admired and honored. I am going to be asking her questions about shooting, about her life and what all she's done in the area of competitive shooting. First of all Martha, will you tell me your name?

MR: OK, my name is Martha Randolph, I was born in Kodiak, Alaska, Territory of Alaska, way back in 1933 on August 12th so that makes me a Senior Citizen this year, or eligible for the Senior Citizens, membership in the local Seniors. I've lived all my life in Kodiak. I can't tell you a better place to live. My parents are Ole Olsen, my father and my mother Laura Margaret Olsen. Her maiden name was Larsen. Laura Margaret Larsen, she's the daughter of Anton Larsen. I think a lot of people will ring a bell with Anton Larsen of Anton Larsen Island. That was my Grandfather's place. He homesteaded that. I don't remember exactly when he homesteaded. It was long before my time. My Grandfather died the year that I was born. I never was privileged to meet him personally, but I feel like I've known him through the years through all the stories that I've heard.

CT: When do you first remember shooting? Did you shoot when you were a little girl?

MR: When I was a little girl, no. I come from a family of five daughters. My parents were not privileged to have any sons, however I remember my Dad saying the men would tease him and tell him that "That's all right Ole, the boys will come later!"

CT: And they did!

MR: They did! But anyhow when I was a child, girls didn't do the things that ladies and women do today. You never ever saw a woman out on a fishing boat. She might have been out there helping her husband or helping with the family gill net operation, or something like that, but to be out on a seiner or something like that, women just didn't do those things. Women's role was in the home. The men were the providers. So, when did I first remember shooting? I was a teenager. My father worked on the Naval Station which is now the U.S. Coast Guard Support Center. He had a very good friend who liked to shoot. In fact he and my dad were duck hunting companions. This friend's name was Eddie Pecore. He was also a former baseball player. He had lost an eye when he was a younger man so that cut him out from league play. Eddie took me out one time and he was going to teach me how to shoot.

CT: Where did you shoot?

MR: If I remember rightly we went to Holiday Beach. And it was with a shotgun.

CT: A shotgun!

MR: I think he more or less challenged me. "Martha see if you can hit this. I'm gonna pitch this bottle or can whatever it was, "I'm gonna pitch it up. See if you can hit it." Well the first two or three times, all I did was shoot great big holes in the air!

CT: Was your shoulder sore?

MR: You know I don't know! I don't recall it being sore and it was a 12 Gauge Shotgun at that!

CT: You don't recall your shoulder being sore??!

MR: No. It was a J.C. Higgins 12 Gauge pump shotgun, I remember that, and I loved that gun! After 4 or 5 times why, I got the hang of it. I think if I had kept up with trap shooting and whatnot I probably would be pretty good at it! Because I loved it. And of course, the more you practice the better you got. Evidently, many people used to keep my daddy informed on my "Progress". And from what I heard, daddy was very proud of me but he never ever asked me how I was doing, or what we did. Eddie used to have dogs and he would take the dogs, he and his wife were very good friends of my folks. This was how we went out shooting. "Martha you want to go out for a ride with us?" Eddie and his wife and we'd take the dogs. We'd take the dogs for a run and of course and then do the shooting too.

CT: Interesting! So it wasn't verbally: "Well we're going shooting."

MR: No!

CT: Did his wife shoot also?

MR: No, Grace did not shoot.

CT: Interesting. Did he ever say if it was his idea or your dad's idea to get you started?

MR: I really don't remember. They didn't have children and that was something they always wanted. Of course here I was a teenager that was interested in baseball, and shooting...

CT: All those things girls were not supposed to be interested in...

MR: Mmm, in other words I was the tomboy in the family. So, anyhow, that was my first shooting experience.

CT: Did your mom ever find out about your shooting? Did she know that you were shooting?

MR: Oh later on she did, yes.

CT: Was it upsetting to her?

MR: I don't think so because now my mother when she was a young girl living on the "Island" this was part of life out there. We're hearing the stories now. We didn't when we were younger girls. She talks about loading shotgun shells. I've heard her talk about when my grandfather, originally when they would do their loading they would use black powder. And of course you know black powder is an awful mess. Anyhow, I can remember just recently she was telling the tale about when my grandpa brought home smokeless powder.

CT: Oh how exciting that was.

MR: Yeah! And you didn't have to get all dirty with all this loading. They didn't call it handloading then. But as a young girl she did shoot. I can recall her talking about shooting a 10 Gauge Shotgun.

CT: A 10 Gauge kicks like crazy too!

MR: Yeah. I've seen pictures of her holding up ducks with her dog. Topsy was her dog's name. There's a picture where she's holding up ducks that she had killed. Topsy is by her side and there's the gun.

CT: Definitely generations of using a gun for...

MR: It was interesting, but basically when us girls were growing up girls stayed home and took care learning how to cook and sew and wash and iron and take care of the house.

CT: Did you know of any other girls that were your friends, or did any of your sisters show any interest

at all in that kind of shooting?

MR: I have one other sister who did, yes. But she is a little bit older than I am. And she's kind of a tomboy like I was too, so naturally... but my other sisters, no.

CT: Were not in the least bit interested in...

MR: Not at that point and at that time my youngest sister, I'm number 4 out of the girls. My younger sister, the youngest one is seven and a half years younger than I am. There is quite a span there. And she shoots now and she's a good shot too.

CT: Great! Do you remember when you first started shooting in a competitive manner? I mean was that the first time you went out with a shotgun? Do you ever remember taking the "Challenge"?

MR: I couldn't tell you. It must have been... the first competition was a Turkey Shoot and I don't even remember who was sponsoring it. And it was real low key. You know, "Old so and so is having a turkey shoot." I was married then.

CT: Basically, a turkey shoot is when the turkey is the prize.

MR: Yeah. And it was with .22's, I remember that. This must have been around '53 I guess or '54. My husband at the time said "Well here, you try it!" and "Oh no!" You know.

CT: Yeah, I know. Playing the role but wanting to do it badly.

MR: Yeah, I did and I did win a turkey.

CT: And what did your husband say at that point? Was he happy about that?

MR: I think he was kind of surprised but he blamed it all on luck!

CT: Yeah, right! In our history class we were talking about during the war. It mentioned in the book we were reading or on some of the movies that we watched. They were talking about how they armed civilians here in Kodiak, at least those civilians who were interested in defending themselves when they truly believed that the Japanese were going to attack Kodiak. Do you remember any of that happening? Were you aware of that going on?

MR: I remember being aware of it. But some tales are that everybody was armed. No, everybody was not armed. Maybe the Military did provide guns to some people. I don't know for sure, you know I've heard that they did. My father worked on the Base. He helped in building that facility. I don't recall him being furnished with any type of gun. I do remember that we were supplied with gas masks.

CT: Interesting! Do you remember any ammunition or anything being handed out?

MR: Not that I can recall. You know I was just about 7 or 8 years old.

CT: You were pretty young.

MR: No, I was 9 I guess. Yeah, I was about 9 years old then. But I can remember the gas masks. Everybody in the family was supplied with one, and having to take them to school with us.

CT: Oh isn't that something!

MR: Yeah, back and forth every day. I think you've probably heard all kinds of tales about the curfews and the blackouts and the air raids or the warnings that we had for Japanese coming over and whatnot. There were times when we did leave home.

CT: Do you remember Dad taking any guns along when you left home?

MR: No. I don't remember that. We dressed warm, and my younger sister was just a little one. My mom and dad took turns carrying her so we could walk faster, and walking in the dark, because it was blackout time. You had to have your flashlights blackened. After the all clear sounded, depending on what time of night, whether we stayed where we went or whether we walked back home. Looking back, it was a traumatic time.

CT: Of course! No question about that.

MR: Real traumatic.

CT: Any war is traumatic. I can understand that.

MR: Because, you just didn't know. You were restricted. I mean here we were living in this small place. And all of a sudden the Government, the Military comes in and areas that we were used to going to were no longer available, because they were out of bounds.

CT: That wouldn't be any fun at all.

MR: You know at that time Kodiak was the little fishing village accustomed to a way of life that was real low key. I guess you could say now a days because people went about and did what had to be done and didn't have to worry about locking your doors or walking alone in the dark. And then all of a sudden you had this big influx of Military. It really changed.

CT: My next question. Was competitive shooting something that you shared with your husband? Did your husband know that you were interested in shooting when you met him?

MR: Oh yes.

CT: I mean in my own life, my husband probably married me because I liked guns. I don't know if that is the case with you, but men seem to be pretty amazed when they finally find a woman who really does like to shoot. I thought I'd just share that!

MR: Yeah, I think that was part of the attraction because at the time that I met my husband I was working on the Naval Station. And I was staying briefly with Grace and Eddie Pecore. They had quarters on the base and it turned out that one of Eddie's sisters, lost her husband. He was going down to help her and Grace didn't want to stay alone so she asked me if I would stay with her while he was gone. So I did. Then I think he had been back maybe about a week and it turned out that Grace and Eddie both knew my husband, or the man that was to be my husband. It was real interesting how I met him. I met his mother before I met him.

CT: Interesting! It was the same with my father and mother.

MR: Oh really!

CT: Yeah!

MR: I met his mother. Evidently she had gone home and told him about this girl that was staying with Grace and Eddie. And soon he was over there and we got to talking. I was interested in sports of all kinds: shooting, fishing, bowling, baseball, in fact at that time I was on a softball team. That was part of the attraction.

CT: And after you had your children did you teach all of them how to shoot?

MR: Oh yes, all the kids were raised around guns. They were raised to respect them. You didn't handle them nonchalantly. And they were cared for just like a fine piece of furniture.

CT: That's the way it should be. Exactly! I agree. Did you ever remember going out with other women to shoot? I mean was it something you shared with other women or did you kind of feel like you were the only one around that did it?

MR: Yeah! I can't recall very many women shooting. I can remember going duck hunting and rabbit hunting and all that. And I was the only female in the bunch. Duck hunting was the same way.

CT: Sounds familiar!

MR: Yeah! I don't remember being around other women who shot or were interested in shooting until getting involved with the Sportsman's Association. There were women who were interested. Maybe it was just to be supportive of their husbands or their companion at that time, I'm not sure. In fact I wondered if I was a little bit strange. You know, why don't other people do this? Why do I like to do it?

CT: I understand where you're coming from! When you went out to shoot with your family, we talked before about places in Kodiak, basically where did you shoot? Before you talked about going to Holiday Beach, you remember about going there and shooting the first time. Are there some other areas you remember shooting at?

MR: Gosh, it seem like we'd stop and if this was a good place, I can't remember any specific locations.

CT: Just a place that was safe.

MR: A good, safe place to shoot. You didn't shoot out over the water. We always had a good backstop. You never ever shot towards the road or going across the road. In other words you evaluated your situation and where you were located. So where ever we went shooting it was a good place to shoot.

CT: But now a days that is very difficult for people to do that because there are homes all over the place and people who still do that end up shooting in an unsafe manner.

MR: Yes.

CT: Have you ever felt the need or had to defend yourself with a gun?

MR: I've never had that happen. And I hope I never have to.

CT: Oh I hope you never have to either!

MR: That's something I've thought many a time. That's a choice you have to make when that situation arises. I don't think a person really knows for sure how their going to react. But maybe if it comes down to defending your life against I don't know...I hope I never have it happen.

CT: I hope you never do either! I'm not sure I'd like to be faced with that choice, either. How did the building of the KISA Indoor Range change competitive shooting here in Kodiak? That's kind of a wild question.

MR: Well..

CT: You were very heavily involved with the beginning of that indoor range out there and I know that when I first came to Kodiak that's where I met you. If you can just give me kind of a general overview of competitive shooting, not connected with hunting and fishing but what competitive shooting and matches were like before that range was built and then how it changed afterwards.

MR: Competitive shooting before that, I don't think there was much of it except maybe an occasional one, you know a turkey shoot. Those were the only ones I can recall in the surrounding area.

CT: Were there any NRA matches held before the Indoor Range was built?

MR: No. Not that I'm aware of.

CT: Not for civilians.

MR: That's right. On the Naval Station, they did have a Rod and Gun Club, a Conservation Club, something to that affect. The Military and the Civilians who lived and worked out there I guess had access to it. And that's interesting because I lived on the Naval Station for a number of years and I knew it was there. But I just didn't have that interest in it. I was younger, raising a family you know and you were busy taking care of those things.

CT: Right!

MR: The things that we did with the kids, going out and shooting and what not, why it was as a family. The Indoor Range, when that was built, created an awareness and a need for people to realize that, number 1: Guns don't need to be feared, if handled properly. It was an education for people here that maybe were opposed to shooting sports beforehand and could come out and see what was happening that "Hey this wasn't such a bad idea after all." I can recall women and I'm sure you can too Cathy, that were afraid of guns.

CT: Scared to death! I've trained many of them.

MR: Mmhm. Because they didn't know how to handle them. And yet after going through a shooting program had an entirely different outlook. To my way of thinking it's something good that had happened. It's got a long way to go yet. I mean there's so much that should be done. You guys have made a lot of progress. There's a lot of history in that range!

CT: There certainly is! No question about that. I think about all the things I remember going on out there!

MR: I don't think they even had a heating system when you were there.

CT: The beginning part I think the heating system had just... no I remember the first meetings, we didn't. We didn't have the heat on.

MR: It was ice cold!

CT: Yeah! The system was in but it wasn't up and running. I remember it was cold in there. I remember it now.

MR: It's come a long way.

CT: It certainly has come a long way. My next question is something we kind of had to laugh about ahead of time but I'll ask it anyway then I'll probably steer it in a little bit different direction. My next question was What do you think will happen after the "Brady Bill" goes into effect? And Martha and I just sort of agreed that there is no way we can really figure out what is going to happen. I think probably another point that I'd like to bring up is that we see on T.V. and in the lower 48 and here in Kodiak it's beginning to happen too, there is an incredible amount of violence around and a lot of people using guns, handguns in particular, who perhaps really should not be using handguns, or should somehow be having some training going on with handguns. Do you think that we as a community can pull together and tackle that problem?

MR: Education is a valuable tool.

CT: And if we all work together...

MR: Maybe so. But I think a lot of it is working together, maybe so, but let's face it, guns, and they class them as weapons. And I don't like to see them classed as "weapons" because, really, when you

come right down to it, the good old kitchen knife is a valuable weapon, a pair of scissors is a valuable weapon. A baseball bat is a weapon. Guns, they've got a stigma right off the bat. And hey, that's not fair! I don't think. But education is something that's needed. There's nothing wrong with guns. What's wrong with going out and enjoying target shooting? Trap shooting? It's a recreation. And you work hard to develop that skill. People like to go out and drive stock cars. Gosh, look at the number of people that can be killed when one of those things crashes! But yet you don't see stock cars labeled like you do guns.

CT: So your feeling is what needs to be educated and changed is we need to go after the people and not the implements.

MR: That's right! That's right! Because guns... God willing, I hope guns are around as long as I am or even longer than I am because Gee Whiz!, we wouldn't be here today if they weren't available for the defensive measures they've done.

CT: One of the issues that came up in the shooting classes that I've taught in this past year has been the question of empowerment of the person who knows how to use a firearm safely. Do you have any thoughts on the feeling that you have, that you hit what you're aiming at, and you know you can handle yourself, and you know that if you use a gun you are not going to use it in an incorrect manner... that feeling of personal empowerment. Do you agree with that?

MR: Yeah! Because I wouldn't handle a gun if I didn't know how to use it. If you were to hand me a gun, yours, I'm not going to just take it from you, I'm going to make sure that you have the action open where it's visibly obvious that there is no danger to me handling it. Not only that. I'm not going to try to operate something that I'm not familiar with. I've got to ask beforehand "How does this work? Show me!" So that's where a lot of the education comes in. These women's firearms classes... I shouldn't say women in general, where firearms training can benefit anybody who doesn't know how. And they're gonna be wiser even if they have no intention of ever owning or ever having to handle a firearm, they shouldn't feel uncomfortable around them.

CT: Thank you! Do you have anything else that you want to say?

MR: Gosh! All I can say is there just needs to a lot more education, a lot more public awareness. Because there are too many people, and I'm really surprised at the number I have met that are definitely afraid of guns. "They are horrible weapons!" I'm not going to use the words that they did because I don't like them. And I'll be there to defend it all the way. I have no fear of guns. If I would be in a situation where someone was carelessly handling one, then I would be fearful of that accident that could happen. Kids, I think it's wonderful you have the Junior Shooting Program going on out at the Range. I think it's great! Because as a youngster you start learning good shooting skills and gun handling and are not likely to have accidents.

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