

MAMIE ELWELL

Anchorage.

REEL 1 Mamie Elwell lives at 126 1/2 West 11th Ave., Anchorage. She and her late husband Luke were big game guides and outfitters for many years in the Kenai, Seward, Kodiak areas.

Mamie was born Oct. 1, 1892 in Ohio. She and Luke came to Alaska in 1920. Her maiden name was Mamie Grimm. She did quite a bit of outdoor writing using the name of Niska Elwell. Publishers in earlier days thought she was a man...would not bother with her stuff she wrote under her own name because women were not supposed to know about the outdoors.

She chose the name Niska as a pen name because she was an outdoor girl as a youth. She belonged to the Campfire Girls and every girl had to select a name. She chose Niska because it means "wild goose" in the Cree language, and her family called her the "wild goose" because she liked the outdoors so much.

She and Luke Elwell went to the same high school and were married in 1915 before he went off to war (he spent two years in France during World War I). He was born in Aberdeen Scotland and came to Boston with his parents as a youth. The family then moved to Ohio. After the war Luke and Mamie headed west and went to Yakima, Wash. Then in 1920 they headed for Alaska - a dream they had had for years. Then landed in Seward with no job but Luke got one soon as a surveyor's helper for job surveying a road to Hope.

While Luke was away Mamie bought a dog team from Russian John. The "team" was composed of two huge dogs who fought all the time....finally got rid of that team and got another team.

Luke began guiding as a helper and packer. In those days one had to work for five years as a helper and packer before one could take the game guide license test. Luke worked for Andy Simons and Hank Lucas, two well known guides from the Kenai area. He trained under them and used Seward as headquarters most of the time.

Later the Elwells built Elwells Fishing Lodge on the upper Russian Lake, half way between Seward and Anchorage. They were there 22 years. Had to fly in or walk 17 miles from Coopers' Landing.

Luke and Mamie had two dreams as young marrieds in Ohio - to go to Alaska and to go to Africa. They did both...living in Alaska and visiting Africa on a picture safari.

Gus Gelles of Anchorage organized some guides, bought some horses, and combined efforts with Luke and other guides for big gamehunts. Luke then guided on his own after association with Gelles for awhile.

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After Luke's illness (heart trouble and several strokes) the Elwells traveled. Their happiest years were the 22 years spent at Elwell's Fishing Lodge, Mamie said. She names some of the clients they had during their operation of lodge - including many famous world wide.

Kept lodge small and two person operation to preserve the Alaska atomsphere. Built the lodge about 1938 and sold in 1959 to Ward Gay who later sold it to Dr. Howard Romig. The spot where the lodge is located used to be a camp for Luke's hunts. Then he and Mamie built a trapping cabin on the site. Eventually the lodge. Had no dogs at the lodge. Could not use salmon (unlawful) to feed dogs and it was cheaper to fly in supplies than it was to feed a dog team year around. Besides, the dogs would have scared away the wild game. Luke trained and tamed many animals. Pet mink lived under the house. Many species of birds that ate from their feeders. Moose broused in the front yard. Bears fished for salmon on their beach.

Interviewer Mike Dalton tells of moose calling at her front door two weeks ago. Mamie tells of friends from Yakima who drove the Alaska Highway and never saw a moose until they landed at Elwell's lodge. However, they did see four elephants brousing along the side of the road (truck broke down about 1954...circus truck).

Mamie tells of the African trip...photographing wild animals.

Back to the lodge for awhile. Grew lots of vegetables in summer and preserved them in root cellars. Always had plenty of wild meat. Mamie preferred sheep to any other meat. She tells of old custom in the mining camps when crews left in the fall. The cook would bake some bread, freeze it in cans and put into cache. He also cooked and froze other food like pots of soup, stew...and left in cache for spring return so there would be some food when the crew was getting dried out and opening up camp.

Elwells had some women hunters in thier lodge.

Typical camp chores for Mamie. Gear was flown into the camps since they usually stayed about one month. Had camp sites set up with stoves, tents. Mamie would cook for breakfast: cereal, (or dry cereal if they preferred), bacon, ham, eggs, etc. Also had lots of canned fruit, fresh fruit, the best of everything. She developed a compreshesive grocery list for outfitting the camps. Never once did she forget any important ingredient. Had meat killed on the hunt. Many times flew in meat.

This winter she has had some sheep and moose. One of her "teen-agers" (Spencer family she is close to) wanted to go hunting so Mamie gave him her 250-3000 Savage. He got a sheep and later on another hunt he got a moose. She said shenever shot a goat. Shot just about everyt^hing else, though.

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