

CELIA HUNTER TALKS ABOUT  
MARDY MURIE WITH AMY MAYER, AUGUST 1, 2001

MS. MAYER: I don't know if you've come prepared with various [topics] but I was wondering if you would want to maybe talk about Mardy Murie today?

MS. HUNTER: I could talk about Mardy Murie.

MS. MAYER: With it being her ninety-ninth birthday and all. . .

MS. HUNTER: Well, that's an amazing thing. Mardie Murie is a long time friend. I don't know when I first met her. It was probably sometime after we started Camp Denali in 1951-52. Because one of the people who was very influential in the Park was Dr. Adolph "Ad" Murie, who was her brother-in-law. Ad and her half-sister, "Weesie", lived at Igloo Cabin, which is right next to the Igloo Campground, at about mile thirty out in the Park. Ad was a very familiar figure. Not that he bothered to come to Camp Denali very often, because Ad did not like people. He liked animals, and tourists were an anathema to him. It was too bad, because I think Weesie would have loved to come out and visit once in a while. But Ad just avoided us like the plague. He really didn't hate people, but just the "*class turista*", I think bothered him. Well, Mardy and Olaus [Olaus Murie] had been in Alaska way back when. She graduated from college here in 1924, in about the first class that graduated. It was right after that when she went trundling down the Yukon River, in one of the river steamers, to Aniak or something like that. I have forgotten which town it was down there, where she was to meet Olaus, who was out in the Kuskokwim. I think he was clear down in Hooper Bay or somewhere like that. He had to make his way up to where she would arrive. They had made arrangements to be married in a little church on the riverbank. Then, they were going on the Koyukuk river steamer, well, it wasn't a steamer it was a little boat, which would take them up to Old Bettles. This is not Bettles where it is right now, but farther down the river. After that, when they got some snow, and cold weather, they took off with two dog teams and went up around Wiseman and different places up in the area which is now Gates of the Arctic National Park.

MS. MAYER: This was long before the Hall Road was in?

MS. HUNTER: Oh, there was nothing up there at all! You just went out with your dogs. The two of them were alone. In fact, Mardy told this rather plaintive story about how she was out in the wilds there, and Olaus had gone off to collect some Caribou specimen. He was doing a Caribou study up there, and he needed the information he would get from an animal. It got to be later, and later, and later, and she sat there and she worried, and she was trying to figure out what she should do. How could she get herself

out of there? Could she run the dogs all by herself? All of these kinds of thoughts that a new bride *might* have who was in a very unfamiliar setting.

MS. MAYER: That *anyone* might have in that setting?

MS. HUNTER: When Olaus came back, he found her in tears. He said, "What's the matter? Are you sick?" She said, "I was *so* worried!" And he said, "Now look, things don't happen right when you think they will. And things often take longer than I think. So you'll just have to get over that". That was it. He was not very sympathetic. He just said, "This is the way life is, and if you're going to worry, that's your problem". He didn't do it that crudely, but she said that that was a real lesson to her. From then on, she just kept her own counsel and figured that everything would be fine. And it always was.

MS. MAYER: It seems like that as life went on, of course the Muries left Alaska and lived down in Wyoming for a long time; but what Mardy did continue to worry about has always been Alaska, and Alaska's wild places.

MS. HUNTER: You bet!

MS. MAYER: A lot of younger environmentalists now really look up to Mardy Murie, but you were almost her contemporary: What kind of influence did she have on you?

MS. HUNTER: Not quite!

MS. MAYER: Well, you're not ninety-nine!

MS. HUNTER: No. Well, I am closer to being her contemporary than you are, by far! We always looked up to Mardy, because for so long, it was Olaus and Mardy. That went right up until 1964 when Olaus died. Mardy was left alone, and she went back to her house in Moose. They were living in Moose, Wyoming then, in this big log cabin that she is still living in. She was ninety-nine on the eighteenth of August [2001]. Which was Saturday I think. We sang "Happy Birthday" to her from the party over at Mary Shield's, and I talked to her on the phone. She's not very verbal these days, but I understood that she was there and she was listening and she was very happy to have everybody wishing her a happy birthday. They did leave for Wyoming because Olaus was given the job of studying the Elk down there. So they spent a lot of time down there. She continued to take her kids with her out in the field, just like she had here in Alaska. But they still were worried about the Artic National Wildlife Refuge and came back in 1956 to set up camp on the Sheenjek River with Brany Kessel and George Shaler and the young man who was the photographer for them. [Ms. Hunter could not recall his name]. They spent the whole summer up on the Sheenjek trying to decide where the southern boundary of the Refuge should be. They hadn't really fastened that in place. It was during that time that she came through Fairbanks and had meetings with people here with

people who remembered her from earlier days, and with the conservation community. They were very supportive of what she and Olaus were doing. It was after that when we founded the Alaska Conservation Society, which was the first statewide conservation group here in Alaska.

MS. MAYER: So it was fettering our the boundaries for that original Artic National Wildlife range that helped introduce the Fairbanks environmentalists to Mardy Murie in person?

MS. HUNTER: That's right, because many of them had not had the opportunity to know her earlier because she had left sometime in the early 1930's when they went down to Moose. Yes that's true. We did then, get together then to give testimony before Congress; Senator Bob Bartlett, who was not very sympathetic to us and our desire to protect the Refuge, any more that Rykowski and Stevens are now. Presidential Proclamation by Eisenhower's Secretary of the Interior protected it. And that's how the Artic National Wildlife Refuge came into being. And it is still in being, and we're going to keep it there!

MS. MAYER: Celia thanks for coming in today.

MS. HUNTER: Your welcome.

MS. MAYER: That's Celia Hunter, our "Fairbanks Pioneer".