

Annie Oakley

Annie Oakley was a woman who was naturally good with a gun. Then, without meaning to, she proved herself worthy of being part of the dominant male sport of gun shooting. Now let me explain to you how this came about and how she proved herself to the world.

You see, Annie was born in Darke County, Ohio on August 13th 1860. She was the fifth of seven children. Her father died of pneumonia and over exposure to the cold in 1866, when she was just six years old. Her mother, unable to support the entire family, had to send Annie to an orphanage when she was nine years old. The orphanage then sent her to work for a cruel family, not knowing just how cruel they were. Annie never gave the family's identities; she only referred to them as "The Wolves." When Annie was 12 years old, in 1872, she ran away from the "Wolves" and went in search of her family. When she finally found them, Annie's mother had married for the third time. By the time she had gone to the "Wolves" Annie had already shot her first gun.

When Annie was eight she shot her first game. She cleanly hit a squirrel in the head. When her mother found out what she had done, instead of being happy for Annie, she forbade Annie to ever pick up a gun again. Her brother was not happy either. He thought that shooting was for men only. That didn't stop Annie. Whenever her brother and she went out into the woods Annie would shoot some game for the family to eat. Some of the game would be sold in town for money for the family. Annie even raised enough money to pay off her mother's mortgage on the house, which was \$200. Then in 1876, Annie heard about a shooting contest against the very well known shooter, Frank Butler. The winner would receive \$100. Drawn by the prize money for her family, Annie decided to enter. Frank Butler couldn't believe his eyes when he saw that his opponent was a 16 year old girl. He was also immediately charmed by her. By the end of the shoot off, Annie had shot all 25 clay pigeons and Frank had only shot 24. Annie had won the \$100 prize money and the heart of Frank Butler. The two shooters didn't let the 10 year age difference come between their love. Annie and Frank were married in 1882.

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After Annie and Frank married, Frank and his partner, John Graham, were the stars of their own traveling shooting act; Annie was their assistant. Then, when his partner fell ill, Frank turned to Annie for help. The crowd loved her. Soon after that, the roles turned and Annie was the star of the show with Frank as her assistant. In 1885, Annie and Frank joined Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show for 17 years. During that time another star shooter, Lillian Smith, joined Buffalo Bill's. Bill Cody probably thought that since Annie shot with a shotgun and Lillian a rifle there would be no competition between the two. How very wrong he was. Annie was very competitive and loved to win. She was jealous enough of the attention Lillian received that she started telling people she was born in 1866 instead of 1860. This competition lasted until Annie and Frank finally retired in 1902.

Annie Oakley and Frank Butler were happily married from 1882 to 1926, when they died within three weeks of each other. Annie died on November 3rd at the age of 66 and Frank died on November 24th at the age of 76. They never had children because their careers took them all over the world, leaving them far too busy for a family.

I chose to write about Annie Oakley because even though she was a woman she didn't let the ridicule of men stop her from following her dreams to be a shooter. She also used her fame for good causes and to show people that you don't have to be a man to gain respect. One event in Annie's life that grabbed my attention was when Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show debuted in Europe. In Europe, when one meets the royal couple, one greets the prince before the princess; not Annie. Annie made a point of shaking hands with Princess Alexandria before greeting her husband Edward, Prince of Wales and heir to the British throne. Annie told the prince, "You'll have to excuse me, please, because I am an American and in America, ladies come first."

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