

Martha Stewart

Aklavik, NT

- Born:* April 16, 1913
- Birthplace:* In the mountains on the Yukon side.
- Parents:* Bella Martin and John (Deeyah) Andrew
- Gwich'in:* Ehdiitat Gwich'in
- Married:* Andrew Stewart on July 4, 1929
- Children:* Charlie, Bella Margaret (d), Thomas (d), Maryann (d), Bella (d), Emily, Ruth, Annie May, Thomas, Wilfred (d), James (d), Andrew, Diane



Martha was born on April 16, 1913 in the mountains because her mother could not go to town – Fort McPherson was too far away and the closest place was Dawson. She was baptized in July and this became known as her birthday.

When she was young, Martha travelled all over with her parents. They lived in the mountains and up the Peel River, at Caribou Creek, at Hungry Lake and Blackstone River. They would travel all over in the mountains until they came upon caribou. "We stayed in a tent steady. With fresh air, nobody got sick. We had lots of meat. It was a wonderful life in the bush."

Martha, along with other children, including Sarah Ann Gardlund, travelled to the Hay River School on the steamboat "Mackenzie" in 1923. An old woman travelled along with them and brought them to the school. While she was at school, her eyesight became poor so she spent much of the four years in bed and therefore did not learn much, except for the Lord's Prayer.

When she returned from school, her family moved to the hills before Christmas and they made a lot of dried meat, which required a lot of work. In their travels, they had to cross the mountain rivers which did not freeze quickly. Her parents held them as they crossed the river. They found some nice ground and stayed there for Christmas, New Year and Easter before making their way slowly to Aklavik. They stayed at Lang's place before they moved to Aklavik. "That time Aklavik was good – no drinking going on, real quiet." Martha said her mother was so strict with her that she could not even go out visiting.

Martha married Andrew Stewart on July 4, 1929 in Fort McPherson. Martha said it was she who asked Andrew to marry her – he said, "Yes." Even as a married woman, at 16, she still played with her friends. Her husband looked after her very well. They moved back and forth between Fort McPherson and Aklavik, but they spent most of the time in the mountains where her father used to travel. Andrew would

trap and Martha made dried meat. She and her husband had thirteen children, some of whom died of TB. Martha remembers the care and love she received from her husband and how he used to spoil her. Andrew became a much-respected chief of Aklavik for many years from 1953 to 1975. Her daughter Ruth Stewart became a chief of Aklavik for one term from 1984 to 1986.

Martha speaks English and Loucheux, the Gwich'in language – "I just love my language." Today Martha lives at the Joe Greenland Centre in Aklavik where she is well looked after. Her eyesight is not good but everybody looks after her well, she says. She is thankful of the many opportunities to share her knowledge. She is grateful for her friends, even those that passed away. Her message to young people and others is to love one another. Her faith is very important to her and she says she feels good when she prays.