

Frances Elmore

5/1/01

Interviewed by Karen Brewster

Frances Elmore was born on March 2, 1944 and grew up by King's Beach, California on Lake Tahoe. Her father was in business for himself working on boats on the lake. She came to Alaska in 1967 after graduating from the Oregon Technical Institute, in Klamath Falls, Oregon as a dental assistant. Many of her friends were going off to the Vietnam War, so she decided to come to Alaska for a few months to make money. She'd heard the wages were better than at home. She arrived in Juneau and fell in love with the place and knew she wasn't leaving. She got a job as a clerical assistant for the state's Department of Public Safety. She realized there were things that the Troopers had to do, like serve papers and give driving tests, that she thought she could just as easily do and it would free up their time for other things. But, to do these tasks she needed to be commissioned. In 1969, the Equal Rights Amendment was passed, which opened up the possibility for the Fraternal Order of the Alaska State Troopers (FOAST) to accept women. She met the strict height/weight requirements (that have since changed) and attended the Trooper Academy at Sheldon Jackson College in Sitka. She graduated in 1969 as the first female Alaska State Trooper. She said the guys in her class were all accepting of her. They helped her with the driving and shooting portions of the course and she helped get them through the report writing, which she had lots of experience with. She said it was like having a cadre of big brothers. She did mention some ribbing she got from the guys, in particular at their first autopsy when she was the first to leave the room.

She was stationed in Anchorage for most of her tenure in the Troopers. She was only a Trooper until 1971, because she married another trooper and because of nepotism clause they could not both continue working. She proceeded to have two children and in 1972 moved to Nome with her husband, where he was the single trooper. In Nome, she worked at their sporting goods shop and did administrative/clerical work for various other entities of the State of Alaska, retiring from the Department of Transportation in 1996. Since 1996, she and her husband, who is also retired from the Troopers, have spent winters in Anchorage and summers at their fish camp in Council, just outside of Nome.

In general, Fran says her time in the Troopers was enjoyable. She calls the Troopers the best people you could ever know. For the most part she didn't feel any sexism or animosity directed her way. Although, there were times when she felt they were concerned that she'd get hurt when they didn't feel about the male troopers. For example, she did undercover work in Anchorage because nobody would be expecting a female officer, but was stopped because worried she might get hurt. Another incident she mentioned was being kept away from the scene of a deadly plane crash by Bill Nicks,

because he was worried that it would offend her. She had to direct traffic. But most times that she could remember, she was sent out to pick up drowning victims, to fly around in a helicopter all day monitoring Memorial Day traffic, and to do all the other normal duties of a trooper.

She is proud to have been the first female Alaska State Trooper and to have paved the way for others, but is quick to suggest names of other women who have come after her and have served longer and in higher ranks, ie. Dianne Brown, Darlene Turner, and Margaret Cox who was with the Anchorage Police Department. She says the hardest thing about being the first was being under a magnifying glass, having all that attention focused on you. Despite this professional accomplishment, Fran considers her children and their growing up to be successful and productive adults to be her greatest accomplishment. She considers her mother to have been her greatest mentor, because she showed her that life had many possibilities. She does regret that she did not get more education.

Finally, Fran mentions some of the changes she has seen in law enforcement since she began in the late 1960s. Now, there is unionization, better equipment, and more money. Each trooper used to be more independent. Rural areas used to be single trooper posts, there was no calling for back-up, so you had to figure out how to handle matters on your own. Now, there often are other law enforcement entities that can be called for assistance.