

# COLLEGES FOR SHOOTERS

**WORRIED THAT COLLEGE WILL PUT AN END TO YOUR SHOOTING CAREER? DON'T BE!**



MICHAEL MARSLAND/YALE UNIVERSITY

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### From early

childhood, I kept my passion for shooting a secret that I shared with only a few people. I rarely talked about it at school or with friends, since no one else shot guns. My public school's administration had a vehemently anti-gun attitude. I grew up in Pennsylvania, a state that has the fourth-largest participation in wildlife-associated recreation in the nation...but in our suburb just outside of Philadelphia, few people hunted or shot.

In that environment, I became a shooter almost accidentally. When I was six years old, my father was introduced to Elmer Boyer, a middle-aged man vaguely resembling Santa Claus. Elmer was a seasoned outdoorsman skilled at hunting, shotgunning, trapping and fishing, but he was also a cancer patient diagnosed with a life-threatening malignancy that had already taken his right arm. I still remember sitting on the 5-stand deck watching him break straights with only one arm to hoist his shotgun. It was Elmer who first took my father to the gun club and taught him how to fire a gun. Captivated by the experience, it wasn't long before my father purchased his first shotgun under Elmer's mentorship. At first, my father was wary of telling my mother about his new hobby, since he was unsure of her reaction. To his surprise, my mother eagerly encouraged the sport and urged my father to teach me to handle a gun, too.

My father instructed me slowly, knowing that even his somewhat tomboyish daughter might be afraid of firing a gun for the first time. He gave me an airsoft pellet gun first, then

took me paintballing and finally, at age seven, he stood behind me as I took my first trembling shot off a .22 long rifle.

From age seven to 13, I avidly competed in a youth league for smallbore riflery, which honed my skills and discipline as I rose through the qualification ranks. I made the switch to shotgunning one afternoon while I accompanied my father on a sporting clays course. Clay shooting seemed like an exciting video game with moving targets, and although I was terrified of the shotgun's recoil, I was curious to try it. As the only female shooter at a gun club of predominantly middle-aged men, there weren't any women mentors who could coax me through the fear. Mirroring the reassurance he brought me when I took my first shot with a .22 rifle at age seven, my father again stood behind me the first time I fired a 20 gauge. I was hooked. The energy, power and motion involved in the sport lured me away from small-bore riflery, and for years I recreationally shot alongside my father on weekends.

When I started considering college choices my junior year of high school, I accepted with sadness that I would have to rack my shotgun for the next few years. I had my sights set on the Ivy League, but I assumed that with universities' "progressive" agendas, there would be no place for a shooting team on campus.

After I was accepted by Yale University, I was overjoyed to find the Yale Club Sports website with a bio on Tom Migdalski, manager of the Yale Outdoor Center, Yale Club Sports and coach of the Skeet & Trap Club. My decision to attend Yale was, in no small part, based on Yale's commitment to training competitive men and women shooters, allowing me to realize my full potential in national collegiate shooting. In addition to promoting women in clay shooting, our Yale team members who practice every Friday afternoon have bonded as a family and encourage each other's success. This camaraderie was definitely something I yearned for. I am currently a sophomore, and have been competing in many intercollegiate tournaments, such as the ACUI Intercollegiate Clay Target Championships.

### I consider shooting in college

to be one of the most memorable experiences of my life. Any college student can tell you, nothing makes time slow down more than a boring three-hour class, or the job that just drags on forever. However, the time that I spend shooting is quite the opposite. I can step out onto that skeet field or trap field or sporting clays course and forget about everything else. When I have a stock at my shoulder, my eyes scoped down the barrel, and I'm only a finger press away from one of the most satisfying feelings in my life. Papers don't exist, work just disappears, and laundry and cleaning can wait. The stress seeps out of me with a sigh. At that moment, there is nothing more important than my gun and that orange target. It's a time when I am

alone with my thoughts. It's a feeling unlike any other and I wouldn't give it up for anything. Shooting has turned into something much more than just a sport to me. But most of all, I love shooting because it's a discipline unlike any other.

I haven't always felt this way. I started shooting skeet and sporting clays in middle school with my father. Then I shot on my high school's rifle team for four years, and that's when I started to realize how much I enjoyed it. In 2005, I was the lady champion at the Pennsylvania State skeet shoot in every event. It was the first time that any woman won every single event at that shoot, and it was an accomplishment that contributed to me wanting to shoot in college. At George Mason University, I discovered just how much I wanted shooting to be a major part of my life. My coach, Gary Olin, taught me how to shoot trap—and at collegiate nationals I won several medals in wobble trap and skeet. These are experiences I wouldn't trade for anything. My time shooting on the Mason team has been unforgettable.

My passion for guns goes beyond the sport itself. I graduated from GMU with a Bachelor's degree in Art History, and will soon be attending Pennsylvania Gunsmith School. Guns are more than a means of crushing a target; they are a work of art. I intend to work with guns for the rest of my life. I will never stop shooting. ✓



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## DANIELLE SHUSTER

### INSIGHT

Are you interested in participating in a collegiate shooting program? The NRA Collegiate Shooting Sports Directory has everything you need to explore the variety of shooting options that are available at the collegiate level. Schools are listed and information is provided on academic, intramural and intercollegiate shooting programs as well as on scholarships, range facilities, shooting opportunities, coaching staff and much more. The NRA Collegiate Shooting Sports Directory is an invaluable resource for young people interested in furthering their development as shooters while attending college. You can find it at: [www.nrahq.org/compete/college\\_lookup.asp](http://www.nrahq.org/compete/college_lookup.asp).