

A digital interview with Susan Larrabee

**1. Where were you born, how long have you lived in Alaskan communities, and how did you end up where you live now?**

- I was born in Riverhead, New York in 1963.
- I came to Delta Jct., Alaska, in August of 1972 with my parents and siblings. I lived there until I graduated from high school in 1981. Then I moved to Fairbanks in September 1981 to attend UAF. Except for a brief time in California (July 1984-March 1985), I have continued to live in Fairbanks. I am temporarily residing in Vancouver, BC until April, 2009 while I begin a Ph.D. program at Simon Fraser University.

**2. How has the community you grew up in changed since the building of the highway (you obviously weren't there, so changes since when you can remember back to.)**

- The Highway was already there when I moved to Delta Jct.; in fact, that is how my family got to Delta. We drove up the highway in a Volkswagen camper; two adults, three kids, and a dog. The highway was not paved through Canada when we drove up, so it was quite an adventure.
- The community of Delta Jct. has had its ups and downs depending on the status of Fort Greely. When I lived in Delta, my father was employed as a test engineer at Fort Greely, as part of the Cold Weather Testing Center. Now, Fort Greely is part of the missile defense system and has seen resurgence in employment opportunities for the community.
- One very large difference from when I lived in Delta has been the influx of Russians into the community, which has meant a change in the school system to accommodate non-English speaking students.

**3. Do you think the highway has linked communities like a 1,530 mile long community, or just made travel between them easier? Or do you think it put a damper on cultural and Native ways of living?**

- I don't think the highway has really linked communities in Alaska, however in Canada, particularly in the Yukon, the highway has become a vital link between communities and the outside world.
- In the Yukon, the highway has changed the way Natives and non-Natives live by giving them different economic opportunities and given them a closer connection to the outside world. This has had both positive and negative repercussions. I would recommend reading Julie Cruikshank's book, *Life Lived Like a Story*, and Ken Coates' *Best Left as Indians*, to get a good understanding of the highway's impact on Natives in the Yukon.

**4. Has tourism positively affected your community? If so, how, and if not, why?**

- Tourism has absolutely positively affected the communities of both Delta Jct. and Fairbanks. During some periods when Fort Greely's future was in doubt, there was the possibility that Delta Jct. might have

disappeared off the map without the highway and the tourists.

- While tourism is an important part of Delta Jct.'s economy, I don't think that the community has really done enough to attract tourists. For the most part, Delta Jct. has been a place for tourists to get something to eat and fill their vehicles up with fuel, with an occasional stop at the visitor center. Delta should be marketing the history of the community and the outdoor recreation potential of the area to keep tourists from just driving through.

##### **5. What is your particular interest in the highway, and why?**

- I first became interested in the highway growing up in Delta. My childhood home was located right on the highway, about a half mile from the Tanana River Bridge, and I would often see tourists driving by and stopping at the river to take pictures of the pipeline bridge.

- When I finally got around to finishing my BA in history at UAF, I decided to write my senior thesis on the history of the Alaska Highway, and I became intrigued by the huge amount of "I Drove the Alaska Highway" literature. So, for my MA thesis, I wrote about the romanticization of the highway, the idea that the highway has, from its construction, been drawing people North for a frontier adventure.

- I am still interested in the highway, but my focus has changed. For my Ph.D. dissertation, I will be looking at the influence of the U.S. on the history of the Yukon. One of the biggest influences the U.S. has had on the Yukon is the construction of the Alaska Highway.