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Sylvia "Susie" Klingner

Fairbanks, Alaska

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Leslie McCartney, interviewer

Susie Klingner talked about her personal background. She was born in Quincy, Illinois. It was not a large town and was on the Mississippi River. Her father was an engineer and wrote a book about his experiences along the Mississippi. She was an explorer as a child. She considers herself a nomad. She had read the Call of the wild and wanted to come to Alaska. She came to the University of Alaska when she was 19 years old. She wanted to be a cultural anthropologist. Her father told her if she wanted support she had to be a teacher or a nurse. She decided to be a teacher. She met Dr. Skarland at the university. She lived in MacIntosh Hall which was a converted men's dormitory. Some of the boys would climb up the walls and the girls would pull them in. This was a time when the girls were locked in at night. She attended the university in 1962-64. She said her early childhood influenced her choice of university. She attended a small elementary school. Her grade school teacher wrote to her until she died. Her high school had 5,000 students. In 1962 the University of Alaska was quite small. She saw in the catalog the teacher student ratio. She saw Dr. Krauss in the catalog. She talked about the tuition for out of state students at that time. She wanted to study under Skarland, Krauss, and Youngblood. She admired all of her professors. They gave so much of their time. She learned Hebrew from Dr. Krauss. The students petitioned to have Hebrew offered. They wanted the language taught because they wanted to go to the Middle East. She said class was on Sundays for four hours. She talked about Dr. Krauss helping her to see language in depth. It helped her later in life when she lived in Jerusalem and studied archeology. She thanked Dr. Krauss for his help. Krauss had Rabbi Gidden come in to teach them how to speak Hebrew. She said she learned not to be afraid to try.

She ended up studying education. She felt you needed to know subjects to be a good teacher. She wanted to know a wide variety of subjects. She was hoping to study cultural anthropology. She continued to study all different groups of people in her life. She started with very young students when she taught. She wanted to teach from preschool to the university level. She taught Hebrew at the university level. She didn't work full time when she had children but subbed. She taught physical education, math, sciences, agriculture, music, and art. She wanted to know what was happening in American education. She attended Hebrew school in Israel. She lectured on Alaska in Hebrew. She said Alaska has influenced her life. She arrived in Fairbanks on the plane. The birches were changing to yellow and she could see the Chena River. She was enthusiastic when she arrived. Jean Schaible was her big sister and introduced her to students and faculty. She was a tremendous big sister. She attended the freshman orientation and met Jacqueline King and Sandra Scotts-Stringer. Sandra passed away a few years ago. She talked about her bond with Sandra.

She talked about her graduation and being applauded by her professors. She said each professor worked hard for them. The professors would write messages and passed them to the students. She said Dr. Skarland and Dr. Krauss made her into a student. She talked about one of her psychology professors, Dr. Atamian. On engineer's day the students had filled up Dr. Atamian's hallway with chairs so he could not get out of his office. He was very upset by the prank. That same day there was a terrible explosion. Her friend, Karen Waltle, came from across the dorm hall and told her that her windows had been blown out. They blew out quite a few windows with the explosion that was supposed to wake everyone up. The engineer's students had turned over one of the professor's cars and set it on fire. She said McIntosh was wonderful. They could decorate their rooms and had a lot of freedom. She went outside one day when it was -68. The university was closed for the day, but she headed off to class. She was frosted over by the time she came back to the dorm. The dorms were locked at 10:30 at night. The student male, female ratio was large. There were always men around. She couldn't study at the library without being interrupted. Dr. Krauss let her use his office to study. Dr. Krejci was also in the office and was disturbed by her recordings. She was once locked in the library because she didn't pay attention to the time. Eventually the night watchman heard her and let her out. She was locked out of the dorms and had to wake someone up to let her in. She went before the dorm council for her punishment and they wouldn't believe her excuse. She was given an early curfew. She talked about the skis that she used. She used to ski the loop around the university. She would see bears crossing the path in front of her. She talked again about her early curfew punishment at the dorms. She missed part of her evening class and received a lower grade. She talked about her friend, Randy Chase.

Leslie asked if her parents came to visit her. Klingner said her parents came to visit when she graduated. Her mother wasn't sure she would have let her know her daughter come up to Alaska if she knew about it. She talked about her mother, Belle Klingner and her lineage. She said it has been fifty years since she has been in Fairbanks. She has visited other parts of Alaska. She wanted to see all the changes in the university. She talked about babysitting for the Geophysical Institute's faculty. She talked about Dr. Wescott and taking care of one of his children. She said one of her linguistic professors took his life and she returned from a visit to her home to attend his funeral to support one of the professor's wives. She received more support from Dr. Krauss after that. She said she learned from everything. She said she can thank the university for preparing for her for a greater world. It gave her tools to face her environment.

Leslie asked her about her jobs during college. Klingner said she was not the clerical type. She was able to clean for a living. She talked about Elnora Klisneski, their dorm cleaner. Klingner and another student were upset with the way Elnora was treated. Elnora invited them out to where she lived. They were living the pioneer life and in a natural way. She corresponded with Elnora for many years.

Leslie about what she did after graduation. Klingner said she returned to her home town and taught special education. She taught students with Down syndrome and brain damage. The children were in a separate building next to the regular school. She had to fight to integrate her children into the regular lunch room and playground.