



Yukon Prospectors' Association

- Meetings
- Metal Prices
- Home
- Hall of Fame
- Honour Roll
- Contact Us
- Prospector of the Year
- Yukon Geoscience Forum
- Properties for Option
- Larry's Corner

JANE GAFFIN: YUKON GOOD TO LOCAL AUTHOR

by Pat Ellis

(The article, written by Whitehorse resident and artist Pat Ellis, appeared originally in the Whitehorse Star, April 3, 1998)

Introduction "ABOUT THE AUTHOR" as extracted from Justice Served Up Yukonslavia Style:

American-born Jane Gaffin and her blue-eyed Siberian Husky, Chuchi, were threading their way north along the twisting ribbon of gravel and dirt known as the Alaska Highway. It was June 1966.

She only intended to interrupt her Fairbanks destination with an overnight in Whitehorse. But the next morning, the immigration officer had found her a prospective job selling ads for the Whitehorse Star.

She immediately wrapped the charming burg around her like a comfortable old coat. She found the traditions refreshing. A new country: a new town North of 60 where the midnight sun shone all night. There were no traffic lights with which to contend. It was fun just honing her French skills on the canned goods lining the grocery shelves before peeking at the English translation.

The Yukon had to be the world's best-kept secret, especially when the jaws of winter clamped shut over the land. Even the 40-below-zero temperatures would prove to be an exhilarating novelty worth relating to the folks back home.

Smitten by these zany residents whose main purpose in life was "fun" first, she never left "except for a later jaunt to Anchorage to earn a private and commercial land-and-sea rating in single-engine aircraft.

Then, back to the Yukon and to the Star. A special research assignment about the 1898 gold-rush mining history evolved into a fascination with hardrock mining and mineral exploration. Truth be known, it was a good excuse to experience more of the expansive and great land.

As a freelance writer, she became a voice for the mining industry. Her numerous analyses on such subjects as mining, law, economy, politics, justice and firearms have appeared often in the Yukon News and the Whitehorse Star; some articles were syndicated in national and international publications and posted on various Internet Websites.

From her mining-related articles and personality profiles came her first book, Cashing In, a history of the hardrock mining industry. It was followed by two more books bearing

Northern themes: Adventures of Chuchi, a delightful children's novel about an adorable Siberian Husky always in trouble; and Edward Hadgkiss: Missing in Life, a biography that probes the pilot's and girlfriend's mysterious disappearance after surviving the crash of his Harvard on a remote island of coastal British Columbia.

Gaffin has also contributed to two other books: Writing North, an anthology showcasing contemporary Yukon writers; and Up From The Permafrost, a collection of reflections on learning as told through short stories and art.

Sadly, the Yukon and Canada degenerated slow-motion into a place she no longer recognized nor understood. Her latest book-length project, e-book Justice Served Up Yukonslavia Style, was motivated by a strong sense of justice to somehow right the wrong of a Yukon prospector and gunowner that the government chose to criminally convict in Canada's highest court for a law that did not exist. It can be found at <http://www.diArmani.com>.

The following is Pat Ellis' article:

Jane Gaffin had a dream of going north.

Born in Kentucky, and a graduate of its school of journalism, she packed up her Scout. With her Siberian Husky, Chuchi, she head north in June, 1966.

She had already filled out her landed immigrant papers before she left home just in case a town in Canada appealed to her.

Coming down the old Two Mile Hill, the brakes barely held together. The Scout needed repairs. This gave her the opportunity to case the town.

Whitehorse was just what she dreamed of: mud-slogging or dust-deviled streets, a brew of characters from prospectors to authentic native trappers with their gunny-sacks full of furs and tractor-trailers loaded with road-building equipment roaring off to build new roads. The Yukon was booming.

Jane asked Bob Erlam, the then-new owner and publisher of the Whitehorse Star, for a job. He liked what he saw: a young, eager girl with a honey drawl and a toothy smile. A natural sales-person.

She was hired on the spot as the advertising manager and given a column to write: Odds and Ads by Kaintucke. [Note: Her business cards, a gift from the publisher, read: See Jane for good layouts, advertising manager, Whitehorse Star; We publish three times weekly if the staff is sober.]

Soon she was known as Kaintucke, and sales shot up. Roaring about in the Star's blue Volks and wearing a new moose-hide jacket, customers bought an ad before they knew what hit them.

The Star was the main newspaper at the time. There was also a small shopper's paper called the Whitehorse News-Advertiser, which had begun in 1960 in an old shack behind Jamieson's Corner Store. Owner-publisher Ken Shortt was on the verge of taking a partner, Dave Robertson, and changing its name to the Yukon News.

The Star was then in its original location, in the middle of Main Street. The old store front, which still had the original wall-tent embedded in the walls as insulation, held the busy stationery store.

A 25-by-50-foot old army barrack was the crowded shop, tacked on the back. Ice-cold floors in winter, paper littered and with cans of varsol scattered about the cigarette-smoking employees.

It was a fire trap. But was there ever a more light-hearted one?

Venerable Flo Whyard was the fearless editor. Rusty, Bob's wife, was the witty and productive reporter. Their son, Paul, helped "Roger the draft-dodger", an American hillbilly, run the new offset presses that replaced the one from the Gold Rush.

The rinky-dink presses held not the big rolls of newsprint you see today, but smaller, journal-sized cut sheets which slapped back and forth, sometimes back to front or upside-down.

"You can't be great every week," Bob used to say (often) when things got out of control or his photos blackened in the developer.

Murphy, the ex-honey wagon owner, was the janitor, a job Bob gave him when his business crashed after the city installed the water and sewer system. He was ever-grateful and slightly high.

Some poor scribe sat in a closet typing on an I.B.M. Selectric on long strips of paper (the two-inch columns), relying on a margin blue-line, an ear for the bell and endless hyphens and a deft hand with the white-out.

And the most unbelievable of all, a gang of housewives came three afternoons a week to hand-collate and fold the paper. A slow process, it was hoped the papers would hit the street before late evening.

The editorial office had been located in a small shack in the alley which that spring had burned down when a half-shot prospector discharged his flare gun from his hotel room. It was then hastily moved to an office in the Whitehorse Inn, next to the beer parlor.

Jane loved the zany atmosphere. It was all she imagined the North to be, especially when a trapper wandered in from the bar and sold her a fresh fox pelt for only \$10. She still has it.

Jane was introduced to flying by a pilot friend, Ed Hadgkiss, and decided to save up to take flying lessons.

After three years with the Star, Jane had another dream. She wanted to be a serious writer who had a secure profession.

Her next step was to move to Anchorage and get a job on a small newspaper. In November 1969, she heard the shocking news that her ex-boyfriend Hadgkiss had disappeared in his plane off the B.C. (British Columbia) coast.

After taking her commercial pilot's licence, in 1970, she applied for a well-paid job as an air traffic controller.

A misdiagnosis by the doctors screening applicants for the traffic controller's job turned her life into a nightmare. She was told she had a serious eye condition. She then spent a miserable year seeking out specialists as far as the Mayo Clinic. Finally, she was reassured her eyes were fine.

That was when it hit home. Alaska was just another busy, populous place. She missed the carefree, eccentric Yukon.

Bob took her back to the Star even though her old job had been filled. While she was in Alaska, Bob had replaced the old Star shack with a new concrete building complete with a new modern, large web press. Main Street had changed.

In 1974, Jane made a new job at the Star for herself; she wrote stories and sold ads for the special editions. The LodeStar was her own invention, devoted to the mining industry.

The Yukon was in a mining heyday. Elsa, Clinton, Faro and Whitehorse Copper were in full production, as well as Cassiar in B.C. (British Columbia) and CanTung in the N.W.T. (Northwest Territories).

This gave her a broad knowledge of hard-rock mining, and led her to write *Cashing In* and into the self-publishing field. Finally, her life evolved to being a self-employed free-lance writer and to more books: *Chuchi*, a fictional children's book based on the adventures of a Siberian husky, and also a book that took her five years to write: *Missing in Life*.

Jane is proudest of this book, as it remains one of the biggest B.C. aviation mysteries, and still she receives comments about it from her readers.

It's about Ed Hadgkiss and his passenger, a young girl from Dawson named Kathy Rheume, who flew off in November 1969 down the coast of B.C. and crashed onto Roderick Island, near Bella Coola. The plane and a note that they were walking out were found, but they never were, and it remains a mystery to this day.

Jane has lived in the same small office/studio apartment for years. It's a bit shy on space, but in a central location. For breaks, she walks to the library and mining offices to chat or do research. No Internet yet; she likes to see people.

Like many writers, Jane finds it a bit of an isolated life, with ups and downs. The uppers are rushing to complete an exciting article; the downers are when the ideas don't come. These usually last about three days.

She produces about five or six articles a month, and is known by editors for her clean, dependable articles.

She loves writing about personalities and bringing out interesting tid-bits in people's lives, like looking into someone's personal diary. It's a wonderful life, and one that has given her the opportunity to have her name before the public.

The Yukon has been good to her.

* * * * *

(The Whitehorse Star was inducted into the Yukon Prospectors' Association's Honour Roll

in 1988 and Jane Gaffin was inducted in 2005 in recognition of their many years of support to the prospecting industry. Their names are engraved in the base of the bronze prospector statue that watches over downtown Whitehorse from Main Street and Third Avenue. Additionally, The Whitehorse Star's name is inscribed on a brass plate attached to the Hall of Fame artpiece on display in the foyer of the Yukon government administration building.)

Articles are published on this website with the permission of the authors.

The authors retain the full copyright to their work.

1998 - 2013 Yukon Prospectors' Association