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### Doc Larry Reynolds, a real country doctor

by *Charity Winters*



According to Dr. Larry Reynolds Seldovia is “the best of two worlds!” For him, Seldovia combines the refreshing atmosphere of mountains and ocean, with the most wonderful arrangement a doctor could ask for – a small, remote town with a hospital not too far away. Indeed, it was just what he was looking for in 1974 when he was trying to find a place to settle down and practice medicine.

Larry Reynolds grew up in Fresno, California in the midst of mountains and ocean (one of the reasons he found Seldovia so attractive). He graduated in 1966 from Notre Dame where he completed a General Program in Arts and went on to Creighton medical school in Omaha, Nebraska. From there, he went back to California where he completed his residency at a hospital in Oakland. “It was the war-zone hospital,” he laughingly called it, “where the po’ folk went.” If you were shot or in a wreck, that’s where you were sent. Sometimes there were shootouts in the ER!

Now 30 and finished with his chaotic residency, Reynolds traveled a bit, searching for that perfect place. He knew he wanted to be in Alaska – he was attracted to the similarities that the coastline shared with his native California, yet there was still a wildness to this place. He wound up in Fairbanks in the middle of February, hunting through the library’s ‘vertical’ files, as he called them. These gave all the demographic information for every city and town in Alaska – average precipitation, population, type of economy, etc. But most importantly, it told him if there was a hospital nearby. Seldovia seemed to fit the bill: on the coast, mountains, small town, secluded, hospital right across the bay in Homer.

Once he was in Seldovia, Larry got in touch with the “Hospital Guild”, a group of local women who volunteer their time to raise funds for necessary medical purchases and work to promote community health. (The guild still exists today and has been responsible for purchasing every piece of equipment in our medical clinic). Reynolds discussed his desire to practice medicine in Seldovia and from there set up a straightforward contract with the city. He was hesitant to set up a contract at first – “I didn’t want a ‘boss,’” he said. So when the city came to him with a contract stating several contingencies, Reynolds vetoed and told them, “how

about, 'I'll provide medical services and you provide the building.'" They went for his version.

And the rest is history. Ever since then, Reynolds has operated a 'fee for service' medical practice, his only income coming from the services he provides for his local patients. He also bought a plane and made daily rounds at the hospital in Homer if he had a patient staying there. He did this up until a few years ago when his plane finally gave out. He also serviced Port Graham and Nanwalek for a short time. In Seldovia, he practiced out of the old hospital building for the first few years. "That building was a mess!" he exclaimed. He remembers putting pots out to catch drips from the leaky roof. The cop lived in the basement of the building. "I don't know how he did it. You needed rubber boots to walk downstairs!" Although, his living situation the first few years wasn't much better. He resided in the old Lipke building, living upstairs from the jail. The building was simply made of aluminum with absolutely no insulation. The city had "decondemned" it so he could live there. At times, the snow would blow hard enough that it would come in through the light switches, making little snow piles on the floor. In 1981, the present clinic building was erected.

A small town with few patients is one of the things that made Seldovia so great. "Plenty of time for kids and family," Reynolds explains. Larry married Cheryl Haines in 1977. She has worked side by side with him as the receptionist and bookkeeper for the past 31 years. The two met during Larry's residency in Oakland and had kept in touch until their marriage. Reynolds says Seldovia was a great place to raise their two children, Shawn (25) and Jennifer (22). Larry and Cheryl now live in the home they started building back in 1980.

"You have to have an alternative reason to be here if you don't want to be an economic success," Dr. Reynolds says. Maybe Larry hasn't made the big bucks most people associate with a doctor. However, his dedication to the people 'this side of the bay' has earned the respect of a community grateful to have his services.



"The beloved putty-tats of the family"



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