



Seldovia Gazette

Serving Seldovia, Alaska and Kachemak Bay southeast

Seldovia

29 °F / -

Partly Cl
at 7:53

[Click for Fo](#)

Thursday, Jan. 5, 2006

Just another day in

A truly unique shopping experience - Gifts for that special person! Friendly - Affordable

HERRING BAY MERCANTILE

<http://www.herringbaymercantile.com>

Located in beautiful downtown Seldovia - 275 Main St.

[Local News](#)

[Calendar](#)

[Opinions](#)

[Spotlight](#)

[School](#)

[Classifieds](#)

[Archives](#)

[Seldovia.com](#)

[Gazette S](#)

[Current Spotlight](#) | [Spotlight Archives](#)

Elaine Giles, an Alaskan Pioneer

by Charity Winters



Elaine Giles

Elaine Giles is, and always will be, a person who loves Alaska to the deepest core of her being. This really struck me as we talked – her eyes would just light up as she talked about the beauty of her surroundings and all of the places she’s visited in the state. She’s even a member of the Pioneers of Alaska, an organization established in 1907 to "unite the old-timers of Alaska and by permanent organization, preserve the names of all early settlers on its rolls". Elaine has been an Alaskan for 52 years.

Elaine M. Steurer began her life on July 29, 1922 in the town of Barron, Wisconsin. While she was in high school her family moved to Ardenvoir, Washington to be closer to other family. Even then it was evident that Elaine was a hard worker. She talks about how she scrambled to meet the 40 credits required to graduate in

Elaine put herself to work while the kids were at school. "I kept myself busy!" she exclaimed. She kept books for the canneries, worked at the grocery store waiting on people and bookkeeping, and for 22 years served as the clerk treasurer for the city of Seldovia. For a time she worked for the ferry office trying to sell tickets. At that time, \$5 was all it cost to go all the way to Dutch Harbor, stopping at all the little bays on the way. Being the adventurous pioneer that she was, Elaine took advantage of such a price several times "just to see" more of her beloved state. Of course, it was good PR work to be able to sell the tickets once she had gone.

Around 1960, Elaine got tired of renting with her 5 children (Douglass and Rebecca were born a few years earlier). She and her husband bought their rental house (which was not too far from the first house they had lived in across from the chapel). Part of the deal was that they had to feed a beautiful

Washington coming from the 32 credits need in Wisconsin. She ended up graduating with 42 credits from Entiat High School in 1940. Afterwards, Elaine worked at a box factory for 75 cents an hour until she met and married her husband, Larry Giles in 1944. Larry was the beginning of her association with Alaska. For years, Larry's family had been going back and forth between Alaska and Vancouver. Larry continued to do the same, working as a fisherman and at a sawmill on the Kenai Peninsula. When housing became difficult to find in Washington, Elaine's brother-in-law, Fleming, bought her tickets on the MS/V Garland to move her and her three kids up to Alaska. The Garland was the mail boat that left from Seattle and stopped in Seward and Seldovia before going down the chain. Elaine talks about that trip with enthusiasm. They were on the boat for 7 days and, though it was a bumpy ride at times, Elaine never got seasick and the scenery was gorgeous.

Finally, Elaine and her three children, George, Marillyn and Leslie landed at Portlock Bay to meet her husband where he was working at a sawmill owned by Fleming. Portlock Bay is further down the peninsula past Nanwalek and Elaine didn't stay there long because there wasn't a school for the kids. So, just a little over a month later Elaine took her children to Seldovia and enrolled them in school. Fleming had a house across from the Seldovia Bible Chapel (which is no longer standing) where they stayed. Soon, the sawmill stopped operating and Larry came home. He continued to work as a fisherman, fishing offshore with a net and a skiff.

collie dog named Snifter for the rest of his life! "You won't find a deal like that nowadays!" she chuckled. Elaine lived in that house until 1982 when her 2 sons, Leslie and Doug built her the house she currently lives in. But she still has a picture of her old house, there in her living room with her and all her children smiling from it's weathered porch. The house is no longer standing today.

I think the one thing that Elaine probably loves more than Alaska is her family. She talked often of her 8 grandchildren and her 8 great-grandchildren and showed me several pictures. Indeed, they were hard to miss since Elaine had them lovingly displayed in every corner of her home. When I asked her if she ever missed Washington, she replied that she only missed her parents. They always asked her when she was going to come home. Finally, her father came up for 2 weeks. "I had to work, so he spent a lot of time by himself, wandering the beach. I would just watch from the window and shudder – he knew nothing about tides and such!" But after that visit, her father understood why she stayed and never asked her again.

Elaine's favorite thing about Seldovia is the lifestyle – laid-back and relaxed. She claims that she never felt isolated here. "I was the type to put on a pair of boots and just go hiking. My kids would have a fit! 'You might break a leg!' they would tell me." She stopped going so often because of the bears but you can tell that she probably wouldn't mind strapping on a pair of boots again and hiking up a mountain. At the end of our interview, I got up to take her picture. "Shall we go outside?" was her reply. Surprised, I agreed and we walked out onto the frosted porch. But it was very fitting. Elaine, with her glorious Alaska hovering behind her.

Copyright © 2006 Seldovia.com, Inc. and Seldovia Gazette. All rights reserved. The Seldovia Gazette is published weekly by Seldovia.com, Inc. Contents of this publication not be used or reproduced, in whole or in part, in any form or manner without the express written permission of Seldovia.com, Inc. [Click here for additional details.](#)

Seldovia Gazette Newspaper