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Renee Purpura - Alaskan Through and Through! *by Charity Winters*



Though Renee and her family have been living in Seldovia for only 6 years, she is no stranger to the area. Born and raised in Homer, Renee went on to commercial fish out of Little Tutka with her husband Robert for over 20 years. She has now been working as a custodian for the Susan B. English school for 5 years and head custodian for the past year. Even though she misses commercial fishing, Renee says she really likes her job at the school. "I'm always doing something different! And it's nice to be around the kids."

In 1979, Renee met Robert Purpura, a commercial fisherman who lived on a houseboat and fished off of MacDonald Spit and Kasistna Bay. The two were married in 1980 and stayed on the houseboat, commercial fishing in the summers and taking various odd jobs in the winter. Renee used to do things like tag salmon fry in Valdez for Salmon Gulch Hatchery or work at the Tutka Hatchery for her off-season work. Once their first daughter, Rochelle, was born in 1991, things began to change a little bit. For one, the family began living in a cabin on shore in the



winters. Renee and Robert shared the responsibility of homeschooling Rochelle. Once baby girl number two came along “the houseboat got a little tight,” said Renee. Homeschooling and fishing were also becoming a challenge and Robert and Renee decided it would be best to find a way to get Rochelle into school. They decided to make a permanent move to Seldovia, hoping it would be close enough to fish out of in the summers at the same time provide the comforts of a small community for their family.

At the time of the move, Rochelle was ready to enter 4th grade and Rosalia had just turned 3. Then their summers became really crazy. Since they shared their set-net sites with two other families in Little Tutka, Robert and Renee were able to divide the fishing time into large chunks between themselves and their partners. Robert and Renee would then split their time into shifts, one would work while the other was home with the girls. “We started getting crunched for time,” explained Renee. Robert had taken on local fish marketing and Renee had started her custodial job at the school. That with the girls, health and age, it was time to let fishing go. After 22 seasons, the Purpura’s sold their sites to their partners and left commercial fishing behind.

All in all, Renee says that the move has been a good one. It’s been strange to have their summers free now with such a different schedule to live by but she feels that Seldovia has a lot to offer for young children and it was great for Rochelle as a little girl and now for her 3rd grader, Rosalia. She and Robert made a difficult choice this year in sending Rochelle to Boston to live with an aun and attend high school there. But as many people know, Seldovia can be a tough place with its small town ways for a teenager. Renee says they are still glad they chose Seldovia over Homer to relocate. “We wanted to stay small; going from a community of 7 in the winter to 5000 seemed like too much.” And Seldovia was familiar to them as they had used it for their “town days” during fishing. Seldovia has been good to them and their family and they will choose to stay as long as they can.



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