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Fred and Millie Newmeyer: Business Owners from Seldovia's Golden Days

by *Charity Winters*



“God’s country” is how Fred Newmeyer describes Seldovia. And even after traveling all over the world with his wife, Millie, they both agree that nothing comes closer to a quiet and beautiful home than Seldovia. So, despite putting up with the cold in their more aged years, they have no plans to ever leave! Living here since 1973, Seldovia has become a part of them that they are not willing to leave behind.

Originally from San Francisco, Fred grew up working in his father’s bakery. For the rest of his life, he continued on in the food service, starting with owning and operating several of his own bakeries in California. When his bakery businesses went “belly up” (as Fred put it) in 1960, he decided to give Alaska a try. He had always liked fishing and, especially at that time, Alaska was the place to go for fishing! He was a baker by trade and he was soon offered a job managing a bakery department in Anchorage. The same year he arrived in Anchorage, Fred met his soon to be second wife, Millie. Millie was an attractive Native Alaskan woman who grew up in Wainwright, Alaska. Her first husband had brought her to Anchorage and there she met Freddie. The Newmeyers were married on May 8, 1965.

Most of them ended up at the Seldovia Lodge for a meal or a drink. Fred grinned as he reminisced about the “Golden Days” of Seldovia, as he called them. The Christmas parties, the town meals that the canneries would help provide food for, the endless bands that performed at the Lodge. In fact, he told a story about the famed singer, Jewel. Jewel and her father lived in Homer. One night, when Jewel was 10, her father brought her over to the Seldovia Lodge. After he performed, he put Jewel in the spotlight and she yodeled for the crowd. “Most beautiful thing you ever heard,” said Fred. Apparently, that was the first time that Jewel had ever entertained. Gene Cameron passed around a hat during the performance and collected \$750 for Jewel.

The Seldovia Lodge was originally built immediately after the 1964 earthquake as a housing unit for those brought in to clean up Seldovia after the disaster. When Fred and Millie bought it, it had been used off and on as a restaurant and motel. There were several trailers outside of the Lodge that were also used to sleep people. Fred said for a few years when they first opened the business, they were the only restaurant in town. Everyone went to the Seldovia Lodge when they needed a meal! And Fred and

The 1964 earthquake shut down the bakery where Fred worked and he soon found himself relocating to Chignik out on the Alaska Peninsula . There he and Millie bought a house and spent their summers working where you can find “the finest red salmon in Alaska !” During the winters, Fred worked various jobs as a cook in and out of Anchorage . About 10 years later, Josie Carlough approached he and Millie with a proposition to open up the “Night Spot”, a bar/restaurant in Seldovia. The “Night Spot” was located where Shoreline Gifts now resides.

Within 4 months of their new position, Fred and Millie decided to buy the Seldovia Lodge. “He [the owner] was lettin’ it go cheap!” And at that time (1973), Seldovia was “busy, busy” – there was no reason to think there would ever be a lack of business. Fred described fishing boats like the *Rosie* and others that would come into Seldovia with deck-loads of crab. The cannery was open and running and the Jakolof logging outfit housed hundreds of people for their operation. In fact, every night a vanload of people would come from Jakolof to use town

Millie were committed to their business. Open 7 days a week, they were only closed for a few hours between lunch and dinner so Fred could take one of his three big boats halibut fishing. “I was there to feed people, and people want to eat every day! There was nothing else to do in Seldovia, anyway.”

It was a busy lifestyle that lasted until 1994. During the last few years, things really began to slow down as Seldovia’s fishing tapered off. The Seldovia Lodge could no longer stay open all winter long. Fred and Millie began taking vacations all around the world on their time off. Finally, illnesses for both Fred and Millie convinced them that it was time to sell the Lodge and retire. As far as they are concerned, they’ll be living out their days in Seldovia. They gave Anchorage a try for a little while but, says Fred, “Who wants to fight traffic when you’re my age! I like country living.”

