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Laurel Hilts - Seldovia's action figure!

by *Charity Winters*



Laurel Hilts and her family have been a big part of the Seldovia community since 1970 and now Laurel has chosen to raise three children here in the town where she grew up. Once serving as a teacher at Susan B. English, Laurel is now unit director of the Boys and Girls Club which, on top of being a full time job, requires hours of volunteer time to be successful. All of this along with three children, makes for a very full plate for a single mom!

The Hilts family moved to Seldovia from Kenny Lake in 1970, when Laurel was a year old. Living the Seldovia life all winter long, the family spent every summer for 20 years up in Kotzebue. Kotzebue is a native community located above the Arctic Circle and is home to about 3000 people. Because their oldest daughter had been adopted from this community, the family wished to maintain their connections to the people there. So every summer they ran a small restaurant and commercial fished.

For Laurel, being raised in Seldovia was the "best way to grow up." She commented that it often felt like you were living in a town like a big neighborhood and there were often many opportunities for kids to keep busy and have fun. Spending summers in Kotzebue added a very personal view of the native culture in Alaska, which has in turn affected many of the choices she has made throughout

elementary to high school, she taught all school music, plus 6th grade, a 4-5th grade combo class, Kindergarten, high school journalism, plus she did the yearbook for 3 years and was the Title I reading specialist for one year. A small town with 150 kids in the school, it sounded a lot like Seldovia!

During her first year in Yakutat, Laurel developed a desire to get into foster parenting. The next year she took in a little girl named Devon as her foster daughter, with the hope of being able to adopt her one day. Since Devon was an Alaskan Native, the adoption process was very strict. Home options for these children consisted of keeping them in their own tribe or another Alaskan tribe. Options never include an upbringing in a Caucasian household. Thanks to Laurel's close connections with the community, she was able to convince them of her desire to keep Devon as connected to her people and culture as possible and in 2005 the adoption was finally complete.

With the adoption under wraps, Laurel was able to move with Devon to Seldovia – something she had been wanting to do for a long time! She acquired a job as a high school English and elementary music teacher at SBE. Towards the end of the year,

her life.

After graduating from SBE in 1987 Laurel went on to Biola University in LA first for Music Education but finished with a degree in Communication with an emphasis in journalism. During college she worked in the office of Missionary Athletes International and after graduation, decided to continue on in a full time capacity. She relocated to Charlotte , North Carolina where the ministry supported a professional soccer team, the Charlotte Eagles. Laurel stayed for 6 years before deciding that it was time to move home. In 1998, she subbed and house-sat for a year in Seldovia. That year, she was contacted by one of her supporters from the ministry back in Charlotte . They offered to pay for Laurel 's entire graduate education. So off Laurel went to Juneau to earn her Masters in Elementary Education at the University of Alaska Southeast . She chose teaching with the intention of staying in the state and "giving back what I had already been given." As a product of the state with all of its culture along with its educational system, Laurel had enjoyed her childhood and wished to help other Alaskan children in the same way.

So, next it was a teaching job in Yakutat in 2000. Laurel spent 5 years there, teaching a "little bit of everything" – from

she came upon another opportunity to open her home to more children. She is now foster mom for Adam and Chaela – both close in age to Devin so it makes for a handful at times! But Laurel says it is a great experience and that they are all wonderful kids. She also notes that the support of the community has helped them in this transition time.

This year, Laurel is working as the Boys and Girls Club unit director. Her responsibilities there include overseeing staff and the monthly budget, programming, fundraising, and promoting community involvement as well as involvement from other organizations, sponsors, and donors. Right now, Laurel states that the club "lives and breathes because of grants." Her dream, along with those she works for, is to see our club become a self-sustaining club, able to work off of it's own fundraising and other supports.

To top it all off, Laurel finds other ways to serve in our small community. She plays the piano and teaches Sunday School for the Seldovia Bible Chapel, is the Booster Club secretary, a member of the Chamber of Commerce, was recently trained as a backup dispatcher, and hopes to organize some sort of Christmas music program for this season. Phew! Seldovia is blessed to have dedicated community servants such as this one around!



The kids at Halloween 2006

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