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Mike Miller - Notable Seldovia Fisherman!

by *Mary Glover*



Mike Miller was born in Anchorage, Alaska to Dick and Grace Miller. Not only has Mike lived in Seldovia for most of his life, he has quite a family history with Seldovia. Mike's father, Dick Miller, was born near San Francisco. Dick, as a young man, wanted to be a pilot, but Dick's father wanted him to work in the family bakery. How Dick became a pilot was accomplished by a deal: if Dick built a cabin on some property near Redwood City that the family owned, then his father (Mike's grandfather) would pay for flight school for Dick. Dick built the cabin, went to flight school and came to Alaska in 1935. Mike said that his father went on to be a very noteworthy pilot and probably taught "2,000 people to fly in Anchorage besides doing all other sorts of things".

Dick Miller and Ruth Jefford were once co-pilots on a notable trip from Fairbanks where they almost lost their lives. They were also good friends (see article in January 11, 2007 issue of the *Seldovia Gazette* on Ruth Jefford).

married a local girl. Then in 1967 he got his first chance to run a boat out of Kodiak. In 1971 he ran a boat out for Seward for four years. When asked about the various boats he has owned, he said that his first boat was an 86 foot vessel. Next he got a smaller boat, *Seamill* only 48 feet! Then he was partners with a 50 foot boat in Kodiak named the *Judie N*. He ran the *Katherine Kane* and the *Hornet* and the *Viking Queen*, a Seattle boat. Mike's experience as a fisherman is broad: if it is Alaskan seafood, Mike has fished it at one time or another. He commissioned to have the *Independence* built in 1973 and fished the *Independence* for twelve years. However, in 1994 Mike was diagnosed with kidney cancer. He had to stop fishing. This is when Dick Yingling started running the boat for Mike. Mike eventually had one kidney removed and today he has totally recovered from that condition.

Being a very knowledgeable fisherman, Mike has witnessed a cycle with the fishing industry. He states, "When it goes away, it will come back if left alone, unless there is a problem in the ocean." He felt that the King Crab contracted a disease and this coupled with over fishing caused its demise in Cook Inlet. The Alaska Fish &

Mike Miller even remembers the day that Ruth Jefford came to Seldovia in her sailboat.

Mike's father, Dick, was a bush pilot and established the first commercial air taxi service out of Seldovia. It was called Seldovia Air Service. In 1953 Alaska Airlines moved into Seldovia. This large company drove Seldovia Air Service out of business. Mike stated, "During the 30's and 40's it was a great time to be a bush pilot in Alaska, but it was also a tough time." Mike's mother, Grace, grew up near Ogden, Utah and after graduating from high school, she went to San Francisco where she met Mike's father through an uncle. She was a telephone operator in San Francisco. First Mike's father came to Anchorage in 1935 and the next year his mother came up. They started their family in Alaska. Mike has one sister who lives in California.

Mike spent some of his childhood here in Seldovia during the time when the canneries were in full production. Mike's father took a job as a can loft foreman at the Alaska Shellfish Cannery (Seldovia cannery) after Seldovia Air Service went out of business. He loved Seldovia and wanted to stay here. However, he developed throat cancer in 1956 and the family moved back to California where Dick Miller had grown up. California is where Mike finished high school and attended a couple years of junior college. Although Mike was in California for school, he returned to Alaska every summer to go fishing. This began when he was only 14 years old. There was only one year that he missed during all that time. Mike fished out of Kodiak in the Bering Sea, beyond Dutch Harbor, and other remote parts of the Aleutian Chain for King Crab. (Television tells us King Crab fishing in the Bering Sea is: "The most dangerous job in the world.")

Mike lived in the fisherman's world in Kodiak for a number of years. He was in Kodiak in 1964 when he

Game Department stopped fishing for King Crab in Cook Inlet in 1984. He remembers a time when he caught some deformed King Crab. He stated, "Crab, if they lose a claw, if they are left alone and allowed to grow, they can grow two claws in place of the one claw."

Mike moved to Seldovia after the 1964 earthquake in the early '70s. He bought a house on Fulmore Street and still lives there today. Mike is different from most Seldovians as he does not have a dog--he has two goats! I asked Mike how he came to own two goats in Seldovia. Mike said, "Last June, I was just sitting down for a nice dinner and here comes Willie Brun with two baby goats." One of Mike's good friends, Karl Myers, President of CIRI, purchased them from a farm in Maine and had them flown in. It was stipulated that the goats had to be named "Mike" and "Joe." (We all know where the "Mike" came from, but "Joe" is named after Joe Carlough.) The goats have grown to be great little pets. According to Mike, "They can even take a walk like a dog, although they walk at their own speed." Mike states, "they had to move them to the farm." The "farm" is another place that Mike owns. It is north of the airport on the Seldovia Slough. Currently the goats like to frolic where the snow has been plowed! He said he "had to put fences up all over the place because they like to eat flowers and vegetables... and if you bend over, they can't resist butting."

Mike has two daughters who live in Seldovia: Alison and Amanda. Alison is currently serving her first term on the Seldovia City Council. Alison attended SBE school up to the 4th grade and Amanda attended school in Anchorage. Sue Rich has been Mike's partner for fourteen years. She was an ACS operator in Anchorage when they met. Sue also loves Seldovia. Last year Mike underwent a back operation and now he is finally feeling like fishing again. He owns a bowpicker and he plans to do a "little set net fishing" next season. Maybe he will even do a little gardening! Mike likes the fact that in Seldovia we can be self-sufficient as far as providing food for the table. We can grow our own vegetables and fish what we need out of the bay. He said, "It's great to put everything on the table by our own two hands."



Left to right: Mike Webber, Pierre Int-Houte, Mike Miller, Sue Rich and Dick Yingling - Photo taken at the Chainsaw Carving Contest May 06



Sue and Mike during the 4th of July 2006



The M/V Independence



Mike Miller



Alison Miller

Editor's Note: At the time of this publication, no picture of Amanda was available. If we receive one, we will put it in.

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