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Michel Bieri -- An Extraordinary Seldovian!

by Mary Glover



very young. Michel stated, the food truck was of “good design” in that it opened and folded outward providing a covering against the weather and a display shelf for the food sold. Both businesses were very profitable. However, tragedy struck when Michel’s father passed away at only 48 years of age. Michel’s mother continued in the food industry and eventually was able to purchase a restaurant in a building.

Michel started his working career at a very early age. When only 13 years old he began an apprenticeship under a baker---one year just studying flour! [To a music student, it would be equivalent to studying the G scale for one year! To a violin student, it might be an amazing study.] Then he went on to the National Baking School in Paris. He worked two years as a baker. When given the final exam he placed 1st in a class of 216 students. Then Michel went on to earn his Masters of Pastry and Baking.

As a young man in France, he was required to fulfill his term in the French military. He enlisted in 1970. Quickly Michel discovered the food was “terrible” and being an outspoken young man, he quickly told his superiors how he felt. They placed him in the kitchen to see if he could do any better! To make a long story short, he became the lead chef and when his year’s service in the military was completed, the military tried to get him to re-enlist. Michel told me that one of his baker instructors had been sending him money while he was in the military and then wanted him to come back in his hire after the military, which Michel did. Michel then obtained his “Master Brevet” which meant that he could have apprentices under him. This was quite an accomplishment for such a young man! Then when he was 24 years old, Michel owned his first bakery, coffee and tea shop.

Time marched on and Michel married and had two children, Natalie and Stephan. Unfortunately, Michel’s first wife died and Natalie also passed on. Today, Stephan lives in France and has two small boys, one is 5 years old and the other is only 1 year old. (Michel and Liza went to France last year to see them.) Michel’s first wife came from a family that owned a winery. At one time they processed 250,000 bottles of wine a year. Michel’s son, Stephan, is still in the wine business of Tarillon Champagne. Michel told me those were the days that he would work 18 hours a day: 15 hours at his business and then 3 hours at the winery---every day of the week!

When he got the opportunity to come to Dallas, Texas and run a restaurant, he was told he would work 40 hours a week and have two days off! Michel said he “thought this was a vacation!” Life worked out in a rather unusual manner. Michel came to the USA to work for a Swedish man and his wealthy American partner. However, shortly after Michel arrived in Dallas – without a green card – his Swedish employer was arrested and thrown in jail. Michel could not speak English! He managed to purchase an English/French dictionary and wrote a letter to the American partner, asking him to give him 1 week to prove himself. The American partner agreed and Michel started making the delicious food---the people came and the profits started! Shortly thereafter a Russian baker and his

Michel made a deal with the Hilton. He would come to Alaska if they would ferry his car and pay for his transportation all the way to Anchorage. This was 1985 and Michel has been an Alaskan ever since. Michel met Liza in 1986 in Anchorage. Michel left his employment with the Hilton when they wanted him to move to Atlanta, Georgia.

How did Michel come to Seldovia? It started long before he came to Anchorage. When Michel flew [Braniff Airways](#) to Dallas, Texas, the dinner menu aboard the aircraft had a map of the United States and Alaska showing where Braniff Airlines flew on the reverse side. The two cities shown for Alaska were Anchorage and Seldovia! Remember, these were the boom days for Seldovia. Michel filed this away in his head and always wanted to go to Seldovia! He even tried coming to Seldovia but got weathered out and ended up waiting in Homer for three days, finally giving up. Finally in December 1985, Michel and Liza were planning on taking the Alaska Marine Highway System to Kodiak on a special trip for them. Well, Liza told Michel that they could go to Seldovia on the way and Michel was anxious to see Seldovia. They landed in Seldovia and never left!

Since then, Liza and Michel have had quite a history in restaurants and other businesses. In 1987 they opened the Fancy French in Big Lake and because the *Frontier Man* newspaper ran a story on their restaurant, they ended up seating 700 people for Mother’s Day in four settings from 10:00 AM to 6:00 PM! They had a bakery in Seldovia that is still remembered and talked about by some folks today. Michel told me that when Jerry Willard was Mayor of Seldovia they made \$5,000 on the 4th of July by selling a \$1.50 item. That is a lot of work and food! They had the restaurant named Paris Roma in Eagle River. Then in 1994 they came back to Seldovia and ran the Linwood Bar with Liza’s mom and dad. In 2000 they bought the Linwood and in 2001 Liza opened the restaurant portion of the bar. They now have sold the Linwood to the current owners, Joe and Heather Miller.

In 1989 Michel started as an assistant guide in a hunting business. By 1998 he had his own business, as a fully licensed outfitter. His first business was named P.A.C. Alaska. The P.A.C. is a French acronym for fishing, adventure, hunting.

P.A.C. Alaska became know in France and other parts of Europe as the outfitter to use in Alaska. Consequently, Michel has served as a guide to many Europeans who have flown to Alaska for their wilderness experience. [P.A.C. Alaska](#) became known not because Michel promoted it that way, but because this was the name the Europeans understood. Michel wants his business to be known as “Seldovia Guide Service”.

Now in 2007, Michel is completing construction of the Stuyahok River Lodge, which has been a his labor of love and nothing short of a lots of work. It is remote and located near the proposed [Pebble Mine](#). [View Pictures of Stuyahok River Lodge](#). Michel still has three years to be a Master Guide. He has 12 years of the 15 required. Michel holds the following licenses:

family who had emigrated from Russia, asked Michel for a job. They all started cooking, selling and growing in both sales and reputation. Later Michel said he wanted to buy the restaurant (named, D'Azay) from the American partner who told him that the Russian family had just purchased it out from underneath him! (Strange things can happen quickly in a life!) When confronting the Russian family, they wanted Michel to come to work for them!

Now Michel moves on. He had been in the USA for 20 months and still was not "legal." However, he secured a position with the Marriott Hotel based in Anaheim, California. He was the Executive Chef overseeing the openings of the Marriott hotels on the West Coast. This job expanded from Acapulco, Mexico to Hawaii, California, Washington, Oregon and Alaska. He supervised 10 to 12 chefs during the openings of the various hotels and the food that was served for these grand affairs. Michel served in this capacity for about 4 ½ years. During this time he married a Mormon and had two children with her. His daughter, Hollie Angelina, is currently studying to be a doctor at Brigham Young University. His son, Michel Brendan, is an Assistant *Chef de Rang* in Mission Viejo, California.

Alaska Registered Guide, U.S. Merchant Marine Officer, Remote Water Fishing Guide, Commercial Pilot, Seatime on Float, and has 10 units with the State of Alaska. (A unit means that he has passed a test for a license to hunt in that area. Every unit requires a test.)

This article would not be complete without mentioning his stepson, Justin. Justin has been Michel's assistant guide and Justin is now working in construction for the new owners of the Seldovia Lodge. Justin's girlfriend, Crystal, has also moved to Seldovia and will be working with Liza this summer. (See Spotlight article on Liza yet to come!)

To sum Michel's life up, one looks at Michel and knows he is a ball of energy and works very hard at what he does. It all spells success. As the colloquialism goes, "You done well, Michel" and we look forward to your future endeavors.



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