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## Alta Colberg... a great lady with a rich Seldovia history

by Mary Glover



Yesterday, I had the pleasure of visiting with Alta Colberg. Alta is a fountain of stories and history about Seldovia--the people of today and years past. Her charming apartment reflects her personality of warmth and happiness. There is no idle time in her life between taking care of Neechie (her little poodle) and quilting and family, etc. Alta is also modern as she keeps up with technology. She has a computer and does emails. She is just delightful!

Alta Colberg now lives at Lakeside Terrace. If anyone deserves to live at Lakeside Terrace, it is Alta. (For you out-of-towners, Lakeside is a wonderful facility that provides housing to persons who qualify.) Not only has she been a resident of Seldovia for most of her life, but she was also married to John N. Colberg, Jr. who served Chairman and Chairman Emeritus on the [Cook Inlet Region, Inc.](#) (CIRI) Board of Directors for almost 30 years.

A little history: Born on February 24, 1934 in Seattle Washington, Alta Crete Rosenbush was the second child born to Leslie Grant Rosenbush ("Rosie") and Alta Crete Rosenbush (named after mother). Her dad "did a lot of things...He first was in the Army, then the Navy, then was a merchant marine and then a commercial fisherman." They moved to Seldovia when she was two years old. When her father was a

Renee (Haller) and Leslie, and two step-daughters, Ruby and Jennifer. Leslie was named after him, Leslie Daniel Peterson. Ruby, Jennifer and Leslie's other grandmother is Mary Fitzgerald, also of Seldovia. Ruby lives in Seldovia and Leslie and Jennifer recently left Seldovia to go live in Hawaii. Renee Haller is the wife of Scott Haller. They live on Jakolof Road and have two boys. Alta's son, Albert, had one child named Jamie, but raised two step-sons in addition to Jamie.

On October 5, 1955, Alta married John N. Colberg, Jr. They had four children together: Liza Bieri of Seldovia, Arlis Borup of Anchorage, Alexis Nelissen of Anchorage and John P. Colberg, III of Seldovia. Liza Bieri's son, Justin, is expecting his first child in December. This will give Alta a total of twelve great grandchildren seven grandchildren. Alta and John lived in Seldovia and reared their children here. John was a commercial fisherman in these early days. Alta was a stay-at-home mother taking care of all the children and she babysat other children too. (She has unofficially adopted several other children too!)

Alta said that after the earthquake, the urban renewal was a hassle. There were many hard feelings and many rumors around town. She started going to the council meetings every time they met. Before she knew it, she was appointed to a seat. She later ran for a term and served that term. Alta stated, "I think everyone should take their turn on council. It is a good experience and gives you an understanding that you don't get unless you are a part of it." She also served on the local school board before Alaska became a state. After statehood, the school board was taken over by the Kenai

merchant marine, he traveled to Hawaii and Alaska and he thought it would be good to move to either state. This was during World War II and he chose to move to Alaska instead of Hawaii. Alta said this was "a good thing because Hawaii was not a good place to be during World War II".

Alta has one older sister (Anita Snyder, born in Snoqualmie Falls, Washington), who lives in Tacoma, Washington. Beth, who is now deceased, was born in Fall City, WA. Her youngest sister, Barbara was born in Seldovia. Barbara Komm, used to cook the meals at Lakeside Terrace after she grew up. Alta's mom worked in the salmon cannery during the summer as the floor person. She did the hiring and managed the women. She also operated the machine that made the cans. Her father was a commercial fisherman. He also was a hunter and had a big garden. Alta said that they lived off the land and had a diversity of food to eat: fish, bear, sheep, duck, geese, moose, potatoes, cabbage, turnips and other vegetables. She stated her dad could make a carrot pie that tasted like pumpkin pie! He also knew how to build a house. They rented their first house from Mr. Morris before the 1964 earthquake. It was located "across from Morris' store and it was attached to the store warehouse. It was on pilings over the water". They later moved to Hesketh Island (an island near Yukon Island) and stayed there until the kids had to go to school. Then the family moved back to Seldovia.

At this time, the first "old school" in Seldovia was "located downtown about where the medical clinic is located." It later became the library and magistrat's office. The "new school" was built and it was located where the current school's shop building is standing. (The shop building was the gym.) Anita had missed the first year of school, thus putting Anita and Alta in the first grade together in the "new school". (Alta's older children attended the "new school". Some of her younger children attended the current Susan B. English School, which was built in 1971.) Next they moved into a cabin where Eric and Honeybee Nordenson's house is now located and later they lived in a house in the area where Leny Buchman now lives. The family then bought the house now owned by Bud and Hazel Brown which is located on the old Seldovia boardwalk. After all the girls were grown, Alta's mother left Seldovia and went to care for her ailing mother in Washington State. Her dad stayed in Seldovia.

As you can see by Alta's story, she has seen a tremendous amount of changes in Seldovia. Alta remembers when the bridge over the Seldovia Slough was a draw bridge. She told me of the story where she was playing on the bridge as a child. It had a rope that would open the bridge up so a boat could go through and this rope increased the opening of the two sides of the bridge by increments. She remembers opening the two sides of the bridge and jumping across to the other side while the bridge was up! Then opening it more and

Peninsula Borough. She is a charter member of the Seldovia Hospital Guild. When Doctor Armstrong was the doctor in Seldovia, the Seldovia Hospital Guild raised \$10,000 to get him a new X-Ray machine. Other supplies were also purchased by the Seldovia Hospital Guild. Alta worked with Dr. Armstrong and even assisted in some baby deliveries. She was a volunteer at the hospital. (The Willards have their home in the old hospital building now.)

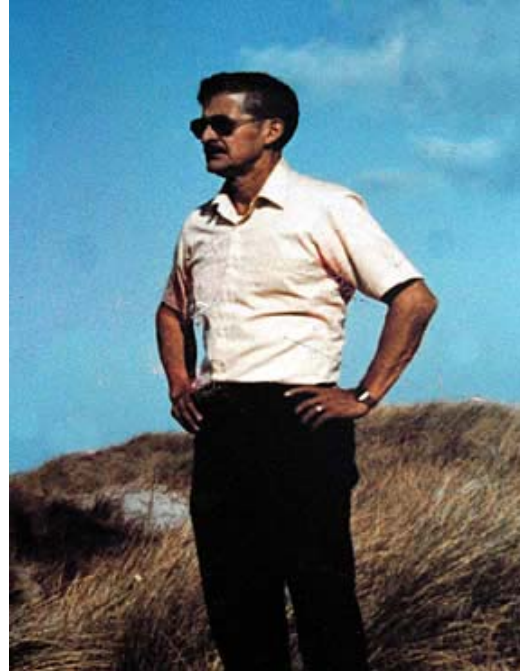
Another interesting story that Alta told me was the way people used to be prepared for burial in Seldovia. Her ex-mother-in-law, Mrs. Peterson, would prepare the bodies for burial. Frederic Elvsaas and Tollac Olstead would make the coffins. The bodies did not have to go to Homer, but could go directly to the grave yard. Alta said her first experience was at age 16 when she helped her future mother-in-law after a plane crash took place and there were multiple casualties. She asked if she could help her because it was quite a job to be handled by only one person. Alta said this experience prepared her for working in the medical field later on.

Alta also gave me some history about the bars in Seldovia. "The Polar Bar was run by a black man named Joe Hill. This was located where the Alaska Dancing Eagles is today. Joe Hill also had a barber shop and some rooms for rent. You could also get something to eat at the bar. Another bar was called the Surf Club. " I was a kid at the time and it was run by a woman named Dicky Collins, "said Alta. The Polar burned down and Joe Hill opened another bar. Alta's father-in-law, John Colberg, Sr., and George Burgin purchased a bar named the Linwood. They later sold it to Shorty Bailey. Some time later, Alta's husband, John Colberg, Jr. went to work for Shorty Bailey. The name of the Linwood Bar came from "Lin" from Linstead and "wood" from Eric Nordenson's aunt, Laura Wood. After working for Shorty Bailey for a number of years, Alta and John leased the bar from Shorty and ran it. They later purchased it from Shorty. Alta worked the bar until 1965 when she had a stroke and could not add numbers in her head anymore. According to Alta, "that was the only reason I retired." They subsequently sold the bar and the people who purchased it could not make the balloon payment. Alta said that Judy Johnson called her and said it would revert back to them. Alta and John later sold the Linwood Bar to Liza and Michelle Bieri. Liza and Michelle Bieri then sold it to Heather and Joe Miller, who are the current owners. Alta said that John passed away after a long illness on December 23, 1992. She said he enjoyed history and reading books. She wanted me to include some pictures of him in this article and they are pictured below.

Alta likes to knit and crochet. It is obvious that she is excellent at making quilts. The quilt she just finished is also shown below. Alta is known in our community for her beautiful quilts. She is also kept very busy by Neechie, which means "friend" in Chippewa. Neechie was given to her by her granddaughter, Brittany, when Neechie was six weeks old. She is now nine months old and is truly her little cute companion.

jumping across again. Alta said that when her mother found out what she had been doing, “Mother gave us a reason not to do that again! It was a wonder we survived! We didn’t have TV or anything else. One time I remember playing on one side of Fish Creek and a mother bear and her cub were on the other side of the creek fishing. They didn’t bother us and we didn’t bother them.... My dad always respected the wildlife.”

Alta had two boys with her first husband: Leslie Daniel Peterson and Albert Peterson. Leslie passed away when he was in his 40’s of a heart attack. He is survived by his two daughters,



John N. Colberg, Jr.



Here is Alta holding up her latest beautiful king-size quilt.



This is the quilt fully laid out. It was made by with quilt squares and applique. (click on this image for a larger view)



**Neechie and Alta**

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