

Everyday Woman of Sitka – Rebecca Himschoot



1. Can you please tell us a little about yourself? How long have you lived in Sitka? What types of things are you involved in here?

My arrival-in-Sitka anniversary is something I celebrate every year: 8:50 pm on July 2, 1988. I've left Sitka twice, once for a decade of professional opportunities in Hawaii, Kuwait and SW Alaska, and again for a National Science Foundation fellowship for a year. Both times when I left my return was open-ended: for the right opportunity I could have stayed away. What I discovered is that nothing compares to Sitka.

My activities in Sitka are limited right now to teaching and serving on the Assembly. In a few years when I retire my hope is to volunteer for a number of worthy organizations around town, such as the animal shelter and Braveheart. Other holidays I celebrate are International Women's Day on March 8th and Albert Einstein's birthday on March 14th.

2. What is your biggest struggle right now?

My deep respect for my community makes me despair for the national divisions I see taking root in Sitka. I am a strong believer in the power of continuous improvement, and I'm not sure we've grown as a nation in recent years. To be clear, my concerns are for the value of all voices across the full political and cultural spectrum. It is much harder to find respect and love across ideological differences, and yet that is exactly what we must do. The most worthwhile things are often the hardest things to do. I want to be part of a community where people can hear and value each other, and I fear losing that foundational respect in Sitka.

3. What does a normal "Day in the Life" look like for you?

Most days begin and end with a focus on informing myself through local, state and national news, and podcasts such as "Have you Heard" and "NPR One." I am fortunate to spend my workdays with some incredible fifth graders, and my weekends out on Sitka's trails. No day is complete without chocolate, of

course, so there tend to be treats sprinkled across the day. Lately I've been losing the battle to walk off the effects of those treats. A highlight of every day is snuggling the pandemic cat I picked up from the shelter, Mike B (named for a political fixer in the series Madam Secretary. The fixer is self-centered and only interested in advancing causes that benefit him, which seemed cat-like to me).

4. What makes you proud to be a woman?

There is likely a body of research out there, but I can only speak anecdotally to my observations of women's leadership. Where women lead there is often a focus on improving societal conditions, whether that is through schools, health care, the environment, elder care or assistance to the most vulnerable in society in any form. A rising tide lifts all ships, and with more women in leadership we are more likely to focus on policies that lift everyone. From a continuous improvement perspective, whether men are making room or not women are increasingly in leadership roles, and I am convinced these female leaders will play a major role in solving some of humanity's biggest problems, from climate change to the pandemic.

5. Do you have something you'd like to say to other women in Sitka?

Your voice is your power. Whether you choose to serve in leadership in an organization or your family or your community, your voice is everything. Use it wisely and courageously.

6. Is there anything else you would like people to know about you?

It has been an honor to be a teacher in Sitka for nearly 20 years, and I am grateful to the community for the opportunities I've had here. The young women I've taught are the community's future leaders. I envision a day when organizations like SAFV are not needed, when families have the support they need to raise healthy children, and when cultural revitalization isn't something we strive for but something we live. Until that day I hope we can continue to work together as a community to solve our shared problems and build our respect for each other. Where everyone thrives there is no room for hate.