

## PERSONAL JOURNEYS

## A Memorable Place

## Wild Alaska has the power to heal

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SPECIAL TO THE SUN

As I peered through the small window, pressing my forehead to the cold glass, I found myself grinning like a kid on a carnival ride. I was in a DeHavilland Otter, that workhorse of a floatplane, flying over rivers, mountains and glaciers en route to Taku Glacier Lodge near Juneau, Alaska.

Across the narrow aisle my husband was doing his own contortions, trying to aim his camera at the best angle to record the incredible sights below, as we banked and turned over rivers of water and ice. All eight of us on this excursion wore earphones so we could hear the description of what we were seeing over the engine's roar. Conversation was impossible, but grins and thumbs-up and "Wow!" expressions were everywhere.

We flew over glaciers and marveled at the shades of blue in the ice. The guide explained that pressure on the ice, which can be several hundred feet thick, changes the structure of the ice crystals and makes them reflect light differently. Some glaciers have streaks of brown from the silt and debris they pick up as they grind over land on their way to the sea. Others have cracked surfaces like parched land dotted with



**The Hole in the Wall glacier grinds and winds its way through the mountains near Juneau.**

pools of Caribbean-blue water.

As we landed on the Taku River and walked up to the rustic lodge for a lunch

of grilled king salmon, we could see the whimsically named Hole in the Wall glacier just across the water. Soon we were drinking tea and lemonade chilled with ice from that same glacier.

After lunch, we wandered around the lodge, enjoying the forest trails, gem-bright hummingbirds and mountain vistas. We found ourselves walking slowly and speaking quietly, in tune with the calm of our surroundings.

Too soon our plane returned and we took off for the trip back to Juneau and our cruise ship. We would soon return home, but we would return changed.

The cruise and the glacier excursion were supposed to have happened months before, but the events of Sept. 11 forced us to postpone our plans. We could not have predicted that moving our fall cruise to the spring would make it better. But the new perspective increased our appreciation of the elemental beauty of Alaska. The salmon tasted sweeter, the air smelled cleaner, the bald eagles were more majestic.

And the implacable advances and retreats of the glaciers reminded us that mankind, for all its occasional insanity and horrors, is no match for the timelessness and grandeur of nature.

*Peg Silloway lives in Columbia.*