Collision in the Arctic

Collision in the Arctic

BARBARA HINDS

DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES DIGITAL EDITIONS
HALIFAX, NS, CANADA

Collision in the Arctic by Dalhousie University is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted.

All text © Dalhousie University Licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted.

Select photographs as indicated in the text are © Library and Archives Canada. All rights for photographs are reserved.

This book was produced using Pressbooks.com, and PDF rendering was done by PrinceXML.

Contents

Foreword	1
Places Visited	5
Chapter 1 ~ Beginnings	7
Chapter 2 ~ Melting Pot or Slum	13
Chapter 3 ~ Frobisher's Mainspring	19
Chapter 4 ~ Rehabilitation Centre	27
Chapter 5 ~ Point of Collision	36
Chapter 6 ~ No Discrimination	42
Chapter 7 ~ First Seal Hunt	47
Chapter 8 ~ Fort Chimo	56
Chapter 9 ~ Tapestry Threads	60
Chapter 10 ~ Eskimo Hero	65
Chapter 11 ~ An Eskimo Life	72
Chapter 12 ~ Grass Roots Economy	80
Chapter 13 ~ Clochemerle-by-the-Sea	97
Chapter 14 ~Time and Tide	108
Chapter 15 ~ God's Pocket	117
Chapter 16 ~ Some Sex Customs	131
Chapter 17 ~ The Place of Many Lamps	145
Chapter 18 ~ Henry's First Consignment	152
Chapter 19 ~ Polar Bear Stew	161
Chapter 20 ~ A Small Port in a Storm	175
Chapter 21 ~ Diminishing Herds	182
Chapter 22 ~ Luxury Camp	188

Chapter 23 ~ Artists and Spirits 201
Chapter 24 ~ A Dog's Life 215
Chapter 25 ~ Getting Religion 221
Chapter 26 ~ How to Catch a Fox 232
Chapter 27 ~ Is there a Mechanic in the Camp? 242
Chapter 28 ~ Endings 255

Photographs in Order of Appearance 261

Foreword

Barbara Hinds had a deep and abiding interest in the Canadian Arctic even before she arrived in Canada from England in 1956. In 1960, she realized her dream when she and friend, Rosemary Gilliat (later known as Rosemary Gilliat Eaton), took a trip that would influence the rest of their lives. Barbara and Rosemary met in Ottawa at the 1959 meeting of the Canadian Women's Press Club. The two immediately hit it off and discovered a mutual interest in the Arctic. During the ensuing months, they developed a plan to travel to the eastern Canadian Arctic and document the people, places and circumstances that they encountered. From the outset, the trip was infused with a sense of adventure and risk-taking. Barbara and Rosemary were intent on exploring the Arctic without being limited by any of the usual setbacks reserved for two young female travelers. Their enthusiasm and determination propelled them to an impressive list of places. It was clearly the trip of a lifetime and they embraced all aspects of it, both positive and negative.

After returning to Halifax from the Arctic, Hinds prepared a manuscript for a book about the trip and sent it off to the MacMillan Company of Canada Ltd. On November 30, 1964, MacMillan replied, "We have considered your manuscript, COLLISION IN THE ARCTIC, and I am sorry to report that we are not sufficiently enthusiastic about this work to undertake publication." Despite her success travelling to far-flung places in the eastern Arctic, this setback proved to be one that she could not overcome. The work lay dormant for the next 54 years.

The digital edition presented here is the first public presentation of *Collision in the Arctic* as a finished work. The typescript was included in the material donated to the Dalhousie University Archives in 2015 with some of the pages out of order, duplicated

and re-written. I have assembled it using my best guess as to how Hinds would have liked it to appear. For those interested in a more complete study of the manuscript, the digitized typescript is available at the Dalhousie University Archives. This digital edition includes the text as was presented in the typescript, with minor typographical corrections and rearrangement. This edition also incorporates audio clips and photographs from the Barabara Hinds fonds. All photographs were taken by Rosemary Gilliat. Many were intended to be part of the book and they provide a meaningful visual accompaniment to the text. A more complete collection of Rosemary Gilliat's photographs is available from Library and Archives Canada, and her papers and other photographs are available at the Cole Harbour Rural Heritage Society.

Many things have changed since Barbara prepared the original manuscript in 1964. Geographic names have undergone significant revision in the Arctic. Nunavut did not exist in 1960, when the eastern Arctic was included in the Northwest Territories. Important place names in the book such as Fort Chimo (Kuujjuag), Frobisher Bay (Iqaluit), George River (Kangiqsualujjuag) and Port Burwell (Killiniq) have changed to reflect their connection to the indigenous people of the Arctic. Similarly, Hinds uses the term "Eskimo" to refer to the Inuit, which we acknowledge to be a derogatory and offensive label for current readers.

In addition to geographic names, there are also problems with how Hinds spelled some personal names in the text. "Blanket toss under midnight sun: Portraits of everyday life in eight Indigenous communities" (2019) by Paul Seesequasis provides a point of comparison for several individuals who Barbara and Rosemary encountered in Cape Dorset. Based on the work by Paul Seesequasis, I have included updated names of the three print makers shown photographed together in Chapter 23. I have also corrected names for Kenojuak Ashevak and Sheouak Petaulassie (spelled simply as "Kenoyuak" and "Sheouak" in the original typescript for Chapter 23).

For students and scholars interested in the recent history of the Arctic, this book provides a somewhat different perspective from the typical information sources and government documents covering the period. Government programs in the Arctic were administered almost exclusively by men, as were the large-scale construction and resource extraction projects. Even within her own profession, it is clear that Hinds did not identify with the "newsmen" of the period. This detachment is evident when she describes her time with a group of journalists visiting a luxury camp near Cape Dorset in Chapter 22.

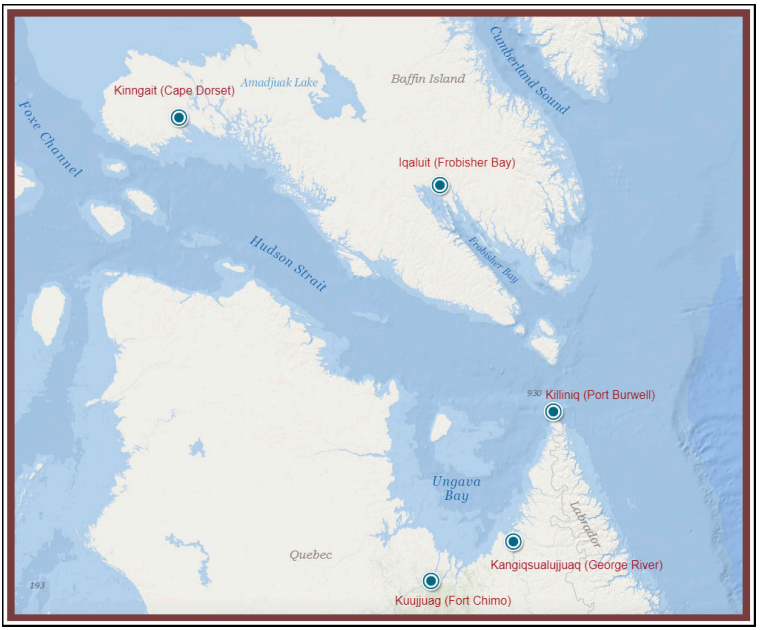
With her manuscript, Hinds has provided us with a first-hand account of living and working in the Arctic in 1960. She visited schools, trading posts, co-ops, camps, fish plants and government-sponsored work projects, and provided her perspective on the successes and failures that she observed. Inuit hunters invited Barbara and Rosemary to accompany them on hunting trips and participate in their way of life. Barbara and Rosemary were also invited into people's homes to hear and record personal stories and tragedies of the people and families living in the Arctic. The result is a fascinating story and an excellent entry point into the Barbara Hinds fonds in the Dalhousie University Archives.

Barbara Hinds in Frobisher Bay, 1960

Geoff Brown
Digital Scholarship Librarian
Dalhousie University Libraries

Places Visited

Collision in the Arctic takes place in 5 major stops on the coast of Baffin Island and Ungava Bay. Barbara Hinds and Rosemary Gilliat traveled by plane from Iqaluit (Frobisher Bay) to Kuujjuag (Fort Chimo), then on to Kangiqsualujjuag (George River). From Kangiqsualujjuag (George River) they travelled by boat to Killiniq (Port Burwell) and back. Once back in Kangiqsualujjuag (George River) they flew to Kuujjuag (Fort Chimo) and then on to Iqaluit (Frobisher Bay). The final leg of their journey was by plane to Kinngait (Cape Dorset) with a return trip by boat to Iqaluit (Frobisher Bay) before returning home.



Map of Hudson Strait and Ungava Bay showing the major places visited by Barbara Hinds and Rosemary Gilliat in the summer of 1960

Chapter 1 ~ Beginnings

My great grandfather, my grandfather and my father were all Customs officers. So were my uncle and brother. And when I had spent 11 years in the same Customs service, I decided it was time to make a break with the family tradition. So I resigned, became an emigrant and took a boat to Canada.

The day I arrived in Halifax, Nova Scotia, a local newspaper advertised a vacancy on its staff. I applied and got the job and became what I had always wanted to be, a newspaper reporter.

Three years later, in September 1959 I was asked to speak at the triennial meeting of the Canadian women's Press Club in Ottawa. Within five minutes of my arrival at the Chateau Laurier Hotel, I met a fellow English woman, Rosemary Gilliat, a photographer, and within an hour we had discovered both of us were bent on going to the Canadian Arctic, so we resolved to go together as a team, she would take the photographs and I would do the writing.

Photographer and fellow traveler, Rosemary Gilliat in Cape Dorset, 1960

The following spring, I cashed my Canadian savings, sold my car, sublet my apartment, found a foster home for Henrietta, the cat, and bought a tape recorder, because I decided to break into radio as well. For her part, Rosemary bought a cine camera with the intention of going into film production. We were both very earnest.

Anyone who has been on a week's camping trip would understand the extent of planning a four months' journey in unfamiliar Arctic regions. We had to be prepared for extremes and our organisation

was complicated by the fact that we lived almost a thousand miles apart. I lived on the Atlantic coast and Rosemary lived in Ottawa, which was near the government offices with which we had to deal. Consequently, the bulk of arrangements about transport and the freighting of supplies fell on her shoulders. Rosemary was experienced in camping, so it was she who listed the equipment we needed and she who bought most of our supplies and had them shipped to Cape Dorset in West Baffin Island, where we hoped to spend the Arctic Summer.

I was to take on the plane enough of life's necessities to tide us over the first few weeks. Accordingly, I presented myself at the store of a ships' provender in the old seaport of Halifax. My needs were listed on the back of an envelope. A young, beardless clerk approached me first but on learning my destination, he put me in the hands of the old proprietor who had outfitted ships from Newfoundland to New Zealand.

"Take lots of spices," he said when I named our prime staples of dried potatoes, tinned beef and prunes.

Later, I learned Rosemary had shipped an enormous quantity of tuna fish. She could not eat tinned beef and I did not like tuna fish, so we were doomed to chewing our way through one of the most monotonous diets ever taken North.

Advice was plentiful. I was told to take lots of mosquito netting; how to treat frostbite; to be ready for rain, and a subscriber to the legend that the Arctic is paved with gold assured me I would "make a pile" because in the North there was nowhere to go and nothing to spend money on.

On June 14, 1960, I arrived at Montreal airport dressed in tennis shoes, rock climbing pants, yachting anorak, ski mittens, tweed socks and carrying a bee keeper's hat. My pockets bulged with bottles of fly repellent.

"We," I thought, "are ready."

In addition, I carried a rucksack, a suitcase, a typewriter and the tape recorder. Going North is referred to by "those who know" as going Inside. When you are North, the South is named the Outside. This helps to maintain the exclusive club atmosphere, which has been nurtured by bearded scientists, prospectors and traders, and discourages women from entering the Arctic, except for nurses and school teachers. They are functional. We were to serve no cause but journalism, and in respectful deference to the club we were entering and whose members we may have to entertain, we included a little whisky amongst the apple rings and flaked onions.

Exhausted with excitement we presented ourselves at the Dorval air terminal on the morning of departure and joined a queue of engineers, stevedores and black coated missionaries. We shuffled towards the ticket agent's desk and a suave, silver haired clerk asked us to wait. When everyone else had disappeared on to the plane, he approached us, sad eyed and courteous, and explained there were too many people for the plane and would we mind waiting until the next day.

We were too stunned to protest and flopped down among our baggage. It was the first lesson in patience, a virtue required by all Arctic travelers who may find they have to wait weeks at a time for transport.

A succession of delays followed, but two days later we boarded a flight for Frobisher Bay, and surrounded by our kit we settled down for the six hour journey North. My seat was close to the door, which communicated with the cockpit and I could hear voices. Someone distinctly said, "You've got to mend it." There was a sound of heavy hammering. A frowning mechanic opened the door and rushed off the plane. My eyebrows rose. From within a voice asked, "How long does the run take?" Someone answered in a quiet mumble. "Then you'll have to mend it," the first voice said. A cool looking stewardess emerged wearing a reassuring smile and announced to the eight

passengers: “They’re just mending the pilot’s seat. We won’t be long now,” and passed down the narrow gangway.

The hammering stopped and out stepped a flight engineer in a white overall and carrying a tray of tools. He looked confident and gave me a brave smile, but he got off the plane. Down on the tarmac someone gave the thumbs up sign to the pilot, the plane throbbed and shuddered. Within minutes we were above the roof tops of the air terminal buildings, past the toy sized houses below and into the solitude of a cloud bank.

The fuselage had a very businesslike interior. Seats were anchored on only the port side and mindful of the months of close cohabitation ahead of us Rosemary and I selected seats at opposite ends of the plane. On the starboard side, freight was stacked high and lashed down with rope nets and steel wires. There were packing cases of char nets, fishing lines, filter tip cigarettes, sleeping bags and baby food. A coffee urn bearing the instruction THIS WAY UP was stacked among eight cases of Encyclopaedia Britannica. It looked as though things were not going to be so primitive after all.

Most of the journey was passed in a glare of brilliant light shining on the landscape of cloud below us, but after five hours we emerged from the pillars of cloud and we were flying over Polar seas. Below, ice shimmered on Ungava Bay cradled in the coast of Northern Quebec. Viewed from such a distance, the ice looked like a giant specimen slide seen through a microscope. Cell formations of turquoise and white ice seethed in black streams of icy water and passed beyond the frame of the plane’s porthole. Turgid and sluggish, the floes lay close packed like a frozen blood stream, waiting to flood into life in the Arctic Summer, when sunlight gives the North no night and twenty four of day.

Years of hearsay and impressions garnered from books were suddenly crystallized in that first sight of those icy seas and I found the reality no disappointment. I knew I should relish the North.

Our immediate destination, Frobisher Bay lay at the head of a two hundred mile long bay that penetrated the South East corner of Baffin Island, fourth largest island in the world if you do not include Greenland.

As we lost height flying up the bay, we could see to the East black hills white-dappled with snow. To the West, ice caps glistened on the mountains of Meta Incognita – Beyond the Unknown – named by Sir Martin Frobisher, the doughty Elizabethan navigator who searched for a North West passage to the riches of Cathay.

Ahead of us sprawled the Eskimo camp of Iqaluit and the township of Frobisher Bay with its Polar route airport, gateway to a summer full of the promise of excitement in the wide, cold North which every greenhorn Artic traveller imagines is certain to be found.

Chapter 2 ~ Melting Pot or Slum

We were met at the airport by Frank Delaute, the regional administrator for the Canadian Department of Northern Affairs, who promptly offered us accommodation in a government hut. After carrying camping equipment nearly two thousand miles from Nova Scotia to the Arctic, it came as a disappointment on one hand and as a relief on the other to discover there was comfortable lodging.

The hut, as it was called locally, turned out to be similar to a score of houses in Frobisher Bay. It had three bedrooms electric light, cooking range and that strange paradox, a refrigerator. Our first chore was to lower the thermostatically controlled central heating from 85 degree Fahrenheit to a more bearable temperature. Looking at my down filled sleeping bag and mosquito netting I felt like that girl who took her harp to a party and was never required to play.

An invitation to dinner came from the Delaute family and we delightedly postponed eating our tinned beef and walked over to their house across the sand and grit on which Frobisher was built. Inside, soft mmdc was played on a tape recorder as we sat down to a dinner for which all the ingredients had come from tins. Ham, pineapple, corn-on-the-cob, potatoes, butter and even the cherry pie.

The final kindness of the Delaute family on our first day in the Arctic was the loan of heavy bedroom curtains to keep out the midnight sun.

We stayed four busy weeks in Frobisher trying to understand why it was named by some “The Melting Pot of the Arctic” and by others more pessimistically as “The Slum of the Arctic”.

Frobisher Bay, 1960

The population was a medley of two thousand souls: broad featured, brown skinned Eskimos, women who carried their babies in hoods on their backs and smoked Lucky Strike cigarettes, men who harpooned seals through the ice and chewed gum; American service men who counted the days they spent away from home, and a cross section of Canadians such as you would find in any Canadian province.

The people lived in four separate areas. High above the town, crowning the skyline with its domes and radar screens was a semi-subterranean U.S. Distant Early Warning site. Its inhabitants seldom emerged from the self-contained camp, with its warren of leisure rooms, workshops and connecting tunnels except to collect mail from the post office where one would see them, etiolated by indoor living. They counted their time in the North not by months or weeks but by days. "I've been here two hundred and thirty one days, one air man told me.

The town was inhabited by Canadian civil servants, teachers, policemen, administrators and nurses plus a few regularly employed Eskimos, who enjoyed the same accommodation and privileges as the non-Eskimos. About a hundred Eskimos lived at Apex Rehabilitation Centre, where natives returning from sanatoria in the South were given a chance to re-adjust to the Arctic climate before returning to living the hunter's life. Those who were too sick to return to their original way of life were given a chance to learn technical and simple commercial skills.

By far the largest proportion of the Eskimo population lived in the village of Iqaluit sprawling across the delta of a shallow river. It was a cluster of dingy tents and packing case dwellings improvised from the jetsam of the white man's rubbish tips.

Iqaluit was out of bounds to non-Eskimos, but it was the Mecca of about seven hundred people who had forsaken the harsh uncertainty of a seal hunter's economy and they had migrated there from almost every camp in Baffin Island. Even in the Arctic there was a trend towards urban living.

Most of the former seal hunters had travelled overland by dog team and komatik, or sled, during the long winter. They no longer had boats for hunting in the more bountiful summer although the efforts of hundreds of Eskimos hunting in the waters of Frobisher Bay would have been unavailing. The waters there had never been noted for seal hunting. Unable to obtain fresh meat for either themselves or their dogs, they had to let the dogs die or shoot them, and scores of Eskimos were caught in the downward spiral of living on government relief rations.

The Department of Northern Affairs employed or found employment for as many Eskimos as they could, but for the rest, they were given a new kind of security. The department created partly for their welfare could not let them starve, and relief rations were taken by the sack load into Iqaluit.

The Eskimos could not be blamed for accepting security from hunger, no matter how squalid their lives appeared to be in Iqaluit, and it was no uncommon sight to see families sifting mounds of garbage at the town's refuse dump, and bearing away some still-edible trophies.

In the summer, about half of the children I saw in Iqaluit were disfigured by the revolting scars of impetigo, induced, according to the doctor, by poor diet, uncleanliness, crowded living and foraging on the garbage tip.

Most, if not all, the Baffin Island Eskimos had been given religious instruction in the first sixty years of the Twentieth Century, but lamentably few had ever received any schooling and it was their inability to speak the English language, their ignorance of numbers and arithmetic and indifference to the division of time usually which forced them into the menial labour usually offered them in the town of Frobisher.

Fortunately, the migration to Frobisher coincided with the development of a new school with a curriculum adapted to the future practical needs of Eskimo children. Part of the tragedy of Frobisher was that still young Eskimo parents often sacrificed returning to their preferred old way of life for the sake of having their children educated.

The men who were lucky enough to find work and who proved themselves reliable were rented houses alongside the civil servants from Ottawa, with exactly the same facilities – daily delivery of water, central heating, electricity and sewage disposal, the latter a problem aggravated by the nature of the land.

North of Canada's treeline, the sub soil is permanently frozen all year round. In summer, it may thaw to a depth of two or three feet, the top soil becomes a squelchy bog seeking to find a run-off while the earth beneath remains solid and impenetrable as an iceberg.

Faced with such impermeable land, construction and sanitary engineers in the arctic were harassed men. Except the technologically expert Americans. They had developed and installed a costly drainage and water supply system which was electrically heated, the former flushing for more than a mile into the shallow reaches of the bay even in the bitterest weather.

More economical consideration fashioned sanitation in the town. Unable to build underground drains, the engineers solved the problem by having dry closets installed in each house. Giant plastic bags were issued to the householders, and the bags were put inside the dry closets and gathered every morning.

It was this unexpected arrangement which brought us our first rendezvous with Eskimos. Inevitably, the sewage collectors were natives, who called at our hut each morning just after breakfast. They were disarmingly cheerful and spoke not a word of English and rattled to the door in a shattered looking truck. There were four of them, dressed in parkas, sealskin kamiks, or boots, and always wearing kid gloves.

We christened the leader Dan. He came with a boisterous shout and a grinding of gears, shuffled up the steps and across the floor, shedding Frobisher sand from his sealskin boots. He emerged from the bathroom with a firm, gloved grip on the plastic bag and always said, “Peeoyuk,” grinning and waving at us.

We learned that peeoyuk meant good, and I felt wonderment at a disposition which could find jollity in such labour.

Dan, we were told, was paid about two hundred dollars a month, and he certainly earned it.

Other Eskimos found regular employment driving water tankers from a lake more than a mile out of town. A few were caretakers of buildings and some were capable motor mechanics. One was the driver of Frobisher’ only bus.

Pointing the trend of Eskimo integration into the "civilised" North American way of life were road signs at the side of the road form Apex. The words, "Yield Right of way" were painted in both English and in Eskimo syllabics – the form of shorthand writing introduced by missionaries in the past century. Though most Eastern Arctic adult Eskimos have never been to school they are claimed to be one hundred per cent literate in syllabic writing which enables them to read the mission bibles but little else. There is a dearth of any other syllabic literature except for the terse black and yellow road signs pointing the way along the road to Frobisher.

Chapter 3 ~ Frobisher's Mainspring

After Dan's initial visit, we were called on by many Eskimo visitors. Most of them were gentle, tawny skinned children, looking like gnomes in their peak-hooded parkas, their black eyes round with curiosity.

They were too shy to speak at first, but a supply of lollipops diminished in ratio to an increase in their courage and they soon ventured inside the house and played with my typewriter or drew pictures of domed snow houses with dogs and komatiks, just as a child in London or Toronto would draw a square house with windows door and chimney.

We made our first excursion the day after our arrival to the Hudson's Bay Company Store to supplement our larder. The HBC food store was at Apex, about three miles down the bay. Before we passed the outskirts of town we were offered a ride and drove past the hovels and tents of Iqaluit to the neatly kept buildings nestling at the edge of the shore ice. They were white painted timber buildings with red roofs and trim duckboard paths connecting warehouses, shop and trader's house. On the shore, the HBC flag streamed at the flag pole head, proclaiming The Bay was open for business as it had been since 1670.

The red roofed buildings of the Hudson's Bay Store in Apex, 1960

A Shell gasoline pump advertised "42 cents a gallon" and close by waited two emancipated Eskimos with Italian style motor scooters. Inside the store was a conglomeration of fox pelts, rifles, sealskin slippers, tinned goods and brightly coloured trash trinkets marked "Made in Japan."

The store was running low and waiting for its annual delivery of supplies which would not arrive until after break-up of the ice. Meanwhile, money burned a hole in the pockets of Eskimo wage earners who could not conceive of a rainy day. There was a steady sale of chewing gum, cowboy music, cowboy Western stories and cowboy hats to men who had never seen a live horse and who had never tasted fresh cow's milk. I watched an Eskimo spend almost nineteen dollars on three gramophone records and a carton of cigarettes.

We piled our food into my frame rucksack and set off home over the tundra. The land was still cool and the air about 50 degrees Fahrenheit so not a mosquito was in sight or ear shot. The day

was perfect. Across the white and blue ice of the bay, hills dappled as a grey mare rose to a misty horizon. Beneath our feet lay an abundance of Arctic flowers, pale dryas, anemones and the most exquisite miniature azalea rhododendron. Overhead horned skylarks swooped and darted, trilling in joyous flight. Every shade of green, from pale ashy caribou moss to deep emerald carpeted the ground. Bright orange and red lichen enriched the tussocks. Almost every flower was purple or mauve. It was a royal day,

We scrambled up to the highest ridges and vainly tried to push over a rocking stone, poised there by some ancient glacier.

Rosemary disturbed a skylark and found five brown and olive eggs,

“If she hadn’t lost her nerve, poor thing, I’d never have found her nest,” she said.

We left the lark in peace with her eggs, skirted the Eskimo village and returned to the road, close by oil storage tanks sitting in lakes of cold, black water. Their smooth silver surfaces contrasting strongly with the rough land and rose coloured rocks of Precambrian granite.

During our absence, heavy baggage had been delivered to our hut. We were overjoyed to find familiar possessions neatly stacked in the lobby and we fell to, unpacking long underwear, extra sweaters, candy for children, lipsticks for their mothers; an air mattress, made in Scotland and “guaranteed never to let you down.” I unpicked my knots with parsimonious habit, Rosemary slashed the cords of her packages with a penknife, unable to fiddle with string. Apart from my fishing rod, not a thing, had been broken.

As I had bought a fishing licence and we intended to supplement our diet with fresh fish, the rod had to be repaired. A chivalrous former Bush pilot, Clare Dobbin mended it. It was one of his many kindnesses. When my stocks of copy paper dwindled, he located a source of supply and he gave Rosemary access to a photographer’s darkroom.

He had lived in remote places for many years and pioneered aerial photography, map making Canada's inaccessible mountain ranges of the far North West. His experience had made him an understanding man, and suspecting the dullness of our diet, he called regularly with a few inches of celery, lettuce leaves or cucumber slices.

The engine of his car was always left running when he called. It was a northerner's habit in winter, when the temperature stood at forty below zero Fahrenheit and it was better to idle the engine than have it freeze solid.

At first, it seemed a great waste, but we found there was no shortage of fuel in Frobisher. There were vast tank farms, widely spaced to offset the danger of fire. Oil was the life blood of Frobisher, and the airport was the mainspring of its existence.

From its single runway, Strategic Air Command of the U.S. Air Force shuttled giant tanker planes which refuelled the aircraft carrying atom bombs high in the Arctic sky.

The bomber patrol was maintained for the twenty-four hours of each day. Twin crews took turns, working and sleeping overhead, maintaining a vigil for the Western World. Below, in the newly built complex building was a vast communications centre. Its hub was an instrument panel and at its centre was a red warning light.

If ever the bulb flashed, through the remote control of Washington and Ottawa, the fliers overhead would receive the order to, "Go man. Go," and the civilised men of the Twentieth Century could begin their own destruction.

Frobisher Bay air base was the largest airport established in the Canadian Arctic during World War II, but almost two decades of aero-engine development had made it almost useless for high-powered jet planes which required long runways. When civil trans-Polar route planes turned to jet engines, the number of planes calling at the airport diminished.

A reprieve came when the U.S. Air Force undertook to have the airfield widened and lengthened to accommodate its Strategic Air Command planes and the work was in progress the summer we were there.

It was the biggest commercial gamble Baffin Island had ever seen. The stakes were four million dollars and the gambler was a construction engineer, Tullis Carter of Toronto, who contracted to have the work finished by October. He was a fresh complexioned, spring heeled gentleman with a military moustache and pleased to claim his great grandmother was a pure-blooded Cree Indian, he was a present day pioneer. A man of quick decision with the courage to trust his luck.

Work on the airport filled the twenty-four hours of daylight with sound and rocked Frobisher with explosions. A week following our arrival, Mr. Carter took us to the construction site where giant bulldozers and machines valued at a quarter of a million dollars scratched and tore at the frozen grit. The machines could move no more than four inches off the top of the permafrost at a time. The land was frozen so solidly that progress was limited to the speed with which the sunlight thawed the ground and the bulldozer clawed as fast as nature's own slow process would allow.

The loosened grit and rock was taken to a crusher; a white-hot flame seared and dried the gravel at three hundred degrees Centigrade with the scream of a jet engine. The coarse gravel was used in the runway's base course. The finer grit was mixed with asphalt from Trinidad and used in asphaltic concrete on the new tarmac.

The asphalt was carried in huge drums from the tropical Caribbean island almost half a world away, on the bleak northern landscape, during the summer sealift period. A gang of six brawny men, tanned by Arctic winds, cut open the drums with giant shears, clawed the metal edges apart and hammered the curved metal sheet flat. A crane hoisted the shining black tar and lowered it into a tremendous

cauldron where it fused with the gravel laid down in the last Ice Age. The mixture was carried direct to the runway, and dumped, rolled and watered by mammoth road-laying machines in a nonstop shuttle.

The work was six weeks behind schedule and the time had to be made up during the brief summer. An atmosphere of surging energy hung over the work site. While tarmac was laid down, drillers scrambled over the adjacent hillsides, boring tea rows of holes in the toughest granite in the world. The hillsides were to be blown up to make the airport approaches safe by reducing the angle of slope to one inch in seven. Drills of tungsten carbide steel bit thirty feet an hour into rock, Forcite was packed in immediately because the holes had a tendency to close if left for any length of time and the men were in a hurry.

We followed Mr. Carter across the hillside as he loped along the uneven ground at an astonishing speed. We toiled up a steep hill, where the powder monkey was scurrying round, tying up charges and laying bright yellow fuse wires from bore hole to bore hole.

He was an insignificant looking man, but he had changed the face of Canada's wilderness, blowing up more mountains than any other man living. He followed radar site construction gangs right across the wide North. His friends called him the Arctic Fox but they meant no malice. The name referred to his quiet shyness. He was small, straight backed, and wore low strung trousers at his lean hips, a faded check shirt and peaked cap to shield his mild blue eyes in the brilliant Summer sun. His hair was tufted, thick and white round the edge of his cap and his voice was low.

Like many Arctic workers, he was a bachelor and he said "I don't live anywhere special right now. I haven't got a home," Loneliness and the lack of a family life was the penalty many men, such as he, paid for the strange freedom they found in the North.

We stepped over the yellow detonation wire as we returned to the

runway. Rosemary was bestrung with cameras and angled for a good shot of the hill. I hoped the noise would be loud enough for my tape recorder to pick it up. The foreman hustled us to the shelter of a truck, where the Arctic Fox tested wires on a battered meter slung about his neck.

An engineer with a two-way radio called the airport control tower and was granted permission to blow the top off the hill. We were probably half a mile from the hill, so far away that I could not understand the extensive safety precautions taken by the foreman.

The powder monkey crouched over his plunger, said in a soft husky voice: "Get ready to go," and I watched the mountain top spout into the air. Rocks rose lazily and arched through the cloud of dust.

I moved forward with the microphone, trying to capture the sound, then the explosion thundered across the still air. Sharp edged knives of granite began to slice into the newly laid asphalt. A workman grabbed my arm and hauled me close behind the upturned truck. Someone recalled a man being struck in the throat by a flying stone. He died in less than two minutes.

The powder monkey looked pleased and murmured "That was a humdinger," and hurried along the runway to check another batch of fuses. Drillers swarmed back over the hillside through the smoke and Mr. Carter said, "We hope to be finished by October and have the equipment taken out on the freighters during the sealift. If we don't, it means leaving the machinery here, idle, for almost a year."

Asked why they were behind schedule, he replied, "I wish I knew. You'd do better on the gambling tables at Monte Carlo than gambling up here. You'd stand a better chance of winning."

We stepped aside to let a truck roar up the tarmac. It was two hundred and sixty horsepower and part of the equipment he wanted out of Frobisher by October. Mr. Carter wanted it probably for Abyssinia, where another job was waiting. If he could get the

machinery there. We left him on the runway, hustling the men among the dust and dirt of construction, and Rosemary and I walked westwards to the Sylvia Grinnell River. Snow buntings fluttered close by, ravens called overhead, cawing to each other in flight. We passed a derelict airstrip built years ago. It lay east to west with the prevailing winds gusting across it. In the forsaken debris about the uneven old runway, we found tiny Arctic flora, slowly, infinitesimally reclaiming the land.

In the river valley most of the flowers were yellow. There were shrubby cinquefoil, potentilla fruticosa and a ranunculus, very similar to the small southern buttercup, looking very brave as it blossomed close to the ground near the receding ice of the frozen river. Shore ice lay in a tumbled layer of giant cubes that splintered into shining slivers of crystal with the gentle prodding of a shoe's toe cap. Gurgling water could be heard making its secret way to the sea, tumbling along invisible channels beneath the ice.

In the wake of the melting ice on the river bank, clumps of Arctic willow lay as low as moss, distorted, clinging close to the ground out of the wind's reach, its purple pollened flowers gay against the grey and black rocks.

We walked a mile upstream along the bank from which the American explorer Charles Hall named the waters for the sake of the daughter of a man who backed his expedition. Hall had set out to search for the lost Franklin explorers and discovered Frobisher Strait was a bay. When he reached the sprawling gravel delta upon which the town of Frobisher was later built, he was the first man to see the broad river. He later wrote that he immersed one hand in its waters and clutched the Stars and Stripes in the other. The waters seemed to babble a tune of Yankee Doodle, and he could see no reason why the river should not have an American name, and forthwith christened it the Sylvia Grinnell.

Chapter 4 ~ Rehabilitation Centre

Although Frobisher was urbanised to a great extent, there were only two shops, both operated by the Hudson's Bay Company. There was no bakery and so no loaves of bread were sold in the town. Housewives made their own with dehydrated yeast. Construction companies had their own canteens, and bakers were as important as foremen. To postpone the day when we would have to eat bannock, I was appointed cook of our two-man party on the strength of my proficiency in making oatcakes.

They were made from a recipe culled by a guest at the Inverary Hotel in Cape Breton, and passed on to me. The hotel in their turn had obtained it from a Scot, whose family, according to legend, had carried it across the Atlantic during the great exodus from the Highlands. Somewhere along the journey, the recipe must have been altered, because I became certain as the days passed that no recipe for the oatcakes I was producing deserved to survive.

To our mutual comfort, we discovered a source of baked bread. It could be bought at the Eskimo Rehabilitation Centre. We had business in Apex, so one morning we set off in the bright yellow single decker bus, driven wildly across the tundra by an Eskimo named Charlie. His friends were numerous, and they sat on the back seats, smoking, coughing and ignoring the "No Spitting" sign, printed in English and Syllabics. Charlie seemed to have vital business to discuss with them, and the nerve-splitting journey was spent with Charlie leaning over the back of his driver's seat, joking, chatting, reassuring nervous passengers, twirling the steering wheel in nonchalant hands bouncing over the corrugated road with the elan of a jet test pilot.

Public transit in Frobisher Bay, 1960.

We reached Apex rehab centre with mingled awe and relief, and bundled out of the bus near the canteen where we could smell the aroma of baking bread. An elderly Eskimo came coughing to the counter. I asked for a loaf, but he did not understand. Rosemary explained: “She means bread,” and he disappeared into the kitchen.

He emerged with a brown paper package. The wholesome smell of fresh bread wafted on the air. We broke off pieces of crust and savoured the taste as we followed an Eskimo out of the building. He limped badly and stumbled as he descended the few steps into the gritty street. He was a resident of the Apex rehab centre the gathering place for handicapped and afflicted Eskimos from the Eastern Arctic. The bakehouse was one of the many projects, launched by its tireless superintendent, Bob Green, a former social worker.

Bob Green, superindendent of the Apex rehabilitation centre

"Bob Green in Frobisher Bay, Northwest Territories" © Library and Archives Canada. Reproduced with permission.
Library and Archives Canada/Rosemary Gilliat Eaton fonds/Box 9 file 9

Apex offered hope of a new life to Eskimos crippled by disease. In their own society, hunting for their existence, they married young, had a high birth rate and one of the highest infant mortality rates in the world. Their expectation of life was short, for a hunter's semi-nomadic life was dangerous, and nature ensured the fit survived. The seriously ill succumbed in the severe climate.

Neatly painted houses of Apex, 1960.

In West Baffin Island, a generation ago, if a man became mad he was put alone in an igloo and his fellow hunters surrounded the snow house or tent and all fired their rifles through its walls. No one man bore the responsibility and the impediment to the tribe's survival was removed.

The rehabilitation centre was the outcome of a more recent government program, largely stimulated by Farley Mowatt's book, "The Desperate People," in which he focused attention on the plight of some of Canada's Eskimo people.

At Apex, the victims of tuberculosis, poliomyelitis, heart disease or the physically handicapped were offered shelter and a means of learning to live in a new and different type of economy. Patients returning from the exile of hospital in the Outside were given a chance to become re-orientated to the Arctic climate before continuing their journeys home to camps in remoter parts of the Eastern Arctic.

We met Mr. Green in his office. He was tall, athletic, in his late thirties and smoked hand rolled cigarettes. His voice was quiet like the Eskimos he worked with, and although he was pressed for time, he explained to us every aspect of the rehab centre as we toured the workshops among the brightly painted wooden houses,

A bare three years previously, there had been few buildings on the site, but it had developed into one of the best maintained permanent settlements for Eskimos on Baffin Island. It even had a fire station. There was garbage removal and the houses were kept trimly painted by the residents who had a strong community spirit.

Criteria of residence at Apex was some handicap and the superintendent's most important work was the creation of a wide variety of employment for people who were almost all without formal education, people who were "culturally dislocated" and who were to be settled, if possible, in Frobisher as self-supporting wage earners.

"If you sent patients from a sanatorium straight back to the land in winter you'd kill them," he said. "If they really wish to return to the life of a hunter, Apex gives them a breathing space and time to readjust to the Arctic climate. If they're badly handicapped and they choose to stay, we find a place for them."

The houses provided for the people were of the economical "A-frame" construction. They had two rooms but they were waterproof and windproof, with electricity. There was a communal canteen, where they could eat three good meals a day. The cooks were White men, willing to teach any interested Eskimo how to cook, so that in time, the Eskimos could run their own canteen. But it was almost impossible to train Eskimo men in such work. One ex-hunter was asked if he would like to earn his living as a baker and he told Mr. Green: "Get a woman to do it. Circumstances may have forced him to forsake his hunter's way of life, but it was not going to emasculate him further by making him perform work done by women in Eskimo society.

Typical of some of the tragedies which forced former independent hunters to live at Apex was the case of an eighteen-year-old seal hunter from Pangnirtung. He was crippled in both legs by poliomyelitis. He was treated in a hospital, Outside, and when his legs were fitted with braces he was offered employment in Ottawa. He refused. He also refused to accept the limitations of his crippled legs and declined to stay at Apex. He demanded to be sent home to the tents of his people in distant Pangnirtung, a camp where one supply boat a year and an occasional plane kept contact with the outside.

He was warned of the difficulties he might have to face among his own people, semi-nomadic and living off the land, where for thousands of years only the fittest had survived in the endless battle against the world's most inhospitable climate.

The young man was adamant and homesick for the smell of sealskin, the taste of fresh seal meat and the freedom of the wide Arctic. He was resolved to go home. A plane took him in to Pangnirtung and restored him to his own people. Within a few days he learned he could no longer live in the world he preferred, among his own kin, and he sent a message to the superintendent of the rehab centre, asking to be taken back to Apex.

His return was arranged and when he got back to the centre he was taught the trade of a launderer. The laundry served the hundreds of people living at Frobisher townsite and was one of the first minor industries initiated by Mr. Green. He and an Eskimo girl started it between them in an old U.S. Air Force building. Two days after it opened the pressure tank burst. All the pipes had to be replaced and the work was done by four Eskimos who were being trained, as engineers. On days when it was impossible to bulldoze a way through the snow from Apex to the laundry in Frobisher, Mr. Green and his Eskimo helpers walked the three miles on foot. One of the Eskimos, Yougayougaoshik, a tuberculosis widower with three children was puffing so much with only one lung and one lobe, that

he was “graduated” to a house in the town. It was a happy change for him because Yougayougaoshik met and married a widow with four young children and solved a lot of social problems. Then they solved two more social problems when they adopted two Eskimo orphans.

A carpentry shop was opened early in the history of Apex, where Eskimos were taught to use tools, how to build their own wooden houses and furniture. At Christmastime they made wooden toys from scraps and the proceeds helped the work at the centre. A small clothing factory was founded where the women, traditionally excellent sewers, produced fine sealskin slippers, parkas of windproof Grenfell cloth with inner linings of the best duffle cloth and woven belts – the only type of cloth weaving done by Eskimos. The art of weaving cloth was unknown to them, their garments being made for thousands of years from the skin of the animals they hunted. In a few places, they wove baskets of grass.

Inside the clothing factory, the women were too shy to speak and sat sewing. They wore the distinctive Baffin Island parka – long tailed at the back for extra protection when sitting, and with large pouches at the shoulders, where dark eyed babies quietly watched the world over their mothers’ shoulders. Anthropologists have said the Eskimo children are very advanced. Before they start to walk, they have observed a wealth of experience watching their mothers use tools, cook, render blubber for oil, tend the lamps or make clothes.

Another venture of the rehab centre was Frobisher’s one and only barber’s shop. The operator was trained at Apex and although his hirsute trim may not have been the finest style, it was still the best in Frobisher. When spring arrived, business became brisk. In one month the barber took in one hundred and sixty dollars. It was not quite enough to be self-supporting according to Mr. Green, but it was a creditable performance by man who had once lived in a snow house and judged a good fox pelt by the length and density of its hair.

Frobisher's busy barber bringing new hairstyles to the Arctic

"An unidentified man having his hair cut by a barber" © Library and Archives Canada. Reproduced with permission. Library and Archives Canada/Rosemary Gilliat Eaton fonds/Box 9 file 9

The biggest moneymaker was "Baffinland's Aurora Theatre – Aksangnik," with its Apex trained projectionist. The cinema fascinated the Eskimos who attended the three or four performances given every week. The films were nearly all Westerns.

Making the transition from a hunting economy to the Twentieth Century culture of North America destroyed the social pattern of Eskimo life. It also left them with a deep physical hunger for fresh

meat. Nearly all the meat eaten in Frobisher came from tins and was devoid of the vitamins and nourishment which had kept the Eskimo race healthy and given them the perfect teeth typical of people who live on an almost exclusively meat and fat diet. Accordingly, the rehab centre sponsored an organised seal hunt, led by the finest hunter in Frobisher Bay. He was a lean, handsome Eskimo in his mid-thirties, named Mike.

We met him on the seashore, where he was overhauling the seal hunting boat, ready for the summer. We were introduced to him but Mike barely paused to shake hands. He nodded indifferently and gave his attention to more important things on board. In complete contrast to him was Spyglassee, a dark skinned, elderly man with a terrible cough and as friendly as a puppy dog. He had once been a special constable for the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, but tuberculosis had curtailed his career and he spent eight years in a sanatorium. His five sons were still patients in a hospital and he was now a widower, living with his two daughters at Apex.

Mr. Green chatted to the men. Spyglassee talked to Mike and Mike looked haughty and slowly gave an answer. We learned from Mr. Green as we left the shore that we were invited to go on the seal hunt and Rosemary and I waited as impatiently as the Eskimos for the break-up of ice in Frobisher Bay.

Chapter 5 ~ Point of Collision

The Eskimo people were lured to Frobisher by the prospect of money to be made on the air station, built by the Americans in 1942. Many of them did earn good salaries for a while, but it was a brief prosperity without permanent basis and a short future. The pull was irresistible to hunters, many of whom had never seen a coin of the realm and who had no idea of a coinage system. They were men who had lived by trapping in winter when fox pelts were thickest, travelled by dog team and lived in snow houses on the long trapline. They lived on seal meat and a barter system with the Hudson's Bay Company traders, who granted them credit and who demanded that they stay out on the land. The fur trade had small use for hangers-on round a trading post.

With the advent of World War II, when Arctic air stations were built to support the West's strategy, and in the Cold War, when the DEW line radar sites were built across the Canadian Arctic, there was a shift in population distribution. Frobisher in the Eastern Arctic proved to be one of the greatest magnets and from all over Baffin Island, howling dog teams drew komatiks, piled high with tents, kettles, hunting implements and children wrapped in caribou skin robes, racing across the snow into the Atomic Age.

The Eskimos who went to Frobisher camped at Iqaluit – The Place of Many Fish. Faced with a settled existence, they began to build more permanent homes with materials they found littering the perimeter of the American Air Base.

Probably the greatest point of transition occurred when a former hunter bought a clock and learned to divide time into hours and his life became harnessed to a routine never before experienced. He was no longer a part of time itself, governed by tide, weather and the seasons. His children began going to school and he was enmeshed

in a web from which he could never escape and be the same seal hunter again.

Iqaluit became a squatters' village scattered on the shore between the neat houses of Apex and the gleaming huts of Frobisher town. The village was forbidden territory to non-Eskimos. Entry was obtainable only through direct permission of the area administrator. So we called at his office one morning. Permission was given and we were escorted by a young, pink complexioned civil servant down the track to Iqaluit. At its outskirts we passed a huge notice, painted in English, saying "Out of Bounds," I asked the young man why. He said there were three reasons: "We don't want people to see this mess. Construction workers are looking, for girls. And it prohibits sharp practice."

As we entered Iqaluit, the huskies which had survived a disastrous epidemic the previous winter set up a mournful howling as we passed the bald patches of fouled ground where they were chained. Nearby was the first church built in Frobisher, a leftover from the earliest U.S. camp. There were a few rigid frame houses, built and paid for by wage earners, but most of the dwellings were built from scrap and stood as monuments to Eskimo ingenuity.

The civil servant who escorted us was delivering sacks of relief to a number of families who were without food. The relief rations were dried beans and the sacks were dumped down, without ceremony, outside some of the scrap heap houses.

One of the most talented carvers in the area was a man named Inuksiak. His name meant Beautiful Person. He was an elderly man who had travelled 800 miles to Frobisher from his old camp in Hudson Bay. Inuksiak's home was the first Eskimo dwelling we entered.

From the outside it looked like the dumped load off a truck, an enormous bundle wrapped about with a patched tarpaulin, held down by lengths of knotted rope and anchored by great stones. Its

frame was made from discarded packing cases, pieces of assorted timber covered by pieces of fabric salvaged from truck canopies, old army tents and ships' hatch covers. In any other society, Inuksiak would have stood a chance of founding a fortune as a scrap dealer.

His welcome was unmistakable, and we entered his house while Rosemary took photographs of him carving a lump of soapstone into a lovely, slender-necked goose.

The interior was laid out in the same pattern as an Eskimo tent dwelling. The rear half of the floor space was a sleeping platform and Inuksiak patted the low shelf and invited me to sit while he settled himself on the left hand side (looking towards the door) and worked away on his soapstone.

I looked round his house. Its walls were lined with pieces of corrugated cardboard and brown paper which bore a postmark from somewhere in the southern United States and the instruction, "Do not open until Christmas Day." The single window over the low wooden door had once been the windshield of a vehicle. The vehicle had evidently been involved in an accident because the glass was fractured in a pattern of fine splinters. A sound of crumpled clothes were strewn on old arm mattresses on the sleeping ledge of stones. There was a collection of saws, two hunting rifles, an accordion, a battered radio, a tool box with hammers, files and chisels, a dipper from inside a deep frying pan, an enamel pail for water and a set of blackened pans. Just forward of the centre of the sleeping platform was a bucketful of strong smelling, foul mixture of urine, kitchen scraps and Inuksiak added some sputum while we watched him carving. To offset any undesirable odours there 'were two chlorophyl deodorisers on a small cooking bench where- the oil stove was wedged.

Inuksiak put down his carving and drew from beneath the mattress a fisherman's needle and a length of char fishing net. His fingers, white with powder from the carving, were supple and deft, knotting the twine into a mesh for catching Arctic char. He was an obliging

man and shifted his position for the sake of photography. Then by common assent, we bundled out of his home into the bright sunlight and fresh air.

A woman holding a soapstone carving in Frobisher Bay, 1960.

Our escort had a call to make at the home of Iqaluit's matriarch. She was Ooa, a keen witted woman of great age, the oldest person in Frobisher Bay. She sat outside her neatly kept modern house, sewing sealskin trousers with a length of caribou sinew, using the age-old skill and traditional patter employed by Baffin Island Eskimos for countless centuries.

Ooa was born at Lake Harbour on the South shore of Baffin Island and had lived in the seal hunting camps about Cape Dorset but when her children were drawn to Frobisher Bay she accompanied them. Through an interpreter, she told us she still fished with a spear but it didn't stop her from drawing the old age pension. "I think I must be getting old though," she said, "because the last fish, it wriggled too much."

Ooa might have been old, but she moved with the times. Then a teacher at the school proposed classes for adult Eskimos, to teach them how to cook white man's food, there was a shy reluctance on the part of the women of Iqaluit. They appealed to Ooa for advice and she said, "The women will go to school," and they obediently went. For most of them it was the first time in their lives they had been to a lesson.

A place like Iqaluit was inevitable in such a violent collision of cultures with its casualties and debris. But to further compound the impact, the government sanctioned the licensing of a bar in Frobisher in 1960, and many Eskimos took to liquor like babes to silk.

Chapter 6 ~ No Discrimination

It would be an understatement to say the opening of a cocktail bar in Baffin Island's only hotel was a momentous occasion. The moment was historic, and like a stone cast into a pool its effect rippled through the population of Frobisher Bay.

For the first time in the history of the Eastern Arctic, liquor was on sale to the public, and the public included the Eskimos who had small knowledge, if any, of the fermentation of liquors.

Proprietor of the East Coast Lodge was an ex–RAF officer, Captain Alex Gallagher, who invited Rosemary and me to dinner one evening in his hotel.

It was a haphazard warren of rooms and passages, lacking in any style or design, but the proprietor said it had cost the enormous sum of two hundred thousand dollars to build, mainly due to the cost of importing all the materials and to the high rate of wages paid to employees in the North. For all its lack of taste, the East Coast Lodge had warmth, music, a friendly atmosphere and thirty-six different cocktails on the wine list.

We were generously dined on Arctic char, a delectable red-fleshed fish, seated in the intimacy of individually lit tables, burning electric bulbs at fourteen cents a kilowatt. Fourteen cents would about equal a shilling.

Although Captain Gallagher was a Scot, he spoke impeccable public school English and told us in a flood of conversation how he became a hotelier.

He commanded an RAF station in Singapore from 1945 to 1947, when he turned to commercial airlines and flew for Trans Canada Airlines

until 1950, when he emigrated to Canada. For a number of years he was based at Frobisher Bay flying for Maritime Central Airways and it was while he was at Frobisher that he saw the possibilities of private enterprise and resolved to start a company.

He founded the East Coast Carriers freight agency in 1958 with six employees and half a million dollars in assets. While running the carrier's business with air freight at thirty six cents a pound, he opened the hotel. Four bags of potatoes cost more than a hundred and fifty dollars before the highly paid kitchen staff put a potato peeler to them. It accounted for the high price of a meal. A hotel room cost between twelve and fifteen dollars a night and did not include breakfast.

He was apparently an adaptable, hard working man who performed every kind of job in his growing business. He drove taxis, was office manager, waiter, accountant, cashier and acted as advisor when and if any of his employees were in trouble. The Arctic has a way of magnifying psychological problems and emotional worries, he said.

He was a man with a sound, business head. In summer, the town was always crowded with thirsty construction workers and stevedores. He applied for and was granted a liquor licence within eighteen months. On April the First, 1960, he said, the Rustic Room had its gala opening. It had been advertised that only men wearing collars and ties would be admitted. In this way, it was hoped to deter unwanted customers. Within hours of the notice being put up, the Hudson's Bay Company store had sold out every collar, shirt and tie in stock.

When the doors were opened, it seemed the whole town came in. Captain Gallagher said there was even an Eskimo girl in an evening gown, but from the knees down her dress was tucked inside rubber boots. A large proportion of the first night customers had to be bounced out.

House rules were introduced. "No one under 21 years of age may

enter the lounge." "No one in an intoxicated condition may enter the lounge." Unofficially, Eskimos were to be limited to two drinks each, he said. Volunteers sat with them to say "no" and help them to be strong minded when friendly strangers offered drinks.

As Captain Gallgher spoke to us, a drunken Eskimo weaved across the floor, stopping to speak at each table. He was very gay and laughed with everyone. His sports jacket reached almost to his knees and his tie and enormous shirt collar sagged below the base of his wrinkled old throat. He was Pop, we were told.

"Pop gives us the same routine every night. He has two beers and starts to laugh. That makes him laugh all the more so he calls at every table. He bought his sports jacket specially for opening night" said the proprietor.

Captain Gallagher gave employment to a number of Eskimos, two men trained at the rehabilitation centre had helped to build the hotel. He said when the Eskimos wanted to go hunting in winter, they would, give him two days notice before leaving and then leave the hotel (which was centrally heated) for seal hunting through the ice and living in a snow house. He acknowledged that hunting was in the men's nature. He accepted it and on the whole found the Eskimos a great success, hard working and reliable. Some of them had been with him from the day after his company was formed, and in the violent storms of winter, two of them had walked the three miles from Apex through a "white out" blizzard when not a vehicle of any kind moved.

"Won't drink damage the Eskimos?" I asked him,

"You'd do more harm by discriminating against them," he said, and excused himself from the table. He went to a far part of the room and sat at the keyboard of a great electric organ.

Some construction workers started to talk loudly. White jacketed waiters slipped over to a table and two people were gently but

firmly piloted from the bar. Captain Gallagher's fingers ran over the keys and Noel Coward's "Tea for Two" swelled through the cigarette smoke. An overhead light gleamed on the proprietor's smoothly brushed hair and the waiters returned from the doorway to serve beer at sixty cents a bottle and rum at a dollar a tot.

Some days afterwards we were being driven home in the late evening by the area administrator of the Department of Northern Affairs and we passed an Eskimo woman lying drunk on the ground. Nearby her small child was crying. Mr. Delaute put us down at our hut and returned for the woman and child, but she had disappeared in the few minutes he had been away.

We learned a day or so afterwards that a friend had been close behind us in a jeep. He had noticed the mother and child and picked them up and taken them to the entrance of Iqaluit, out of bounds to non-Eskimos, and out of harm's way.

During the summer, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police detachment at Frobisher Bay added two more cells to the barracks. The most frequent crime was drunkenness. There was another problem the authorities had to contend with – the incidence of venereal disease which brought tragedy to many Eskimo homes. Casual labourers, who spent a few months of the year in Frobisher earning high wages, were often carriers of the disease.

They could earn five hundred dollars, about one hundred and eighty pounds a month and were brought up in a society which will pay for sex. Eskimo women who had grown up in a society which regarded sex as a common natural function, came into contact with the white men and discovered they could earn money for a pleasurable occupation. It was probably the main reason why Iqaluit was put out of bounds to non-Eskimos. Such fraternising was discouraged.

There was one tragic case I learned of. It concerned a young woman who had lost her parents, she had spent years in hospital where she learned to speak English and she returned to the Arctic and

was trained at the rehabilitation centre. She found employment and was rented a small hut. She was a friendly popular girl who enjoyed her new independence. She had been reared in an Eskimo camp where no one ever put a lock on his tent door and she never troubled to have a lock put on the door of her hut, so when a White construction worker noticed the girl lived alone, he tried the door and found no resistance.

The girl became gloomy and withdrew from her friends. When her condition deteriorated rapidly she was admitted to hospital, where the doctor diagnosed what is euphemistically termed “white man’s disease.”

It would seem to be a simple expedient to have all people entering the Arctic undergo a medical examination, but there is no Canadian law which requires such a precaution.

Chapter 7 ~ First Seal Hunt

As June drew to a close the bonds of ice gripping the Sylvia Grinnell River were sundered with the force of melting snows, and a racing current scoured the channel free. The Arctic char, which had lain dormant all winter on the lake bottoms up river, began their annual journey to the sea, swimming downstream with an easy motion. And so the fishing season began.

Throughout the twenty-four hours of daylight, while the char were running, Eskimos fished from the riverbanks. With my mended fishing rod I tried supplementing our tinned beef with fresh fish. Though I used every kind of lure, I never caught a thing except a catfish close where the river flowed into the bay. On every rock and ice floe near me, the Eskimos hauled in char almost as fast as they threw in their hooks. Rosemary was unwilling to try as she had firm ideas about hurting any kind of creature, and finally I gave up and left the Eskimo fishermen to their spoils. They had more need and far more skill than I.

Barabara's fishing gear

By the second week in July, the combination of flooding river and pale warmth of the sun had cleared the winter ice from the bottom of the bay and we were told to be ready at short notice to go seal hunting with Spyglassee and Mike.

Spyglassee in Frobisher Bay, 1960

"A man named Spyglassee in Frobisher Bay, Northwest Territories" © Library and Archives Canada. Reproduced with permission. Library and Archives Canada/Rosemary Gilliat Eaton fonds/Box 9 file 10

On Monday, July 11, the weather turned cold and raw. A strong wind toppled the shore ice as the tide crept over the sandy delta. Rosemary spent the day indoors, working in the dark room loaned to her by Mr. Dobbin, while I identified some of the wild flowers we had collected, and placed them between sheets of old Montreal

newspapers and laid them aside under mats to press them. During the afternoon a message came to say the seal hunt would start at about nine o'clock the following morning, provided the wind dropped.

On Tuesday morning, Rosemary was up early to scan the sky. The wind had diminished, but the day was grey and wet with drizzle. We dressed in long woolen underwear, ready for a day on the water. Rosemary packed dried fruit, nuts and a stack of sandwiches in my rucksack and after a meagre, hurried breakfast we set off carrying our cameras and recording equipment.

The rain lifted when we arrived on the shore and we could see the Peterhead boat anchored about a mile off, beyond the shore ice. Spyglassee, Mike and Mr. Green were busy ferrying out drums of fuel, harpoons and rifles in an outboard motor canoe. Spyglassee removed his mittens in Eskimo style and smiled as he greeted us with a warm handshake. Mike nodded, still looking inscrutable and carried on loading the canoe, Rosemary unpacked some cameras and went along the shore to take close-ups of the flowers – sea lungwort, Mertensia Maritima, and bellflower, Campanula Rotundifolia.

A sweet-throated snow bunting perched on top of the HBC flagpole and began to sing so loudly that I decided to make a tape recording of his song while waiting for Spyglassee to return in the canoe. I became absorbed in making the tape and added an impromptu script between outbursts of bird song, describing the phenomenal forty-foot tides in Frobisher Bay, among the highest in the world. As I spoke into the microphone, the tide inched forward. The snow bunting started singing again and I reached as high up the flagpole as I could to make certain of a good recording.

Next time I looked round, the beach seemed smaller. Rosemary's parka was afloat and so was the rucksack with all our food. I dashed in after them, encumbered by the tape recorder, but seized the parka before it went out of reach. The rucksack bobbed uncertainly

out to sea then sank in about eighteen inches of water, and I was able to retrieve it with little more than soaking my right sleeve and filling my boots with ice cold water.

The Hudson's Bay Company had been spring cleaning its stores and the incoming tide had released a pile of rubbish on the beach. Among the bobbing cans were some large plastic bags which I eyed with suspicion and consequently I tossed the food from my rucksack, in amongst the floating refuse. I could see it was going to be a hungry day and I hoped it would not be a long one. Rosemary returned, listened to my explanation and asked with a hungry look, "Did you throw away the nuts too?" And I had to admit everything had been committed to the sea.

It looked as though we were in for a lean time. Mike brought the canoe back to shore and Mr. Green returned from Apex, dressed in high boots, thick trousers, woolen hat and a caribou skin parka. I also could see he was armed with a coffee flask, some tinned meat and one loaf of bread. We distributed our weight in the little boat and Mike steered for Tookak, the name the men had given their new boat. Tookak was Eskimo for the business end of a harpoon, usually made from the ivory of a walrus tusk,

We clambered aboard and a thin shaft of sunlight filtered through the clouds. Mist fingered the steep valleys of Meta Incognita, Mike pumped water from the bilges and Mr. Green went forward to help Spyglassee and the third Eskimo, Isaak, to haul up the anchor. After a few concerted heaves the anchor clattered up, Mike started the engine while Spyglassee took the wheel and Isaak laid out ammunition and new, telescopic sighted rifles on the low roof of the engine house. The stout stem carved a half circle in the tranquil water and we headed down the lonely bay.

The boat was about 40 feet long. She had a tiny foc'sle six feet long, a large hold with a camp stove and there was room for four people to crouch in the "engine room." The wheel was right abaft

and completely unprotected, from the weather, and we towed the canoe astern.

Spyglassee wore a peaked tweed cap beneath the hood of his parka to shield his eyes from the glare. He stood sturdily at the wheel, smiling quietly and always watching the water. Mike and Isaak sat on top of the foc'sle, rifles across their knees and kept a tireless lookout for the seals hour after hour.

The Peterhead boat we were in belonged to the rehab centre and had been built by Eskimos in a small ship building yard at Lake Harbour, a former flourishing camp which had lost most of its people to Iqaluit. The minor ship building industry had been established by the Hudson's Bay Company with government assistance and it had been run under the direction of a shipwright from Nova Scotia, Joe Thorpe. Tookak was probably the last boat of its size to be built at Lake Harbour and because the population was dwindling so rapidly, the shipwright had left and gone home to Nova Scotia.

Two families had sailed the boat on its maiden voyage along Hudson Strait and up Frobisher Bay the previous autumn to deliver it to the rehab centre before the sea froze. They had carried their dogs and sleds with them and when the snows of winter covered the black mountains of Meta Incognita, they had harnessed their dogs, loaded their komatiks and returned to their winter hunting camp on Baffin's South Shore, where there were walrus, whale, polar bear and seal to hunt.

Seal hunting from Tookak was an affair of patience and keen eyesight. We cruised steadily down the bay, spreading a broad fan in our wake and we all watched for a seal's head rising from the water. Nobody spoke very much. Suddenly Mike made a rapid movement, raised his rifle to his shoulders. Spyglassee reduced to half speed and steered in the direction Mike aimed his rifle. The seal's head looked like a black football on the waves. It gulped down air. Mike fired twice rapidly and it disappeared beneath the surface.

In early summer, seals are thin and in poor condition. If killed by the first shot, they sink quickly and a seal hunter has to move rapidly and accurately if he is to save the animal before it goes out of sight, so he shoots to wound, and it is best hunted from a small, maneuverable boat. When Mike spotted and wounded his second seal, he raced into the canoe we trailed astern, heaved on the starter cord and steered for the quarry. The canoe surged ahead for a few yards and sputtered to a standstill. He tugged repeatedly on the starter but the engine refused to spark, and by the time he had scrambled back on the Tookak, without any evident anger, the seal had disappeared and only a brilliant scarlet stain remained in the water.

Mike saw several seals as the day progressed, but they were too far away to capture and submerged as we moved towards them. He remained impassive and turned to either pump the bilge water or pack grease in cups from the diesel engine and screw them on again. He sat in the canoe for a while, examining the outboard motor and eventually grunted in cryptic English, "Too much oil in gasoline. -Oiled carburetor." Like most Eskimos Mike had a practical ability which makes them efficient mechanics, and there is the undoubtedly true northern story of the Eskimo who bought a watch when he arrived at Frobisher Bay and took it apart to see what made it tick. When he understood why, by an application of basic logic, he put it together again and it still kept time.

The Eskimos seemed tireless on the water, I wished for extra clothes, and tried not to feel cold. The air grew danker as we moved into leads among ice floes for ice still filled three quarters of bay. Seal hunting, even in July, was a chilling business standing on the deck of a boat. Beads of moisture clung to our clothing then darkened as the damp seeped through the fabric. My apologies to Rosemary for losing our sandwiches were overheard by Mr. Green and he shared out what was left of his food. The mist thickened and rolled about us and rain began to fall heavily.

The seal hunters were having no luck and Spyglassee turned our bow northwards among the turquoise and white ice pans swirling in the grey sea. We were still going at full speed, and as he swerved Tookak round the floes I held on tightly as the boat heeled and rolled beneath my feet.

"What time will we get back Mike?" Mr. Green asked,

Mike pondered, turned his head as though listening and peered into the wall of vapour ahead. It took him almost a minute to decide and he said, "Back at ten."

I looked at my watch and saw it was six o'clock and took refuge in the foc'sle. The three Eskimos stayed together, soaking wet at the wheel. Mike took over and turned our course ninety degrees to starboard, and a dark shadow loomed through the fog as we skirted a rock.

"You wouldn't last four minutes if you fell in these waters," said Mr. Green and for hours I watched the Eskimos peering into the white walls of mist. We passed more islands, mere rocks in the water, each wearing a girdle of ice at high water line. The engine dropped to half speed and we were running in shallow water with waves breaking on some shore.

Mike shut off the engine and we drifted forward, nosing our way into thick fog. The howling of huskies pierced the air and Tookak ran ashore. A boy came out of the fog to meet us. We were at Apex. I looked at my watch and the time was ten o'clock. Mike looked no more than satisfied that his judgement was correct and we tried to thank them for taking us. Spyglassee smiled and nodded and we left them with their empty boat on the shore and we hurried back to Frobisher to our hut. We had locked ourselves out and I climbed head first through a window into the warmth, and I blessed the central heating. We boiled up some tea and started to pack our equipment ready for a plane journey the following day which was to

take us four hundred miles southwards to an assignment in Ungava Bay.

Chapter 8 ~ Fort Chimo

We had two stories to cover in Ungava Bay; a newly established char fishery at George River, and a new small Eskimo co-operative venture at Port Burwell. Both places were on the East Coast of Ungava and both places were approached through Fort Chimo in Northern Quebec.

The camps of George River and Port Burwell were said to be simple in the extreme, so we boarded the plane with our warmest clothing, our tents and camping gear, certain at last our basic equipment was going to be put into use.

Using some of Frobisher's newly laid runway, we took off in a two-engine Nordair plane for Fort Chimo at three o'clock on the afternoon of July 13. The coast below us sparkled in bright sunlight where the Sylvia Grinnell River splashed and rushed into the bay. Snow still clung like cake frosting to the rocky landscape and ice still plugged the bay like a champagne cork.

Clouds hid Hudson strait from view and our next sight of land was two hours or so later as we neared the flat landscape that rims the horseshoe shape of Ungava Bay. Compared with Baffin Island the countryside looked lush and verdant, and there were even a few small trees to be seen.

We circled the gravel airstrip lying on the west bank of the Koksoak River, slowly lost height in a gusty wind and we touched down in Northern Quebec.

A group of Eskimo women stood watching at the air terminal building – an unpainted shed comprising office and warehouse. The women did not wear sealskin boots nor did they wear parkas like the Eskimos of Frobisher Bay. Instead they wore bright tartan blankets over their heads and wrapped round their shoulders in the

fashion of Indians or Scottish fishergirls. They wore long Mother Hubbard dresses, introduced by missionaries years ago to replace the sealskin trousers which were un-Christian, though warmer. Some women achieved a compromise wearing trousers beneath their dresses. On their feet they wore leather shoes bought at the HBC store. The women carried babies in their arms, instead of on their shoulders as in Baffin Island, and they waved rags or some cloth over the children's faces to disperse the myriads of flies. Geographers may describe Fort Chimo as on the banks of the Koksoak River, but for me, Fort Chimo is in the heart of Canada's Mosquito Region.

Its precise location is sixty eight degrees and eighteen minutes West of Greenwich and fifty eight degrees, nine minutes North of the Equator which is the same latitude as the Isle of Lewis in the Hebrides. It also lies precisely at the northern limit of Canada's great forests, usually seen on a map as only a line of printer's ink. Seen from the air, the Treeline is a dramatic boundary between forest and tundra, a breeding ground for millions of mosquitoes which thrive in the swamps and countless lakes, eternally fed by winter snows and cradled by the earth's frozen subsoil.

To the South, the coniferous trees grew straight, dark green but sparse on the fringes of the sub-Arctic, while from the treeline northwards, they dwindled, shrank and disappeared, Only Arctic willow and birch survived, contorted to conform to the low configuration of all Arctic plant life, no more than one foot tall.

Fort Chimo is also on the great frontier dividing the Eskimo and Indian races. Traditionally enemies, the two people are roughly separated by the Treeline. The Indians live in the forest where game is richer and fuel is abundant. The less aggressive Eskimos live in the bleak, treeless Arctic, hunting mostly on the ice of the North's coastline in winter and on the sea in summer. The two races live in the same community in only a few places, usually under the aegis of

a white administration, such as at North West River in Labrador, or at Churchill in Manitoba.

When white men reached Ungava Bay in the 18th Century, the Eskimos used the word “Chimo” or “Shake Hands” as a welcome to the traders, seeking to expand the fur trade through Hudson Bay – Canada’s back door – when the main entrance was dominated by the French in the St. Lawrence River. Today, the word is seldom used but it gave the main Ungava Bay settlement its name in 1830, when the Hudson’s Bay Company first established a fur trading post in the Koksoak Valley. In those days, great caribou herds crossed the river each winter on their annual migration. The waters were rich in salmon and the land was rich in game and fur bearing animals.

In the 1960’s, only an old woman, the oldest inhabitant of Fort Chimo, remembered seeing caribou herds cross the river, for they have long since disappeared. Improvident hunting and the repeating rifle have taken their toll.

The advent of an air base, built during WorId War II, dissuaded most of the Fort Chimo Eskimos from following their traplines in the vicious temperatures of winter. Instead, the men took simple, highly paid jobs at the American air base. When the war ended, two main factors contributed to the impoverishment of Fort Chimo. The Americans went home and synthetic fibres and man-made fur fabrics knocked the bottom out of the fur trade.

White fox and silver fox furs were no longer fashionable and former trappers who had clustered round the air base turned to the HBC trader and government officers to live largely on relief rations and handouts. The U.S. airstrip had been built on an air route through which it had been intended to evacuate the expected heavy casualties of the second front in Europe. The number of wounded was fewer than the strategists anticipated, so Chimo was never used to the extent the planners had expected and the result had a curious and long-term effect on the Chimo Eskimos.

Millions of gallons of fuel, stored on the west bank of the river were left behind when the war ended, and it was made available to the Eskimos. Fort Chimo developed an oil drum based economy.

Although the people lived in the most humble shacks by the airstrip, they had a constant supply of fuel for their stoves. It was free and seemingly from an endless stock. When the Department of Northern Affairs sent in officers to look after the Eskimo affairs, one of the most constant complaints from the people was that the outboard motors they used on their canoes had a short life. They burned out in a season, although they developed plenty of power while they lasted it. It took a little while before a Northern Service Officer discovered the reason. The Eskimos were running their outboard motors on high octane spirit, originally intended for hospital planes carrying wounded men back to the United States in World War II.

Eskimos are nothing if they are not ingenious and they allow nothing to go to waste, if they can help it.

Chapter 9 ~ Tapestry Threads

The government officer at Fort Chimo was Sam Dodds, a former meteorologist, whose wife, Dedee, had once been keeper of Canada's oldest lighthouse. They had received a telegram telling of our arrival and were at the airstrip to give us a royal welcome and an invitation to dinner.

Mr. Dodds also insisted we sleep under a roof instead of pitching our tent and accordingly gave us use of a small storeroom near to his office. So we inflated our air mattresses and unrolled our sleeping bags indoors, where we were well protected from the flies and the weather.

There was a tiny stove in the office kitchen where we were allowed to prepare supper and breakfast; we collected drinking water in jugs from Mrs. Dodds' domestic tank and washing water was delivered from the Koksoak river in water carts driven by Eskimos, and we were permitted to take our main meals at a mess hall for engineers and labourers, where the chef was a magnificent French Canadian cook.

Before entering the mess, we were told we must conform to the rule, "No Talking." It was similar to a rule observed in many northern mining and lumberjack camps, and the reason was explained to us: "If the men speak, they argue. If they argue they fight. So, no talking."

Intrigued at the prospect of dumbly dining, curious and silent, we entered the dining hall only to discover the rule was not in operation. There was a pleasant low buzz of conversation, although no one lingered over his meal. The oilcloth covered tables were stacked with food, sauces, jams, pies and cakes, but again, almost everything came out of a tin. Fresh meat was a rarity and the cook, who was more of an artist than a tradesman did wonders with

ancient tins of moose meat. The men were not accustomed to women about the place and there was a noticeable "laying on of hands" upon the hair and shoulders, like an archbishop's confirmation class, or decoration day at Buckingham Palace.

Outside, an enormously fat husky puppy lay in waiting, he was named Hercules and he had the Augean Stygian task of eating up all the unwanted mess hall tidbits. He was the fattest dog I ever saw. The temperature was much warmer at Chimo than at Frobisher, and the mercury usually stood at about sixty-five degrees Fahrenheit at midday. The flora was different from Baffin Island's and familiar southern flowers were evident. There was yarrow springing from the fine sandy ground, Indian paintbrush, violets and Grass of Parnassus, which did service brightening up the breakfast table before being identified and pressed.

Mosquitoes were thick and I wore my beekeeper's bonnet in addition to a fairly efficient fly repellent sprinkled on exposed surfaces.

Although it was warm, I was obliged to wear gloves, my sleeves rolled down, and my pants tucked inside my socks to avoid being bitten too much.

We had to wait in Chimo until we could get on a small plane going to George River in East Ungava Bay, and while we stayed there, the Dodds' family were generous hosts and did all they could to make us feel at home. Shortly after meeting Mrs. Dodds she plunged the conversation into the Eskimo handcraft industry and she wanted to know what was made in Frobisher Bay and how it was marketed. She had been in Chimo only three months, but already she had set up a weaving loom and taught a deaf Eskimo woman how to use it. The usual practice of numbering the foot treadles was too difficult for the woman who had never been to school, so Mrs. Dodds solved the problem by colouring the foot treadles to correspond with the pattern.

Fifteen years in the North had shown her the great need for Eskimo women to be taught how to cook white man's food upon which they were becoming increasingly dependent. She had undertaken teaching the womenfolk of Chimo how to bake bread and cook packaged foods.

Recipes on packets were always printed in English and sometimes in both English and French, but never in Eskimo Syllabics. She said there was a great need for syllabic cookery books to be made available alongside the goods sold in the Hudson's Bay Company stores, which have no commercial competitors in the Eastern Arctic, if you discount the few newly formed Eskimo co-operatives.

While living at Baker Lake, West of Hudson Bay, an elderly Eskimo woman had come to her and complained her gums were bleeding through eating White Man's food. Mrs. Dodds said she had looked at the woman's mouth, and, "Sure enough, her gums were cut. I asked her what she had eaten and she showed me a package of macaroni which she had tried to eat – raw."

The woman had treated it like biscuits and had not known it should be cooked.

"From then on, I taught any Eskimo woman who wanted to learn, and before I left Baker Lake, they were even making doughnuts and loving them," said Mrs. Dodds.

Her cookery lessons were unsponsored, and, of course, free.

Only twelve Eskimo men were steadily employed in Chimo out of a labour force of nearly eighty, and Mr. Dodds was hard pressed, giving relief rations to families which were hungry. It was a difficult task, because the men had to be encouraged to go out on the land hunting and fishing to support themselves. On the other hand, it was easy for undernourished men to feel disinclined or too lazy to set out on a difficult journey with an empty stomach.

The Hudson's Bay Company trader claimed the government was

ruining the Eskimos with too much kindness; so did the staff at the nursing station; and there was an undercurrent of resentment among many traders and missionaries against the introduction of Northern Service Officers by the government, men expressly appointed to look after the interest of the Eskimos. The newcomers were usurping old powers.

Mr. Dodds did what he could to prevent families from going hungry. He said he hoped for an improvement in the Chimo economy when development of rich local deposits of iron ore and asbestos provided opportunity for work to all the employable at Chimo.

While visiting at a house one evening, I met an English speaking Eskimo woman who had regular employment in Chimo, and who, alone, supported her three children fathered by casual white men. She had also adopted a fourth child into her small family.

The adopted child had been underfed, was sickly and was in a louse-infested blanket when she took him in, but he had grown into a fine boy. He attended school regularly and spoke both English and Eskimo. The woman had a reputation as an industrious worker and she was obviously a good mother. She rented a wooden frame house and had one or two modern amenities such an oil fired motor washing machine and she was waiting for delivery of a refrigerator by boat when the supply ships came in during the sealift period. Apart from her daily work, she took in sewing in her spare time and during the summer, she cut hair for the annual influx of construction workers.

As we talked to each other, I realized I had heard of her before, although I had never known her name. Many years prior to our meeting in Fort Chimo, an unkempt, neglected Eskimo child had been flown to a hospital in Halifax, Nova Scotia. The child was severely ill and had travelled from a remote camp on the Koksoak River. A young Eskimo woman had attended the child throughout the long and difficult journey.

The girl had pneumonia, and she was so badly undernourished it was feared she was too weak to recover and would die. The doctors at the government hospital fought hard to save her life. The nurses bathed and cleaned her and eventually her body responded to treatment but she remained impassive and impervious to everything that was said to her, until one day, a nurse entering the room slammed the door and saw the child took no notice.

It was discovered she was deaf. Also she was dumb because of her deafness. The child was given every chance to live a normal life. Being an Eskimo she became a ward of the Canadian government and she was educated in Halifax, where the only Maritime School for the Deaf is located. A generous Englishwoman assumed the role of personal guardian during school holidays and realising the child's limitations through deafness and the delay in recognising her condition, helped her to travel extensively in North America and Europe. The child was taught to ice skate and became a champion skater, and that was when I first met her, when I interviewed her for a Halifax newspaper.

The girl had also inherited a remarkable Eskimo sewing skill and was a wonderful needlewoman. She was sent by her benefactress to a private academy in Halifax, and when she was old enough, she went to the United States to attend a university for the deaf.

When last I saw her, she had grown into a beautiful young lady, poised and well educated and still with an Eskimo's gentle nature. The Eskimo woman I met in Fort Chimo supporting her family of four children, was the girl who had carried the sick, deaf child to the Halifax hospital years ago. Fate had been kind to both of them, and had finally led me across both their paths, though they were more than a thousand miles and two cultures apart.

Chapter 10 ~ Eskimo Hero

The Eskimo language is spoken from Alaska, across the roof of the world to Greenland, and despite the thousands of miles which separate them, an Alaskan Eskimo would be understood by Eskimos in Greenland if he went there.

The language is rich and complex, and few non-Eskimos have mastered it. To assist liaison between the Chimo people and the government representative, an interpreter had been appointed. He was George Koneak, aged about thirty, handsome by any standards, with the straight black hair of the northern people and the light coloured eyes of a white man.

George Koneak, 1960

"George Koneak" © Library and Archives Canada. Reproduced with permission.Library and Archives Canada/Rosemary Gilliat Eaton fonds/Box 26 file 1

George was born at Cape Hopes Advance, the tip of a desolate

peninsula on the North West rim of Ungava Bay, where the economy was based on seal hunting. A radio operator who worked at the lonely direction-finding station had taught English to George in return for Eskimo, and the exchange had enriched both their lives. The radio operator later studied at University and returned to the Arctic for some time as a doctor. George grew up to become a clerk in the Hudson's Bay Company trading post, where he was able to put his knowledge of the two languages to good use.

When the government first sent a Northern Service Officer to the area, George acted as an interpreter for him and when the visitor had to travel down the coast, George took him by dog team. A friendly relationship built up between them, and George was offered a job as a civil servant with better prospects than he had ever dreamed of. George accepted the offer and moved to Fort Chimo with his family.

Listen to George Koneak tell the story of how he started working for the Government of Canada. Dalhousie University Archives MS-2-130, Box 9, Folder 9, Item 3.

An audio element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can listen to it online here: https://digitaleditions.library.dal.ca/arctic/?p=52

His background made him a unique person. He had lived the complete life of the Eskimo hunter, but he knew English. Usually, if an Eastern Arctic Eskimo speaks English with any fluency, he has lived in a settlement where the white man's way of life is more familiar to him than a hunter's semi-nomadic existence.

By happy circumstance, George had combined the best in both worlds. He had a native intelligence and instinct and a capacity for absorbing non-Eskimo skills. Above all he was a man of courage and he is believed to be the first Eskimo to have won an award from the Royal Canadian Humane Association, for the part he played in saving the lives of eight Eskimo children.

Mr. Dodds first told me of the incident and suggested I get George to tell me the story.

It began one day in December, when the temperature stood at forty degrees below zero, Fahrenheit. A dog sled with a lone driver came racing across the snow covered tundra into Fort Chimo. He had travelled without stopping from an Eskimo camp on the west Ungava coast with a message for help.

An epidemic had broken out in one of the camps and medical help was needed immediately. The nursing stations prepared beds to cope with the expected patients, a tracked vehicle, a snowmobile, was borrowed from a local company and the French Canadian driver was dispatched to bring back all the sick people. The driver was accompanied by a priest, by George Koneak and by the Eskimo messenger who had brought in the request for help.

They lost no time reaching the camp and found there were eight children seriously ill. The boys and girls were carried aboard the snowmobile and bedded down on the floor and the driver set back for the nursing station, more than seventy miles to the south.

Because the children were so ill, the men decided to take a short cut across the ice of the estuary of Leaf Bay. It would save time. The weather had been cold for so long that they did not imagine there could be any danger. The ice should have been deeply frozen. But they had not reckoned with the powerful rush of tidal water in the bay, where spring tides are the highest in the world, rising more than sixty feet and attaining a velocity of twelve knots as they sweep through Leaf Passage to the sea.

The forceful rush of water on the outgoing tide that night had weakened the surface ice, and when the snowmobile roared through the Arctic winter darkness, it crashed through the crusty surface and plunged into the fast current beneath.

The driver, the priest and the messenger escaped through the upper hatch, but George Koneak remained with the children, who lay stunned and frightened in sleeping bags on the floor.

The snowmobile had bounced forwards and grounded on rock where it lay shuddering in the forceful waters. Then George began his rescue of the children. One by one, lifted them out and passed them to the men who stood outside. They formed a human chain and quickly got the children to safety on shore.

Death by freezing was close at hand, but George seized a piece of wire and bent the end into a hook. Then he jigged like a fisherman in the black water swirling in the snowmobile. After several attempts, he jigged out the most precious thing in the vehicle. It was a little oil stove.

Still working with presence of mind at top speed, before he took it from the still–warm interior, George pumped it free of water so it would not freeze and burst when it was taken ashore. He reached with his hook again into the rear of the vehicle where the water-was deepest and hauled out a can of stove fuel and some gasoline. Then he grabbed the pilot biscuits floating in the water and the tea kettle and made a dash for the shore.

The snowmobile was later swept away by the current and never seen again.

George then buttoned the children inside the sleeping bags. Two children to a bag for extra body warmth. He put them close together then he ringed the group with gasoline and set fire to it to cut down the temperature. (When the mercury falls below zero, you talk of cutting down, when it becomes warmer.)

While the children lay inside the ring of fire, George searched for snow suitable for the snow blocks required for building a snow house. By some intuitive chance, he had carried his "primitive" snow knife with him when he boarded the snowmobile in Fort Chimo, and by a further stroke of good fortune, George Koneak was almost the only Eskimo in Fort Chimo who was accustomed to building a snow house. He completed the shelter within twenty minutes, and it was typical Eskimo modesty which made George say it was his snow knife which had saved their lives.

"I never knew my snow knife to work so fast. I was wet and shivering but I didn't notice the cold. My knife was far too busy," George said as he recounted the event.

He had never built a snow house so quickly and when the last block was put in place the four men and eight children huddled inside to shelter for the remainder of the night. The Primus stove worked, due to George's foresight, and they were able to boil water for a drink. In the morning, the Eskimo messenger walked off across the snow to see if any Eskimos still remained at a camp he had passed on his first dash by dog sled to Chimo. He found the tents, but only women and children were there. The men had gone hunting on the ice with the dogs and sleds. There was still one sled left however, so he dragged it back to the igloo, the eight children were laid on it and the men hand-hauled it across the snow to the women's tents.

Time was running short for the sick children, so instead of waiting for the hunters to return with a dog team, the Eskimo messenger set off once again for Fort Chimo. Again he was alone and this time he travelled on foot.

As he neared Chimo, he met a dog team driven by a patrol of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, who took him aboard, whipped up the huskies, and sped into the camp. There was only one other snowmobile, but it was mobilised and dispatched to the camp where the seal hunters' families were sheltering the children.

The children were put aboard once more, and the crowded vehicle turned and raced for Chimo nursing station.

The boys and girls all survived their terrible journey, and their illness. The nurse diagnosed German measles and some weeks later they all were returned safely to their parents.

When George finished his story, I asked him if he had received anything for the part he had played in rescuing the children.

He answered, "No."

"Didn't anyone say anything to you George?" I asked.

"Yes," he replied slowly. "The parents. They all said 'Thank you.' They were very happy and I was very happy too."

The official report of the incident had been put away in government files, so when I returned Outside, I wrote to the Royal Canadian Humane Association and told them of George Koneak, and that was how George became the first known Eskimo to receive an award for courage – a courage he and his race take so very much for granted, a requisite for survival in the Arctic and a part of daily life.

Listen to George Koneak's first hand account of the rescue at Leaf Bay. From the Dalhousie University Archives MS-2-130, Box 10, Folder 4, Item 1.

An audio element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can listen to it online here: https://digitaleditions.library.dal.ca/arctic/?p=52

Chapter 11 ~ An Eskimo Life

George Koneak was born in a snow house at Cape Hopes Advance where his father was a trapper and a seal hunter in the years before the Canadian government introduced child allowances. The family had known great hunger and one winter they had almost starved to death, as did some of their neighbours, when the Eskimos had only a trader to turn to in their times of need.

The following story is in George's own words as he told it to me for my tape recorder.

"In 1940, when I was nine years old, as far as I could remember the Eskimo people had a tough time in the winter, in the cold weather."

"That year, my father was not doing too good on foxes hunting, and trapping. It was a very poor year. Also it was very, very difficult to hunt seals. There was packed ice and it was rough and you couldn't get to the open water, I think the east wind lasted more than a month and never changed."

"My father had the dog food cached from summer for the winter. He used up most of it and had one more cache. That was the last one he had left, and we went to pick it up. Somebody else tried to swipe it…and takes half of it and we didn't know who took my father's dog food. There was only a very small amount left over…so he tried to stretch it, and each day the dogs eat less and less."

"Ourselves, we could not eat very much. There's no fish. No seals. No foxes nor anything so we can get some food at the stores."

"There's only Hudson's Bay stores available, even right now, still. We couldn't get anything from the Hudson's Bay Company unless we got something to trade."

"There was no ration like today … No relief ration from the

government and it was very hard. There was a lot of people died that time."

"During the winter that year, our dogs were very hungry and they're very wild. Every time my father plans going for seal hunting, he couldn't go out through the door. Instead of going through the door, he's going out through the side. He opened the side (of the snow house) and he's got out that way."

"He had seven dogs, big dogs too, and they've been very, very hungry. They've been fighting once in a while and trying to kill each other, they were so hungry."

"We had one pup at that time. That pup stayed in the house. My mother asked me one morning how I am feeling if she cooks little pup for dinner. I like that little pup, which is my little dog. So, I told my mammy I don't want to eat the dog, no matter how I am starving. We still eat some skins. Boiled skins. That's the only thing we can get. Also, we can eat the dog lashes, lines and harness, but we haven't touched anything of those yet."

"One morning, my mother asked me (again) if I could eat the little pup. She was going to kill it and cut it up and cook it and boil it. 'No,' I said, 'I don't want to eat it.' Even if she killed it I wouldn't eat it. I told her, 'No matter if I'm going to die, I won't eat the dog,'"

"Finally she didn't kill that little pup,"

"After a little while … my father tried to make a last trip with his (dog) team. He went to the other place, the village to see his brother. While he was driving along on the ice, when he went along on the ice, his dogs smelled something … then all of a sudden, the dogs stopped and were sniffing around on the ice. While the dogs were sniffing, my father takes his snowknife and went along to the dogs and he tried to poke the knife into the snow. He found about two feet of snow on top of the ice and he couldn't see anything, but there

must have been something there for the dogs were sniffing around and trying digging."

"Then he finally found it … it was a great big whale. Not a white whale, but a Greenland whale or whatever you call it. Then he started trying to eat, and as soon as a piece is cut he eats it."

"It must have been drifting round in the summer and got caught up in the ice in freeze-up, and then got stuck. That's why he found the whale, the dead whale. And it was a big one. He can't get the whole lot of it out. There was a whole lot in the water. You could see about three quarters of the whale. He could get that much and so he saved the dogs and also himself."

"He gave the meat to the dogs and the dogs couldn't walk any more after that. They were fed so well. For a long time they couldn't get up and walk around or anything, they were so weak."

"The next morning, he started out again. Only four dogs could walk after they've been fed. The other dogs have been so far gone, that after a while they died."

"He made it to the camp and then met his older brother, he had a few seals the same day my father found the whale. From then on they started catching seals more often and that's how we're alive."
Listen to George Koneak tell the story of how his father saved the family from starvation. From the Dalhousie University Archives MS-2-130, Box 12, Folder 1.

An audio element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can listen to it online here: https://digitaleditions.library.dal.ca/arctic/?p=64

George Koneak's youth was similar to that of most Eastern Arctic Eskimos. Fortunately, not all the traders at remote camps were alike and some of Canada's most northerly citizens owed their lives to the kindness of individual traders who would never knowingly let their trappers, basis of the fur trade, starve to death.

Childhood is happy among Eskimo people, but youth is short because the serious business of hunting for food is soon thrust upon Eskimo boys. Within two years of George's brush with death by starvation, he went hunting with his uncle for polar bears. And he told the story this way:

"One time when I was twelve years old, the first trip I ever made with my uncle was to Akpotak Island in the middle of Ungava Bay. We went out to Akpotak Island by Peterhead (boat)."

"One day, while we were at Akpotak, my uncle and myself went a long walk to hunt polar bear up the mountains. While we walked along, my uncle told me he saw something strange up on the snowbank."

"He saw a dark spot on the middle of the snow bank and he told me he thinks it is a polar bear house. So, we walked along up towards the snowbank."

"That snowbank was so (such) a steep slope, it was too slippery… and we walk along very slowly. Sometimes we slide down."

"When we got close to the hole, my uncle slows down and gives me time to get near. When we get up to the front of the doorway, he told me he thinks something is in it. He can tell (by) what he feels. The air is warmer than outside."

"He asked me if I would come along when we were going inside. So I'm very scared. I never do this before. And I was so young, I don't know anything about the polar bear hunting."

"So he wants me to follow him right inside. First thing, we slide in.

Then we stopped at the flat bottom, a sort of floor. We can't see anything ahead of that hole. It was zig zagging and not a straight hole. We had a flashlight and he kind of shined it ahead and still we can't see anything."

"Also, when I turned round, I couldn't find the hole (way out) because the hole was not straight. We gradually went inside and it seemed to be getting warmer and warmer. The air was very warm."

"Finally, he told me he saw something right down at the bottom of the hole. He saw the two eyes shining when he flashed at him. He told me to keep following him. I kept following him. I am so very shake I could hardly stand. I'm holding his parka behind him. I don't even think about my rifle, though I'm still holding it somehow."

"He told me to keep ready and put the bullet in the chamber just in case the polar bear is coming out … I saw the polar bear, and I am even more scared."

"He is looking at us, and he's laying down and growling a few times. We walked along, around it (to) the other side. When we were standing on the other side, my uncle told me he was going to try chasing it out."

"He don't want to kill it inside, it is going to be too (big a) problem to haul it out after he's dead. He wanted to get the polar bear out before he killed it."

"He started to light up the cigarette and tried to make a stink inside, smoking inside the polar bear house. Finally, the polar bear started getting up and walking and turning round and going away."

"After he stand up, 'Boy,' I'm thinking, 'what an animal.'"

"We followed him behind, he walking out and we walking behind him, behind the polar bear. After he got out the doorway, he slid down the bank. My uncle told me he don't want me to go fast, because sometimes the polar bear goes out of the house, just goes

right around above the hole, waiting for someone to come out, and then he jump right over them."

"My uncle, he's very careful on that and looked around a few times before we came out. After we came out, he saw the polar bear, scared and running over the hill. Just before it went over the hill, my uncle saw it and we started to run after it and he killed it from there. He shot it using a 30 30 high power rifle. He fired twice and he killed it with the second bullet."

"It was almost two tons, about six foot high at the shoulder and about ten feet long,"

The meat and fat of a polar bear is rated highly by Eskimo people, and a well placed bullet from the rifle of a good marksman can furnish a hunter and his family with food for a week.

Killing a bear is an occasion for a feast and nothing from the carcass goes to waste, except the polar bear liver. Even a bear's ivory teeth are used to make fishing lures, or made into a miniature carvings. George said it was dangerous to eat the liver, as far as Eskimos knew, because it was too rich. Even the dogs which are fed all kinds of entrails and scraps are not allowed to eat it. He had once seen some dogs which had stolen a polar bear liver: "The dogs' hair all came off, so that means it must be very powerful," said George.

The Eskimo people look on the Arctic as their own land. They call it "Our Country" and are thoroughly adapted to living a happy existence in conditions which would defeat and kill a stranger. But because of their isolation, they are easy victims of infectious diseases, which are often carried in to the Arctic unknowingly by White men, and sometimes, tragically, by their own people as in 1953 at Fort Chimo

George was involved in an epidemic when an outbreak of measles swept the west Ungava coast following the return to Fort Chimo of two Eskimos who had been patients in a hospital Outside.

As he told his story to me, George was obviously deeply moved. He had unwittingly contracted the disease himself and carried it to Gape Hopes Advance, where his mother helped to look after him. She caught the illness from him, and died.

“In 1953, two boys came up from hospital Outside and nobody knew they had the measles with them. Two days after they arrived home, all the rash and sores (of the) measles came out on their bodies.”

“The people round here don’t know enough about sickness, how they should care for them. They went along to visit the people who came from hospital. They hadn’t seen them for a long time and were looking forward to seeing them. They also catch the measles from them, and so the sickness spread …”

“I had the sickness myself. I didn’t know I had it, when I was here (in Fort Chimo). I must have caught the measles without feeling it.”

“It was when I was beginning to live at Fort Chimo and had a plan to visit my father and mother.”

“After the measles arrived in Chimo, I had a trip to Koartok (Cape Hopes Advance). When I got half way and half way to run yet … I got sick. I take two weeks from Chimo to Koarktok by dog team. All the way after the half way (mark) I am sick and I can’t do anything, I had a partner, a young boy. One day he feels worse and I feel a little better. Then the next day, I feel worse and he feel a little better. That’s how we got along and that’s how we continue going.”

“When we arrive at Koarktok, at Cape Hopes, the people start catching the germs from us, and quite a few people died. My mother died for the same reason.”

George stopped, unable to go on. His usually sunny countenance clouded. He sat on the edge of the camp bed, clenching his fingers first in one hand and then the other. There was no doubt that George felt the epidemic as more than one of nature’s calamities.

It was his own personal tragedy.

Listen to George Koneak's first hand account of this tragic story. From the Dalhousie University Archives MS-2-130, Box 10, Folder 5, Item 2.

An audio element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can listen to it online here: https://digitaleditions.library.dal.ca/arctic/?p=64

He stood up slowly and announced our tape recording session was ended. "That's the story, I haven't any more stories right now," and with a gentle inclination of his head, he left the room. Later that evening as we left the mess hall after dinner, we saw George busy on the patch of ground outside his small wooden house. He was stretching lengths of sealskin lines for his dog traces. The tough skin of an udjuk, or squareflipper seal, had been cut off spirally in a continuous length. While we watched him, George passed the trace round a stout pole in the ground, knotted the ends and stretched the line by standing inside the loop and leaning all his weight against it.

His cheerful disposition had evidently restored itself and he waved to us and bounced about against the sealskin line. The inevitable happened and he went sprawling as the line snapped under his exuberant bouncing. He scrambled up, rubbing the area of his major point of contact with the ground, and examined the part where the dog trace had snapped, George was getting ready for winter trips once more.

Chapter 12 ~ Grass Roots Economy

A plane left Fort Chimo on the night of July 15, bound for Port Burwell, but Rosemary and I were not among the passengers. Instead, a posse of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police dressed in breeches and red coats went in it to give a symbolic display of law to a certain Eskimo named Noah.

Noah was causing trouble in Port Burwell, a camp of about thirty Eskimos, and he had accomplished it in the not unusual Eskimo practice of taking unto himself a second wife. His actions had roused passion among the other Eskimo men, because Noah was elderly – close to 60 years old – and the young men in the small settlement were jealous of him securing the affection of a young, marriageable woman. To compound the matter, Noah's first wife, Emily, was still very much alive, although according to account, she took less exception to Noah's amorous adventure than did the young men of Port Burwell. Hunting rifles had figured in the reports, so on the maxim that prevention of crime is better than its perpetration, the Mounties flew in to warn Noah and the young hunters of the consequences if their tempers flared too wildly.

Emily Anatok in Port Burwell, 1960

"Emily Annatok from Port Burwell, Northwest Territories" © Library and Archives Canada. Reproduced with permission.
Library and Archives Canada/Rosemary Gilliat Eaton fonds/Box 22 file 5

It was an unpropitious moment for the arrival of two journalists, so we remained in Fort Chimo and a handcraft development officer from Ottawa, Bill Larmour, went in our place on the aeroplane with the police and with a cargo of cured sealskins for the women sewers of Port Burwell, reputed to be the finest needlewomen in the Arctic.

The weather continued fine and on receipt of a favourable weather report on the radio from George River, we had a hurried breakfast of tea and oatcakes early on the morning of July 16, and packed our gear ready to go.

The Wheeler Airline traffic agent called for us in his four-wheel drive Land Rover, and accompanied by Mr. Dodds, the administrator, we sped off through the scrubby woodland road, southwards in the bright morning air. A broad clearing widened ahead, and instead of an airstrip, as I expected, we drove on to the sandy shore of a lake where a seaplane was moored.

It was the first inkling I had that our journey was to be by seaplane. Our destination, George River, lay in the type of country Arctic old timers referred to as The Boondocks, a region without a road, or an airstrip, close to the back of beyond.

At the lakeside, two short wooden booms formed the dock and they were being extended. Two great mechanical grabs were gnawing into the lake banks and loading trucks, which moved the fill no more than seventy five-yards to the water's edge, and tipped their loads into the "pier." A gang of lethargic labourers levelled off the fill with shovels.

Directing operations was a man in nautical cap, bright yellow gloves, knotted silk cravat tucked inside his black and white check shirt, khaki drill trousers, a leather belt buckled below the belly button and in high heeled cowboy boots. Despite every conspicuous item of his outlandish garb, the predominant thing about him was a pair of shaggy eyebrows, glowering and black. His stance was that of a bull at bay.

At twenty minutes past nine, he walked towards us, peeled off his yellow gloves, pushed his cap to the back of his head and said:

“All aboard.”

He was the pilot. Phil Lariviere, one of the best-known bush pilots in the Arctic.

Concern for the dock, where he moored his plane, kept him busy with the construction gang when he was not flying, “You can’t turn your back for a minute,” he said, “If you do, they all stop work.”

We climbed aboard with our baggage and the pilot carefully stowed it evenly in the tiny fuselage, already crammed with rescue and emergency equipment – life jackets, rucksacks, rifles, sleeping bags, ropes and a pair of paddles, a fishing rod and landing net. We looked ready for anything and with Phil Lariviere in charge, we probably were. I was lucky enough to be given the co-pilot’s seat, and I strapped myself down, ready for the take-off.

Lariviere took off his cap and revealed a thatch of snow white hair, so I settled back, confident that he must have been flying safely for years in terrain, where often enough one mistake, or inexperience, can cost a pilot and his passengers their lives.

He turned and winked broadly, turned on his switches, started the engine and we taxied across the lake for the take-off.

By half past nine, we were airborne and Lariviere pointed downwards. The score of white men employed on the dock site had all stopped work and were leaning on their shovels as they watched us climb into the sky and set course to the northeast and George River. Below, the Land Rover snaked down the road back to Fort Chimo with parcels of excess luggage left behind because of their weight. Lariviere left nothing to chance.

We soon left all traces of trees, and beneath us the rocks, scoured by ice, looked like beaten copper. For a while we travelled over the

barren landscape in the company of a prospector's seaplane. It was bright orange coloured for easy spotting in the desolate barrens where its occupants were seeking mineral deposits, richly stored in the north tilted Canadian Shield. As the planes drew apart and Lariviere turned in a more northerly direction, the planes rocked wings in salute and the prospectors soon disappeared into the vast, wide sky to the south.

We passed over bright green muskeg, thousands of lakes linked by north flowing streams and rivers, on one of them lay an unoccupied HBC trading post, testimony to the decline of the Ungava Bay economy. We passed Whale River, Mukalik and Tuktuk rivers. Tuktuk is Eskimo for caribou. The river had been named long ago when the great herds roamed the vast plain. Northwards the ice still lay thick in Ungava Bay. It was mid-July, yet the shipping season had barely started. We thumped and shuddered through air currents, like a stertorous elevator, and little more than one hour after take-off, we sighted a cluster of eight white tents on the edge of an ice-strewn shore.

It was George River char fishery. The canvas tents, an aluminum shed, two canoes and a Peterhead boat were the only signs of life for more than a hundred miles north or south along the coast. Lariviere put down in the bay, a little to the west of the broad estuary of George River, and we taxied across the waves to tie up at the Peterhead boat. I climbed quickly out of the plane and stood on one of the floats with the water slapping and swirling about my boots as we lurched in the swell. Leaning on a strut I felt green faced and closer to travel sickness than I had ever felt in my life.

Three Eskimos in a canoe came out to pick up the party, and ferry us ashore. A young Eskimo boy in a sealskin kayak skimmed over the waves like a dry leaf in the wind to look at us, and we looked at him, equally curious.

He dipped his paddles with effortless ease, barely touching the water as he sped along. He was browner skinned than any other

Eskimo we had yet seen and he had an unusual haircut. The back of his head was cut very short and the front was grown long and hung in a forelock. It was the summer style of the George River Eskimos.

Young man in a sealskin kayak near George River, Quebec, 1960

Rocky promontories, scoured clean of any vestige of plant life, guarded the crescent shaped beach. The rock was peculiarly stratified, and lay like enormous mounds of peppermint candy in pink and white stripes. In the centre of the beach, like the bright jewel of a diadem, lay a glistening chalk blue floeberg.

In such a wild free place I expected there to be an Arctic stillness on the shore. Instead, the air throbbed with the pulse of a diesel engine. It came from the hut housing a deep freeze plant, hub of the Eskimos' char fishery, heart of a new industry intended to revitalise the impoverished economy of East Ungava Bay.

The wind began to blow and rain started falling in the half hour that Mr. Dodds, the administrator talked with the Northern Service

Officer in charge of the fishery. Lariviere became restless and went out to his plane, standing by and ready to hold it off the shore if the wind increased. White caps crested the waves, Mr. Dodds said, "I'd better not linger," and wished us luck.

An Eskimo started the motor of his canoe and the administrator paddled through the shallows to climb aboard. He waved goodbye and the canoe sped to the seaplane, already tossing too much on the water. There was a roar from the engine and Lariviere taxied the Norseman beyond the rocky headlands to a take-off point. Minutes later, the airborne plane buzzed the camp, then quickly disappeared beyond the low hills rolling to the south.

We were almost alone, in real Eskimo country at last. We prepared to pitch our tent, but the Northern Service Officer, Keith Crowe, said it was too small for long-term comfort and he offered us the use of a larger tent, where he kept office supplies and a radio transmitter. It already held a camp bed for visitors, so we accepted, inflated our air mattresses and unrolled our down filled sleeping bag. We were under canvas at last, even though it was not our own.

Keith Crowe invited us to his living tent for a meal. He and his wife and two children slept in one tent on the floor and lived in another. Alongside were the similar homes of a small group of Eskimo women who worked, cleaning fish at the freezer site. Their children were in a residential summer school upriver, and their menfolk were camped on the barren islets scattered at the bottom of Ungava Bay, where they set their nets and gathered the fish.

Everyone lived by tide and weather, and because the fishing season was short, they even worked the night tide. Keith Crowe was adjusted to the irregular hours and took life in his firm-footed stride. He was a patient man, born in the North of England, he had an Arts degree from the University of British Columbia and he spoke Eskimo with a slow, recognisably Yorkshire accent.

Sitting in his tent, warming our hands round our steaming mugs of

tea, he told us something of the char fishing venture. The people of the region had lived mainly by hunting and fishing, and by trapping in winter for fox, marten, otter and mink. With the furs they trapped, they bought rifles, ammunition, flour and tea at the Hudson's Bay Company trading post. They used to use sealskins for winter clothing, for their kayaks and oomiaks, dog traces and harpoon lines. It was a bare existence, but it supported them.

After World War II, the fur trade slumped and the HBC closed the George River trading post for some years. The Eskimos became too poor to buy ammunition to hunt with, and were unable to renew their boats. They went hunting on the land with bows and arrows, or they threw stones at birds and hares to kill them. Some collected used cartridge cases and strung them together with cords to make a bolas and when they could get within throwing distance, they would bring down a hare as it ran, if they were accurate enough.

They lived on the brink of starvation, for there is little fat on a bird or an Arctic hare, and they were appallingly neglected by an indifferent government. At some time in the 1950's, the government had the plight of the Eskimos thrust upon them and the job of halting the downward spiral began. Economists, sociologists and biologists went into Ungava Bay and in due course a programme of self-help was recommended. The char fishery was part of the self-help.

Marine biologists first studied the Arctic char and a fixed a limit of thirty thousand pounds weight which could be taken in one fishing season. An advertising campaign was conducted across southern Canada and a market was assured in luxury hotels, on railway systems, airlines and the best restaurants. Embassies and socialites were supplied with samples of Arctic char to launch the fish in society, and it was served at state banquets, yet the whole George River industry was hinged on a fallible diesel engine refrigerator and it had no engineer to maintain it.

A loan of twenty five thousand dollars was made to the George

River people, to pay for the boats and tackle, the fuel oil and the freezer, and Keith Crowe of Ilkley in Yorkshire taught the Eskimos how to fish with the new style char nets. He taught them how to gut and fastidiously clean the fish for a luxury market and how to flash freeze them without bruising the flesh.

Cleaning arctic char in George River, Quebec, 1960

Later that same day, when a load of fish was brought in on the

tide, I helped the Eskimo women to clean the bellies and wipe the slime from the chars' skin. We stood at trestle tables in the open air, surrounded by persistent biting mosquitoes. The women wore parkas, Mother Hubbard dresses and gum boots. They sprayed each other generously with fly repellant, and through hours of drizzle and cold dampness, they stayed patiently at work, washing, rinsing, wiping tirelessly. It was tedious labour. "We could do with a power hose for washing, but we don't have one, so it's all done by hand," said Mr. Crowe as he gave a final inspection to a full rack of char. He hung each fish by the throat on angled nails driven into a driftwood pole and when the rack was full, he and Eskimo Johnnie, heavily dressed, staggered under the weight and carried it into the flash freezer. As the door of the giant fridge was opened, a cloud of vapour poured into their faces and they disappeared inside to the 40 Below Zero Fahrenheit atmosphere to glaze the fish.

As we stood on the shore, a lone canoe put into the beach and a stranger came towards me. He introduced himself as Tom Ananak. When I left Fort Chimo earlier in the day I had been given a reel of tape on which was a message from a woman patient in Hamilton Sanatorium. The woman's husband, was somewhere on the fishing grounds of Ungava Bay. As good luck would have it, the tape was made at seven and a half inches a second, which was the only speed at which my tape recorder would operate, and the tape had been given to me to carry in the hope that at some time I would cross the path of Tom Ananak.

I had been in the settlement less than six hours when Tom came ashore, summoned by the Tundra Telegraph from one of the remote islands. Somehow word had reached him that I had a message from his wife. He was a dark faced, frowning fellow with close-set eyes, immense shoulders and the most aggressive looking Eskimo I ever saw. When he discovered I could speak no Eskimo, he looked puzzled, so I beckoned him to follow me and led him to the office tent where my tape recorder was lying.

Tom sat on the edge of the camp bed and I put the reel of tape on the machine, plugged in the stethophone (a gadget like a doctor's stethoscope) and the only means of listening in to my recorder. I handed the earpieces to Tom and he gazed back at me blankly. He knew nothing of such instruments, so I plugged them into his ears and switched on.

Tom Ananak listening to a message from his wife

"An unidentified man with a tape recorder and headphones" © Library and Archives Canada. Reproduced with permission. Library and Archives Canada/Rosemary Gilliat Eaton fonds/Box 9 file 12

As the reel turned on the spindle his perplexity softened and suddenly, as he recognised his wife's voice, he smiled enraptured. I played it to him three times and then he stood up to go and struggled for some English.

"Thank you. Nakomik," he said, his face beaming, and he shook hands so vigorously I thought my fingers would never flex again. I stood at the door of the tent and watched him leave for the shore. His canoe was in the centre of the crescent beach. He stepped in and crouched at the stern, then without a backward glance he sped for the horizon. I watched until he was out of sight, the canoe's path, a fleeting furrow on the water, straight as an arrow from a bow.

The tape he had listened to was the first news he had received from his wife for more than a year. She had been taken away with tuberculosis to the Outside, leaving him with no one to sew his sealskin boots or make his clothing, or cook his food or care for his children when he went hunting. His difficulties had been further compounded by a complete lack of news for the past year. A similar lack of communication existed among many families which were broken up through ill health and caused untold misery between men and women, parents and children.

Only the youngest babies and toddlers were kept at the freezer site, the other children were at the school-under-canvas, and by living close to the Eskimo women, we learned how remarkably gentle they are with their children. One of their most outstanding virtues was the quietness of their voices, and the gentleness they showed them.

School site in George River, Quebec, 1960

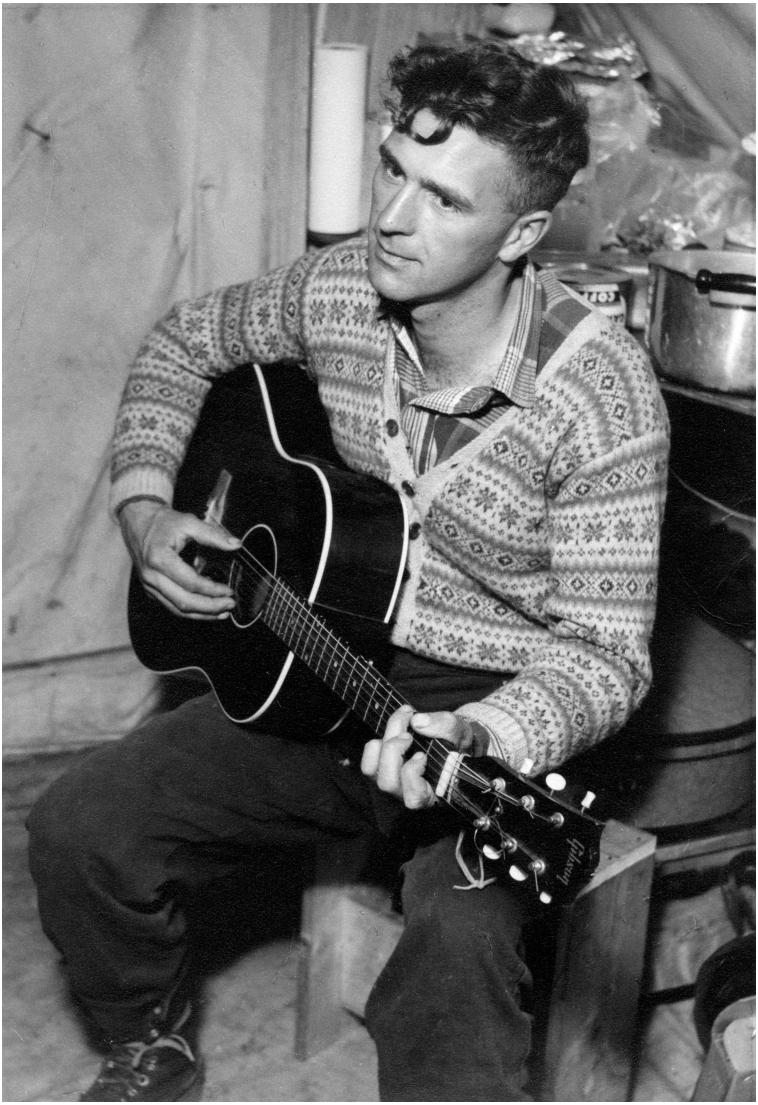
Mr. Crowe said he once smacked his elder daughter for deliberately hurting her sister. Some Eskimo men, visiting his tent, opened their eyes wide with astonishment and gazed at him as though he were a brute, frowning and muttering among themselves. It was so unlike anything they would do or had seen done before. He said he was completely embarrassed by his visitors' silent condemnation of his action.

There were always visitors in Mr. Crowe's tent. The people gravitated towards him like children to a father. He bandaged their cuts, doctored their ills and diagnosed their complaints. He said he had never heard of an Eskimo with ulcers, they didn't look to the future so they didn't worry. "If they worried, they wouldn't live at George River because there's plenty to worry about here," he said.

When Mr. Crowe first arrived by dog team among the char fishermen, he almost immediately earned a reputation as a medical

man. An epidemic was sweeping George River when he arrived with a supply of anti-biotics. There was no one else to administer the drugs, so he toured the settlement every four hours, jabbing Eskimos with a hypodermic needle, and except for a pregnant woman, everyone survived and his reputation was made.

In such a remote place, kindness and beauty were of threefold importance and one of the greatest joys in that brave, small camp was the sound of Keith Crowe playing his guitar and singing in a rich baritone voice when the day's labour was done. Seldom did such a lovely voice fall upon a more appreciative ear.



Keith Crowe strumming his guitar in 1960

"An unidentified man playing guitar" © Library and Archives Canada. Reproduced with permission. Library and Archives Canada/Rosemary Gilliat Eaton fonds/Box 26 file 1

Listen to a clip of Barbara Hinds describing the scene as Keith Crowe plays his guitar. From the Dalhousie University Archives MS-2-130, Box 10, Folder 2, Item 4.

An audio element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can listen to it online here: https://digitaleditions.library.dal.ca/arctic/?p=69

Perhaps it was the loneliness of that barren shore, the high hopes of the people and courage of the people and the courage of the venture which tinged his song, but as I went to bed on that first evening I heard his voice, haunting and melancholy. I stepped outside to listen. A moon hung low over the black tundra, and the Eskimo tents glowed from within with the soft light of oil lamps, pale as the moon in the velvet sky.

I was drawn to the sound like all the people who came from their tents and I went in to where he was sitting. The song unfolded lazily, bright smiles lit the Eskimo faces clustered at the tent door, and Keith Crowe, three thousand miles from home sang an old folk song about a spinning wheel, and though the lamps were dim I went outside, for I wished to hide my eyes.

Chapter 13 ~ Clochemerle-by-the-Sea

Mid-July is not a hot season in Ungava Bay. Fog is fairly common and the mists and drizzle soon wrapped themselves round our small camp by the sea shore.

I dressed going to bed in two woolen vests, an angora wool sweater, nylon tights, long woolen underpants under a pair of flannel pajamas, a balaclava helmet and round my middle I wrapped a small blanket carried all the way by Rosemary, who insisted the cotton flannelette sheet she had was just as warm. My pillow was the folded hood of my parka and my sleeping bag of quilted eider down was sheer pleasure to get into.

Once in, I buried my head and waited for some warmth to generate and send me to sleep, and though I wore a pair of Harris tweed socks my feet still felt cold. Fatigue always won, and I would drop off, still chilly and sleep surprisingly well.

Getting up was hard work. I was never as eager to greet the damp mornings as I was to surrender to the nights. In the morning, the cocoon of warmth sapped all initiative. I steeled myself to pull back the flap of my sleeping bag and peer round the tent, flooded with a light that glowed through the wet, white canvas, making the grey morning outside seem brilliant. Firm willed, I withdrew from my eiderdown chrysalis and went to collect washing water from a stream close by. The first days at George River were disappointingly grey. Grey sea, grey sky and grey mist shrouded the dome of visibility. The chill penetrated with clammy fingers, saturated the tent and laid a cold pall that I found inescapable despite wearing full regalia.

The local plumbing was done by Keith Crowe, Bachelor of Arts, who

was able to turn his hand to any task. The stream was effectively dammed with a sheet of plastic material, so there was always enough deep water to dip a bucket for washing either fish or oneself. He had also built a splendid, sturdy communal lavatory from driftwood timbers and hessian – more a necessity than a luxury in treeless country and it earned George River freezer site the name of Clochemerle-by-the-Sea.

The freezer site for the George River char fishery, 1960

Monday, July 18, found us working, wearing every scrap of clothing we possessed, except for our waterproofs, My fingers were so numbed with damp cold that it was with the greatest discomfort I punched the keys of my typewriter. Unable to take photographs in the drizzle and fog, Rosemary sat fully dressed inside her sleeping bag writing up her journal when Mr. Crowe came into the office tent. He sniffed the air and insisted in rigging up a stove for us, improvised from a biscuit tin and a length of stove piping, A stove meant we had to gather driftwood from the shore – there being no other source of fuel on the unyielding land.

Pleased to have some purposeful physical activity, we donned our waterproofs, gathered two wet sacks and set off along the beach, gleaning driftwood sticks from high water mark. Stooping and searching for the meagre twigs, many of them only a few inches long, I felt basic and primitive and wondered if this was how my Ice Age forbearers felt when they went faggotting, and did they feel as joyful as I did when they came upon a branch of a tree, fully three feet long. I felt uncomfortable and cold, because it was tedious work in the rain, and I dreamed of a roaring fire in some farmhouse hearth at home in England, but even as I imagined the crackle of flames I knew I would not have changed places with anyone in the world, wet and soggy as I was.

Early in the afternoon, the light brightened through the white wall of our tent, where we were coaxing our wet twigs to smoulder in the biscuit tin stove, when Mr. Crowe called and asked us to join him and the young Eskimo boatmen in a trip to the fishing camps.

Warmly clad, we set off in two of the flat bottomed boats used for the fish collection – "not too good in rough weather, but handy for beaching," according to Mr. Crowe.

The tide was rising as we left the bay. The little floeberg remained on shore, pert, blue and shrinking imperceptibly. Over the swishing of the waves in the sand and the sputtering of the outboard motors, the diesel engine of the freezer throbbed steadily, an audible assurance of George River's prospects, its hope for the future.

The Eskimo boys were in their early teens, but they handled the boats with complete confidence and took us at full speed to the islands. Our wake curved, whitened then vanished into the swirling grey water as we headed into Ungava Bay.

We passed an island where Eskimo dog teams were marooned for the summer. As we neared them, they set up a high howling and raced to the edge of the rocks and into the water, thinking we had called for them. Mr. Crowe refused to have them at the freezer

site, mainly because of the fish. He could risk no fouling or filching of the hard won catch. Also, the womenfolk who cleaned the fish had the youngest children and babies with them and hungry dogs would have been a hazard. (Three children were killed by huskies in Hudson Strait that summer, we learned later.)

After half an hour running at full speed, the boats reached a barren island of pink rock. Eskimo people ran down to meet us and asked Mr. Crowe to go at once to a tent where Elijah, one of the fishermen had pains in his stomach.

His white canvas tent was pitched in the hollow shelter of bare boulders. Smoke curled from a stove pipe and inside, Elijah sat on an old caribou skin, crouched near the fire. His arms 'were tight around his midriff and he tried to smile at us, but obviously he was in pain.

He talked to Mr. Crowe in Eskimo for a while, then the young Yorkshireman stood up and said, "It's hard to know what it is. They eat so much raw fish here that they get infested with colonies of worms. He might have a mild rupture or colic." He also feared the fisherman might have appendicitis, so he suggested the Eskimo go in to the freezer site for a while where an eye could be kept on him and where the radio transmitter could be useful immediately, if an emergency arose. The nearest doctor was hundreds of miles away, and a journey to hospital would need bringing in a seaplane from Fort Chimo, nearly a hundred and fifty miles distant.

We went back to the shore where Rosemary filmed the men taking char from their nets. Some men came in with driftwood roped athwart their canoes, gathered from rocky islets nearby. It would serve as their light and warmth at night on the fishing grounds, unless they should be lucky enough to get a seal for its blubber, but seals were not as plentiful in lower Ungava Bay as they used to be.

One of the men who arrived with a load of driftwood was Stan Annanak; the camp comic, who dashed about the rocks with a cod fish in one hand and a very dead Arctic hare in the other. He had

chased and caught it on one of the islands and though it was lean and scraggy, it had back legs on it “like a kangaroo” and reminded me of a friend who served in the army on the Labrador Coast early in World War II, before the United States was attacked by Japan, and when northern camps were primitive indeed. Going across the snow one day, he found an Arctic hare half dead with cold. Being an animal lover, he put it inside his parka to take back to camp but as it warmed up it revived and nearly kicked his ribs in with its back legs, so he opened his coat and had to let it go.

Stan Annanak provides food and comic relief.

Like many Ungava Bay Eskimos, Stan Annanak had grey eyes, inherited from some white man, probably a whaler who went to Hudson Strait generations ago, and who, like hundreds of white men

in the North neither knew nor cared for the life he had conceived and left behind when he returned to some kinder, southern land.

The whalers begat some stout hearted souls in Ungava Bay, some of the most tenacious Eskimos in the Arctic, who have been alternately favoured and neglected by traders and missionaries and until recently seldom, if ever educated by an indifferent government. It was this few score of men who operated the char fishery under the direction of Keith Crowe.

They were divided into four camps, Kaeleroclik; Kaura; Katatu; and Kapeetata. Grey eyed Stan Annanak was in the outermost camp to the West of George River, probably the most barren of the four camps where the men lived almost entirely off fish, tea and tobacco.

Their lives followed the tide cycle; at low water they set their fifty yard long nets at right angles to the shore and when the tide had risen and fallen again (about thirty two feet in a spring tide) they disentangled the Arctic char from the meshes, took them ashore and gutted each fish. The entrails were fed to the dogs, thus serving two ends – keeping the campsites clean and satisfying the voracious appetites of the huskies .

The fish was put into boxes and ferried up to twenty miles to the freezer, where it received immaculate cleansing before being frozen. Strict watch was kept on the number taken for fear of over-fishing the waters and destroying the industry. Two French Canadian fishery scientists kept a survey of the size and weight of the catch and presuming we were ignorant of the French language they would jest in Gallic fashion about the fishes' reproductive organs. Char grow very slowly in the cold Arctic waters – the increase in size occurring almost entirely in the brief summer. It takes them twenty years to reach full growth of about twenty-six inches, when they weigh about seven pounds and are one of the most sporting fish to be taken on a rod and line.

The George River char, Salvelinus Alpinus, were "sea run char"

which spent the winters dormant in fresh water, lying in protective slime on the bottom of lakes up river. When the ice on the rivers broke up and was washed down to the sea, the char followed, except for those which were under six years. They remained in the lakes eating insects. The char in salt water would feed intensively for three months and then fight their way back up river to the fresh water spawning grounds – their bellies bright Vermillion red and their flesh bright salmon pink and excellent to eat.

It was early evening when we left the fishing grounds and returned to our tents at George River. The two flat bottomed boats swept inshore together, neared the beach and the helmsmen cut their engines. The silence was complete on the lonely northern shore.

"The freezer. The freezer's stopped," Keith Crowe shouted and ran hard up the sands.

In our absence, the motors had broken down. The fans no longer extracted air from the flash freezer. The fishery on which the Eskimos' future depended was in jeopardy, and there was no engineer at George River. Fortunately, the regular evening radio link-up with Fort Chimo was due within an hour and Keith Crowe sent out an S.O.S. for a new pump and spare parts. The radio crackled violently through too much interference and the only message we could hear was to "try again at nine o'clock." An hour later, a storm was blowing up. Rain spattered on the canvas roof and a gust of wind swirled in as Mr. Crowe came into the tent again to raise Fort Chimo on the transmitter. He made contact, but reception was hopeless and he could only repeat over and over his call for help, trusting to luck that reception at the other end was better. Then he returned to the freezer hut and he and seventeen-year-old Willie Annanak worked for hours in the streaming rain, sucking fuel through the feed pipes until they were sickened. From time to time the engine burst into life.

I put on my sou'wester and cape and went over to see how they were getting along. They were crouched round the oily pumps, black

oilskins gleaming wet in the light of handlamps, their faces white and anxious and the temperature in the freezer growing warmer as each hour passed.

“I might lose the fish in the flash freezer, but I can hold the stock in the deep freeze for a day or two and that will give time for a plane to get in, if the weather isn’t too rough,” said Mr. Crowe. At one o’clock in the morning, he tried again to raise Fort Chimo on the radio. As the receiver crackled there was a sudden roar of the fans as the diesel engine shattered the quiet of the night outside. Willie had coaxed the motor into life and for the rest of the night he and Keith Crowe nursed the motors into sporadic outbursts. A strong wind blustered about the tent when I finally dozed off and it seemed unlikely a plane would be able to come in, even if Chimo had heard the message for help.

As I drifted between sleeping and waking, I became aware of the high powered revving of a seaplane engine. It was dawn. I leaped out of bed, pulled on my boots and dashed out. The Norseman was taxying into the bay and when the door swung open, Phil Lariviere the bush pilot emerged wearing his bright yellow gloves and a new variety of footwear – a pair of baseball boots. He had with him a maintenance engineer and spare parts for the engine.

I wondered how he had landed on the waves and he explained the bay had been far too rough to land on, so he put down five miles up George River and taxied all the way downstream into the bay.

Within half an hour the engineer had rigged up a new fuel pump and the freezer was purring again. The stock was saved, and provided there was no further catastrophe, Arctic char from Ungava Bay would be on menus in deluxe hotels in the following winter, to stimulate the appetites of an indifferent public, already well fed.

Later that day, we left George River. In the few days we spent amongst them we had grown to care deeply what happened to the people on the lonely shores and we prayed for their success. Tom

Annanak arrived as we were about to leave and he offered to take me with some of the baggage out to the seaplane.

It had no shield against the weather and it was up to the gunwhales with heavy kit so that it looked ready to founder. Tom was scowling as the heavy swell threatened to pour over us, and Stan Annanak, the comic, got a bad ducking in the bow as we bucked a bad sea. As we came alongside the seaplane I leaped for the pontoon and the men handed up the kitbags. When everything was aboard the plane, Stan gave a cavalier wave and nearly toppled over the side. Tom Annanak held out his big, warm hand and shook mine, squinted into the light dancing on the waves and rewarded me with a broad, brown toothed smile that lightened up his countenance, and he said, "Aksuni, Nakomik," which was Eskimo for Goodbye and Thank you.

Lariviere headed for the open sea and we thundered off, thudding over the wave tops and after a shuddering haul we took to the air as heavy as lead. Behind us, we left Keith Crowe, patient, unrested, waiting for the next tide and the next load of fish, I thought no finer person could serve the people of George River – unless he happened to be a diesel engineer.

As we flew on to Fort Chimo, the waters of Ungava Bay were a lame tapestry of blue, shimmering with light. The islands looked like mounds of boiling toffee in their desolation. Here and there was a mixture of rocks, moss, seaweed and sand. The process of rock disintegration was clear to see. Lichens began the cycle of plant life, moss found a bed of its organic matter in the rock clefts, low flowers and shrubs probed with tough roots to compound the work.

Further inland and south, the world began to appear green again and even small distorted trees emerged from the landscape where they found shelter in south-facing hollows. As we neared our landing place the windshield suddenly appeared to be shattered, cracks shifted and flowed across the Perspex.

"What's that?" I croaked, rigid on the edge of my seat.

“Fractured oil line. Better have that mended when we get in,” grunted Lariviere, completely unruffled.

The apparent cracks were striations of oil streaking across the windshield in the plane’s speed of 120 miles an hour.

“When do you rest Phil?” I asked him.

“When it freezes up. We just keep going while the weather’s fine.”

I thought of the tide rips and the wind in George River where he had landed at five o’clock that morning and I wondered what he would call bad weather, and what would the George River people have done without him.

He put us down gently on the lake, peering through the stained windscreen and taxied to the dock. Sam Dodds was waiting to meet us, and invited us home for dinner. We were two ravenous and dirty visitors, and hospitality included the wonderful luxury of a hot bath. Replete, clean and happy, we went to bed and slept like tops.

Chapter 14 ~Time and Tide

The tides in Ungava Bay were so great that they coursed high up to Fort Chimo, thirty miles from the mouth of the Koksoak River. Medium sized supply ships could navigate the channel in summer, despite its shoals, but they invariably carried Eskimo pilots and moved in the river only between half tide and high water.

In the Sealift period when supply ships reached Chimo, they had to anchor in the shelter of mid-river islands and the cargoes were transferred into barges to be ferried ashore. A six-knot current kept sailors on their toes, and captains were warned that no anchorage could be considered safe. All ships had to be ready to move at any time. Mute witness to the dangers was the rusting wreck of the Upshur, which had dragged anchor in a storm and foundered on Big Elbow Island, her back broken and her boilers burst.

Cargo ships had been going up the Koksoak since 1830, when the Hudson's Bay Company trading post was built on the east bank of the river. One of the early traders at Chimo was a Scotsman named John McLean, who described the place as a "cheerless landscape … as complete a picture of desolation as can be imagined." He was the only white person living in Chimo at the time – his wife having died there within a year of their arrival in 1837.

His trading post was built of logs floated down the river from forests to the south, and it was built on a marshy plateau between the broad river and a range of low, rocky hills, where the ancient Eskimo tribes buried their dead.

For five years he traded with the Eskimos and the Naskapi Indians of Labrador. He was not only a trader, but an explorer and the first white man to cross the peninsula and the first white man to see the Grand Falls of Hamilton, Labrador, a waterfall mightier than Niagara and with a present day potential of seven million horse power for

hydro electric energy. He tried to open an overland trade route to the Atlantic coast but it was not successful, and on his advice, the post was closed in 1842. It was re-opened in 1866, before the advent of rival missionaries in Ungava Bay, with their conflicting and confusing Roman Catholic and Protestant faiths. McLean's lonely reign in the heathen land probably helped to account for the HBC initials being interpreted by old Arctic hands as meaning, "Here Before Christ,"

It was a warm morning on Thursday, July 21st, full of the promise of a lovely day when George Koneak offered to take us in his canoe across the Koksoak River to visit the old east bank trading post and the old Eskimo burial ground. Few people lived on the east bank any more.

The Anglican church and the HBC trading post were being moved to the west bank, where the Eskimos had gravitated round the airstrip. We accepted George's invitation, glad of the opportunity to see the other shore from ground level. Looking down on it from the cockpit of Lariviere's plane it had looked a lovely place of neat white buildings and emerald green grass.

The glorious weather encouraged a number of other people to make the trip and there were three canoes in our party. George held out his hand to help Mrs. Dodds and me into his canoe and we crouched in the bottom of the boat as it moved down the Koksoak against a fast rising tide.

George's outboard motor began to sputter trouble so he followed the bank quite closely before crossing the swift current at the river's narrowest point. Suddenly the engine cut out and George moved to the bow, flung the anchor overboard and we sat in the sunshine in a quiet eddy while he scraped carbon off the plugs. The other canoes, darting like dragon flies, were far away to our starboard bow, racing downriver. They noticed we were stopped, changed course and headed towards us to keep a kindly eye on George's

progress. It was typical of the way the Eskimos cared for each other on a journey.

George soon had the motor mended and once more we thudded across the waves on the after keel of the canoe, the bow pointed skywards and high octane fumes billowing in our wake. lt might not have been the proper fuel but it made the canoe cut away like a cannon ball.

White caps seemed to threaten us with swamping as we left the protection of the riverbank, and once in a while George slowed the boat and we wallowed for a moment or two before leaping off again over the wave crests. Several times the motor cut out, and each occasion the other Eskimos came back up river to ensure we were not in danger. By the time we reached the landing place we were soaked to the skin and George, concerned that his passengers were wet, advised me to wring out my trousers and borrow some clothing from Mrs. Ploughman, the trader's wife.

The grass grew high and green round the old settlement, predatory huskies snarled at us and we had to carry stones in self-defence as we walked along the duckboards to the old store. Because the business was to be transferred to the other side of the river, the stocks on the store shelves were low, but the credit cards of Ungava's fur trappers were still on hand. There were names like Good Night Willie of Port Burwell, an epithet he earned because they were the only words of English he knew and he used them day or night; there were cards for Daniel Snowball; Peter Partridge; Ned Ungnatweenuk and Jacob Sequaluk, and scores of other men whose lives pivoted on HBC credit from infancy to grave.

I left the old store and wandered along a rocky ridge flanking the river, crossed a steep gully and mounted the next ridge to the east. A pile of stones and timber fragments attracted my attention. It looked like a fallen cairn, I scrambled to the crest of the ridge to add my stone and suddenly saw the cairn was a sepulcher for four very old, decaying coffins, partly covered by boulders.

Three of the coffins had broken under the stress of time, weather and curious creatures. The planks were rough hewn and irregular, bleached by a hundred summer suns and winter snows. In one mound lay the skeleton of a child who must have limped on those Ungava hills before she was laid to rest forever. The femur of her right leg had been fractured and it had knitted improperly, shortening her leg by three or four inches.

I followed the ridge and passed other human remains, porous, roughened and scattered in green banks of lichen and moss. More than a score of blanched human skeletons lay on the lonely hill. One coffin had no nails in it, but it had been bound about with a cooper's bands, undoubtedly by a craftsman at old Chimo cooperage where fish were salted in barrels and shipped in sailing vessels to England a hundred years before.

When the bodies were buried in the stone mounds in pagan Eskimo fashion, they were probably accompanied by tools, soapstone lamps and sewing kits to take on the eternal journey they expected before missionaries came to teach them about Hellfire, Heaven, Purgatory and Christ. No artifacts remained after the lapse of so many years and the passage of so many people. The sun shone out of a cloudless blue sky. A strong wind kept away the flies and swept the tundra with a fresh breeze out of the North.

Rosemary said quietly, "What a lovely place to be buried, with the sun, the wind and the sky about you."

We retraced our steps past the clear pools, blue under the sky. The hollows sheltered low tamarack trees with waxen red cones, aromatic as spice. We passed through the newer Christian graveyard, where neat wooden crosses marked the resting places of the converted. The land was swamp, I looked back up the ridge and thought the old pagan people had chosen a far better place on the hilltop.

A coffin on the hilltop near old Fort Chimo, Quebec

While waiting for the tide to rise to go home, we sat talking in the house of Rube Ploughman the Hudson's Bay Company trader. He said he sold fifteen thousand packets of chewing gum to the Eskimos in one year in Fort Chimo.

"Why do you stock so much cola and chewing gum when other foods would be better for the people?" I asked him.

"Because there's a demand for it," he said,

"It's not The Bay's problem," said Mrs. Dodds, "It's the problem of education. The people must be taught food values and tooth care if they're going to eat non-Eskimo foods."

The trader said he tried to keep his customers happy, but he sometimes had trouble keeping his White customers in order. Sumer casual labourers often thought they ought to be served ahead of the Eskimos – his regular clients, "Eskimos are our bread and butter in the Hudson's Bay Company," he said.

He had a high regard for his “regulars” and plenty of proof of their ingenuity, a boundless Eskimo virtue which has contributed to their survival in the world’s most forbidding climate. One winter, Rube Ploughman was with some Eskimos travelling by dog sled and they stopped for the night out on the ice. The Eskimos found suitable snow and built a snowhouse in which they camped. The dogs were left outside as is customary, the sled was unpacked of its caribou skins, food, tea kettle and two Primus stoves. When they tried to light the stoves to boil tea, neither stove would work, and they discovered they had no pricker or needle to clear the jet. It meant they could have no tea, which they sorely needed, and no warmth in the snowhouse.

One of the Eskimos told the others to wait, and he disappeared down the igloo tunnel and almost at once a blood curdling howl set up from the hungry dogs,

Mr. Ploughman said he was certain his guide had been set upon by the huskies and he seized a knife and crawled down the tunnel. Near the entrance he came nose to nose with the Eskimo.

“In his hand he carried a stiff whisker from the muzzle of one of the dogs. He split a match, wedged the whisker in the split, pricked the Primus and we were away,” said the trader.

He told us of the day three years previously when what could have been a tragedy was averted by the prompt action of the Eskimos when the old East Bank store burned down on a sub-Zero day.

“They grabbed the blankets from the shelves, laid them on the floor and swept all the goods they could reach into the blankets, bundled them up and rushed outside. The rescuers came in through the back door and shuttled out through the front. No more than a hundred dollars’ worth of goods were lost, but the old building was completely destroyed.”

Rube Ploughman was always a busy man. In addition to his shop

keeping and trading he was the postmaster and had to frank every letter posted out of Chimo. He had to sort incoming mail and even do service for the Hudson Bay Company's greatest rivals – the mail order catalogues.

Chain store proprietors in the Outside had discovered the northern market and flooded Mr. Ploughman's post office (in the HBC store) with mail order catlogues, and when the customers, his Eskimo traders, wanted to buy money orders to pay for his rivals' goods, he had to sell them the orders over his counter.

To further mortify his soul, he had to sort the incoming parcels and arrange their collection when they were delivered by airmail to Fort Chimo. Not only was he losing business through the catalogues, but as post master he was accomplice in the depreciation of his own trade.

As we sat talking, George Koneak, who had been visiting friends and tending his vegetable garden, sent in a message telling us the tide would be right for the return trip at seven o'clock. There was a rush to Mrs. Ploughman's generous table. We ate quickly. I exchanged her slacks for my own which had dried on the paling fence in a fresh wind and we trooped down to the ramshackle pier.

The three canoes were afloat and the Eskimos were waiting. The sun glazed the water, the wind and tide were with us and the evening was full of peace. George started the engine, shaded his eyes against the glare and steered a course up the broad stream. Mr. Dodds was waiting for us on the West Bank. There was a crisis on hand.

Elijah, the fisherman at George River had developed all the symptoms of appendicitis and a plane was being sent in as soon as possible. A Land Rover was waiting to rush George Koneak up to the office in time for the radio scheduled for eight o'clock, and we went up with him. Radio reception was clear, George River came in and a rendezvous was arranged for the plane to go in with the hospital

nurse that evening, pick up Elijah and bring him back for the journey to a hospital in Roberval.

There was a dash to the seaplane berth. Mr. Dodds and the hospital nurse laboriously hand-pumped fuel from two drums, while the airline agent stood on the fuselage of the plane, guiding the two jets of aviation spirit into the tanks.

The bushpilot, Phil Lariviere, stepped inside a hut at the lakeside, spoke briefly to another pilot and came rushing out.

"Quit that. I'm going to take the Otter," he yelled and climbed into the cockpit of his friend's machine which was already fuelled. The unwritten law of the North was at work – "What is mine is yours in emergency."

The other pilot had told Lariviere not to hang around wasting time, but to "get out from under, and get the beggar to hospital."

The wind had dropped, and Lariviere made a long take-off run across the lake, pulled the Otter up to tree top height, banked to port and headed for George River while Mr. Dodds returned to the office to relieve the schoolmaster standing by with George Koneak at the radio transmitter.

We had barely arrived in the office when someone dashed to the doorway and the cry went up; "The boats are here. Max Budgell has come." And there was an exodus, back to the riverside to meet the first supply ships to get through the ice that Summer.

That night, two Eskimos were carried aboard the Nordair passenger plane from Fort Chimo to Roberval. Lariviere had brought back Elijah, the appendicitis case, and Elijah was joined by another Eskimo, Charlie who had ruptured himself unloading cargo from the newly arrived boats. Dosed with morphia, the two men were transferred aboard the twin engine passenger plane, which called at Fort Chimo three times weekly on regular schedule. A radio message was sent to Roberval to prepare for two emergency operations, and

by the time everyone got to bed that hectic night in Fort Chimo, the two Eskimos were safely in hospital. A few years previously, neither man could have been dealt with so swiftly and Elijah would probably have died of peritonitis long before he could have reached help.

As it was, both men recovered and returned to the aegis of that most benign of administrators, Sam Dodds, who had tirelessly coped with all the crises and emergencies of the long day.

Chapter 15 ~ God's Pocket

The two boats which arrived in Fort Chimo on the night of July 21st, were in the charge of Max Budgell, a man born and bred on Labrador. He was the first skipper North that season, navigating the dangerous coast by day and anchoring in the sanctuary of its harbours each night, in the Eskimo way of travel. The ice was still lying thickly about the coast and could have foundered either of the small boats, barely forty feet long with a beam of twelve feet. They weighed just over thirteen tons apiece and were stoutly built in Newfoundland by shipwrights who well knew how to combat the storms of the North West Atlantic fishing grounds.

Listen to an interview with Max Budgell speaking about the boats in use at Port Burwell and his trip up from St. John's in July, 1960. From the Dalhousie University Archives MS-2-130, Box 10, Folder 2, Item 3.

An audio element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can listen to it online here: https://digitaleditions.library.dal.ca/arctic/?p=58

The journey down the Labrador Coast had not been without incident. One crew member, who had fallen overboard twice and survived immersion in the ice-cold water, described the trip as "a hairy voyage." Max Budgell was nonchalant and minimised the hazards of navigating a small boat through ice fields with a wave of his pungent pipe and the comment "it's fine, as long as you know

where to anchor at night." He was a calmly energetic man, who first demonstrated his singular resolution shortly after the outbreak of World War II.

He was living in Davis Inlet, Labrador – home of the Naskapi Indians – when he made up his mind to join the army. It was winter, and there was no hope before summer of transport to a recruiting office, so instead of waiting for the ice to break up, he set off overland with a band of Naskapi Indians, to Seven Islands on the shore of the St. Lawrence River.

Their supply of flour lasted for about a month, and from then until the end of their journey three months later, they lived off the land, fishing for suckers and Whitefish in lakes and rivers, eating berries and hunting for bear in the forests.

They travelled over the watershed of Labrador's coast, crossed the mountain divide and by the time they reached Seven Islands, they had walked and paddled canoes more than twelve hundred miles. There were days when they had nothing to eat. At one time, five days passed with only water to drink and their fast was broken only when they killed a black bear.

Living off the land meant they had to build shelter where they could find it. The worst part of the journey, according to Max, was crossing wide lakes in open canoes, kneeling in the bottom of the boat, soaked to the skin, stiff with cold and knowing you were unlikely to get dry for days in the swampy forests.

When the bedraggled party reached Seven Islands, Max was honoured by the Indians in a way seldom afforded a white man. The Chief of the Naskapis adopted him as a son of the tribe, but the Royal Canadian Mounted Police had different ideas.

They treated him as an alien and clapped Max into jail.

As Max explained to me: "Labrador was part of Newfoundland which was still a Crown Colony in 1940, and not a part of Canada.

Newfoundland was a 'foreign country' but an ally, I hope." And because he had entered Quebec illegally, through the backwoods, he was arrested. The RCMP were apologetic to Max about his imprisonment and softened the seeming Canadian hostility when they said, "A hotel would cost you a lot of money. We can feed you free."

Any jail with regular mealtimes would have suited Max, so he accepted their apologies and his spell in jail philosophically. Facilities did not include a kitchen on the prison premises, so three times a day he was escorted to the home of a genial French Canadian woman, who was an excellent cook.

"She'd put the plate on the table, and then stand back amazed to watch me eat," said Max. "I just wolfed my food you see. I'd been in hungry country. Very hungry country."

When formalities were over and his Newfoundland identity established, Max was released from jail and allowed to join the Canadian Army. Few men could have gone through more discomfort to join up. Max soon went overseas to the United Kingdom, served to the end of the war and married an English girl from a quiet country town and took her home to Labrador.

Listen to Max Budgell tell his story of travelling overland from Davis Inlet, Labrador to Seven Islands, Quebec to join the Canadian army in 1940. From the Dalhousie Univsersity Archives MS-2-130, Box 11, Folder7, Item 1.

An audio element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can listen to it online here: https://digitaleditions.library.dal.ca/arctic/?p=58

After thirteen years on the coast, working as a fisheries officer, he moved to the federal government's Department of Northern Affairs and began one of the most vigorous careers anyone followed giving practical help to Eskimos in the Eastern Arctic.

He helped them to organise whale hunts in Hudson Bay, and taught them how to can the surplus meat to see them through hungry winters; he made nets to help aging Eskimos catch seals in the dangerous waters round Port Burwell; he set up a cod salting industry for times of hunger in Ungava; and he was a prime helper in forming the first Eskimo co-operative in Ungava Bay, teaching the people to trade amongst themselves, to operate a char fishery, a sewing industry and to manage their own trading post at Port Burwell – the first store of their own the Eastern Arctic Eskimos had ever known.

He helped cut and float logs from high up George River and established a little sawmill in barren Northern Quebec and above all he helped the Eskimos to market sealskins through their own co-operative instead of through the Hudson's Bay Company which in bad years had paid the impoverished people as little as fifty cents for a seal skin. (I learned later that the Eskimo co-operative fur marketing coincided with a resurgence in the popularity of sealskin coats and the different types of skins began to fetch unbelievably high prices – seven dollars, fourteen dollars, twenty dollars and even up to thirty-three dollars for one top quality skin.

When I met Max, he was helping to found the first Eskimo co-operative in Ungava Bay.

We saw little of him during the days following his arrival in Fort Chimo. The planes were kept busy and fully loaded and Rosemary and I gave up hope of ever reaching Port Burwell and resigned ourselves to returning to Frobisher Bay where we would wait for a

flight to Cape Dorset. Instead, with a fast developing flexibility, we changed plans one night at almost midnight.

We were preparing for bed when Mrs. Dodds rushed in to our sleeping place to ask if we wanted to join Max Budgell's boat when he went to Port Burwell. He was leaving in the morning and was willing to take us with him.

Max Budgell on his boat in Port Burwell, 1960

The prospect was almost too good to be true. It meant we would be

able to cover the stories we had hoped to get – the women sewers of Port Burwell; the first Eskimo Co-operative; and we would see Bill Larmour again, the handcraft development officer, taking the Arts to the tundra, and added to all that was the prospect of spending more time with Max Budgell who seemed to have an inexhaustible supply of humour and Arctic legends.

Rosemary Gilliat, Bill Larmour, and Barbara Hinds in Port Burwell

"Rosemary Gilliat, Bill Larmour, and Barbara Hinds in Port Burwell, Northwest Territories" © Library and Archives Canada. Reproduced with permission. Library and Archives Canada/Rosemary Gilliat Eaton fonds/Box 9 file 1

We rolled out of our sleeping bags and went with Mrs. Dodds to

her house where she was still baking bread, ready for Max to take with him on the boat trip to Port Burwell. When the supply of loaves ran out, Max would have to return to the northerners staple diet – bannock. He said he wanted to postpone the moment as long as possible.

While waiting for the bread to cook, Mrs. Dodds showed us some artifacts given to her by an old Eskimo lady in Baker Lake. There was a caribou leather bag, full of very white caribou teeth, boiled as clean as pebbles. They clicked together like the balls on a roulette wheel as she shook them from the bag on to the coffee table. The teeth had three fanged roots; two roots and there was one baby tooth. A game was played by picking up two or three teeth at a time without looking. The one who picked up most three rooted teeth won; or you could scramble and search for the baby teeth and the finder was winner.

Of the caribou, from which the teeth came, nothing had gone to waste. The dogs had been fed with the lungs, liver, and inferior portions of meat, such as the tenderloin, which the Eskimos rejected when there was plenty of game. The heart and kidneys, marrow bones and bulk of the meat and fat were used for food; in winter, caribou tallow was used for lighting the houses of caribou eating Eskimos; the sinews were used for sewing; the skins for sleeping robes and the bones and antlers were used, as they still are in some communities, for tools or tool handles.

Among the old tools Mrs. Dodds showed us was a skin scraper made from a shoulder blade and a snow knife carved from bone. It had been used to cut snow blocks for generations of Eskimos. Now it was a curio to show visitors, its span of usefulness ended and the snow houses it had been used to make were a rarity. The Padliermuit people from whom it came had been dispersed and the caribou herds had gone. The woman who gave the treasures to Mrs. Dodds also gave her a pair of Eskimo sun goggles. They had belonged to her grandmother when she was a child.

They were made from a piece of wood, about eight inches long, hollowed out like a canoe, then shaped to fit over the bridge of the nose and cheekbones. Two slits pierced the wood to correspond with the spacing of the wearer's eyes. The wood had to be at least a quarter of an inch thick at the eye slits to effectively protect the wearer from snow blindness, and the inner surface was blackened with soot from an oil lamp. The goggles served to subdue the glare of brilliant sunlight on the unshadowed Arctic snows.

At Mrs. Dodds. request, I left behind my white snow smock that night. She wished to use it as a pattern for the women sewers of Chimo while I was in Port Burwell. The garment was basically an ordinary parka, pulled on over the head like a sweater, but it had an unusually comfortable hood and four commodious pockets, the envy of fellow travelers, but a bit of a bane to me because I constantly was asked to carry other people's odds and ends and I could seldom find my own things without turning out all four pockets.

For some reason I did not properly understand, Eskimo parkas had no pockets. Perhaps it was because they had few extraneous possessions. Tools would be carried on their sleds or in their boats, and necessary items were often carried in either the hood of their parkas or in the legs of their sealskin boots. Pocket handkerchiefs, of course, were an unnecessary refinement. Noses were blown straight on to the ground with a finger on first one nostril and then on the other.

When I returned to Chimo after the Port Burwell trip, I had to examine my parka minutely before I could tell the garment had been taken completely apart and sewn together again by the Eskimos.

They had used the pieces for a pattern and my war-surplus snow smock had set a new fashion. Parkas were growing pockets in Fort Chimo. As we left Mrs. Dodds to return to our bedrolls, she gave me two caribou teeth for luck on the boat trip with Max. Ungava Bay had a bad reputation and the entrance to Hudson Strait where

our destination lay had a worse one, and though I am not very superstitious, I slept with the teeth under my sleeping bag, just in case.

We started the two-hundred-mile journey to Port Burwell in Max Budgell's long liner on Sunday morning, July 24. It was a fine day with a high blue sky, full of flies extracting their own blood transfusions from every exposed section of skin as we helped to load up supplies. At last, everything was stowed aboard, the barrel of salt pork was to starboard and the salt beef was to port. The deck was a litter of oil drums, coils of rope, tea kettles, water keg, lanterns, fishing nets. rucksacks, pans, oars, floats and a red fire bucket brightening up the roof of the wheelhouse.

By some trick of light, the whole paraphernalia contrived to look shipshape. As Max described it: "She's packed like a small suitcase for a long trip."

Rosemary and I were given the stateroom, which was the tiny fo'c'sle, and we stowed our cameras and recording equipment inside our bedroll and settled down into shipboard routine for the journey, which was likely to last at least two full days.

We made a brief call at the HBC store on the East Bank, where Max bought tobacco, his patent tranquillizer, and Rosemary and I bought chocolate and yo-yos for the Eskimo children at Port Burwell, and cheese and sunglasses for ourselves. Then on a receding tide and a strong current we sped down the Koksoak River towards Ungava Bay. Not a trace of cloud shadowed the sky, and Rosemary looked up and said, "I bet we're the luckiest girls in Canada today."

Apart from ourselves, the other people on board were Max Budgell; Joseph and Bobby Annanak, the two Eskimo pilots; an Eskimo family of six with their dog team of eight huskies; and a new member of the expedition, Paul Dubois, a shy French Canadian diesel engineer from Montreal. He had come in by plane to Fort Chimo and he was to install the engine of the refrigerator at Port Burwell, the basis

of Ungava's second char fishery. His job was to rig the motors, stay with them until they had run for twenty-four hours without trouble and then return to Montreal.

He was said to cost the co-operative fifty dollars a day, which explained why there was no resident diesel engineer to service the char fisheries' refrigerators in Ungava. Paul, of course, did not receive fifty dollars daily.

Even with Paul Dubois to attend the engines, the success of Port Burwell as a fishing station was not a certainty by any means. Max explained to me the people were growing old at Burwell, the waters were dangerous. Young men were needed for the fishing. On the way down Ungava Bay to Fort Chimo, before we had met him, he had spread the word among a few Eskimos he had met, telling them he would return in several days time and he wanted people for the fishing- grounds. He would take anyone who wanted to go, including their dogs. For Max, taking dogs was an enormous concession. But for the success of the new co-operative, he said he was prepared to make some sacrifices. His sacrifice proved to be on a far larger scale than he had feared. We followed the tide down river, high water mark showing like a yellow fringe on the wet rocks, until we neared the pincer-tip headlands at the river mouth.

Just before we entered Ungava Bay, the pilots sighted a whaleboat and Max told them to change direction towards it. "We need people at Burwell and if they've got a boat, all the better," he said. The pilots followed the whaleboat beyond a reef into a small harbor. Two Peterheads bobbed at anchor and several canoes lay on the shore but there was no sign of any tents.

Suddenly, over the bare headland and down the cliff a tribe of Eskimo people poured, stark against the skyline, their parka hoods in sharp relief against the light.

They carried babies and tea kettles, rolled tents and caribou skins. The women had bannocks for the trip and rolls of sealskin to make

boots for the fishermen. They surged to the shore. Men carried rifles and ammunition to hunt seal again; children carried driftwood to light fires and they clambered into the canoes and streamed towards us as the Israelites must have entered the promised land.

Five men packed into a reckless looking outboard motor boat, crouched forward like Indians in a war canoe, with their rifles tucked under the right armpits, and advanced on an old whaleboat which looked decrepit enough to sink. They climbed aboard it and maneuvered alongside our longliner. Canoes pressed round us and we helped to haul aboard a score of yelping dogs that howled and squealed as they fought for deck space. About thirty men, women and children climbed up and laid claim to the hold. Max said, "If the department of transport could see us now, they'd never let us go to sea."

The men in the whaleboat said they would go to Port Burwell too, and it fell in behind us and hoisted a thin, brown sail. They would never have kept up with the stout longliner, so Max flung them a rope end took them in tow. Our diesel engine spurted and settled into a steady chug, bound for Burwell and the fishing grounds.

As we picked our way through the reef, Max saw the expression on my face and said "Don't worry. You're as safe on board this, as if you were in God's pocket."

With the Eskimo families in the hold, the dogs on deck and the fo'c'sle given over to Rosemary and me, Max and the diesel enginer, Paul Dubois, shared the bowels of the ship and slept alongside the propellor shaft. It was a tight fit as the headroom could not have been more than eighteen inches high and they had to worm their way along the boards to stretch out. Rosemary and I slept on the wooden seat-cupboards that ran the length of the fo'c'sle; and the Eskimos bundled together snugly in caribou skins. "They're very sociable people and they like to get together," said Max, "Some of them sleep twenty to a house." We were very crowded with more

than thirty people on board and there was only one barrel of fresh water, so tea was rationed, and so was washing.

Max lit fires in the wooden ship with an abandon that would have scared a fire marshal out of his wits. Some Eskimos in the hold had a two burner camp stove and we had a small coal-burning stove in the corner of the fo'c'sle. Because it had room for only one pan on top, meals consisted of monster stews or giant fry ups. One family shared our stove to make tea, but for the two days at sea, they subsisted on their own food which was a miserable, inadequate diet of bannock made from white flour. The two Eskimo pilots shared our meals and though we wanted to do something for the other people, the ship's stores would have lasted for no more than a couple of days if we had supplied them too.

The dogs did not get fed on board ship and one poor brute discovered the salt pork barrel. His howls of delight brought the pack of dogs upon it like vultures to a carcass. Yelping and shrieking, they hurled themselves on to the food.

"My salt pork," Max shouted, every inch a Newfoundlander who loved pork scraps with his salt cod.

The Eskimos on deck laid into the dogs with fists and feet. Under the hail of blows the dogs withdrew, except for one starved animal whose shrunken sides became wedged between the ship's dory and the pork barrel, unable to escape.

Two men hoisted the barrel of pork on to the fo'c'sle roof and one of the women hauled on the dog's harness and shook it. There was one final grunt and the dog lay still beneath the shadow of the dory. The big pads were seamed with old cracks, its claws blunted by its work in the recent spring. His dog's life was over. The suddenness of the animal's death and the pathetic condition of its feet were disturbing. I said as much to Max, and he explained, "When the snow melts in spring, the dogs still keep going all day, although their feet nearly soak apart. They have little sealskin boots made for them,

with holes cut through for their claws so they can still get a grip on the snow and ice, but it's impossible for the most careful owner to stop their feet from splitting." Although the Eskimos depended almost entirely on their dog teams for winter transport, we saw no tinge of kindness or sentiment in their treatment of them in summer. With the warmer weather, the dogs looked anything but noble beasts.

Their coats thinned out and hung about them like matted wool. They cringed at the approach of human beings and if you stooped to tie a bootlace they ran away because they were so used to being stoned. They were fed occasionally and ate human excrement in lieu of starvation, so camp sites were kept quite tidy in that respect when dogs were about.

Max professed to dislike dogs but admitted in the intimacy induced by an Irish stew dinner, in the fo'c'sle, that he had once owned a husky. It was such a sorry spectacle when he first saw it that he traded a tea kettle for it, put it in a shed full of seal meat and left it alone for three days. When it staggered out, round and full, it was a dog of the finest kind and never looked back. Then, after a compliment about the dinner, Max picked his way distastefully through the dogs on deck and returned to the wheelhouse.

To the north, where the edge of the sky met the sea, the horizon was lightened by a pale stripe of light. It was "ice-blink" caused through the reflection of light on the ice still lying up the bay towards Hudson Strait.

Astern, the whaleboat with its brown sail filled by the breeze, carved two white ostrich plumes with her bow from the sea. Her rakish lines and canvas were crisp against a glorious sunset that stained the sea and sky flame, yellow and dusky purple. To the south, a lone star poised over the darkening land and traced a faint pathway across the water. Ahead, the sky and sea was cleft by a line of white ice floes and as we neared the approach to our anchorage, the

Eskimo pilots, Josephee and Bobby Annanak changed places at the wheel.

Rosemary and I bedded down for the night in the fo'c'sle. There was no room for inflated air mattresses, so we stretched out on the wooden seats with our heads to the prow. Through the hatch, I watched a star weave to and from above the masthead as we altered course constantly passing through the ice floes. The pilots cast off the whaleboat and left her to make her own way to the anchorage. Her weight would have made the longliner's steering too heavy. Lying against the planking, I could feel the boat shudder as she struck and scraped small pieces of ice. With every alteration of speed my mind jerked awake with little twinges of apprehension. Ice chunks rolled and rattled from my head to my toes on the other side of the planking, I could feel them through the ship's timbers.

At about midnight, the engine stopped and I heard soft footsteps across the deck, then a great splash as Max found bottom with his anchor. The night fell quiet and I nestled down into my sleeping bag and swung out to sleep, at peace for the night.

Chapter 16 ~ Some Sex Customs

Out on deck next morning, I could see the boat was anchored near familiar coastline. We were opposite George River, and soon after breakfast, Keith Crowe came out to meet us and said the fishing was going well. He had been up all-night packing char, ready for export on a cargo ship.

Max wanted to sail up the George River to a community hall round which the summer boarding school, for the fishermen's children was encamped, so as the tide filled the channel, we set off inland after putting the passengers and dog teams ashore to await our return. Two hours later we anchored opposite a beach and went ashore by canoe. As we rounded a headland, a log cabin, festooned with radio aerials and flanked by half a dozen tents, loomed on the cliff to our left. The cabin looked very trapper-ish, and more appropriate to Indian country than to the sub-Arctic tundra. A year previously, its logs had been felled up river and a gang of ten men, led by Max, had floated them downstream as a raft with the men herding stray logs. Not a limb was allowed to go to waste in a land so bereft of building materials.

We were greeted by the schoolteachers, Joan Ryan and Anne Will, who invited us so warmly to lunch we could not have refused. We ate together with the children in the log hall, on char, bannock and beans. Snow shoes hung in the corner, white and silver fox skins were stuffed out of harm's way in the roof beams and there were bales of sealskins and boxes of embroidery thread, duffle cloth and braid for use by the women sewers at the fish camps.

The Eskimo children sat in White man's fashion to dine at long tables. Their seats were planks salvaged from packing cases laid

on sections of tree trunks and the school teachers' chairs were upturned wood cartons.

It was the first school the George River children had known and was run entirely alone by the two young women who were foster parents and teachers during the fishing season. Eight weeks' school was all the Eskimo children had in a year.

Listen to an interview with Joan Ryan and recordings from the school at George River. From the Dalhousie University Archives MS-2-130, Box 9, Folder 9, Item 1.

An audio element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can listen to it online here: https://digitaleditions.library.dal.ca/arctic/?p=44

The reason for our detour up George River was to obtain some radio equipment for Port Burwell from the community hall. Dismantling the aerials took longer than Max expected, so we missed the tide and had to wait until nightfall before going down river.

By four o'clock in the morning we were back in Ungava Bay and Max was out on deck blowing his cow like foghorn – a groaning, hand-pumped affair to summon the Eskimos, who, he hoped, would be "arriving imminently," but they failed to materialise and it was long past breakfast time when we formed convoy again and headed North, loaded with a full complement of huskies, jovial, well-slept Eskimos, and babies.

The day was misty and our boat rolled noticeably, which caused the first casualties, Paul Dubois, the engineer, retired abruptly from the

lunchtime stewpot and submitted to seasickness. Max snatched a nap alongside the turning propeller shaft and Rosemary snoozed in the fo'c'sle. I set up business, sitting on the hatch cover, with my typewriter on my knees and wrote up my notes with a romantic fervour stating: "It is sheer heaven to be pitching through Hudson Straits in a forty-foot longliner. To have gone through in flat calm and blue sky would have had small sense of adventure." And I tried to picture poor Henry Hudson and his crew as they tacked and hauled their way at the wind's mercy through the uncharted waters and turbulent currents that converge at Hudson Straits.

The author at her typewriter amid the chaos

"Barbara Hinds typing while sitting on a boat on the Koksoak River" © Library and Archives Canada. Reproduced with permission. Library and Archives Canada/Rosemary Gilliat Eaton fonds/Box 9 file 2

Fantastic ice floes surged by us, duck-shaped, dog-shaped and one even like a horse drawn carriage with waves breaking through its windows. The longliner had to battle a powerful tide as we neared Port Burwell, but by eleven o'clock that night we entered a T-shaped canyon of high craggy rock. Max gave a blast on his foghorn; a light appeared on shore; the anchor splashed down and Bill Larmour's welcoming voice called across the water – "The coffee pot's on."

It was like going home.

We scrambled up the cliff, lighting our way with hand lamps, up into the tiny settlement, built on a narrow, grass covered ledge. There were three small buildings and barely room for half a dozen tent rings where our fellow travelers pitched their tents and tied their dogs. The buildings comprised the freezer shed, the government officer's hut and Noah's packing case one-room home.

Cove in Port Burwell, 1960

Half a dozen tents of the Port Burwell Eskimos were clustered in a cove on the opposite end of the bar of the T. There were less than thirty of them altogether, and most of them were elderly, the survivors of a flu epidemic which had decimated Port Burwell, once bustling and known as The Gateway to the Arctic.

Photo of family standing outside their house at Port Burwell, 1960

:"Family standing outside of their house in Port Burwell, Northwest Territories" © Library and Archives Canada. Reproduced with permission. Library and Archives Canada/Rosemary Gilliat Eaton fonds/Box 9 file 12

We had barely sat down to drink our coffee in the government shed when Bill Larmour announced that Willie, one of the Eskimo hunters, had married in true Eskimo fashion earlier in the day. Bill was a conventionalist where the proprieties were concerned, and said: "When it was all over, I asked them, if they wanted to get married. I asked would Mr. Clarke the minister at Fort Chimo do. They said he would, so Willie can go down to Chimo on the longliner as pilot. That'll save manpower here." Max had other ideas, and he asked how it happened.

“Willie killed twelve seals today and was only half way through skinning them, He needed a wife. I suppose he got tired of skinning and decided it was time to get married,” said Bill.

In an Eskimo hunting economy, duties are clearly divided between the sexes, and when a hunter has killed a seal and dragged it back to camp, he takes little further interest in it, except to eat the meat, or unless he makes dog lines with the skin.

It is a woman’s job to skin the seal, flense and render the blubber, and cook the meat. Willie was about thirty years old and long past the age when most Eskimos marry. Catching twelve seals in one day had sickened him of his enforced women’s work. Trial marriage is still an Eskimo custom, so he resolved both of his problems by ending his bachelorhood and then promptly putting his new wife to work, skinning his six other seals.

His fortune in catching so many in one day was due to the migratory instinct of the harp seals which pass Port Burwell, northwards, in July and again southwards, in November, when they go down to the Gulf of St. Lawrence for the pupping and breeding and molting in spring. Two days after Willie had made his lucky strike, the harp seals had left, bound for Davis Strait, Greenland’s coast and the North. Max sat puffing his pipe for a while, after Bill’s explanation, then he said: “You’d better raise Fort Chimo on the radio tomorrow morning. Tell them to have Mr. Clarke on the quayside with the book in his hand. I want this boat for the fishing. The season isn’t all that long and I want Willie out of Chimo on the same tide.”

The shortage of manpower for the fishing was acute. Also, the longliner was the only really dependable, seaworthy boat to bring the char from the fishing grounds, through the dangerous Straits of McLelan to the Port Burwell freezer.

After further consideration. Max decided he could spare neither the boat nor Willie, even to sanctify his marriage.

"Why do you have to marry them?" I asked.

"Well, they're living together," said Bill.

"Why doesn't Max marry them on board ship. He's captain, isn't he?" I asked.

"A splendid idea," said Max. "Give me the book and I'll do it."

Bill dampened the notion and said he had already promised Willie and his wife to go to Chimo. "I think they like the idea, and they think it would be very nice for Mr. Clarke."

(Eskimos are probably the most obliging people in the world".)

Max came from Labrador, a fishing country, "where," he said, "you got wed at the end of the fishing season. Not at the start. Not at the middle, but at the end. Fishing comes first."

He offered to quell Bill's qualms by performing the ceremony in the wheelhouse of the ship. We could not find a prayer book. Max said any book would be suitable. The National Geographic Magazine was good and colourful, and if that was not good enough, he had an excellent diesel engineer's handbook.

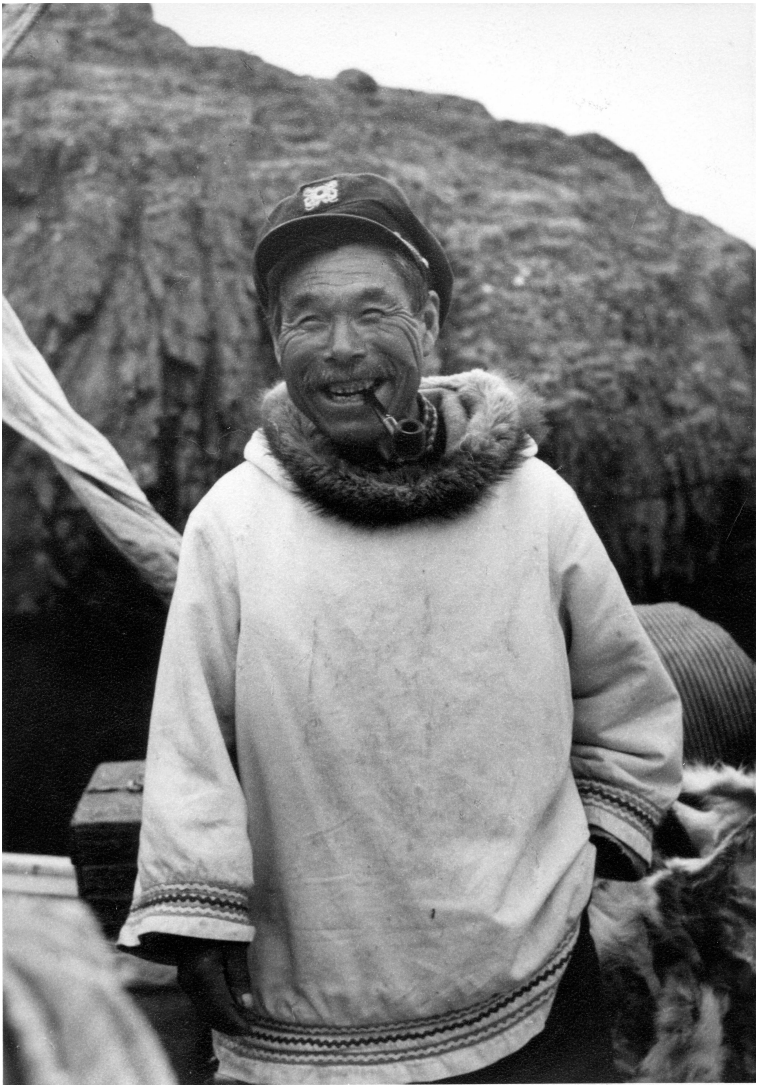
"I can marry them well enough. Once on Labrador, I successfully divorced a Roman Catholic couple. They were Indians and they stayed divorced for five years. They used to fight each other so much I thought there might have been a death in the family. Divorce seemed the best thing and they were both in favour of it," he said.

Years afterwards, the priest who had married the couple returned to the camp and discovered they had married again. He asked what they were doing living in sin, and they explained to him they had been divorced by Mr. Budgell, "I wish I'd seen his face," said Max. The trouble with Max was you could never tell when he was pulling your leg. And I think Bill Larmour could not tell either. So the matter of

Willie's wedding remained unresolved and it was put aside, at least until the end of the season.

The fishing grounds which were to supply the Burwell freezer with char lay several miles down the Atlantic coast of Labrador. The journey had to be made through McLelan Strait, separating the mainland from the Island of Killinek on which Port Burwell was situated. Killinek was Eskimo for "The End of the Land" and the narrow channel which formed its southern boundary was a vicious stretch of water that was not recommended for large vessels owing to the strong tidal stream in its narrows, and not very good for small vessels either.

Nor was it deemed advisable to attempt the strait without a pilot. The man who was to lead us through the straits to the fjord of Ikkudliayuk was Henry Anatok, a cheerful, handsome man of about sixty years, and brother to the doughty Noah. Both men had lived through the epidemic of 1918-1919 when the Moravian Mission ship, the square-rigged Harmony, carried Spanish flu to the isolated camps on Labrador.



Henry Anatok in Port Burwell, 1960

"Henry Annatok in Port Burwell, Northwest Territories" © Library and Archives Canada. Reproduced with permission.
Library and Archives Canada/Rosemary Gilliat Eaton fonds/Box 9 file 12

In those days, the Moravians operated trading posts at the mission

stations, where trappers could exchange furs for supplies, or test the missionaries' brotherly love by obtaining credit in lean times. It was said all along the coast that the Moravians never turned away anyone who was in need. By the end of the war in 1918, the stores were sorely in need of supplies, and the good ship Harmony was eagerly greeted when she reached the coast, her holds full of goods. At each harbour, Indians or Eskimos, half breeds and settlers helped to unload the supplies and carried them into the trading posts. But as the old Harmony travelled North, the Spanish flu spread in her wake in an epidemic which killed hundreds of people.

The welcomed goods stood on the shelves, untouched, there were so few people to purchase them. The coast never recovered from the tragedy. At Port Burwell, the population fell from two hundred to less than thirty souls. In Okak, seventeen out of a population of four hundred lived to mourn their dead and the camp became a ghost place. The survivors could not bury the bodies fast enough, and so they were committed to the harbour, wrapped about with rope and weighted with stones.

In 1926, some of the ropes began to break apart and the bodies rose to the surface, their features still clearly recognisable, perfectly preserved by the icy cold water which would not support parasites and people no longer stayed overnight at Okak. The fjord of Ikkudliayuk, where the fishery was to be established, had a similar history.

Port Burwell's decline was rapid after the epidemic. The Moravian trading post was taken over by the Hudson's Bay Company, but they too eventually had to close it down. Thereafter, the Eskimos' nearest trading post was a hundred and fifty miles away up the George River – a journey which they made once in winter, and perhaps once again in summer. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police withdrew, there were not enough people to warrant any showing of the flag. The Moravian Mission finally left in 1928 and the buildings gradually-disintegrated until only a few red bricks of the foundations were

discernible in the long green grass where the Eskimos pitched their tents.

For a while, the government tried to winkle the Port Burwell people from their rocky outpost, but the people ignored the blandishments and preferred independence at Killinek, the End of the Land, to the moral rot, living on relief and lolling about the HBC trading posts up George River or at Fort Chimo.

There was no doubting the courage of the Burwell Eskimos. They had really good hunting for no more than five weeks a year when the herds of harp seals passed by; but there were polar bears, ducks, hare and ptarmigan, cod and char, if they went fishing. But fishermen need boats, and they had been poor for years, so their expeditions were limited by the seaworthiness of their old craft in summer and by the stamina of their dog teams in winter.

Noah told me the weather was so violent in October and November, when the seals passed south, that the people often had to move about the rocks on their hands and knees, and he made sure I understood him by getting on all fours to show me exactly what he meant. Seal hunting was sometimes a failure, and then winter was a hungry thing to be endured. The harbour of Port Burwell was sometimes calm inside when a gale was blowing out in the Straits, and we waited for several days until our pilot, Henry Anatok, decided the weather was suitable. The party busied themselves about camp while the gale blew itself out. Bill Larmour showed the women sewers the type of sealskin hat he wanted made from the cured sealskins he had taken in with him, and he made an inventory of the articles already made by Noah's wife, Emily. Paul Dubois worked hard on his refrigerator engines and appeared only briefly for meals before vanishing once more into the freezer shed. Rosemary worked away at her photography and I wrote a few stories for my newspaper and we both kept house for the party.

Max rigged up the aerials he had filched from the George River community hall, then he built a water supply line down the hill

to the freezer site so the fish could be cleaned the more easily. Plumbing was no new trade to Max.

He told us that after he took his English bride back to Labrador, he decided it was about time someone introduced indoor plumbing to Nain. Every man is a handy man in Labrador, so he wrote to the advertisers in a mail order catalogue and ordered a complete domestic plumbing outfit. Boiler, tank, piping, lavatory, bathtub and basin.

When it arrived months later by cargo ship, willing hands helped him to haul it up the shore. Everyone wanted to see the new plumbery. An old sea captain helped him to install it, and when the job was finished, old Captain Carter was dirty and said he would initiate the system by having a bath.

He turned on the hot water taps, but only cold water gushed out. It proved the water was running though. They smoked a pipe or two of tobacco, waiting until they thought the water had had a better chance to circulate. There was no doubt it was hot, the water was boiling and bubbling in the pipes.

Again, Captain Carter tried the bathtub, but again he was unlucky.

"If I can't wash in it, at least I can try the lavatory," he said, or words to that effect, and he disappeared into the smallest room in the house. He flushed the cistern and out came a boiling hot cloud of steam, said Max, "We were just amateurs you see, and we'd connected her up wrong. But that's the origin of the expression, A Fine Head of Steam."

Rosemary and I also assumed another office, gathering graveyard puffballs. The puffballs were discovered by Bill Larmour who swore they were edible and proved it by having them fried with his tinned bacon for breakfast each morning, and then eating them.

The puffballs grew high up the hillside in a graveyard made by the Moravian Missionaries. I used to leave the others and walk there on

my own sometimes, because though we were such a small group of people, we lived almost in each other's pockets and there was tranquility on the hill, away from the communal hut.

Standing up there in solitude, I was pervaded by a tremendous sense of space and of wonderment at the Eskimos' courage. Even the plants had to fight hard for survival. Away to the east rolled the Atlantic Ocean, studded with majestic icebergs. Westwards was the turbulent entrance to McLelan Strait and below me, the sea fingered its way into the harbour. At my feet pale yellow Arctic poppies grew and two snow buntings chirruped happily as they hopped from post to post on a paling fence surrounding the only two named graves in Burwell. They were for Ada Jessica Lyall and August Lyall, a brother and sister who died, within a short time of each other in 1920. Lyall was a name well known on the coast of Labrador and inevitably, Max Budgell had the story.

The young man, August Lyall had acted as guide for a Mountie going out on a journey late in the year when a fierce storm blew up, capsizing the boat. Both men reached shore and Lyall, who had fared the better of the two, elected to return overland through a blizzard to Burwell to get help for the policeman. He scraped a hole in the snow and built a wind shield for his companion who was suffering from exposure, and set off alone.

He almost reached Port Burwell when his strength ran out and he fell in the snow close to home. Next morning, his body was found frozen and the people followed his tracks, seeking the body of his companion. They found the policeman, frostbitten but alive, and August Lyall was buried on the hill and when the settlement was abandoned by the White men, the Lyall family went down the coast to Nain where some of them live to this day.

Nature seemed to take care of their graves, for certainly no-one was there to tend them. Inside the neat paling fence, the yellow Arctic poppies seemed to bloom larger than anywhere else on the hillside,

and the two snow buntings hopped and sang like two bright spirits on the cool air.

Chapter 17 ~ The Place of Many Lamps

Health was a topic of conversation at Burwell that July. Max swore if you kept your socks on all fishing season no harm could come to you. Even if your socks wore out, you ought to keep on the remnants and pull the new ones over them, he maintained, and he certainly looked a fit advert for his advice. The rest of us were in fine condition even though we wore clean socks, but two of the Eskimos were off colour.

One of them, Jimmy, came to me and indicated he wanted me to look at his back. High between his shoulder blades he had an ugly red swelling. The medicine chest was called for and it was discovered an enormous supply of penicillin and sulfa drugs had disappeared.

The lovable Henry Anatok was called in as he was patriarch of the tribe and officer commanding the medicine chest when the government officer went South in the winter.

Max either could not believe his ears, or he could not understand Henry's explanation, and as the conversation was conducted in both broken Eskimo and broken English, we could not understand either. That evening, Max raised Fort Chimo on the radio and asked George Koneak at the other end to find out from Henry, who was standing by us in the hut, exactly what had happened to the drugs. A three-way conversation took place between Max, George and Henry. The upshot of it was, Henry had maintained the tribe's health in a remarkable manner during the previous winter. Anyone who had so much as a headache had been given three hundred thousand units of penicillin.

And the Port Burwell Eskimos, crowded at the door to listen to the

radio, were all there, bright and smiling, proving its efficacy. Not a dose was left, so it was resolved to get some drugs from the first ship which called in, in case an emergency should arise. Meanwhile, Jimmy still needed treatment. I banked on the swelling being a giant boil, and by some fortuitous chance I recalled an old wives' tale that soap, sugar and saliva would draw out poison. Sitting in the hut with his parka on his knees, Jimmy watched as I prepared the mixture with my own spittle.

Even he looked wary of the remedy, but luck was on our side. It proved to be a boil and cleared up beautifully and I considered the treatment was my small contribution to the char fishermen's welfare, because Jimmy hauled nets with the rest of them when we reached Ikkudliayuk.

The other sick person was an Eskimo woman in the opposite cove. Her temperature fluctuated, she vomited and took to her bed for several days, and when we obtained drugs from an ice breaker which called in, she confounded us all by saying she felt better and got up.

On the last Saturday in July, I was up first and served coffee to the men, Paul, Bill and Max as they came in to the hut from the freezer where they slept. As I handed round the cups, a deputation of Eskimos headed by Henry came in.

"We will go fishing today," said Henry, and we immediately whizzed into action.

Rosemary and I were to accompany the boats to Ikkudliayuk with Max, while Paul and Bill continued their work at the freezer site. Bill put on a large pot and cooked an enormous stew for use on the trip. It was vitaminised with manglewurzles, a coarse large type of turnip, usually fed to cattle, but the only fresh vegetable in Port Burwell.

We deflated our air mattresses, packed films and cameras and a few clothes and found a comfy rock each before departure. The only

alternative on the longliner was to have the men all look forward while the women went astern, and that was not going to be good for navigation in the Straits of McLelan.

The Eskimos, looking like pirates, moved up and down the cliff with boxes on their shoulders. Cooking pots, puppies, bannocks and babies were piled on board. They loosened the guy ropes and their tents fluttered and fell to the ground and were stowed in the hold. "I won't take me gun, but where's me pipe and tobacco," said Max as he set about stowing a mountain of fishing gear, anchors and nets on deck.

Deck space was soon limited by the number of dogs and people, and Max moved about them like a referee in a football match played by three teams, dressed in a pair of fireman's overalls fastened with orange buttons, numbered "199 Guarde Feu Auxiliare." Before we slipped our moorings at noon, two small boats were lashed on deck and the Newfoundland dory was towed astern and we entered a thin fog towards the straits. By half past one in the afternoon, the fog had lifted and a clear blue sky covered us.

People, dogs, supplies all crammed onboard to support the Port Burwell char fishery, 1960

The battered whaleboat followed the longliner and Max called for us to "hang on tight" as we entered a seething cauldron of whirlpools. The passage through the mountains was like a canal, it was so narrow and straight, but the water was in constant turmoil. Webs of tenuous mist drifted down each valley, cleaving the desolate north shore and not a blade of plant life seemed to grow in the canyon. Snow lay in north facing furrows and the whole fifteen miles of water had a black, brooding air of the most evil aspect. The Eskimos spoke little as the longliner and whaleboat struggled ahead, but when we thrust into the Atlantic side of the strait, the kettles went on and tea mugs and slabs of bannock were handed round. The motion of the ship was entirely different in the broad swells of the Atlantic as the waves pressed the last of their energy against the rugged coast of Labrador. We hove-to until the whaleboat, with Henry Anatok at the helm, caught us up and took the lead down the coast into the tranquil waters of Ikkudliayuk Fjord.

The inlet wended fourteen miles deep between sheltering mountains, and flocks of eider ducks bustled away as we disturbed their quiet dominion. Seals bobbed in the water and the men aboard jerked to life, unslung their rifles, loaded them up and peppered away in an outburst of active joy.

Henry called, "You find many seal and trout," and from their bundles, one or two of the Eskimos hauled out ancient telescopes to scan the fjord with an awakening interest. Henry Anatok had known the fjord as a boy and he had promised them it would be good hunting country. He had lived there until the flu epidemic of 1919 and already they had seen enough game to justify his claim.

At the head of the fjord, a waterfall cascaded over low rocks. It was the outlet of a broad lake which was flooded by salt water at high tide. It was on the salt water side of the rocks where Max and Henry planned to spread the char nets to catch the fish as they returned to the lake after summer feeding in the sea. The movement of Arctic char can be predicted with a fair amount of precision, and

the fishermen had arrived at what was promised to be a fruitful time.

The land between the head of the fjord and the mountains to the north was a half-mile-wide strip of gentle green tundra, and as far as the eye could see, stone tent rings lay in ranks, right to the foot of the hills. Empty rings were the only traces left of Ikkudliayuk's Eskimos in the camp once known as The Place of Many Lamps, for not a soul lived there any more, only the lemmings and the ptarmigan and the foxes.

The two small boats were slung over the side of the longliner and the women and tents were ferried ashore. Josephee, who had piloted us up Ungava Bay, took the dory full of dogs and puppies, then he came back for Rosemary and me. It tipped ominously as our gear was dropped in and Max allayed our fears by saying: "A Newfoundland dory will never tip up. They're wonderful boats. They don't tip, they just sink straight under you."

With such reassurance, no sensible person would hesitate, so I hopped down and Josephee pulled for the shore. Already the people had pitched their tents inside some of the old stone rings and they came over to help raise our tent inside another empty ring near the beach.

The plateau began to fill with life again and looking round at the pathetic traces of a once busy camp, I could picture the tribes of people, the cycle of birth, life and death inside those small, enduring circles of stone – their cheerful courage of no avail under the onslaught of a foreign disease, their tenacity for survival obliterated like wheat before a scythe.

Henry Anatok's tent was pitched a little way from the rest of us so I walked over to visit him. When I asked why he was so far from the rest of us, Henry gave me the most exquisite smile. He pointed to the stones holding down the ropes of his patched tent and said gently: "This is my home, I was born here inside this tent ring."

Henry, aged sixty, had indeed led his people back home.

Chapter 18 ~ Henry's First Consignment

Down on the sands, Max and the fishermen were unravelling char nets, unkinking new ropes and sorting out the anchors which were entwined like a Chinese puzzle in a Christmas cracker.

Each net required an anchor to hold it off shore when it was set, and as the tide was low and right for laying nets, Max wasted no time in starting work. With Willie, the bridegroom, he boarded his untippable Newfoundland dory and while Max rowed, Willie paid out the net over the stern.

There was a considerable amount of skepticism among the Ungava Bay Eskimos, who had listened to the impractical notions, the loud orders and spurious advice of dozens of White men, who had lived briefly among them, usually during the summer and then left for' the Outside when the worst weather started. The idea of a co-operative, offered them by the government, stood as much chance of working as any other improbable scheme as far as they knew.

They listened to Max, politely, as Eskimos do, but when he left the shore with Willie, they picked up some of the ropes and started a skipping contest, faster and faster, like a crowd of schoolboys. Max, imperturbable, rowed on and Willie, with one eye on the men skipping and the other on the net he was unfolding, loosed the meshes over the stern. Suddenly, there was a shout from the shore.

“Ikaluk”

“Fish”

We all turned towards the water. The net had not been fully paid out, but between the shore and the dory stern, the water was threshing and spurting as fish fought to free themselves from the

nylon mesh. The men stopped skipping. Willie the bridegroom paid out the last few yards of net with a more purposeful air. Max stopped rowing and with dexterous aplomb, plopped the anchor into Ikkudliayuk fjord, swung the dory round with a few deft oar strokes and nodded to Willie to haul the net up and gather the fish as he headed triumphantly towards the shore.

The cry echoed round the hills again, and when the dory grated on the beach, the bottom was covered with wriggling, gleaming fish. The women had already lighted their stoves and lamps, using the driftwood we had carried to Ikkudliauk, and soon the smell of cooking fish permeated every tent, puffed out of each little chimney and wafted on the still, evening air.

The char were plentiful in Ikkudliayuk, Labrador

In our tent, Max demanded, and was given the right to be cook. He made a quick excursion to the longliner and returned with his Newfoundland salt pork, chopped it into small pieces with his hunting knife, fried it crisp and brown and served it poured over the steaks of pink Arctic char. There was seldom a better dinner, and

Henry Anatok and Max must have tasted a little of the flavour of success that night.

Although everyone seemed assured of enough to eat at Ikkudliayuk, the Eskimos wasted no opportunity, and before the sun had set, Josephee, the pilot, had killed a seal in the fjord and there was singing in the tents before we went to sleep in The Place of Many Lamps.

Early Sunday morning, Max set back for Port Burwell in the longliner. Before leaving, he arranged with Henry for the delivery of char to the freezer. The longliner was to be returned and used for the delivery of the fish. To keep the char fresh, Henry was to line the hold with snow, which still lay thickly in the north facing corries. The fishing was to go on and Max promised to send the longliner back from Burwell as soon as possible with Noah as skipper while he, Max, supervised the cleaning and freezing end of the business. The whaleboat was not deemed seaworthy enough to run the McLelan Straits regularly. Everyone came to the headland to watch our departure. It was difficult to navigate out of the small cove, where she was anchored, but after some heaving and hauling, her head was brought round and with full speed ahead, and hard to port, we bucked into the tide.

The Eskimos ran along the rocks to wave until we were out of sight, and I could see Jimmy, my patient, waving the packet of plaster I had given him for the last dressings on his back.

I prayed they would have good fishing and calm seas and turned seawards. The sunlight shimmered so strongly in the sea spray that I could feel my eyes brimming.

When we reached Port Burwell, the sound of a refrigerating engine hummed on the air. Paul Dubois had put an end to the Arctic silence of Port Burwell for the rest of the summer. Bill Larmour was nursing a mangleworzle stew for us when we went into the hut, and to celebrate I hunted round for ingredients to make a pudding of some

kind. At the back of a top shelf I found an old bannock studded with currants. No one knew how long it had been there, nor who had made it; close by was a veteran tin of English custard powder, just asking to be made into a trifle, so with a tin of fruit the Canadian Bannock of doubtful origin was converted into a splendid Olde English Trifle. Heartened by the fishery's prospects, we toasted the venture after dinner – the Port Burwell people had quickly endeared themselves to us, we had seen the perilous waters they had to sail, and though Rosemary and I were only observers of the co-operative's humble beginnings, we felt deeply involved with their struggle. We went to bed in a tornado of wind and a torrent of rain that night, and it boded ill for our immediate departure down Ungava Bay. Max was agreeable to send us down in the longliner with Paul Dubois, whose job was completed. Or so we thought.

We ate breakfast early the next morning, Monday, August 1st, in case we could get away to George River. There was a lull in the conversation and Paul leapt to his feet and dashed out of the hut.

The diesel engines had stopped.

In less than five minutes, Paul was completely black from head to foot and came back looking like a coal miner to tell us the exhaust lines had come off. In Max's words, the engine had "suffocated on its own soup."

Our journey down Ungava was postponed for at least twenty-four hours. Next day, a gale was blowing inside the harbour and Max went out to the longliner to put out a second anchor to hold her fast. Rosemary and I spent the afternoon on nearby Jackson Island, exploring the site of an old camp where there were ancient tent rings, old bones and shells. From the top of the island we could see magnificent icebergs, calved in Greenland, floating down the Labrador Current in the Atlantic. As we scrambled clown the hillside, Max saw us from the hut window and pulled over in his dory to collect us in time for stew dinner.

We were just about to eat when an Eskimo rushed in and called, "Henry."

We piled out of the narrow doorway and there, chugging into the cove was the tipsy whaleboat, lying low in the water, an old sealskin kayak lashed on deck, its hold full of Arctic char.

It was Henry's first consignment.

Dinner was forgotten, Eskimo girls came from their tents in the far cove, ready to clean the fish. Max and Bill carried out bowls for the operation, the tap spouted geysers of water and Willie the bridegroom and Noah staggered up the cliff with the first boxful of char. They had more than two hundred prime fish, weighing an average of five pounds each. By nine o'clock the fish had all been cleaned, flash frozen and stored in the refrigerator.

Paul Dubois, his eyes still ringed with soot, stood by and looked well pleased with his day's labour. We were all in high spirits after dinner and sat round in the hut after dinner while Max settled behind a cloud of tobacco smoke and told us of the electioneering practices of some Northern politicians he had known.

In Fort Chimo, which lies in Northern Quebec, one of the Roman Catholic missionaries allied himself to the Union Nationale Party and issued free paper hats carrying quaint slogans on behalf of the favoured French Canadian candidate. He also gave promises of dubious worth to the Eskimos – a beer parlour, and even dances with white people if they voted for the right party. Max did not say if such blandishments succeeded.

Down on Labrador, bribery came from the other quarter. A number of years previously, the prospective member for Labrador went down the coast, soliciting help and votes and he called on Max and his plumbing friend, Captain Carter.

The politician said they should put in a good word for him, say what

a good fellow he was and what a lot of fine things he would bring to the Labrador.

The incorrigible pair had told the politician they were going to be blunt. If he wanted the good word spread, they wanted a branch government store put up for the people at Nutak, and a lighthouse erected on Moore's Harbour Point – an anchorage very difficult of access for fishermen.

I did not find out if the lighthouse was ever put up, but the Labrador and Hudson Bay Pilot, Canadian Edition, records on page 178 that Nutak has a population of sixty-six people, a radio station – and a government store.

On Thursday, August 4, I noted in my diary, "I let down my air mattress again. I think we are definitely getting away today." It was hard to leave such excellent company, but we had no excuse to linger and Paul cost the co-operative fifty dollars a day whether he worked or not. The freezer had continued operating satisfactorily for twenty-four hours and more, so Paul was not obliged to stay and the weather was set fair at last.

The sick Eskimo woman, Emily, had become very ill, so she was helped on board, wearing her best white parka for the journey and bedded down in the hold among some caribou skins with a sick child. By half past seven in the morning, Bill Larmour, Paul, Rosemary and I with the two patients were bound for Port Chimo. The pilots were Josephee who knew the lower part of the bay, and Noah, Port Burwell's aimant, who knew the northern reaches.

The passage through the Hudson Strait section was without incident, except for a two-hour squall, but around five o'clock in the afternoon I went in to the wheelhouse to announce dinner was served – stew, cooked on a camp stove in the hold – and Noah pointed ahead.

The sky was dark and brooding, “We will have rough weather. It comes this way,” he said.

We ate quickly and had just finished when the storm abruptly hit us. Paul and I were in the fo’c’sle stowing all the loose articles and Rosemary was wiping the plates in the hold with the two patients. Bill Larmour was in the wheelhouse with the two pilots.

The ship began to pitch in a constant shuttle up and down the steep rooftops of the waves and the last few loose items of gear started to shift hard in the fo’c’sle. I tried to hold a balance and carried on stowing things as tightly as possible, slamming the cupboard doors tightly shut as the boat moved violently. Even the planking seemed to buck as the little boat swung about in the waves which seemed to converge from every quarter and fling themselves upon the boat, determined to crush it. She rolled like a wild thing and I clung to the edge of the cupboard seat with one hand and pressed the other flat on the wall. It was useless to try to wedge into a sitting position, so I stood with my feet astride and held to the timbers in the ceiling, made up my mind not to be seasick and fixed my eyes on the horizon through the porthole. The horizon kept disappearing from view and in its place, a wall of water rolled along. Not all the planks of the fo’c’sle door were in position, and as the water washed over the roof of the fo’c’sle, some of it streamed down the companion ladder and sluiced about our feet. The wind’s noise was endless.

Unexpectedly, there was a new, frightening motion in the longliner. She lost power. She was thrown broadside into the wave troughs. Her engine had failed.

Eskimos seldom travel far from the coast and we were in a perilous situation. As we rose up on a broad wave, I could see the rocky shore. Each time we wallowed into a valley of water we moved closer to the shoals.

Paul was wretchedly ill beside me in the fo’c’sle but he took hold of the end of a rope and lifted away the two planks fitted in the

doorway and lumbered across the deck towards the wheelhouse. He vomited as he staggered.

Through the buffeting wind I could hear the sound of Paul hammering at the machinery in the tiny engine room. Now and then hammering stopped and I could hear him retching as he was sick again. The boat still rolled violently, inexorably nearer the rocks. I wondered what we would have to do, when suddenly the engine whined into life. Noah gripped the helm and the boat answered. The bow turned into the wind and she plucked herself away from the white breakers behind her.

It was hours before the storm abated and though I was marooned in the fo'c'sle, for nobody cared to try to cross the deck, I felt I was in good company. Looking astern to the wheelhouse, I was able to see Noah's face blurred at the streaming window, peering into the dim light. Occasionally he would catch sight of my face and smile a roguish reassurance through the squalls of spray and rain, I had every confidence in the boat – provided the engine kept turning over – for it was built in Newfoundland, moreover there was an Eskimo at the helm, a man with an indisputable heritage of seamanship.

Late that night, the wind died away and fog shrouded the boat, hiding one end from the other. It was pitch dark when we anchored and we sorted out the wet sleeping bags and lay down until daylight. When day broke and the' mist lifted, I looked in amusement at the familiar coastline of George River, Despite the thick fog and the wind, Josephee and Noah had dropped anchor unerringly at Beacon Island.

Keith Crowe came out to meet us in his outboard motor canoe and we took our gear ashore where Rosemary and I pitched our pup tent in the sand, crawled in and fell sound asleep.

A few hours later, Phil Laviere came in with the Norseman plane, picked up the Eskimo patients for hospital, stowed us in with the

baggage and as the longliner turned back to Port Burwell, we took off for the hour's run to Fort Chimo.

Chapter 19 ~ Polar Bear Stew

Frobisher Bay was in a hubbub of activity in August. The annual Sealift was in full swing and every store house and larder was being replenished with its year's supply plus the hundreds of sundry commodities needed to keep a small town functioning in an entirely unproductive land. Food, building materials, clothes, boats, fuel and even motor cars were listed in the freight.

There were no docks, no berthing piers and no machinery for unloading HBC dry cargo, so every item was transported to shore during high tide. As the flat-bottomed barges grounded on the beach, scores of Eskimos, men, women and children grabbed sacks and cartons to carry them above high water mark to the warehouses of the Hudson's Bay Company. The words "dockers' strike" have not yet been translated into Eskimo language.

The children liked to carry sugar bags, the older ones carrying fifty-pound sacks and the younger carrying five-pound bags. Some of them would burst open a corner and tip a handful of contents into a rag, screw it into a ball and suck the sugar as other children suck a lollipop.

Taking a break from unloading the sugar

The Eskimos worked the tides both day and night in a happy confusion, drinking tea and eating hard tack biscuits for sustenance in the HBC warehouse while waiting for the next barge or the incoming tide. Only bad weather could stop the unloading, and inevitably the bad weather came. A constant south wind plucked summer's outgoing ice from Hudson Strait and blew a million ice floes up Frobisher Bay until the waters at its head were choked from shore to shore with a field of translucent green and turquoise floes that chilled the air and sealed off every passage between supply ships and shore.

Work was held up for a week.

At this time, Rosemary received some mail from the Outside, including some reels of colour film, exposed at Port Burwell. They had been sent out for processing. At first glance, the film was excellent, but as she held it to the light, she discovered her perfectly exposed shots were ruined by scratches which extended throughout every inch. Her unrepeatable story of the Port Burwell char industry was irrevocably disfigured. The camera was diagnosed

as having grit in the "gate." It was a great blow but she accepted it with an amazingly stoical, "It can't be helped," which was English for the Eskimo expression, "Iyungnamut."

It seemed to be the day for producing a delicacy which I had secreted, at the bottom of my kitbag more than two months before. It was a Camembert cheese, intended for a rainy day, and husbanded in a tin. The time was ripe. And so was the cheese.

We had it for lunch with a batch of freshly made oat cakes. It was our main and only course. We sniffed it, and we savoured it. I carefully cut it into exactly equal halves with all the relish of Ben Gunn, who dreamed of cheese for years on Stevenson's Treasure Island. I put the two halves on two plates, served them and slowly ate all my half. Rosemary sat in front of hers and cut the rind from the cheese and said she would eat only half that day and the remainder on Sunday. "Oh no you won't," I told her, thinking of a cheeseless morrow. The prospect of smelling Camembert and not having any was too unkind. The problem was soon resolved however, for after Rosemary gave me her cheese rinds, she decided it was not really such a big piece of cheese after all and she ate the lot.

On our next trip to Apex to see the unloading, we met Spyglassee, and to our delight we were invited on another hunting trip down the bay. We were no longer ignorant of the hazards of a life on the ocean wave, but we decided we could not refuse such an opportunity. So we said, "Yes," and went home to pack our gear once more. We solemnly wrote out letters to be opened in the event of our non-return and left them in our bedrooms, beyond the glance of casual callers during our absence. Chastened by our previous sea trip, we thought it would be of help to the authorities if they knew how to dispose of our equipment should they have to.

Two boats were to go on the seal and walrus hunt and it was to last three days. It seemed an excellent way to fill in the time while we waited for better flying weather to get into Cape Dorset – our next assignment. We made a rendezvous with Spyglassee and the

hunters, on the shore, in front of the HBC warehouse, Tuesday, August 11, and we accordingly presented ourselves for cooking duties, or anything else useful, at two o'clock on a day of powder blue clouds, mist and flat calm sea.

The bay was so thick with ice, that to us it seemed impossible to float a boat – there just was not enough water. We were detailed off in the Tookak with Mike, the leading hunter, while Spyglassee, Mosesee and another man were to take the open whaleboat. Flimsy canoes ferried us to our respective boats, daintily picking their separate ways through the mass of ice. Once on board the Tookak, it seemed a vain proposition to reach open water, the floes towered so high and thick.

A man was sent aloft to spy out a route, Mike started the engine and the boat moved forwards, slithering between floes, nosing into leads and forcing a narrow channel. Sometimes we were brought to a halt, stopped against an ice pan. Then Mike lodged the Tookak's bow against the obstacle started up the engine again and pressed it out of the way.

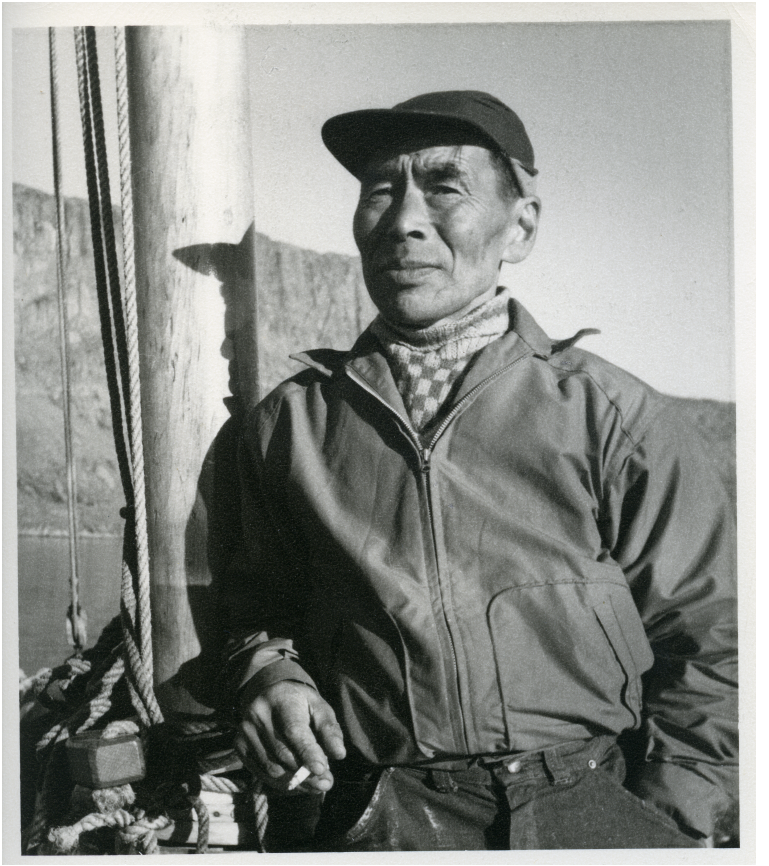
By half past five we found open water.

Mike spurred the boat to full speed ahead and we leaped into the crystal-clear water with a tremendous sense of freedom and space. Our spirits rose as we left behind us the ice and the sprawling ugliness of Frobisher with its guilty debris of Eskimo civilisation.

Out on the water once more, the incidentals of a sophisticated chromium-plated economy gave way to the fundamentals of simple living, and we settled down to a shipboard routine, which was going to depend for sustenance more and more on the hunter's skill the longer we stayed out. Life was untrammelled and gay in Eskimo society and I had no care about how long we stayed at sea.

Apart from ourselves and Mike on the Tookak, there were his eleven year old son Mosher; Pitsolak the helmsman and his son Sapinak;

Isaak, who was a poor shot but a merry one; and Eetuk, who was a crack shot and a renowned polar bear hunter from Hudson Bay.



Eetuk

Eetuk was also well known in Frobisher for another reason. Six months prior to our journey, he had been given up for dead after suffering a heart attack. His pulse rate had been a feeble twenty-eight, and his relatives were so sure he was dying that they had begun to mourn, sitting by his sleeping platform. Bob Green,

superintendent at the rehab centre, went to Eetuk's home, and Eetuk rallied. Resuscitation was begun and to everyone's astonishment, Eetuk recovered. He was a mild natured man and took up the age-old position of watchfulness with the other hunters in the bow of the boat. The whaleboat was ahead of us and hugged the shoreline more closely than Tookak, and the three men aboard it seemed to find life a very gay affair. We could hear them laughing and their journey was punctuated by stops for tea. We could see the kettle spouting steam and the enamel mugs being passed round when we picked them up in the sights of the binoculars.

There were more seal in the bay during August than there had been in July. Soon, after leaving the ice floes we startled a small herd of a dozen or so. They were rolling and playing in the water, singing with little moans and swooshing water through their whiskers, but as we bore down on them, they submerged, and neither boat successfully shot any.

Mike injured one, but by the time Tookak glided into the brilliant scarlet patch of water, only a thin stream of bubbles riffled the surface. The seal had sunk immediately.

There was no chagrin on the men's faces; only a long-drawn "eee" of disappointment, a self-conscious laugh from Pitsolak at the helm and the quiet direction from Mike to carry on down the bay.

Spyglassee's boat was at the anchorage rendezvous first that night. Neither boat had made a kill, and we clambered down into the Tookak's hold for a dinner of tinned pork, beans and vitamin biscuits sprinkled liberally with caribou hairs. Mike boiled a kettle cold water and tea leaves in a brew-up strong enough to tan rhinoceros hide. There were more people than tin mugs, so he insisted Rosemary and I drink first with the two children. The tea was inescapable. I switched off my sense of taste, swallowed hard and handed the empty mug back to Mike. He did not stop to wipe it on his sleeve, but poured himself a mugful and sat back content.

The occasional dish washing was a perfunctory matter of a splash in sea water and a wipe with a rag, if there was one, which seemed to distribute the omnipresent caribou hairs more effectively. It seemed that once caribou sleeping robes were put aboard ship, the hairs wafted into every crevice and cranny and no meal was complete without them.

The seven hunters, Mosher and Sapinak slept in the Tookak's hold that night while Rosemary and I had the fo'c'sle. As we turned in, Mike padded along the deck and cheerfully offered me the communal "honey bucket" with honest to goodness Eskimo hospitality.

"Who could ask for anything more?" I said to Rosemary.

A long way away, I could see a lonely tent, yellow with warn lamplight ashore. I washed my face in sea water by the light of the moon, dressed up in my warmest togs and retired to my sleeping bag, thoroughly aware I was supremely happy.

I awakened at six o'clock to the sound of someone using a rasp on metal overhead. It was Eetuk, filing the V-sight on his rifle and making attracting noises at a band of seals cavorting in the water nearby. A shot rang out, followed by the Eskimo equivalent of "Got him" and I wrestled from my sleeping bag, fumbled in my socks up the fo'c'sle ladder and peered out on deck.

Eetuk hunting seals

"Eetuk shooting seal in Frobisher Bay, Northwest Territories" © Library and Archives Canada. Reproduced with permission. Library and Archives Canada/Rosemary Gillíat Eaton fonds/Box 9 file 8

The sea was flat calm, herds of seal were flipping about, bathing and tumbling in the morning light, Mike was poised, with his harpoon, adjusting the tip on it and the Tookak was under way, gently moving forward towards a wounded seal, snuffling and staining the grey sea red. Mike knelt on one knee at the side of the boat, his right arm raised for the strike.

The boat slid by the seal, Mike made a mighty downward thrust, he drove the harpoon hard through the seals shoulder, detached

the harpoon shaft and hauled the shining silver body aboard. He hit it hard across the head and laid it so the wound dripped over the gunwhales into the sea. The Eskimos were particular about keeping their boat clean.

In a few seconds the seal was dead.

Mike probed for the harpoon head with his fingers, extracted it, washed it in sea water and prepared the weapon again for the next kill. Under the watchful eye of Pitsolak, the two boys and I took turns at the wheel during the day. The boys sat on the upturned honey bucket with as much sangfroid as the master of a Cunard liner sitting in the captain's wheelhouse chair and confided to me he wanted to be the captain of a big ship someday.

Once when a breeze sprang up as we passed some ice floes, Pitsolak threw his coat around my shoulders.

When the hunters closed in on the seals, Pitsolak always took over the helm. To get at close quarters with the seals, Mike and Eetuk climbed down into the canoe we had been towing astern and set off in pursuit; Eetuk at the tiller and Mike armed with a rifle and harpoon. To my amazement, as the canoe returned it began to circle the Tookak, Mike stood, braced against a seat and in his hand he carried a cine camera and he filmed our progress down the bay to the point known as Frobisher's Farthest.

By evening, there were half a dozen seal in the Tookak and Mike directed Pitsolak to steer into an inlet between spectacular, rose coloured mountains. We were to spend the night in the shelter of the cliffs. Our wake rolled behind us in the placid blue sea like the pleats of a great wide skirt. Water slapped the overhang of mushroom shaped ice floes and rattled and chattered into small tunnels through the ice, and a glorious sunset began to blush the sky.

We had a kettleful of tea and then Mike took Pitsolak on an evening

excursion, duck hunting, while Eetuk, Isaak and the two boys stayed on board with us.

We cruised deeper into the inlet of Leach Bay, the engine barely turning. All was serene, when Eetuk called out softly.

“Nanook.”

“Polar bear.”

Nanook was a cream furred young bear, out for an evening swim across Leach Bay, and he must have been a quarter of a mile away when Eetuk first saw him.

The boat immediately changed direction, Eetuk handed over the helm to Isaak and loaded his rifle, lining the bear in the telescopic sights. Nanook sensed the danger and tried to escape us by diving under water and changing direction, but he was caught in mid-channel and stood no chance of escape.

The boat began to circle him in decreasing spirals, and Nanook began gulping air and diving faster with the faith of an ostrich.

First his sooty black nose would break the water followed by two coal black eyes and small ears on his long head, he arched his great neck and enormous shoulders and plunged down revealing chubby hindquarters, a stubby tail and big back paws.

I watched fascinated and Rosemary, bestrung with cameras worked away taking colour shots and black, and white photographs as the bear dived and surfaced. The boat circled in and out of light and shade and the exposure differed constantly for her work as we altered direction. The bear was photographed from every angle. We called out, “Hello Nanook,” across the evening air and Eetuk lowered his rifle.

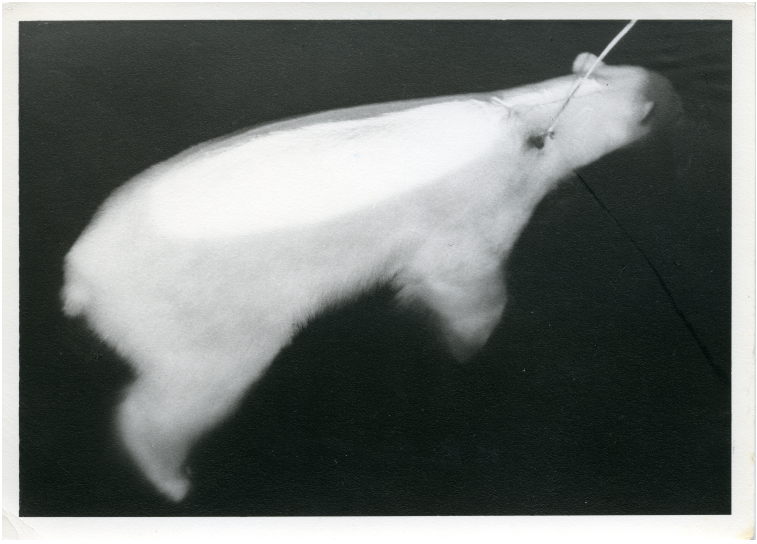
With incredible courtesy, Eetuk asked us through Mosher our young

interpreter, if we minded him killing Nanook. He wanted him for supper.

A polar bear is the greatest prize an Eskimo hunter can take, even when it is a sitting duck, so I told Mosher to tell Eetuk to carry on although I felt like a Pontius Pilate. Hunting was Eetuk's life and there is no room for sentiment in a hunting economy. Hating to see the cornered animal killed, I miserably turned away my head.

One shot rang out and thundered through the high red cliffs of Leach Bay. The bear stopped swimming.

Before the final echo had died, the Tookak was alongside Nanook and Eetuk had harpooned it through the shoulder. His aim had been unerring, his harpoon thrust was clean. The animal was too heavy to be hauled on board, so it was towed alongside the boat to a rocky shelf, where, later, all the hunters helped to skin the carcass and divide the meat.



Dead polar bear towed alongside boat

"A dead polar bear being towed alongside a boat" © Library and Archives Canada. Reproduced with permission. Library and Archives Canada/Rosemary Gilliat Eaton fonds/Box 9 file 9

Eetuk prescribed the way to skin Nanook and drew the first cut from lower jaw, across the underparts to the tail. The second incision was from one fore paw across the chest to the other paw, then the men began to strip the coarse fur coat. Skinned, Nanook looked like a pale old man as he lay sprawled on the wet rocks, his rich fat making the ground slippery to stand on.

That night, sitting on caribou skins in the hold of the Tookak, I tasted a most rare and welcome dish of polar bear, stew. By common assent, Mike was the cook. His recipe was rump of polar bear cut small, salt and pepper to taste and equal quantities of fresh water and sea water.

We sat around, sniffing its aroma as it bubbled on the campstove. By ten o'clock, Mike indicated dinner was ready and sentimentality evaporated as I reached for the salt and pepper. It was a truly communal meal out of a communal pot. We had no plates, no vegetable nor any other culinary accessory and we needed no hors-d'oeuvre for hunger is the sweetest sauce. I stabbed for a piece of meat and speared a morsel on the end of my fork.

It had barely reached my lips when Mike seized my wrist and shook the meat off my fork back into the pot.

I sat frozen, wondering what indiscretion I had committed.

He reached into the steaming pan with his knife and pulled out an enormous piece of bear steak, dotted with lumps of glistening fat, and with a generous courtesy, he impaled it on the end of my fork. Despite my hunger, I was a little wary, but I smiled at him and blinked at the food in front of me. It could never be put back in the pot and diffidently, I nibbled at its edges. I knew I had to eat it all and I wondered if I could.

The second mouthful tasted better than the first and pleasure increased with each bite, and soon I was eating with as much relish as Eetuk who had shot the bear.

Suddenly, the oil lantern used to illuminate the hold fell from its hook and rolled across the floor at my feet. Mike bent down to ensure no fire could start and disturb the meal, then unconcernedly he leaned back against the wall next to me and carried on eating. Too busy to relight the lamp.

The moon began to filter through wispy clouds, and shone pale light through the hatch, illuminating every face that gleamed with grease and gravy. White teeth flashed and bit on a knob of meat held in each left hand, a razor-sharp Eskimo knife slashed and separated each mouthful from the portion remaining in each hunter's hand. Lips smacked noisily, and with a few chews Nanook's meat disappeared down eleven hungry throats. Not even the juice was wasted – the gravy was poured into a mug and passed round. Nothing remained of the dinner but a greasy pot.

That night, Rosemary and I slept again in the unheated fo'c'sle and although it was quite cold outside and ice lay near us, I was thoroughly warm.

Mike seldom spoke in English, always preferring to use Eskimo, but the next morning as I climbed out on deck he came to me and said clearly: "You sleep good and warm?"

It was more a statement of fact than a question.

"Yes Mike. I was like toast."

And then he pointed out his lesson in clear English to make sure I understood: "Sleep well. Polar bear meat make you good and warm. Polar bear meat best to eat."

He was quite right, I had been as snug as if central heating had been in the Tookak's fo'c'sle. I thought of the hundreds of Eskimos

in Frobisher, subsisting on the pancake bread called bannock, and I imagined how they would have relished the meal I had eaten. Mike had given me a salutary demonstration of the need for good fresh meat in a cold climate.

He turned away to busy himself with the engine, and soon the two boats were heading back to the confluence of Leach Bay and Frobisher Bay, where we were to part company. Rosemary and I were expected back in Frobisher that night, so we were to return with Spyglassee in the whaleboat while Mike went onwards to Hudson Strait to hunt for walrus meat.

We climbed down into Spyglassee's boat, followed by the two children, Mosher and Sapinak, and Pitsolak. The seals, still unskinned and the polar bear meat, packed in plastic bags was lowered into the bottom of the whaleboat and we began the journey home. As we moved further away from the Tookak, Mike waved urgently and signaled us to return. He circled and moved alongside the Tookak. Mike pulled off his sealskin mittens and threw them down to Mosher, his son. He gave us another seemingly nonchalant goodbye and bent down to his diesel engine.

Mike was almost inscrutable, but not quite.

Chapter 20 ~ A Small Port in a Storm

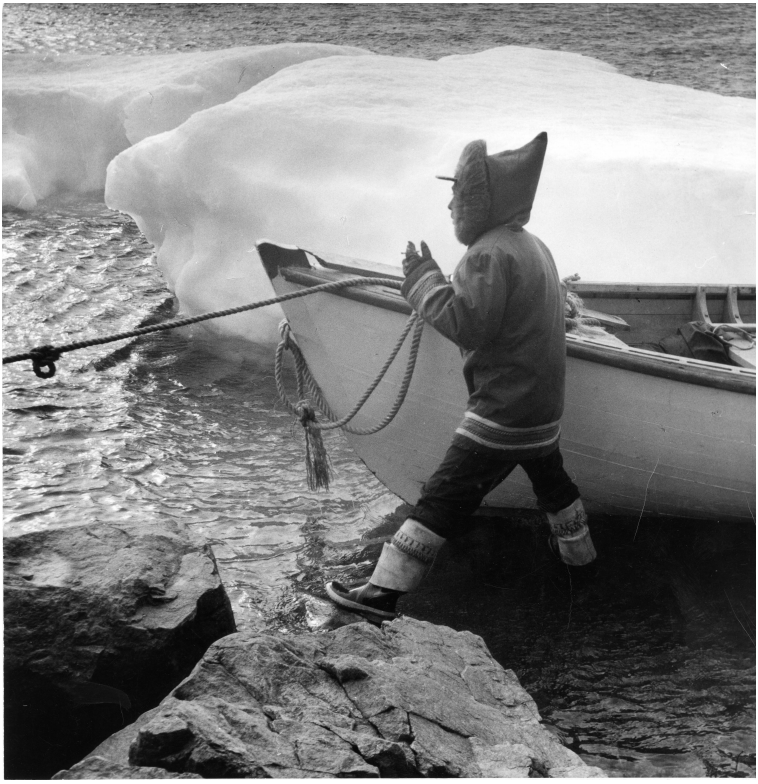
Getting into Spyglassee's whaleboat I had the sensation someone was going to shout, "All aboard the Skylark." It was an open craft without deck or shelter of any kind, but he made it snug for all that through sheer force of personality.

Its engine would have been used for scrap metal in many another place, but his presence contrived to give an air of serene security, and once on board, we soon learned the reason for all the laughter on the whaleboat.

The wind was blowing from the south and the tide was rising as we headed for Frobisher, so we had wind and water helping to scud us along on a navy blue sea. We were making fine headway when suddenly the engine faltered, stuttered and cracked with a report like a cannon shot. Mosesee, the engineer, clawed at his breast, groaned horribly and fell sprawling across the engine housing.

I was stunned at the rapid change in our situation and looked to see who had fired the shot, whereat Mosesee got to his feet with a chuckle that would have made him leading claqueur at a comedy theatre and energetically started to swing the flywheel of the engine. The motor sparked, hesitated and purred into life again.

I said to myself "It's one of those is it," and steeled myself for another journey of stops and starts.



Mosesee

"Mosesee standing next to a boat" © Library and Archives Canada. Reproduced with permission. Library and Archives Canada/Rosemary Gilliat Eaton fonds/Box 9 file 6

While the motor was turning we made rapid progress. When it stopped with the preliminary stutter and explosive crack, the wind's noise was noticeably stronger each time, but it never deterred Spyglassee and Mosesee from going through the pantomime of being shot to death by the engine.

When in motion, we overtook the heavy ice pans being blown up the bay in the same direction as ourselves. The eroding waves formed overhangs on them as the water slapped and chuckled beneath. I

was clad in many layers and cloaked in oilskins, but sitting in the stern of the boat, the following waves, the blowing spray and the rain soon soaked through to my skin.

I felt the first cold touch about my neck, sensed the cold trickle towards my waist, saw the puddles form in my lap and felt them soak through unexpected perforations in my yellow waterproof and seep round to the very bench I was sitting on. Globules of water collected on my Harris tweed socks, massed together and drained into my boots to the soles of my feet. If I kept still the sheet of water enveloping me remained tolerable. If I moved a fraction of an inch inside my clothing, the insulation was shattered and I had to ease myself back on the cold layers about me, warming them with my diminishing body heat.

Dulled and almost immobile, we sat while the hours passed. The two children, Mosher and Sapinak, lay at my feet in the bottom of the boat, curled on caribou skins with an oilskin over them. Mosher pulled his parka hood forward, wrapped his arms; about himself and fell asleep though the rain drummed down incessantly on his face. Almost half the child's life had been spent in a centrally heated sanatorium, he had slept in clean white sheets, been afforded the best medical attention and given a White man's "balanced" diet. Yet there he was, back in his historic environment, sweet natured, jolly as a sandboy, learning to be a sailor and a hunter, uncomplaining and soaked to the skin. He was undoubtedly the most courteous child of his age I ever knew and expressed words of kindness that seemed implicit in the actions of almost all the other Eskimos I travelled with.

By mid-day, the wind was much stronger and the waves sometimes broke against the stern. The engine had stopped countless times and Spyglassee roused us into animation by calling it was time for tea and nosed the whaleboat towards a group of islands strung across the bay.

The ice pans were more numerous on their southern shores and

forbidding cliffs looked ahead. Breakers crashed against them, reared high and smothered the clifftops in clouds of spray. It looked impossible to land, but Spyglassee was a peerless navigator and knew the channels well.

We rounded the northern spit of a high island, and turned to port across the wind. The boat rolled with a nasty gait, then Spyglassee indicated to Pitsolak at the helm to turn into the gale. As we neared a lee shore, the cliffs backing the tiny beach shielded us from the worst of the wind, but three giant ice floes lay aground in the entrance through the shoals, barring our way.

Spyglassee braced himself in the bow and gave a small signal with his left hand, Mosesee eased off the throttle and we wedged our way in against a rocky shelf.

Pitsolak was first ashore with the painter and secured us before he dashed over the rocks to collect fresh water from a stream gushing over the sand. Then, sheltered by a canvas tarpaulin, he lit the camp stove on the boat and we waited with watering mouths until the teakettle boiled. Then he put on a stew pot full of polar bear meat. It had a splendid piquancy and improved in aroma the longer we waited. The fat was soft and succulent and so rich you dared not eat too much. The meat was pale and tender and looked nourishing. We had no forks available and I felt myself going native as I seized a chunk in my fingers, bit a mouthful and made an accurate imputation between my lips and my clutching knuckles. I noted in my journal later in the day that "for this operation, the knife should be sharp." When lunch was over, Spyglassee said we were to stay the night on the island. For two hours we nursed the boat inch by inch up the rocky channel as the tide filled the gullies about us and gave enough depth to float the whaleboat round the grounded ice floes. Pitsolak and Spyglassee hauled the boat ashore while Mosesee watched. I learned that Mosesee also had heart trouble. He also had had lung resection.

I gathered driftwood from the lee shore, lit a fire under the

overhang of the cliff and laid out as many clothes as could be spared. Spyglassee carried the canvas tarpaulin up the beach and the three men built it into a tent, anchored it with rocks from the beach, then with supreme and never to be forgotten courtesy Spyglassee turned to me and said in English: “This is for you.”

The men, he indicated, were to sleep in the boat.

It was time for Rosemary to produce her surprise from the bottom of her kitbag. She hauled out a pup tent made of fine Egyptian cotton. It was little larger than a loaf when it was packed, but it slept two when it was rigged.

Spyglassee had never seen such adequate shelter produced from such a small parcel and did not understand at first that the small package was a “tupik”. He watched us connect the sections of the collapsible tent poles and shake out the tent. The three hunters and the two boys jostled round, suddenly realised what it was and seven pairs of hands pitched the little tent as the mounting wind billowed and cracked the cloth like a dog whip.

I do not know who was the more relieved that we had a tent. The Eskimos who did not have to sleep under a cold wet boat, or ourselves who knew they also were warm and fairly dry under canvas. Even without an anemometer, it was clear the gale had become a hurricane. I scrambled along the beach, bent double to make any headway. At the west side of the island I mounted a low bank overlooking Frobisher Bay and lay face down in the blueberry and Arctic willow. Heavy ice pans lumbered up the bay at a slower pace than the waves and tide. The water smacked into the ice obstructions, seemed to hesitate momentarily then flung itself upwards, was caught by the wind and tossed in a white foam on its way northwards. I was glad to be on dry land. Driftwood lay on the lee shore, so I dropped to the beach and scoured it for fuel as I returned to our camp at the base of the cliff. Although the Eskimos had pitched the tents in the most sheltered place on the island, the wind howled round us like banshees. Anticipating the

worst, we rolled the biggest stones we could find to anchor the guy ropes and tent poles. Then we buttressed the anchors. Even so, the wind whistled about us, seeking the merest shred of loose canvas, flapping it slacker until it whipped like gunfire. At five o'clock in the morning, the wind and noise decreased and we fell asleep, worn out, while the sea washed up the beach.

When we finally wakened, Spyglassee considered the sea conditions and the receding tide. We had slept through the time of high tide and the boat was lying only partly in the falling water, so we spent the day on the island.

Pitsolak served morning tea like an inveterate Englishman and we responded by drinking it and teaching his son, Sapinak how to tell the time. With pots of tea brewing and pans of polar bear stew simmering, the Eskimos' tent had a pleasant picnic air about it. They chattered and talked, finishing their sentences in an upward tone, smiling and laughing a lot with obvious good humour towards each other. The children interpreted for us with shy charm and nobody fretted about time except Mosher, who said: "I hope we get back by Sunday. Then I can go to Sunday school."

Spyglassee disappeared down the shore and went aboard the boat. When he returned he had a small cardboard attaché case in his hand. He laid it on the sand, opened it and pulled out a mirror and razor. He put the mirror on the lid and proceeded to shave the sparse whiskers on his chin with a pan of cold water, a piece of toilet soap and the safety razor.

When I left the Arctic I found the most frequent question asked me was: "Didn't you find Eskimos were terribly dirty?" And always came to my mind the memory of dear old Spyglassee offering us his tent on a hurricane swept island and shaving in icy water to keep up appearances as would any former special constable of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

Spyglassee's attache case contained other treasures. He had a bible

and a hymn book, both written in syllabics. Mosher and Sapinak seized on the books and spent the afternoon reading hymns and urging Rosemary and me to sing "Jesus loves me this I know" and "Now the Day is over." It was almost enough to convert an atheist to Christianity.

The rain and wind had stopped by Friday evening and the men went out seal hunting on the evening tide while Mosher wrestled with a razor sharp knife and the vertebrae of Nanook's lumbar region, preparatory to putting on the dinner pot.

I watched his smooth young face as he took up the bloody mass, poked around at the marrow, clenched it between his teeth and sucked it up. He swallowed it with such relish that I had to envy him his delicacy.

It was the only portion of the polar bear the Eskimos ate raw. The flesh is often infected with the parasite Trichina Spiralis, which results in the deadly disease trichinosis. The same type of worm is sometimes found encapsulated in the flesh of pigs, and unless the meat is thoroughly well cooked to kill the encysted worms, anyone eating infected pork can contract illness.

When the diseased meat of either pig or polar bear is eaten, the capsules enclosing the worms are digested, and the liberated worms burrow their way through the body, causing pain, fever, and if untreated, death can result. Consequently, experience has taught the Eskimos to cook bear meat no matter how keen their appetites or how long they have been hungry and though they will eat seal liver raw, they will not even give the liver of a polar bear to their dogs.

For as George Koneak said – "it's powerful stuff."

Chapter 21 ~ Diminishing Herds

The driftwood fire was only glowing embers and the day was almost spent when Spyglassee, Mosesee and Pitsolak returned in the whaleboat. They had found no seals, but they had seen a sealing ship in the bay and they recognised it for what it was, but I do not think they understood the extent of the sealing industry's operations each spring in the Gulf of St. Lawrence and on the coast of Newfoundland, nor did they seem to realise to what extent its activities affected themselves.

Newspapers are not published in Baffin Island, and at that time, the clearest radio programmes were broadcast from Russia, so information which was common currency a thousand miles or more away was not available to Eskimos, who were further handicapped by the barrier of language.

Later that Summer, I met a sailor on the beach at Cape Dorset. He said the sealing ship he had served in during spring had taken twenty thousand seals on the Front near Newfoundland. What he meant was that his whaling ship had taken twenty thousand pelts and left the seal carcasses to rot on the ice.

His sealing ship was one of a fleet of twenty or thirty, which annually hunt harp and hood seals off the East Coast of Canada as the winter ice recedes. It is the time of the year when the seals are at their most vulnerable. They climb on the ice to give birth to their pups, then they molt their coats and mate with each other.

The process takes about two months during which time, sealers from Canada, Norway, France, Russia and Denmark take an unlimited kill, for the sake of the seal skins and the subcutaneous fat. They "crop" the seals by the hundred thousand each year, taking

first the pup seals which are not able to swim during the first weeks of life, and when there are no more young available the adult seals are hunted across the ice with rifle fire.

The rapid decline in Canada's harp and hood seal population is accelerated by progressively more efficient hunting methods. Nowadays, even helicopters are used to spot the herds, and to transport the sealers across the ice. Consequently, the killing is left less to chance, and each year fewer harp and hood seals survive to make the journey northwards to the shores of Greenland, Baffin Island and Labrador, where Eskimo hunters wait and live in a civilization which utilises all parts of the seal, from pelt to offal, for food, clothing, heat and light. Scant information is given by operators of the sealing industry about the annual slaughter on the Canadian East Coast, and as one company director said, the public would not be interested in talk of a decline, nor would they understand the skinning methods used on the pup seals. Many of them are skinned alive each year.

In ten years, from 1950 to 1960, the seal population declined by more than fifty per cent, according to Arctic Unit scientists of the Canadian Fisheries Research Board, which annually conducts an aerial count of the herds. The survey of 1950 was not quite complete, so the decline may be even greater.

Paradoxically, the seals will be given a chance to survive only when there are so few left that the sealing industry will no longer find the killing of them a profitable commercial venture.

Conservation by limiting the kill or by having an effective closing date on the sealing industry's season will be possible only through voluntary international agreement, because the greatest kill takes place beyond Canada's territorial waters. Men like Spyglassee, or Pitsolak, or the Ungava Bay Eskimos who are markedly affected by any reduction in the game population are most unlikely to have any voice at the industry's conference tables. They are, after all, an insignificant minority which the government feeds on relief rations

or to whom the government or pays relief money when they are otherwise destitute.

I asked Spyglassee if he had heard of the sealers in other parts of Canada, and knew of the thousands of seals they killed. He sat quietly gazing into the dying fire, turning over the answer in his mind, and said: "I think that is many, many seals."

Spyglassee wanted to get away from the island early on Saturday morning, if the weather allowed it, so we let the fire die away as the sun set behind lilac and grey clouds. A cleft in the cloud bank to the north west filtered the rays of the dying day and three shafts of light shimmered beside each other, coral, yellow and silver across the ice strewn water.

Before the last light dimmed, Rosemary and I washed in a small lake behind the cliff, picked our way back over the banks and climbed into our tents for the night, ready to make a quick departure in the morning.

On Saturday morning, we had breakfast of two cups of tea and then we packed our camp into the boat. All traces of our brief colonization were removed except for the two stone tent rings and the ash of our fire. Ballooning in all our clothing, we moved down to the boat. Moving day was quickly over, we had so few possessions amongst us and our gear was put among the caribou skins and seal carcasses in the bottom of the whaleboat.

Spyglassee wore his magnificent fur lined hat and looked like a prince from Samarkand. With his best blue parka, trousers tucked in his sealskin boots and sealskin mittens on his hands he looked ready for any weather, and poised with a boat hook at the bow, he directed Pitsolak at the helm as we cleared the ice floes still in the narrow harbour entrance, and set course for Frobisher.

We stopped from time to time for brew-ups of tea. Pitsolak obtained fresh water by chopping ice from the nearest ice floe, which, despite

being frozen sea water, was always fresh enough to make tea. The salt and the water separate during the freezing processes and sea ice more than two years old is almost completely fresh.

Our journey was halted while Pitsolak cooked the tea, and we sat low in the boat, clasping our hands round the welcome, hot cups, thawing our fingers, burning our tongues as we gulped the liquid too hot to drink.

In knew I had a carton of rock-bottom iron rations in the bottom of my rucksack, I had carried it throughout our Ungava Bay journeys, and I felt that as we were headed home, on the last lap, it was safe to use them.

There was some butter in a tin and Rosemary had kept a half box of processed cheese for an emergency situation. We were certainly in no emergency, but we were hungry in an open boat and breathing a lot of ozonioc sea air which put a terrible appetite on us, so it seemed propitious to muster a breakfast of cheese and iron ration biscuits. There were seven of us in the boat, and to my delight, when I opened the carton, it contained exactly seven biscuits. The Eskimos must have been feeling hungry too, because they kept a close but surreptitious watch on us as I divided the cheese into seven fragments and Rosemary buttered the biscuits. When they were handed round, they gave us rewarding grins and a heartfelt, "Nakoame," which is Baffin Island Eskimo for "Thank you."

Some time later we had lunch. It was served on another deserted island and was a prime cut of seal meat stewed in sea water. Pitsolak was chef and he cut up one of the seals with a nasty, rusty knife. I was so hungry I could not have given two hoots about hygeine, but had the matter risen to mind it would have been quashed at once, for the knife was thoroughly sterilised in the stew as it cooked. We gathered round the pot, and each time Pitsolak served another lump he called out "Spyglassee." Then he promptly gave the piece to someone else, until we were all served and poor old Spyglassee received his last.

The two children crammed themselves, but Mosesee, who was more refined and always blew his nose on a piece of cotton waste from the bowels of the diesel engine housing, instead of snorting over the windward side, ate with calm assurance, knowing there was plenty in the pot when he came for a second helping.

Pitsolak, the perfect host, plunged his rusty looking knife in the pot and speared the liver, and pressed it upon me. I wanted to say, "Just a smidgeon if you please," but language difficulties prevented, so I took just a few bites and indicated someone else ought to have the rest as the Eskimos considered the liver of seal was a tremendous delicacy. The meal kept us warm for hours, and as we moved off, Spyglassee laid out the caribou skins and indicated we were to sit on them in the bottom of the boat as a wind was coming.

In a few minutes the rain began and it was quite like old times again, soaked to the skin. By mid-afternoon, the domes of the United States Air Force camp were distinguishable on the navy blue horizon and we entered the jumble of ice floes we had watched being blown up the bay during the hurricane. Some of the floebergs were about twenty feet high. Spyglassee stood astraddle in the bow, alternately pushing us off one obstacle or heaving on another with the boat hook, punting our way between floes and rocks.

He was a splendid, self reliant figure for all his small stature, and by raising an arm, he indicated quietly to Pitsolak which way he was to steer, or when Mosesee was to stop the engine abruptly. There were frequent occasions when we did not stop quickly enough and the boat ran on to a the ice with a shudder.

It was obvious our last lap was going to be the hardest.

Occasionally the boat would run up on a low pan, roll a little sideways and then fall back slowly into the water and the ice would swing up and down, ready swamp us. Each time it became evident we were still upright and safely afloat, and we had not holed the

planking in one, we would smile at each other as though we had won a victory.

Spyglassee was about sixty years old, but he leaped on and off the floes with the agility of a youth. He poled and heaved with all his might to clear our pathway. Standing on one floe he would press his body on the handle of the boat hook and push the floe lying alongside it out of the way, then as the boat slid by, he would swing back on board with sure footed nimbleness as we wormed down the lead he had made, always gaining headway towards the shore of the mainland. When at last we got through, Rosemary and I were put ashore and told to go on to Frobisher. Spyglassee indicated we were to tell the people at the rehabilitation centre that the boat was back, with seal and polar bear meat, and as soon as the tide was high enough, he would work it in to the cove at Apex.

We scrambled up the rocks, slithering on slimy weed, and once on dry tundra we set off at a jog trot, glad of action, into to Apex, in time to allay concern about our overdue arrival and to avert an air search. Later, I learned from the captain of the supply ship the Woldringham Hill that he had been in a harbour in Hudson Strait during the hurricane and to prevent his vessel being blown on shore, he had been obliged to keep the engines going at full steam into the wind while two anchors were out. When I learned the wind had blown at more than a hundred miles an hour, my respect and affection for dear old Spyglassee rose even higher.

Chapter 22 ~ Luxury Camp

Cape Dorset in the West of Baffin Island has an attraction for Northern travelers somewhat as Mecca has for Mohammedans. It is accessible for only six months out of every year if you travel by ship, or by plane, and its very remoteness makes it the more desirable.

Cape Dorset, 1960

In winter, it is best reached by dog sled, when snow and ice give a footing to man and dogs, or by ski-plane during the precious few days when precipitation and landing conditions are favourable. In its brief summer, ships can use its harbour when the waters are ice free, or seaplanes flying at a comparatively low height can go in when there is no danger of their wings becoming iced up in the cold mists which so often shroud the coast.

Our whole venture had been geared to spending as much of the

summer as possible in Cape Dorset, but it was not until late August that we were able to reach the isolated settlement of about three hundred Eskimos and a dozen white people.

On August 24, full of nervous excitement, we boarded a cargo-laden Canso seaplane for the flight to Dorset; where the Eskimo language is spoken the most richly, where sculpturing is of the finest green soapstone; where the hunting is most rewarding and where a progressive co-operative had been based on a new Eskimo art form – print making.

Two hours from Frobisher's airport, we landed on the waters of Cape Dorset harbour. The sun was shining brightly as we taxied over the waves to the mooring place. Peterheads and trap boats bobbed at anchor, canoes lay aslant on the beach and dozens of white tents on shore glistened in a sparkling light.

It seemed as though the whole settlement had turned out to greet the plane and we were ferried ashore in a light aluminum canoe where the first person to shake my hand was an earnest eyed, intense young English missionary.

Several women and children watch the seaplane land in Cape Dorset, 1960

The Eskimos crowded round in unrestrained curiosity, jostling and smiling eager to remove their mittens to shake welcoming hands. They looked a different race of people from the poorly fed Eskimos we had met so far. Their cheeks were ruddy their faces were tanned and square set, their sturdy limbs filled out their clothing. The women wore spotless white parkas embroidered with brightly coloured threads and they clinked as they walked with rows of old copper coins, jangling at the back of their fishtail parkas. The coins were sewn on to ward off some evil eye if a devil should chance to approach from the rear, and the coins dated to early Queen Victoria's reign when whalers visited the coast, long before missionaries arrived to route the Eskimo spirits and to tell them of the true devil, Satan.

Rosemary's friends, Alma and Jim Houston, were waiting to greet us (it was under their aegis we had been able to arrange our stay at Cape Dorset) and they told us our stores had already been delivered by the patrol ship, the C. D. Howe.

Listen to an interview with Alma Houston about her perspective on food preparation in the Arctic in 1960. From the Dalhousie University Archives MS-2-130, Box 10, Folder 1, Item 1.

An audio element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can listen to it online here: https://digitaleditions.library.dal.ca/arctic/?p=23

We planned to be self-supporting, but immediately on arrival our independence was postponed when we were given an irresistible invitation to join a group of North American journalists at the Arctic's only Eskimo luxury hunting camp at the island of Tellik. The luxury camp was operated by the recently formed West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative, with a lot of help from the Houstons.

We had met briefly with the journalists in Frobisher a few days previously and they were "doing the Eskimos" with something akin to the speed that North Americans employ when touring the galleries, museums, palaces and capitals of six major European countries in a comprehensive two-week tour.

They were a jovial, mixed bag of men, American and Canadian. Amongst them was a "man from Maclean's" that veteran of Fleet Street newspapers, MacKenzie Porter, a thoroughbred newshound, born in what he called The Dogpatch of The British Empire – Oswaldtwistle.

For the most part, they were bearded in accepted Arctic fashion and they were dressed like trappers of the wildwoods. They had brought in crates of fresh vegetables, fresh fruit, fresh shell eggs and some old Scotch Whisky, intending neither to contract scurvy nor to lack some solace if they did.

So our first week in West Baffin was spent with excellent company, cost-free at the high-priced summer camp, where Eskimos provided diverting expeditions for sportsmen who found African elephant hunts and Indian tiger shoots were beginning to pall.

The camp was one of the dividends of Art.

The West Baffin Co-operative had discovered Art paid, and under the guidance of Jim Houston, artist and government administrator, the Dorset people had developed an art centre where they made the then fashionable and popular Eskimo prints. The prints were sold

Outside and the annual income of about forty thousand dollars was an unaccustomed and fabulous wealth for them.

With some of the net profit, they had set up Tellik luxury camp. The tents were specially made by the womenfolk, and fashioned higher than their own types of tent to accommodate the taller White people. They had furnished them with camp cots, air mattresses, sleeping bags, washstands and bowls and even built two substantial lavatories on the banks of a pretty stream. They would never have made such refinements for themselves. In such a place, tourists could live comfortably in the Arctic, they could hunt seal or walrus, fish for sporting char and hope to bag a polar bear.

Even hot water was provided in enamel jugs and delivered to the tents each morning by an Eskimo boy with discreetly lowered eyes. A bill of fare had been devised to tickle the most jaded palate and for the venturesome gourmet there was moose meat, caribou steak, seal liver and muktuk (muktuk is the delectable pickled skin of a white whale) and for the indefatigable athlete, there was Eskimo dancing.

The campsite was on an old habitation, overlooking a sheltered bay. Its clean white tents were pitched on a broad valley that had been a beach uncounted centuries ago. Rugged granite hills flanked the smooth green turf, and the stream close by drained from a lake a mile up the valley and spilled among the boulders to the tidal shore. Beyond the sound of flowing water was complete quiet and the hills of ancient rock seemed to stretch far away into a distant eternity.

Into this quiet and lovely place, the newsmen erupted on a publicity deal. The Eskimos wanted to attract tourists, and the newsmen had been invited so they could spread information about the camp when they went home. Luckily for us, we arrived at an opportune moment to be added to the guest list, and so we were allotted a two-bed tent with the other journalists.

The co-operative was run by the men of Cape Dorset, but it was

Mukituk, a fairly emancipated Eskimo woman, who was the backbone of the camp. Mukituk concocted and cooked the meals. She had a rich streak of independence and had experienced three trial marriages, rejecting each of her suitors in turn. She was the only Eskimo career girl in Cape Dorset.

Alma Houston had taught her cookery, kitchen routine, and how to lay a table, so Mukituk was appointed chef extraordinaire in denim trousers, sealskin boots and an organza apron. She wore her black hair in braids or plaits and could produce a four-course meal after diligent perusal of any one of her three recipe books, all written and indexed in her own clear syllabics.

Her kitchen was well stocked with pots of herbs, an array of new kitchen utensils hung on four inch nails, and it was equipped with a propane gas stove and a refrigerator, obligingly loaned to the co-operative by Mrs. Houston, who cooked for her family on Primus stoves meanwhile.

The meals were served by a remarkably deferential Eskimo youth named Udjualuk, who, according to Jim Houston, was something of a phenomenon. By some strange quirk of character, he did not want to be a hunter like all the other Eskimo men, because he did not like killing animals – an unusual state of mind in a food gathering economy – and Udjualuk was temporarily making a living as a waiter. He also had other talents and played the piano accordion with the verve of a Romanian Gypsy at all the Eskimo dances.

The dining tent had once been a classroom and the home of the Houstons in the days when Alma Houston had taught school, and before the government provided them with a centrally heated, two-story house. It was a large, double walled tent with a board floor, warmed by an oil burning heater and lit by a hurricane lamp hanging from a meat hook on the ridge pole.

The furniture was simple, consisting of two trestle tables and folding camp chairs which were unfamiliar to Eskimos living a semi

nomadic existence and whose entire property could be packed on a sled when they went on the trail.

We spent a glorious week at Tellik. Inevitably we went seal hunting with the newsmen, and inevitably, Rosemary and I were committed to the open boat when they went hunting on a rainy day.

We went fishing for char like millionaire sportsmen and savoured our own catch. We tramped over the hills in the wake of pink cartridge cases while the men in the party chased ducks and drakes across the limitless tundra. We listened fascinated while MacKenzie Porter entertained us with his stories of life as a cub reporter in Fleet Street, when he invited the readers to "dare him" to anything they cared to dream of. And we sailed the waters of Tellik in the soft light of the August evenings. Returning home to our tents at the end of a memorable golden Autumn day, a dim figure moved on shore, going from tent to tent, lighting the lamps so the humble canvas dwellings looked like domes of glowing alabaster, warm and welcoming in the cool evening air. The islands around Cape Dorset were the sites of ancient Eskimo camps and the area had probably been continuously inhabited for thousands of years.

One of our excursions from Tellik was to the place of an old settlement, built when the Dorset culture people made houses of stone, roofed with whale bone and skins.

The abandoned houses were on a green turf saddle between two hills on the island of Mallik, and they appeared to have been a village at the edge of a lake. The lake had certainly been the sea shore and now lay a quarter of a mile from, and about forty feet above salt water.

Raised beaches are a feature of Arctic topography and are formed by the gradual uplift of the land since the recession of glaciers which lay ten thousand feet thick in the last great Ice Age. The ice mass depressed the land about eighteen hundred feet in the Hudson Bay area and uplift since deglaciation is probably about nine hundred

feet. The land is still rising out of the Eastern Arctic seas at the rate of three feet in a century.

The beaches at Mallik were scattered with a wealth of beautiful rocks, soapstone, steatite; jadeite; rose quartz; serpentine and rough textured metamorphic rock studded with crystals of garnet.

Some of the land was so rich in iron ore deposits that the hillsides were bright orange coloured, like the rusting plate of some scrapyard hulk. A deposit of lapis lazuli, valued by White men, furnished the Eskimo co-operative with another source of wealth, but its exact whereabouts were kept a closely guarded secret, known only to Jim Houston and the Eskimo stone polishers.

The old village remains on Mallik were perhaps two thousand years old. The foundations were rectangular shaped and lay in a carpet of rich green grass. The walls stood some three feet high, standing inside the houses, and all the entrance corridors pointed towards the lake edge, their lintel stones still intact.

In the water lay a profusion of old whalebone, skeletons, walrus skulls and debris. It was a wealth of litter for an archaeologist. As far as was known, no archaeologist had dug on the site, so when the newsmen paddled into the lake they extracted a dozen precious artifacts from their cold mud beds into the fresh light of the Twentieth Century. They found ivory harpoon heads, skin scrapers made of bone, part of a mouth bow drill, burins and a strip of bone about a foot long pierced at regular intervals with neat, round holes – fashioned perhaps, by the bow drill already found. Without waders, I pottered in the shallows where I found a burin and part of a sled runner, but they were of the merest importance when compared with the exquisite treasure one of the men found.

He was a quiet, withdrawn man, but he was so elated by his discovery he was compelled to show it to someone. He came to me when I was apart from the others and said: “If I show you something, will you swear never to tell anyone what it is?”

Such mysterious bait had to be swallowed.

I made my vow, whereupon he produced from his commodious pocket such a rare and lovely work of art that it quite took my breath away. It would have graced the central showcase in Canada's National Museum if it had fallen into the right hands.

Some time later, Jim Houston said he intended starting a museum in Cape Dorset, and most of us left our puny treasures behind, but the most priceless item, painstakingly fashioned and which could've revealed so much of the early Eskimo culture was taken from Cape Dorset when the newsmen boarded their plane and flew South.

The very smell of time and history was in the air of West Baffin Island. Perhaps it was the presence of the old beaches, recognizable as former strands, far beyond the highest spring tide, which gave one an awareness of the earth's inexorable change.

One morning after the newsmen had left, while Rosemary and I were still camping at Tellik, I rose early and went walking over the mountains as the sun streamed over the hills. I followed a ridge that led east.

The rocks were white and rough like scoured old seabeds, which perhaps they were, forced up by some primeval force. As I reached a darker, higher outcrop overlooking one of the raised beaches, I came upon the foundations of a strange dwelling made from long slabs of stone. It was a man-made shelter and seemed far older than anything we had seen at Mallik.

Stacked rock wall above Tellik Inlet

The slabs were laid end to end and measured fourteen feet by seven or so. It was thickly matted by moss and almost invisible from a short distance, so well was it camouflaged by nature. Close by was a semi-circle of piled stones and as I looked over the end of the ridge, I could see a flat gravel plateau. Directly below me was an upright marker of three different coloured rocks and stretching from it, an old V-shaped line of stones which formed an old fish trap built on the long-dried out watercourse.

Eskimos used to build fish traps across tidal estuaries to catch fish coming in with the tide. They were then trapped behind the low wall of stones when the tide receded and speared in the shallows with three-pronged fish spears which are still used today. I retraced my steps back to Tellik, Rosemary had cooked breakfast, so after a quick meal, girded about with cameras we returned to the small house. Under the thick moss covering the floor, I found fragments of bone, I took a grooved sliver, replaced the moss and left the rest for some archaeologist of the future.

It was our last day in Tellik, so we walked slowly back over the hills.

Our path lay through moss, soft as a sheepskin rug and far thicker, the slopes about us a tapestry of yellow, red and brown as Autumn breathed frostily over the tundra.

That afternoon, we waited on the shore for the high tide which would carry our boats back to Cape Dorset, and I was reflecting how life had become geared to the unhurried rhythm of tides when I heard a wild cry of honking geese.

They could be heard long before they came into view and I watched the hills of the northern skyline from where their cries came. They poured over the ridge, two hundred or more migrating snow geese and Canada geese, like a wave undulating across the heavens, changing formation and flowing across the valley of Tellik. They glinted in the sun like a silver chain shaken in the sky. A cloud began to pass its shadow over the land, and I shivered. Our Arctic summer was drawing towards its end.

The tide crept higher up the shore, and soon our loaded flotilla of trap boat, whale boat and two canoes were all afloat and the tents, beds, the kitchen and all its contents had been put aboard, and we set off for Cape Dorset.

The journey became quite protracted as the men sighted and chased a square flipper seal meandering in the channel. He was too wily to be caught and escaped the volleys of shot so we returned to a more sedate course and headed for the settlement.

A flock of eider ducks was swimming ahead in the blue water and before we came within shooting distance, Mukituk the cook, leaped to her feet, pointing and shouting with great excitement. Up came the rifles, rusting and unpolished, shells, whiz-banged and Oshowetuk, standing in the prow bagged three. He lifted them aboard and showed us he had shot each of them clean -through the neck. His family was sure of dinner that night. An hour after leaving Tellik, we reached Cape Dorset, the Eskimos unloaded the boat and helped us to carry our pile of gear to a new camp site.

Oshowetuk and an unidentified man hunting on the return trip from Tellik

We were given use of an Eskimo tent because it was much roomier than ours. Within minutes, Oshowetuk and a band of young men had hoisted the canvas over the ridge poles, raised the tent, anchored the guy ropes, battened down the skirt, and opened the low wooden door for us to enter.

We had a new home again.

During a lull while they waited for a washstand to be brought up from one of the boats, I walked over to the Hudson's Bay Company store to buy cigarettes and handed them over to the Eskimos as I met them coming away from the tent.

When I went inside, I found they had furnished our tent with two cots from the luxury camp, covered them with red blankets and laid our air mattresses on top.

They had even blown up the air mattresses.

That night, Rosemary and I bedded down by candle light, and sitting up in bed, wearing thick flannel pajamas, we broached a bottle of rye whisky and toasted the Eskimos whose kindness made life so worth living, and the bottlers, "The Governor and Company of Adventurers of England Trading into Hudson's Bay."

Chapter 23 ~ Artists and Spirits

We awoke on our first full day in Cape Dorset to the morning sun straining round a cloud bank. After an hour's battle it won through and picked out every blade, leaf and stone in all its Autumn brilliance. The date was August 31.

Our tent was pitched on a plateau of velvety tundra above the settlement, and about us, low willow, blueberry and birch leaves were scarlet and yellow, making the lime green caribou moss pale in comparison. A routine was soon devised. First person out of bed lit the camp stove, put on the kettle for morning tea and collected jugs of water from the nearby stream. We took discreet turns to scrub down at the washstand and started each day on a liberal bowlful of Red River Cereal laced with dried apricots, prunes or apple, followed by mugs of steaming coffee and a vitamin tablet.

During our first week living on the hill, the weather was fine and we ate breakfast out of doors sitting in the sun. A small brown lemming lived in a burrow under the rocks and if we sat very quietly in the golden air he would creep towards the crumbs we dropped, but at the least movement he would dart back for cover with the speed of a snapping elastic band.

Day after day, migrating snow geese passed overhead in the morning light. We heard their cries as they lifted from their last Arctic feeding ground nearby, rose into the air, weaving long echelons, pointing the way of their two-thousand-mile journey to the south. By the end of the first week in September the last stragglers had left, and suddenly, summer had gone.

Life's tempo was geared to the weather. When it was cold and wet, we could do little out of doors, but when the sun shone, we

travelled for miles over the hills, climbing the mountains which rose to a thousand feet in pinnacles of pink granite and white fluorspar. My mind and movements became noticeably slower the longer we stayed at Cape Dorset and one day, when I called on Alma Houston, I remarked that I was worried. I had never been in any place where my mind could become so completely blank.

Vast expanse of hills behind Cape Dorset

Alma Houston had a personality like a warm lamp in a cold room, she patted her heart and said, “Don’t worry. It all gets stored up in here and comes out later, when you want it.”

So I stopped worrying.

Jim Houston kindly loaned us an oil lamp instead of our candles to light the tent of an evening, and when we called on him in his crowded office hut to arrange the oil supply he was scratching his thatch of dark hair and poring over a thick pile of wage accounts. The accounts were for the Eskimos who had helped to unload cargoes earlier in the summer sealift. He was a victim of

Bureaucracy's Parkinson's law, inexorably sucked down into paper work at the expense of losing his close personal relationship with the Eskimo people, amongst whom he had lived for twelve years. It was the first year the Cape Dorset people had been paid in cash for their work instead of in credit chits, redeemable in goods at the Hudson's Bay Company trading post.

Jim Houston told me he had written to the government in the spring asking that cash be sent to the settlement so the men could he paid in dollar bills and coins instead of by chit. The money, five thousand dollars, came almost immediately and was closely followed by a warning from an official of the Hudson's Bay Company. He wrote that money in the community would cause gambling, drunkenness and prostitution.

Jim Houston laconically told me he wrote back to the man and asked "Are you sure?"

Banks moved into the Arctic as more people started to earn wages

The money began to circulate in Cape Dorset, passing from hand to hand and getting dirtier and dirtier. On some of the paper money I received in change after shopping at the trading post, the engraved

picture on the back of a bill had been enlivened by a local artist. He had penned a drawing of hunters, sleds and dog teams racing down the road of an alien countryside.

Despite the ominous forebodings of the HBC, Cape Dorset was still remarkably free of vice after four months' money handling. Jim Houston was the man who first recognised Eskimo sculpture as a commercial possibility, and it was he who had first organised the export and marketing of them, thus developing the profitable "igloo industry."

The carvings were originally made as talismans by hunters. The season of the year was reflected in the small charms. When the wild geese returned to the northern breeding grounds the men carved geese of soapstone. If they planned a polar bear hunt, they made a small replica of the animal, just as they did when setting off to hunt whale, seal or caribou.

When the carvings were first marketed Outside, it was difficult to encourage some Eskimos to show their work and offer it for sale. They were shy and their carvings had been made primarily to bring good luck in the hunt. By degrees, they became more confident, gradually making more and larger pieces until some of the work became quite commercialized, ceasing to be real native art and no longer of artistic merit.

In those early days when Jim Houston was helping the people to supplement their credit at the HBC with an income from carvings, he said that he often bought an inferior piece of sculpture from a young hunter who needed encouragement and practice, only to slip it under the sea ice at night. His subterfuge paid off, and there was now many a hunter and trapper supplementing his earnings by selling good carvings and whose earlier work still lay hidden at the bottom of Dorset harbor.

It was a trip to Japan which inspired the first Eskimo prints to be made at Cape Dorset. An artist in his own right, Jim Houston went

to the Far East to study print making. On his return, he began its development among the Eskimos. Like many Arctic projects it was slow getting started. Drawing paper, printing paper, inks, pencils and dyes had to be shipped in on the long sea route from the South, and printing techniques had to be learned by the Eskimos.

Contrary to the belief of many people who have not visited Cape Dorset, no attempt was made to influence the Eskimos' drawing. Those who wanted to try were given paper and pencil and allowed to take the new tools home with them to their tents. When some of the hunters and trappers left for the winter camps, they carried the sheets of paper and pencils on their sleds, far from Dorset and any possible guidance in their choice of subject matter.

Kiakshuk drawing with pencil

"An unidentified man drawing with a pencil" © Library and Archives Canada. Reproduced with permission. Library and Archives Canada/Rosemary Gilliat Eaton fonds/Box 9 file 1

In spring when they returned to Dorset, some had forgotten or not bothered to draw pictures, and others produced a surprising collection of pictures illustrating native life, camp scenes, hunting adventures, impressions of Talluliyuk the Sea Goddess, the Eskimo Neptune, and composite forms of animals with the hunters were completely familiar.

They understood the anatomy of animals clearly. No one better than they knew the way a walrus lay on the rocks, or how a seal raised its head out of the water. They knew an animal's vulnerable parts and positions, and the shape of bone, muscle and sinew, learned at first hand when they cut up a carcass. And no one understood the animals better than the Eskimos, for they had to think like a polar bear when they hunted a polar bear.

Drawings considered suitable for printing were traced on to either untanned sealskin or on to a smoothed slab of soapstone by either the artists or one of the three Eskimo men who had been trained by Jim Houston as print makers.

If sealskin was used, the outline was cut out to make a stencil and colour applied to the print paper with improvised, shaving-type brushes. If soapstone was used for a rubbed print, the picture was traced on the block, painted clearly with white paint, and carved in low relief. Colour was applied to the block and a paper laid on it and the colour transferred to the paper by rubbing first with the fingers, then with a tampon made from sealskin and finished off with a few strokes from the back of an old metal soup spoon. The number of prints made from each stone cut, or sealskin, was restricted to fifty-two, and the number was strictly adhered to, to preserve the exclusiveness of the prints.

Inferior, smudged prints were torn across and irrevocably destroyed and when the last of a series was made, the sealskin stencil was spoiled or the stone was defaced, filed smooth and used again until it wore too thin to be chiselled any more.

The series of fifty were exported to art distributors Outside. One was kept on file at Cape Dorset and one was assigned to Canada's National Museum.

The place from which the prints emanated was called "The Art Centre," but it was merely a small, heated wooden hut where the print makers worked at trestle tables when the weather was not good enough to tempt them seal hunting.

Cape Dorset print makers in 1960, Iyola Kingwatsiak, Lukta Qiatsuq and Eegyvudluk Pootoogook

"Three men making prints in Cape Dorset, Northwest Territories" © Library and Archives Canada. Reproduced with permission. Library and Archives Canada/Rosemary Gilliat Eaton fonds/Box 9 file 11

It was recognised by Jim Houston that seal hunting was the most important job of any Eskimo in Cape Dorset, and print making was secondary on such occasions.

Generally, people made their own dyes, using soot from seal oil lamps for black; water and rusty iron stone for yellow and orange and they made blue with lapis lazuli as it was made in England years ago, before aniline dyes were introduced in the mid-Nineteenth Century.

The first Eskimo woman to venture into printing was the gentle Kenojuak Ashevak. Her drawing was sure and her design was distinctively her own. She never used an eraser on her work. When she penciled in a line it was drawn, for all time. She was always at church on Sundays, but her Christianity was evidently imposed on a strong basic belief in the existence of supernatural spirits. Almost everything she drew portrayed some clearly imagined and strange other-world enchantment.

Kenojuak and her friend Sheouak Petaulassie were Dorset's most talented women artists and their work was exhibited in the United States, in Canada and in Europe. It was quickly bought up by art dealers and by collectors of Eskimo art in plush salons, far from the tents in which both young women lived as the wives of seal hunters in a semi-nomadic existence, bending to tide, tempest and seasons. Neither of them had been to school nor given lessons in drawing. Their work was entirely spontaneous and founded on their beliefs and observations of camp life. They had neither table nor drawing board to work on, but they improvised smooth surfaces from pieces of packing cases and drew on those.

Kenojuak lived in a light and airy tent, so tidy it seemed spacious. She was a good housewife and her few pans, kettles and seal meat pots gleamed with cleanliness, no easy feat when every drop of water had to be carried from lake or stream and heated over her small seal oil lamp.

She was seated on the sleeping platform when we called on her one September afternoon. Sunshine filtered through the tent roof, giving a lovely light as she worked, left handed at a drawing she named “Woman Who Lives in the Sun.”

Now and then she paused and tended the flame of her seal oil lamp with a short blackened stick, pressing down the cotton grass wick into the reservoir of oil if the flame leapt too high, or began to smoke.

Her adopted son, three-year-old Anaco, sat dimpled and smiling, well behaved while her own child, Adlareak, in a woolly sweater and little else, romped over the sleeping platform, showing a tendency to rosy cheeks, even on his bottom and a mongoloid spot at the base of his spine. Sometimes Kenojuak fed Adlareak and sometimes he reached inside her pullover and helped himself. He was fourteen months old. Speaking through an interpreter, she said she knew her prints were to be exhibited in New York, and she knew where New York was.

Kenojuak and her 3 year old son Anaco in Cape Dorset, 1960

She would like to have gone to the exhibition, but she expected she would be going with her husband, by dog sled to their camp instead. As we sat there, Rosemary took her photographs and Kenojuak's husband dashed into the tent, carrying two birds, a sea gull and an eider duck he had shot for their dinner.

He was Johnniebou Towkie, a much taller man than the other Eskimos, a broad six-footer with great shoulders, a kindly face and despite his unusually large physique, he moved over the rocks as swiftly as a lithe youngster. He carried an ivory tipped harpoon and a sealskin line, and stayed long enough to comment on his wife's drawings of the spirits she saw in everything,

"I think the devil whispers things into her ear," he said and left the tent.

We went over to visit Sheouak, a wild haired woman in her mid-thirties, small and dainty with an impish smile, a whimsical twinkle and she also had a penchant for drawing devils, spirits and the things of "Satanisee." Her tent was pitched on a rocky shelf and its door was so small and low that you had to stoop and buckle your knees to scramble in, nearly carrying the door frame with you where your hips wedged in the Eskimo-size entrance.

Sheouak, Cape Dorset, 1960

"An artist named Sheowak" © Library and Archives Canada. Reproduced with permission. Library and Archives Canada/ Rosemary Gilliat Eaton fonds/Box 9 file 1

Inside, the canvas was smoke-blackened with a long kippering from her seal oil lamp, and the tent poles were laced with string and sealskin line over which were thrown duffle socks, sealskin boots, fleece lined knickers, terry towels and mittens.

The only immaculate thing was a clean white folder of drawing

paper and cardboard on the sleeping platform. It lay in a welter of caribou sleeping robes, down-stuffed quilts, duffle parkas and clothing. The tent poles were worn smooth with generations of handling and where they had fractured in severe storms they were splinted because long poles of wood are not easily come by in a treeless country. The floor would have horrified a home economist. It was sprinkled with seal meat, blubber, more sealskin boots, cigarette butts, pots of soup, clean kettles, a coffee pot, enamel cups, ulus and tea pots. Poor Sheouak lived in a muddle.

But her delicate prints, drawn in the smoke darkened tent on the rocky beach were among the most coveted of the 1960 series.

The two women artists were good friends and frequently called at each other's camps. Of the two, Sheouak was the merrier and more boisterous personality. The gentle Kenojuak had been sent to a sanatorium shortly after her marriage, and when she returned five years later, Sheouak, who had six children, gave one of her sons to Kenojuak because Kenojuak had none of her own. (Eskimos love children and the gift of a son was the most generous welcome home present Sheouak could have given. The stigmas of illegitimacy and adoption, which wreck so many lives in a White man's civilisation do not exist in Eskimo society, where children may change hands but never lack love and affection.)

The boy, Anaco, was full of fun like Sheouak, the mother who had given his birth. Her constant impish humour was evidently his inheritance, and to me, it was quite unforgettable. When Sheouak died in a flu epidemic the winter after we left Cape Dorset, she left behind her a perfect epitaph to an Eskimo woman's wit. It was a colourful print named "The Pot Spirits," in which her pans, cups and, kettles were running on strange spindly legs across and out of the picture. Remembering Sheouak's kippered, untidy tent, it was easy to imagine she had drawn it in amused exasperation after very trying day amidst the comfortable disorder in which she lived.

The finest male artist was Niviaksiak, whose collected drawings

were being made into prints while we lived in Cape Dorset. His sudden death, the previous winter was shrouded in mystery and had already given rise to an Arctic legend which was related among the Eskimos and to me. It was said to be a true hunter's tale.

Niviaksiak was highly thought of among his people. He was a tireless and a successful hunter. He was a born leader and he was a fine sculptor. When a documentary film was made about the significance of carving in an Eskimo hunter's life, the handsome Niviaksiak and his family were chosen as the players in the film.

When filming began, he chose to carve Nanook the polar bear as subject matter. When the art centre opened and the print making began, he drew wonderful studies of polar bears and it was said he became so obsessed with them that he made carvings and drawings of them almost exclusively.

A stone carving of a polar bear by Niviaksiak

The winter before our arrival in Cape Dorset, Niviaksiak set off

by boat for his winter camp. Snow was already lying on the land. The weather was bad, and when the story of his sudden death was recounted later, it was suggested that bad weather may have had something to do with his death.

Two of the hunters in his party became lost in a storm. Niviaksiak set out to search for their canoe without stopping to sleep. He found the missing men on an island and took them aboard his boat. They did net stop to rest but carried on to the winter camp. They went ashore and almost at once came across the fresh tracks of a polar bear, and Niviaksiak led the immediate hunt. The trail was well defined and easy to follow, and when they came upon the polar bear, Niviaksiak, being the best hunter, was acceded the right to shoot first. He stopped, faced the bear, raised his rifle to his shoulder and put his finger to the trigger. Before he could squeeze the trigger, he fell down dead. And the hunters who were with him said the polar bear and its tracks immediately disappeared. It took Niviaksiak's spirit with it.

Niviaksiak was buried and the party returned with the bereaved family to Cape Dorset. The settlement was shocked by the news and in case there had been foul play an autopsy was ordered and Niviaksiak's body was recovered, preserved intact by the cold. An Englishman working at the nursing station said he could find no apparent cause of death. There was no evidence of disease nor of injury. He told me it might have been an obscure attack of trichinosis although there had been no sign that he could find.

The Eskimo people of Cape Dorset were sage about the matter and nodded their heads wisely. Had they not already said, Niviaksiak's spirit had gone with the polar bear.

I have a print of Niviaksiak's. It is, of course, of polar bears, hungry and searching the tundra for who knows what.

Chapter 24 ~ A Dog's Life

Religion played a large part in the lives of the people in Cape Dorset, although it was superimposed like a veneer on a solid, basic belief in spirits, which, the Eskimos assumed were in all things, inanimate or not, animal and human.

When a person died, it was customary to give his name to a newborn child. If there was no infant, the name was given to a dog, and the man's spirit was kept alive until a baby was born to carry on the name. Meanwhile, the dog was never beaten or chastised, it was given affection and care, good food and favouritism, a rare state of affairs in a society which treated its dogs in a seemingly neglectful fashion during the summer season when dogs were of more nuisance than use.

Travel by dog sled was impossible after the ice and snow had melted then most travelling was done by boat. With their work of sled hauling ended, the huskies entered the worst phase of their existence.

They were either chained to the ground, separate from each other, to prevent fighting, or they were taken out by canoe and marooned on small islands, where they fended for themselves, digging for small crustaceans at low tide. Those chained in camp were rarely fed and they were a miserable sight.

They lost their magnificent winter coats, they looked mangy and scraggy, which indeed they were, Huskies do not bark, they howl and squeal. The hungrier they became, the more ferocious they sounded at the approach of anything edible. The more they howled, the more they were beaten or stoned and the question of their mean tempers was an arguable point.

Most Northerners, Eskimo and non-Eskimo, claimed huskies were

naturally vicious and so treated them abominably. A few believed they became dangerous because of the ill treatment they received.

It was an unanswerable question, like deciding which came first, the hen or the egg.

In the early days we were at Cape Dorset, two regular callers at our tent were two black and white puppies – almost full grown. They were amiable creatures and announced their arrival at the low door by a musical throaty purring. They were as mild and as woolly as lambs in their thick young coats and soon were christened Mutt and Geoff.

I was finding it hard work to eat through the bully beef, and thought it seemed a little wasteful, after two successive meals out of one tin, I felt Mutt and Geoff were welcome to the remainder. While they were free to roam, they were playful, never snarled or snapped, and they followed us like pets. One day, they failed to arrive and I presumed they too had found bully beef eaten too often was too monotonous. It was not until a few days later that I discovered what had happened to them.

Cape Dorset settlement was spread over a wide area, covering three small valleys, each of which led to the beach. One morning, I was walking along the path to the most westerly valley and heard a hullabaloo of howling and screaming as I passed a stretch of bald, barren rocks. It was near to the place where a little girl had been killed by dogs earlier in the summer.

I moved towards two animals lying entangled in their tethering chains as their owner flung a handful of stones to quieten them. The dogs were Mutt and Geoff, which went almost hysterical with excitement and wagged their tails vigorously although they could scarcely move a leg, so trussed were they in the unfamiliar fetters. The two animals had grown up. Puppy days were over and they were secured, as required by law.

Fully grown dogs which were not chained were liable to be shot by the local dog officer, who might be a member of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, or the local government administrator. In Frobisher, the year previously, the police held a "dog shoot" and killed about two hundred huskies roaming the settlement. The officer in charge told me so.

To the Eskimos, who depended on their dogs for mobility in winter, it was tantamount to a city motorist having the engine of his car wrecked for a parking offence.

From the time Mutt and Geoff were chained up, they would have the dog's life of every husky in the Arctic – work in winter and semi-starvation in summer. Rosemary and I travelled the path near the dogs frequently, so they fared pretty well for scraps of tinned beef until we left Cape Dorset.

The Eskimo population of three hundred and twenty was mostly young. There were many children, many young married couples and only four men who could be described as old. They were Parr, a lame man of sixty-seven; Tudlik, aged seventy, who was blind; Kingwatsiak, nearly ninety, partly blind and whose legs were crippled, and Kiakshuk, hale, hearty and a talented, prolific artist.

Kiakshuk, Tudlik and Kingwatsiak were neighbours in "chapel valley" and our first introduction to them was through Alma Houston. Tudlik's tent was by the shore, where not even moss grew on the rocks. He had been an excellent carver in the days when he could see, and although he could carve only by feel, the Houstons still bought his work and if they gave away a carving to a visitor, it was almost certainly Tudlik's work. He made only owls. They were fashioned with a pen knife and smoothed with a nail file. Compared with his former work, they were crude, but infinitely more valuable to any collector of soapstone carvings, and particularly more appreciated by those people who met him.

Tudlik was sitting outside his tent, carving an owl when we called on

him. His soft skinned hands and his frayed jacket were white with fine powder from the soapstone he was filing and Rosemary asked him to look up to have his photograph taken. He turned his sightless gaze upwards, feeling for the warmth of the sunshine to ensure he was well placed and she would get a good picture.

Blindness had only recently come upon him, but advance of the disease had been rapid. Before he had lost his sight, Tudlik had made several drawings for the new Eskimo art form of printing. Among his drawings was a strange geometric design, the only one produced by the people, and it was understood by no-one although Tudlik had named it "Division of Meat". The picture was said to bear no resemblance to the cutting up of seal, whale, musk-ox or polar bear.

It was among the edition of prints made in Cape Dorset in 1959, and the stone block from which it was made is now destroyed. A bizarre and possible explanation of the strange composition was given to me by a member of the Department of Northern Affairs, who knew of Tudlik and his history.

"Years ago, Tudlik married a woman who was stricken with a crippling disease. It was probably poliomyelitis for it left her limbs useless. For a long time, she clung to life, lying inside her tent, quite helpless and unable to move. One day, when Tudlik returned from hunting, he found a few terrible remains of the woman who had been his wife. A pack of roving dogs had entered the tent during his absence and they had attacked and devoured her. So who knows what was in Tudlik's mind when he drew that curious picture. It certainly is not the way you divide up a seal."

From Tudlik's place, the path led over a low hill, past a burial ground on top of the rise and down into "chapel valley" proper, where about twenty families lived.

In the first group of tents on the left-hand side of the track was Kingwatsiak's tent. He was said to have been born in 1877, before records were officially made or any census taken in the North.

He was certainly the oldest Eskimo in the Eastern Arctic, for Kingwatsiak had been an adult in the Nineteenth Century when whaling ships from Britain hunted the schools of whale for sake of their oil to fill the lamps of Europe and for the tough whale skin to manufacture into long leather bootlaces.

Mr. Wattie, son of the owner of a whaling ship had befriended Kingwatsiak and taken him on a six-month holiday to Scotland where the young Eskimo must have been a great curiosity, just as he said he found life in Britain a strange and curious thing.

It was about the time of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee and Kingwatsiak remembered being taken to different places by train and by "big dogs." The big dogs, of course, were horses, drawing the old-fashioned tramcars and carriages in those days.

He said they were called British Islands, but he went for days without coming to the sea. He had never seen so many people and when the streets became crowded with shoppers at Christmas time, he was kept at the home of the Wattie family for five days, in case he became lost in the hustle and bustle.

When Alma Houston finished translating Kingwatsiak's tales for us, he learned his photograph was to be taken and asked us to wait for a while. He pulled an old tin box from beneath his caribou skin sleeping robe and withdrew from it a small packet containing a bright Coronation Medal, presented to him in 1952, the year Queen Elizabeth was crowned.

He pinned it proudly to the left breast of his faded parka and sat bolt upright, his long white hair reaching to his shoulders, his useless legs stretched out in front of him while Rosemary went to work with her cameras.

During his visit to Scotland, Kingwatsiak had been named Andrew by the Wattie family, so when the Queen's third child was born and

christened Andrew also, he took an even deeper interest in the royal family. (He had a picture of the Queen pinned to his tent pole.)

Kingwatsiak was not a man to let an opportunity go by, so he spoke to Alma Houston in Eskimo while his photo was being taken and he asked that she write down a letter, in English, and send it to the Queen.

She borrowed one of my pencils, and Kingwatsiak dictated his message. He wanted the Queen to know she had named her son after himself, Andrew, Kingwatsiak, and he wanted the Queen to send a reply to him quickly because he was an old man, and Arctic winters felt colder the older you became and he might not live long enough to receive her reply unless she wrote right away. The letter was duly translated, written down and posted to London, and to Kingwatsiak's great delight, before the winter ended, he received a gracious reply from Buckingham Palace: "The Queen commands me…"

That was the first visit of many I made to old Kingwatsiak's tent. Later, I called on him with his most regular visitor, the Missionary, who shortly after my arrival, prevailed upon me to become organist at Cape Dorset's unique church.

Chapter 25 ~ Getting Religion

The missionary, Mike Gardner was a kind man with prematurely thin, fair hair. He arrived in Cape Dorset the same summer as ourselves although he had already spent five years in the Arctic at Lake Harbour, where there was a fine church, but few parishioners any more. Lake Harbour had been almost deserted by the Eskimos, who had migrated to Frobisher, and the former, busy camp with its snug harbour and good hunting had declined, leaving the trading post with few customers, the police with an empty dominion and the church with only a handful of parishioners.

The missionary was transferred along the coast to Cape Dorset, where the Eskimos were of the same Anglican faith as the Lake Harbour people, and where for ten years, they had had their own church, but no minister.

I asked Mr. Gardner if he had not found it convenient to have a ready-made congregation of Anglicans. His reply warmed my attitude towards him when he said, "The Bishop might not like to hear me say this, but it really does not matter to me whether the Eskimos are Anglican or not. As long as they are Christian." The church building in Chapel Valley had an unusual history – it was paid for mostly with white fox skins and it had been built by the Eskimos themselves under the leadership of a man named Pootoogook, who once made a bargain with God.

The story was told to me by Mr. Gardner. Pootoogook was a hunter and a trapper. A generation or more ago, he met a missionary of the Anglican faith and learned the story of a God who cared about him.

It made a deep impression.

One day, Pootoogook was hunting seals in Foxe Basin and he was boat- wrecked in icy seas and flung into the water. There was little

chance of him surviving long enough for help to reach him, but Pootoogook clung to the upturned boat and made a bargain with God. If God kept him alive, he would do something for the sake of the church. Pootoogook was rescued and he kept to his vow.

He resolved to build a church. It was an almost impossible thing to do for he lived by trapping and hunting. Anyhow, Pootoogook went to the Hudson's Bay Company trader at Cape Dorset and asked the trader to import the materials. He would pay for them with half of the credit he earned from trapping white fox. It took many years to pay for it, because not only did they have to import all the wood and nails, but the carpenters' tools as well.

In time, the church was built in the valley furthest from the trading post at Cape Dorset. It was above a stream by which many of the Eskimos pitched their tents in summer. The first roof they put on was blown away in the first strong wind, because they were unused to building houses of wood. They then received help from the Anglican church outside and carpenters were sent in to secure the roof more firmly.

The church that Pootoogook built in Cape Dorset

When the work was done the Eskimos found they had a place in which to worship, but they had no minister and no organ for the hymn singing. During a large part of this episode, two Roman Catholic priests established themselves in Cape Dorset with a house, a church and an organ which fascinated the people. The two Roman Catholic missionaries stayed for twenty years amidst a population which remained Anglican, despite the priests evangelising and despite the lack of any opposition in the shape of an Anglican priest. From Monday to Saturday, the Eskimos were friendly and visited the mission. They were good neighbours, shared cups of tea, enjoyed singing round the organ, but when Sundays came, the Eskimos went to their own church and an Eskimo catechist conducted their own services. Finally, the two priests were withdrawn and their church and house were closed. They left in the same year I went to Cape Dorset.

The Hudson's Bay Company trader was a young man with an eye for business, and when the priests were preparing to go, he bought the organ from them for a hundred and fifty dollars. Within months, the Lake Harbour Anglican Mission was closed down too, and the missionary, Mike Gardner was transferred along the coast to Cape Dorset.

At last the Eskimos had their own preacher to go with their own church, but Pootoogook did not live to know it. He died, a victim of tuberculosis. Pootoogook had three sons at Cape Dorset, and the youngest and brightest was Kananginak, president of the new West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative. Kananginak carried on his father's tradition for when the church got an organ history repeated itself.

Shortly after Mr. Gardner's arrival when ice was still lingering in the harbour, Kananginak and three other hunters set off in a canoe when a white whale was spotted in the harbor. A sudden squall hit

the boat when they were out of sight of the people on shore and the canoe upturned, tossing the four men into the bitterly cold water.

Two men were able to reach the boat and hold on, but Kananginak and Pinguartok were unable to reach the boat because they could not swim and they lost consciousness and began to drown. Rescue seemed impossible, but by a strange and lucky twist of fate, a man was returning to Cape Dorset in an empty canoe. He had been to maroon his dogs for the summer on an island. He saw the men in the water and raced towards them, picked them up and took them to shore. Artificial respiration was applied to Kananginak and to Pinguartok. A crowd gathered on shore, including the newly arrived missionary. As Kananginak recovered consciousness, the first words he heard were the heartfelt prayers of the missionary who said as he saw the almost drowned Eskimo open his eyes "It's a miracle. A real miracle."

And Kananginak, son of Pootoogook, took the words to heart.

He also, resolved to do something for the church, and so did Pinguartok. Convinced of divine and miraculous intervention, they too, went to the HBC trader. They had the organ in mind.

Doubtless the organ had been in the trader's mind for some time. They agreed on a price and the two Eskimo hunters promised to pay one hundred and sixty-five dollars when they had saved enough. So at last, Cape Dorset had its church, its minister and its own organ.

The only thing they did not have was an organist.

And that was why Mr. Gardner, a diffident fellow under normal circumstances, called at our tent late one Saturday night in September. It had started off as a fine, calm day, and every boat and canoe had been taken to sea as the men went seal hunting. There was scarcely an able bodied man left in camp.

The trading post was closed down as the trader had gone. Jim Houston, the assistant schoolmaster, the three print makers and

even the baker had gone too, because basically, the Cape Dorset people relied on seal hunting for their lives. When the weather was good, it was always the same. Everything else stopped because seal hunting took precedence.

The weather broke late in the afternoon, and with so little diversion and our work for the day ended, Rosemary and I decided on an early night. The sky was pitch black and streaming with rain when I went to collect water from the swollen stream which had broadened and deepened with the downpour. I picked my way with a hand lamp across the gully, up the low hill to the plateau where our tent glowed with a mellow light. Nothing stirred out on the hillside, and I let myself in through the low wooden door.

A few moments later, there was a rustling outside. Something was fumbling there in the darkness.

Clutching the handle of a pan of hot cocoa, I undid the cord which served as a latch, I did not know what to expect, and always lurking foolishly at the back of my mind was the notion of some polar bear coming to the tent where the bully beef was kept.

Outside stooped a glistening figure in black oilskins.

It was the missionary.

He immediately apologised for his late arrival and explained only urgency brought him out so late on such a night. He had been unable to come earlier as he had only just ended the funeral service of an eight months old baby. (The child had died two days previously, and was said to have been the product of an incestuous union.) The men had been hunting all day and the grave had been dug on their return, after which, the service had been held by lantern light in the storm.

The missionary was wringing wet, and he said that while the grave was being dug by one party of hunters, another group had ferried the harmonium from the trader's place to Chapel Valley. The men

had carried it up the shore in the gusts of rain, and it now stood in the church of Pootoogook. And then Mr. Gardner asked me the question which had brought him out so late on such a night.

“Will you please play the organ for the Eskimo service tomorrow?”

I told him I might have played the piano but I had never played an organ in my life.

“It doesn’t matter. The Eskimos won’t mind how many mistakes you make, if only you will play it for them,” he said.

So we agreed I would try to play the organ.

The Reverend Michael then deftly flipped a hymnary from his pocket and a prepared list of five hymns and suggested I practice in the morning, and he gave me the church door key. One of the hymns had eight verses. I boggled a little, but I was assured the Eskimos sang very slowly and there would be plenty of time for me to find the notes and pick up the tune.

By eight o’clock next morning I was wide awake and uncurled from my sleeping bag. Overhead I could see a peculiar mottling on the tent roof. I pulled on my sealskin boots, because by now I had gone fairly native and found Eskimo Kamiks were incomparable in cold, wet weather. Shivering I looked through the tiny window in the door. Outside, the world was white. The date was September 11. The mottling on the roof was the first sprinkling of winter snows.

I hurried over breakfast and dashed off over the thin cover of snows to a do-it-yourself lesson in organ playing and to practice the hymns. After all the Eskimos had gone through to get their organ, I felt I could not let them down. It was a massive instrument which required a sprint cyclist’s muscles to play it, I pedaled furiously and produced very little sound. I presumed the climate had finally nobbled the organ. My knees flashed up and down until I became quite breathless, yet still no recognisable music came from it.

It was apparent the Eskimos had bought a lemon.

The loudest noise happened when, tired out, I flopped and my knees sagged on to two movable rails on either side of the knee hole, and soon, I realised you had to function in several directions at once if a tune was to be wrung from the old harmonium. You had to pedal, press the knees outwards, tug the organ stops and vamp the keyboard. All at the one time.

I decided to decline the post of organist.

I was uttering a few harsh words to myself when I became aware of soft voices trying to keep in time with the hymn I was attempting to play. I looked about me and down in the church were dozens of women and children, watching and smiling, shyly giving me encouragement. They had seen me walk over the hill and silently come into the church to hear their own organ played.

Whether I liked it or not, I had got the job.

At about noon as I wrestled with "Onward Christian Soldiers," one of the children called in English, "An aeroplane," and we all dashed out of church to see it.

It sounded like divine deliverance for me from the sky, and I followed the others down to the beach in time to witness the arrival of the Judicial Party for the North West Territories. There were the judge, a Queen's counsel, a sheriff, a court recorder and the pilot, and they all disappeared into Jim Houston's house. Alma Houston had left a few days previously for the Outside, so Rosemary and I were asked to help entertain the guests.

The housekeeper, an Eskimo widow named Ikaluk, beamed with relief when we went into the kitchen and helped her to prepare lunch for the visitors.

The barrister was an engaging man with an Edwardian white wing collar and black tie contrasting oddly with his fur trimmed parka.

The sheriff was cheerful, tall with a somber navy blue suit, spectacles and sleek grey hair. He took a sandwich from the plate I offered him, and said with a confidential raise of his eyebrows, “I’m the hangman too.”

I gaped at him, and he said reassuringly, “Oh, it’s all very painless you know.”

The judge was a resonant voiced man of about seventy, and although he had a physical disability and limped, he was Canada’s most itinerant judge travelling the North West Territories on an arduous circuit administering justice so it was seen to be done. His sentences were tolerantly adapted to the Eskimo way of thinking and to Eskimo conditions, in which survival of the race has dictated social its mores.

When lunch ended, I repaired to church to practice. Children came close to watch and listen. Feet rustled softly to and fro in sealskin hoots, and by three o’clock the women were crowded in their pews. A quarter of an hour later, all the men were present, and we launched the new harmonium and my new job with a very martial version of “Onward Christian Soldiers.”

Once I mastered the organ’s idiosyncrasies, I enjoyed every moment of my vocation – even the long winded sermons delivered in the Eskimo language which gave me time to watch the rapt absorption of the congregation.

They loved to sing, so my time in Cape Dorset was full of music. We had choir practice on Tuesday night; carol practice on Thursday night, even though Christmas was a long way off; I rehearsed the hymn selection on Saturday nights, and on Sundays I performed at the two-hour-long services.

The church was simply designed – a hall about twice as long as it was broad. An old-fashioned wood burning stove with bow legs was strategically placed in front of the preacher’s delivery platform,

and where the stove pipe was angled to a vent hole in the roof, an empty Fort Carry coffee can was tied with wire to catch the drips of condensation that ran down the chimney in cold wet weather.

Christianity more than anything else had caused the Eskimos in Cape Dorset to divide the days into seven-day weeks, and they adopted the practice of wearing their best parkas for church on a Sunday – provided they had not gone hunting.

Host of the women washed their hair in their tents on Sunday mornings, ready for afternoon church, and with the exception of one girl, who had lived in Frobisher, they all had the same hair style – long black plaits, shining with cleanliness and brightly coloured ribbons. Both men and women had their own copies of the New Testament, printed in syllabics, and they carried them in specially made embroidered bags, or bags of sealskin.

The New Testament was not all they took to church. Those particularly afflicted with chest complaints carried some kind of tin which they set in front of their places on the hard wooden benches and accurately expectorated into them, as taught in the best sanatoria. In church, the sexes were divided – men and boys to the east, women and girls to the west. They were all completely unselfconscious about leaving the building for any natural cause during the long services, and they would relieve themselves outside among the rocks near the organist's window, hitch up their trousers and return for more sermon and song, rolling their eyes upwards in the direction they had heard Heaven lay.

The Eskimo women must have rocked some of the early missionaries who had lived in sheltered parsonages in their own countries. Mothers had no hesitation in baring their bosoms during the services and feeding their youngest children, some of whom were nursed into their third year.

The missionary, Mr. Gardner left Cape Dorset in late September to spend a holiday in England, and the services were conducted

by a catechist named Simonee, a devout, bespectacled trapper and hunter who spoke no English. He made me understand which hymns he required by singing them to me in a husky voice, and whenever I failed to catch the tune I compromised by having Cwm Rhondda, so we had Cwm Rhondda every Sunday. The men sang it with all the enthusiasm of a shift of Welsh colliers although they always had difficulty with the descant. It was closely rivalled in popularity by Crimond, but most of all they like to sing a hymn, the English words of which begin "From Greenland's icy mountains." The melody was published in no hymn book. It had been composed by Simonee seven years before.

Simonee was out on his trap line, catching white fox, and he was with two other men. As they travelled they built snow houses at night for shelter. One night when they had made their igloo in the vicinity of Mingo Lake, Simonee woke from his sleep, dreaming he had made a new song. The tune was clear in his mind so he wakened his two companions and sang it to them.

When they came sledging over the snow back to Cape Dorset, they carried the song with them. It caught on like a prairie fire and swept Baffin Island like a pop song and it became known as the Mingo Lake Hymn. No one had ever written down the tune, so one Saturday night at practice, Simonee and his brother sang each phrase to me and I picked the notes out on the keyboard and wrote them down on a sheet of paper.

The light we used was a flickering hurricane lamp from Simonee's tent, and the paper was given to me by one of the print makers. When I had finished writing it, I played it fortissimo for Simonee who had never before heard it played on an organ. No one could have looked more delighted than he.

The following day we gave it full treatment at the service, and when I left for the Outside, I sent a copy of Simonee's composition to the church's headquarters in Toronto in the hope they would publish what is probably the first Anglican hymn composed by an Eskimo,

and someday, maybe, The Mingo Lake Hymn will appear in the hymnal of the Anglican church in Canada.

Chapter 26 ~ How to Catch a Fox

Sleeping in a tent was wonderfully pleasant and relaxing in fine weather. The air was keen, the sounds of the birds always fell kindly on the ear, the soil and plants were earthy to smell and close to touch, and the tent door opened on to a free, wide Arctic world. The thin layer of white canvas about us gave a protection far beyond my expectation, and everything went well until suddenly the weather deteriorated rapidly and brought rain and snow, and the rising winds began to undermine my feeling of security. The winds blew at their worst at night, which was extremely inconvenient. Not only did we have to turn out of our warm sleeping bags to adjust the guy ropes, but we had to do it in pitch darkness, often in driving hail, snow or rain, and we also had to dig with bare hands for more and more rocks to anchor the original tent ring. The rocks lay like icebergs, nine tenths submerged in the ground.

On such nights, Rosemary usually wakened first and had dressed in a waterproof smock and was fumbling for the flashlight before I had roused from inside my two eider down sleeping bags. So Rosemary became a better boulder roller than I, through more practice. We almost lost the tent one night, when the sensation of being hit with a wet dish cloth wakened me and I sat up inside a slapping, collapsing tent.

We both scrambled outside in pajamas and little else to save the ridge poles falling to leeward through the wind redistributing the stones. The wind had gusted so strongly that all the windward guy ropes and their enormous anchors had been blown out of position.

Our home was going West.

It took an hour in soggy pajamas to pitch the tent properly again,

and when we arrived in the settlement the next day, nerve frayed through lack of sleep, we learned we had not been alone in our troubles. Even some of the Eskimos tents had been blown down and their tents were pitched lower and had seemed more protected than ours.

A few days later when I took my turn to go for the morning jugs of water, I found the stream was frozen into a thousand sparkling crystals. I dashed back to tell Rosemary to bring her cameras before the sun had a chance to melt them. From then on, we collected our water supplies at mid-day, by which time the sun had usually thawed the ice. In deep winter, the people cut blocks of ice from the frozen lake and carried the water home in lumps on a dog sled. Until Jim Houston kindly supplied us with a small oil heater, our only source of warmth was generated by the cooking stove. Stove fuel was not in great supply, so we could not keep it alight any longer than neccessary and the temperature soon dropped once cooking finished.

It was the day after the arrival of the Judicial Party that I succumbed to a sickness which was sweeping through the Eskimo tents. Its symptoms were troublesome – vomiting, spotty tonsils, temperature and endless trips to the tundra in the night, so I was committed on to a bed in the nursing station, which gave me time and opportunity to dry out my clothes and my two sleeping bags.

I wrote in my journal for September 12, "It's heaven to be dry again." The constant damp and rain had seeped into all our kit, and there was no way of drying things inside the tent unless the weather improved. It was "between seasons" and the year's most miserable time for tent dwellers. The weather was cold and wet and the Eskimos put on their clothes in the morning, only slightly less damp than they had been when they were taken off.

While I was in the nursing station, I expected to be joined by the baker's young wife but she failed to arrive. She had been on the brink of motherhood since our arrival in Cape Dorset, but she was still

plump and pregnant when I emerged from the nursing station a few days later.

The mother of the baker's pregnant wife was Ikaluk, the Houston's housekeeper, and one evening when Rosemary and I were preparing a dinner for Jim Houston after his wife's departure on holiday, Ikaluk came bounding into the house in her sealskin boots and with a bundle in the hood of her parka. She bent over, shot the swaddled baby over her shoulder with a heart stopping velocity and announced she was a grandmother.

A baby carried in the hood of a parka

Ikaluk said we were welcome to go and see her daughter in one of the tents in Chapel Valley, so the following day I set off to visit the family.

As I forded the shallow stream running between the tents, a familiar featured girl passed me, stepping out briskly. She nodded and

smiled and she had gone out of sight up the rocks when I realised the slim girl who had-just gone by was the new mother.

Confinement was a simple thing in a simple society.

Her baby was as pink faced as a White woman's infant, for Eskimos are not dark skinned. Their exposed faces and hands become brown and weather beaten because of their mode of life, just as any farmer is tanned and ruddy complexioned.

In infancy, they have a telltale "Mongolian spot" which is a dark bluish tinge in the skin at the lower part of the spine. It covers an area the size of an egg and fades as they grow older. The Mongolian spot is common to most Asiatic peoples, to some Balkan Europeans and to the Eskimos, and is an indication of the migration of the Asiatic peoples, Balkan people born with the mark are presumed to have descended from the Asiatic tribes which migrated into Europe at the disintegration of the Roman Empire.

Arranged marriages were common in Cape Dorset, and trial marriages lasted up to six months. Although the Eskimos were not known to have any artificial form of birth control, children born of trial marriages were almost unknown.

For the "probationary" period, the couple lived in the tent of the girl's father, and if they decided to become man and wife, they moved into their own tent and they were then recognised by their own people as married.

Any wedding service performed thereafter by a White missionary was simply a religious conformity, nothing more and nothing less. An Eskimo woman was not valued on such qualities as face or figure as often is the case in a White man's society. The most desirable social values were an ability to sew well, and to tend a seal oil lamp, and when an Eskimo bride entered the tent which was to be her home, the most important possessions in her trousseau were her sewing kit to make her husband's clothing and a kudlik, or soapstone

lamp. The lamp was vital in their lives, it gave them light, warmth and over it, blubber was rendered for oil and their food was cooked. The Eskimos had a saying that if the flame of a lamp died, then life also died in the tent.

The sealskin boot was the foundation of seal hunting economy. The leg of the boot was made from the supple skin of a silver jar seal or a harp seal, and the sole was made from the tough skin of an udjuk, or square flipper. The seams were sewn with threads of dried caribou sinew which swelled when the boot was immersed in water, thus filling the hole made by the needle and keeping the wearer's foot warm and dry. It was worn with warm linings of socks made from duffle cloth, and duffle cloth slippers and was ideal for the constant stepping in and out of shallows when travelling by boat, and for moving through snow in winter.

Ikalu softens seams of kamik (sealskin boot) by chewing

"A woman chewing sealskin boots in Cape Dorset, Northwest Territories" © Library and Archives Canada. Reproduced with permission. Library and Archives Canada/Rosemary Gilliat Eaton fonds/Box 9 file 11

According to Jim Houston, the people In Frobisher were lost because there was no hunting and so no Kamiks and the women no longer were required to use their traditional skills. Rubber boots were bought from the store and the people were beginning to wear

shoes. Men and women had lost their roles in what had recently been an integrated society, with its own well-defined duties.

One of the most successful hunters and trappers living in Cape Dorset was named Pitsolak. He was a man in his middle fifties and still very handsome. His charm was so polished that I suspected he was something of a plausible rogue.

Pitsolak was clever and he spoke and understood more English than he would admit. His camp was well organised and he asserted superiority over other Eskimo men, some of whom were dependent on him. When first we sailed into Cape Dorset from the luxury camp at Tellik, we were overtaken by a well founded Peterhead boat lying low in the water. It was Pitsolak's boat, loaded down with a big catch of walrus. The walrus meat was to be used to feed his dog teams and Pitsolak was assured of getting his huskies in good condition by the time the snow lay thick enough to set his trap line.

He was the first with walrus meat and so he was ahead of the other trappers in the settlement and would become the richer when his traps snared white foxes – still one of the most valuable Arctic furs traded with the Hudson's Bay Company, fetching about twenty dollars an average skin in 1960, according to the trader. The trader had outfitted Pitsolak's walrus hunt. He had no hesitation in doing so. With Pitsolak, profit was assured. The man even looked prosperous. He had gold fillings in his teeth and sported at least three parkas – a sure sign of material wealth. He was the only fat Eskimo in the settlement and he had a magnificent set of teeth, which I learned were false.

Once when they were broken, he took them to the nursing station and asked that they be sent out for repair. He was told it would cost a lot of money.

"That's O.K. I want two gold teeth as well." said Pitsolak.

The teeth were flown out, mended, studded with gold and when

he called to collect them, he paid the bill immediately and without demur, put them in his mouth, flashed a smile at the nurse and said, “Nakoame.”

The missionary had formed a friendship with Pitsolak some years previously while he was still at Lake Harbour. Pitsolak had fallen foul of the law and instead of being sentenced to prison for his offence, the judge banished the Eskimo from Gape Dorset for two years. In his wisdom, the judge realised a term in prison, being served three meals a day and seeing film shows, was no punishment to an Eskimo. By banishing him, Pistolak was made to lose face among his own people – a far worse penalty.

The offender went with his wife to Lake Harbour, and there the missionary counselled him and the “criminal” and the churchman became friends.

Later, when Mr. Gardner was transferred along the coast to Cape Dorset, Pitsolak was already home again and any face the Eskimo had lost must have been immediately restored when he gave the missionary the welcome of an old friend.

During choir practice, Pitsolak usually took charge of the proceedings and translated for me, bossing the singer with authority, and leading the honors with a strong, pure voice.

The missionary lived in a small hut while waiting for a house to be built for himself and his family. It was a humble little dwelling but it was heated by an efficient oil stove and it had a touch of luxury in the shape of a naked electric light bulb in the centre of the ceiling. (Electricity was generated by a spasmodic diesel engine.)

It was only a one-roomed hut, but it held a lot of people and the callers, myself included, used to cram inside until its walls streamed with condensation and the smell of wet sealskin forced even the Eskimos to open the door for ventilation.

Pitsolak was a frequent visitor, sometimes alone, sometimes with his

patrician-looking, thin-lipped wife Ageak. He arrived one evening when I was there, making a bold entrance in a rainstorm. He was wearing the one and only check parka in Cape Dorset and a pair of bright red waterproof trousers over his thick pants. If bowler hats and rolled umbrellas were ever put on sale by the HBC as status symbols, Pitsolak would have been the first to own them, I am sure. Mr. Gardner took the mittens from Pitsolak and Ageak, and Pitsolak made himself comfortable on the missionary's bed. Ageak was just about to lower herself on to an offered seat, when a barked order from her husband stopped her in aid air.

She went to him, knelt on the floor at his feet and helped him off with his waterproof trousers, she hovered a little to see he wanted no more attention and at last sat down. It was easy to see the man had probably earned his reputation as a wife-beater and a tyrant towards his slaves in his camp – men who served him hoping he would leave them enough meat in the tail end of the stew pot.

Pitsolak's boat had been hired by the Department of Mines and Technical Surveys, and he told us he objected to his crew being paid wages. He said it was his right to handle the money. It was his boat and he could use it only forty days or so out of every year and it was a waste of good hunting time when the party of geologists hired it. He recalled the days when white men had hired his boat and his crew had been paid in nothing better than cigarette ends. He was a great traveller, and it was not until Pitsolak, more forthright than any other Eskimo I met, questioned me about myself and my journeys and purpose, that I realised the enigma of visiting White people among the Eskimos. We had arrived without introduction, we observed them, photographed them and then left with precious little explanation.

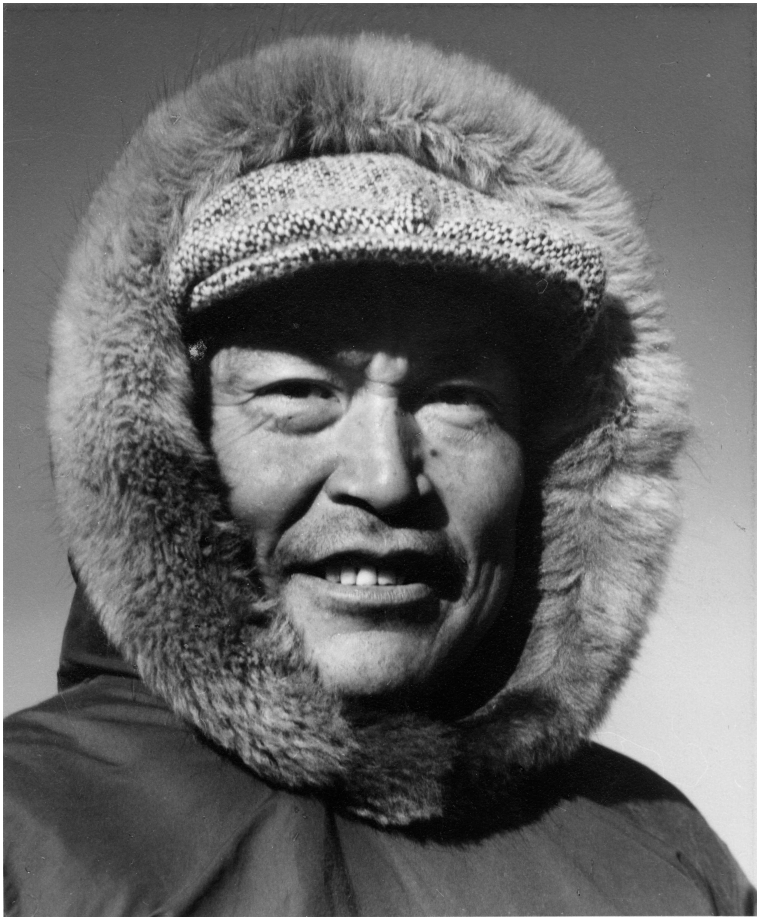
Perhaps because of his boldness, because of his ability to speak English and because we were women Pitsolak told us why he was such a successful fox trapper, when I asked him. He was coy and giggled at first and asked the missionary, in Eskimo, for the English

words meaning “fox lair.” Then he explained how he had become the Hudson’s Bay trader’s best trapper in Cape Dorset.

First he had to find a fox lair and from it he gathered foxes’ frozen urine or droppings. Then he baited his first traps with it, and if any fox passed within sniffing distance it would find the smell irresistible. When the first foxes were caught, there were always droppings in the traps and so he could bait the rest of his trap line. It was bad if he could not find a fox lair at first, but, said Pitsolak, he was not defeated. He knew of a substitute which was almost as good, and he named a certain soap and said he bought some tablets of it from the trading post and used small pieces from it to bait the traps. The soap had been advertised for years as removing from the body that smell which even best friends would not care to mention. As I picked my way home that night, I fell to wondering what a well-washed white man smelled like. Not only to Pitsolak, but to foxes as well.

Chapter 27 ~ Is there a Mechanic in the Camp?

Soon after our arrival in West Baffin Island, we developed a friendship with an Eskimo named Oshowetuk. The relationship was sparked off by his cavalier attitude when one of the journalists gave him explicit and loud instructions as we set off on a seal hunt from the luxury camp.



Oshowetuk, Baffin Island, 1960

"Oshoweetuk of Baffin Island" © Library and Archives Canada. Reproduced with permission. Library and Archives Canada/Rosemary Gilliat Eaton fonds/Box 9 file 1

Oshowetuk was on light duties through Jim Houston's insistence, because Oshowetuk had recently returned from hospital where he had had resection of both lungs, and like most Eskimos he was the type of man who worked to the limit of his strength, and in his case that would be a dangerous thing to do.

One of his light duties was to take charge of a whaleboat on the seal hunt. Food and flasks of hot soup were loaded into the larger Peterhead boat, which had a cabin for the comfort and protection of its passengers. One of the passengers, a hustling American photographer ordered Oshowetuk to follow the Peterhead closely and to go alongside when signalled to do so.

Rosemary and I were in Oshowetuk's open boat, and we watched him listen patiently to the photographer and dutifully set course, following the Peterhead wake. It was a poor position if Oshowetuk wanted to get any seal for himself.

A rendezvous had been arranged for mid-day, by which time the rain was dousing us, and Oshowetuk was again told to keep as close as his boat would permit. He was to be ready to take the photographer aboard as soon as a seal was shot, and we were to keep out of his way while he took action shots.

It was plain to see Oshowetuk would not be hauling any seals aboard his boat if he did everything he was told, so when the stout Peterhead bucked into a head wind, squalls of rain and the open sea, he blandly turned his helm in the opposite direction and steered for the coast with his gaze fixed on a flock of eider ducks.

If the Eskimos have proverbs, then they surely have one: "There are none so deaf as those who won't hear," and the broad smile on Oshowetuk's face as he later lifted aboard his bag of eider ducks was too bland to be innocent.

Although the co-operative craft centre had many carvings for sale I wanted one only from an Eskimo I knew, so I went to Oshowetuk and asked him in manual English if he would make me a carving. I wanted it small enough to hold in my hands, and I left the subject matter to him.

A few days later he approached me with a piece of rag in his hand and a broad smile on his face mixed with a certain self

consciousness. He dropped the rag into my palm and I opened it to reveal a smooth green soapstone carving of a bird, more perfectly finished than any carving I had seen.

The pleasure on my face was plain for him to read, and he wrinkled up his nose as though to say: “It’s a poor thing. Anyone could do better than that.”

His modesty was typically Eskimo. I learned afterwards that the highest price ever paid for an Eskimo carving was for a piece of Oshowetuk’s work. It depicted a woman and child and it passed through several hands before it brought the lofty price of one thousand dollars and found a niche in a New York museum.

Oshowetuk, the carver, had been paid ten dollars for it. The profit, of course, had gone to the dealers.

Carving of woman and child, Cape Dorset, 1960

For his carving of a bird, I gave Oshowetuk a box of ammunition with which he seemed well pleased, and I reasoned if it were well

expended, it would provide him with some meat, blubber oil and clothing for the winter.

Ammunition and rifles were a heavy and constant expense to Eskimos, but in Cape Dorset, the men had been given a rare opportunity to take advantage, unknowingly, of the White man's "cold war nerves." The Eskimos could not appreciate the full significance of what was expected of them, but they had been supplied with rifles and ammunition and put in the front line along with the billion-dollar Distant Early Warning bases in the Arctic. If ever North America were invaded, the enemy would first have to reckon with the West Baffin Militia.

The militia were crack Eskimo marksmen, raggedy but formidable, undisciplined but sturdily individualistic. If ever they were called upon to fight, they would probably give a good account of themselves, but unless the Russian Communisticos labelled themselves as enemies or announced their arrival with volley of telling shots, they were likely to be greeted by Eskimos with sealskins to trade, carvings to sell and promises of an Eskimo dansee in the school house to celebrate the visit.

Eskimos are sociable people and liable to treat strangers as friends whether they be French speaking priests, English speaking traders, American speaking airmen or Russian speaking Communisticos. Meanwhile the rifles and ammunition were not allowed to idle and were useful for seal hunting.

Dansees, or dances were held fairly regularly during the summer. The word would spread like wildfire across the tundra, and some child would come dashing to our tent calling, "Dansee, Dansee," and caper off over the hummocks and rocks to the next tent, full of joy and excitement. It was the signal in Eskimo and English which heralded the gayest evenings we spent in Cape Dorset. The entertainment was held in the schoolhouse and was usually preceded by a show of films from Canada's National Film Board. The most frequently shown was "The Living Stone," starring Niviaksiak,

the man whose spirit went with the polar bear, and his family. The crowd of "extras" still lived at Cape Dorset and greeted their own images on the screen with cries of "Eee." At Niviaksiak's appearance the people would murmur in low voices and his widow, unable to resist watching, would cry softly as Niviaksiak, lifesize, robust, skilled in hunting and so real in colour film appeared on the screen almost close enough to touch. We all squatted on the green linoleum floor to watch the films, massed so closely that we held each other upright, hot and steamy and full of sealskin smells.

When the projector was cleared away, the dance began and the schoolroom came to ebullient life. Dancing was not limited to the youthful. Men and women, children and the aged joined in the marathon shuffles. The music was provided by an accordion played either by Udjualuk, the luxury camp waiter, or by Ageak, the wife of Pitsolak the trapper.

We all doffed our parkas and sweaters. The women wore blouses and skirts over their slacks, and the men contrived in some impossible fashion to wear uncreased, spotless white shirts although I never saw an iron or an ironing board in any of the tents.

The dances seldom began before eleven o'clock at night and they went on until two in the morning – or even later. My first Eskimo partner was a round-cheeked fellow of eleven years named Hatsiak. He was pushed towards me, his hands stuck in his pockets, grinning until his eyes twinkled right out of sight, and presented himself, hat still on the back of his head, for the first measure.

Eskimo dances are a conglomerate of Scottish reels, English country dancing and American square dancing, and while they last, they are far lengthier than three of their source dances put together. Rosemary declined the initial gambol round the floor, saying "I'll watch one first."

An hour later, she was still watching as we trotted and shuffled, jigged and reeled to and fro, round and round, while Ageak, the

accordionist, flashed her fingers up and down the keyboard, her parka hood slipping lower and lower over one shoulder, her eyes our eyes fixed on our kamiks, and our sweat pouring out in the stifling atmosphere.

Kanangihak, president of the co-operative was obliged to display more agility than the other men, and did so. He leaped higher and higher with a wild abandon, yet organised the routine for the rest of us as the dance progressed.

I was pulled through the complex figures as an example, then everyone joined in and I went through them again. The music went on non-stop, and my breathing became more and more laboured as clouds of green dust rose from the linoleum on the floor. It wafted higher and higher until our faces and hair were rimed with a choking green fog. When Ageak finally squeezed the last splendid note from her green accordion, we dashed outside into the frosty night air where the wind blew chill and rapidly closed every open pore.

Racking coughs filled the air, the darkness was studded with the small red glows of burning cigarettes which throw a ghastly light on each smoker's green face, and when we were all thoroughly chilled enough to face the next dance, we filed back into the schoolroom.

Some of the men were extremely handsome and graceful as they danced. Divested of their bulky clothing they appeared lithe and tireless. Even Simonee, the catechist, lost his solemnity as he step danced and waved his arms over his head in an ecstasy of rhythm, each time the accordionist burst into a fresh version of the same tune. For me, the dances always ended too soon though they were harder exercise than a day in the hills, and they always necessitated a large laundry and a vigorous hair wash the following day.

Listen to a clip of what the music at some of those dances might have sounded like. From the Dalhousie Univsersity Archives

MS-2-130, Box 10, Folder 9, Item 2.

An audio element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can listen to it online here: https://digitaleditions.library.dal.ca/arctic/?p=75

The arrival of a ship was often the excuse for holding an extra dance, and towards the end of September, there were two ships which justified celebration. One was an icebreaker on its maiden voyage, and the other was a vessel which called to collect a cargo of empty oil drums. In Cape Dorset, as in many other Arctic settlements, the presence of man was indicated by a litter of old tin cans and empty oil drums. The drums were found in every pocket of non-Eskimo civilization because oil was used by White men for cooking, transportation and generating electricity.

The sudden appearance of a helicopter in front of Jim Houston's house on September 27 brought work to a standstill everywhere in Cape Dorset. The strange machine, yellow and plastic-bubbled, hovering slowly in the sky drew people to it like wasps to a jam pot.

Curious onlookers check out the helicopter that landed in front of Jim Houston's house in Cape Dorset, 1960

The pilot said he was from the ice breaker John A. MacDonald, a deep draught ship, which the captain prudently kept at anchor far outside the harbor. She was on her maiden voyage seeking ice in Foxe Basin to practice in, and iron out wrinkles prior to her work in the St. Lawrence in the coming winter.

Hundred mile an hour winds in Hudson Strait during the previous few days had given the crew some anxious moments, even though the ship was powered with engines generating fifteen thousand horse power, and the hospitable captain sent an invitation to anyone on shore to inspect his ship if they cared to go out.

Accordingly in best, locally made parkas, we presented ourselves in the queue of would be passengers standing before the two helicopters on September 28.

The settlement developed into a turmoil.

The people on board ship wanted to be ferried ashore. The people

on shore wanted to get aboard so there was busy two-way traffic. Accommodation on a helicopter was restricted to one passenger and one pilot per trip, so the Eskimos boarded their own boats and swarmed out to the ice breaker.

We were given the customary tour, which included the engine room, at which point, Jim Houston asked if the Eskimos could come too. Neither the Eskimos nor ourselves had seen such an engine room before. It looked like a tiled swimming pool, gleaming, clean, fresh with white paint and a spotless floor. Nine great engines nestled in a complex of vari-coloured pipes, taps, tanks and catwalks,

Pudlat, an Eskimo who had his own diesel powered Peterhead, gazed in wonderment, turned to Jim Houston and said, "When I think about the man who designed this engine room, I know my thinking is on the level of a dog."

When the time came to go home, the ship was rising and falling in the winds of a gathering storm, and the helicopters were grounded. We then turned to the Eskimos in their boats to take us home. A Peterhead tied alongside, slopped, rose, fell, hesitated in the troughs and rolled up again as though the sea were breathing. As it came out of the blackness below, the cabin roof, painted white, glistened in the great ship's deck lights. We waited near a hatch in the ship's side ready for our turn to jump down. As each person poised on the narrow ledge of the hatch, there was a shout of "Now." I was last to jump and waited for the white roof of the little cabin to come into view from the shadows.

Someone said to me, "Don't jump when they tell you to. Use your own judgement but be sure you don't go until it reaches the top of the swell."

Up came the Peterhead, she hovered on the crest of the wave and I plunged down into the dark. An Eskimo caught me and we fell flat on

the roof as the engine kicked into action and the Eskimo helmsman steered into the darkness for the shore.

Cloud obscured the noon and stars. Pudlat leaned forward trying to see through the gloom. We must have passed the cape closely, for soon the glimmer of a lighted tent slid into view, glowing like an opal as the wind buffeted the canvas, and soon we were jumping into the shallows and back on the beach.

Hand lamps began to stab the shadows and a line of Eskimos started to gather at the landing place, ready to unload cargo from the ice breaker on the three o'clock tide. They chatted cheerfully together the pointed hoods of their parkas pulled up against the cold night air.

I called out, "Aksuni," and stumbled up the shore, home to bed. The time was nearly two o'clock.

Pudlat's remark in the ice-breaker's engine room stayed in my mind for several days. Of all the visitors on the ship, he probably knew more than any other about diesel engines built on a small scale, but he had felt the most humble.

Pudlat in Cape Dorset, 1960

Within a few days another ship arrived.

The captain came ashore and said he had a liberty boat on deck but it was out of commission. It had an outboard motor and none of his seven engineers had been able to mend it. He had heard Eskimos were wizards at fixing such things. Was there an Eskimo mechanic in Dorset who could look at it?

He was assured there was, and Pudlat was sent out to mend the motor. In a couple of hours he had succeeded where qualified engineers had failed and the captain left Cape Dorset with his regard for the Eskimos' mechanical ability higher, and more justified than ever.

Chapter 28 ~ Endings

Our days in the tent ended suddenly after a particularly wild night of wind and storm. Jim Houston had urged us to take advantage of the hut vacated by Mr. Gardner, when the missionary moved into his newly built mission house.

Rosemary insisted we could last out until the end of our stay in Cape Dorset but the area administrator persisted in asking us to move.

I kept a silent, hopeful brief, and thought we should do as we were told, but said nothing. He let us have our way for a while, but one Sunday afternoon in late September, while I was sitting at the seat of the church organ, a few Eskimos moved our house for us, lock, stock and barrel. When I returned to our camp site on the hill, the tent had gone and only a ring of stones marked the place that had been home.

It was a sparkling day with a sprinkling of icing sugar snow on the hills. You could feel winter in the air, but not even the sunshine could cheer my melancholy as I thought of our inevitable, impending departure. Dejected, I walked by the little black tarn, past the big stone mound of the seal meat cache and down to the hut.

It was situated on the edge of the main thoroughfare – a path connecting Chapel Valley with the Art Centre, the trading post, the Houston house and the school. Soon, our house became a stopping place for anyone who felt like a cup of tea. We spent our last week in Cape Dorset brewing tea in the morning, tea in the afternoon and tea at night. We called at the Eskimos' tents and they returned the courtesy with a call from the whole family. The cerise coloured door of the hut was always opening and shutting on somebody, so by the time the HBC supply ship, Rupertsland called in the harbour, bound for Frobisher Bay, we were in danger of becoming social butterflies. The day before our departure was a Sunday. At the last

moment I bought a complete set of the prints which were sold only in Cape Dorset. A mincing white youth employed by the Co-operative served me with a languid air. I handed over the cheque, grabbed the cylinder of five prints and left the stifling atmosphere of the heated Art Centre. He had taken so long to serve me there was no time for lunch, so I tossed the cylinder into the hut, grabbed my tape recorder and dashed over the hill to the church and the unaffected simplicity of the Eskimos.

As I moved along the path, down into the valley and across the stream, I could see the people at the doors of their tents. They were watching and waiting. As they saw me they stepped down to the path and into a procession that grew longer and gayer as more people joined in, and we went up to the church.

Simonee was waiting at the church door to greet us all we whispered together about the order of the hymns and I took my place on the organ bench, while the men shuffled into the pews on the left and the women into the seats on the right.

Looking down at them they seemed to have such sweet natured faces as they smiled shyly and raised their eyebrows in silent messages of greeting.

That organ was probably never pumped and pedaled so hard as it was that afternoon. We put gusto into all the old favorites – Cwm Rhondda was rendered like a Welsh rugby team on a Saturday night after a win at Twickenham, and The Twenty Third Psalm would have drawn encores at the New York Met.

When the service ended, I asked Pudlat to give me a special rendition of the Mingo Lake Hymn. I pointed to my tape recorder and he understood at once. He called the Eskimos forward and I could tell by the grins on their faces we were to have a whooped-up version.

They pressed on to the platform in front of the altar. I held out the

microphone, switched on the recording machine and Pudlat gave out with the first low note. A hundred voices picked up the tune. There were flat voices, flute like voices, loud and husky voices. As they ended the second verse, I switched off the machine and picked up the note on the organ. They were right on key. When the fourth and last verse began, we let everything go.

As the last note died, I saw Simonee raise his hands to his face and wipe his cheeks. Overcome, I turned away and busied myself with the tape recorder. It seemed that Simonee the composer and everyone on the platform, including myself was in tears.

I recovered enough to manage a shaky smile at Simonee and suddenly I realised they were not wiping away tears. They were mopping sweat off their faces.

The stove had been lit as a special gesture because of our parting, and the whole congregation, clustered together on the platform near the organ had been gently roasted by the red-glowing stove.

Rosemary was patiently waiting outside the church to take final pictures of the congregation. Pudlat and Simonee and Oshowetuk and their families lined up in a cheerful row outside the church door, posing like veteran models in their best Sunday parkas, and when she had finished her roll of film, we set off for home down the rocky pathway into Chapel Valley.

The snarling and excited shrieking of a staked team of huskies carried over the valley on the crisp air. By the beach a man was feeding his dog team. The animals crouched at his approach, hauling back as far as their chains would allow, then they snapped at the unexpected ration of meat as it was thrown at them.

To see a man feeding his dogs so liberally was a sure sign winter was about us, and as soon as the snow settled the huskies would be unchained and harnessed instead for sled hauling.

That night, we shared out our remaining food supplies among our

friends, and the next morning, wearing our shabbiest parkas to signify our sadness and our reluctance to leave, we boarded Oshowetuk's canoe and set out for the Rupertsland.

She lay out in the harbour, shrouded by squalls of wet snow. We both felt as chilled and grey as the sleet in the cold, sombre dawn, as we grabbed for the rope ladder to climb up on deck.

View of Cape Dorset from onboard the Rupertsland, 1960

A cheerful Newfoundlander helped us over the side of the ship. Already she had steam up and the planking throbbed beneath my feet. Oshowetuk's canoe circled the Rupertsland in farewell. I could see his hand waving, but he was too far for me to see his features clearly any more.

An old, familiar smell of frying bacon wafted up from the galley. It was months since we had eaten any and my mouth began to water as the Rupertsland slid past the headland of Cape Dorset, bound for Frobisher Bay and the world outside.

Behind us we left a land already bleak with winter, yet peopled by a race full of warmth and courage and humour.

They had shared with us the unforgettable beauty of their Arctic Summer. In danger they had cared for our lives as dearly as their own, and in distress, they had cared for our comfort in kind unselfishness.

I kept the cape in sight as long as I could. Wind streaked the snow flurries horizontally, blurring the landscape and I felt within me an inescapable guilt as I left the Eskimos of Cape Dorset to their certainty of Arctic cold and dark while I sailed off to the comfort of another, more alien civilization.

In the realms of technical invention we were thousands of years apart, but in the sphere of humanity to man, the Eskimos still possessed the key to that dignity which Twentieth Century man lost a long time ago.

Photographs in Order of Appearance

Foreword

Barbara Hinds looking through a window in Frobisher Bay, Dalhousie University Archives MS-2-130, Box 15, Folder 1, Item 76

Chapter 1

Rosemary Gilliat sitting on a rock in Cape Dorset, Northwest Territories, Dalhousie University Archives MS-2-130, Box 15, Folder 3, Item 82

Chapter 2

Several small buildings in Frobisher Bay, Northwest Territories, Dalhousie University Archives MS-2-130, Box 15, Folder 1, Item 22

Chapter 3

Barbara Hinds and two houses in Frobisher Bay, Northwest Territories, Dalhousie University Archives MS-2-130, Box 15, Folder 1, Item 97

Chapter 4

Young woman and a bus in Frobisher Bay, Northwest Territories, Dalhousie University Archives MS-2-130, Box 15, Folder 1, Item 66

Bob Green in Frobisher Bay, Northwest Territories, Dalhousie University Archives MS-2-130, Box 16, Folder 9, Item 18

Houses in Apex, Northwest Territories, Dalhousie University Archives MS-2-130, Box 15, Folder 1, Item 94

Man having his hair cut by a barber, Dalhousie University Archives MS-2-130, Box 16, Folder 5, Item 4

Chapter 5

Woman holding a carving of a man, Dalhousie University Archives MS-2-130, Box 15, Folder 1, Item 81

Chapter 7

A fishing rod, a glass, and fish hooks, Dalhousie University Archives MS-2-130, Box 15, Folder 1, Item 32

Spyglassee in Frobisher Bay, Northwest Territories, Dalhousie University Archives MS-2-130, Box 16, Folder 9, Item 6

Chapter 10

George Koneak, Dalhousie University Archives MS-2-130, Box 16, Folder 9, Item 21

Chapter 12

Emily Annatok from Port Burwell, Northwest Territories, Dalhousie University Archives MS-2-130, Box 16, Folder 9, Item 3

Man in a kayak near George River, Quebec, Dalhousie University Archives MS-2-130, Box 15, Folder 2, Item 1

Man and a woman cleaning fish in George River, Quebec, Dalhousie University Archives MS-2-130, Box 15, Folder 3, Item 4

Tom Ananak with a tape recorder and headphones, Dalhousie University Archives MS-2-130, Box 16, Folder 5, Item 3

School in George River, Quebec, Dalhousie University Archives MS-2-130, Box 15, Folder 3, Item 16

Keith Crowe playing guitar, Dalhousie University Archives MS-2-130, Box 16, Folder 10, Item 28

Chapter 13

Several people and a freezer in George River, Quebec, Dalhousie University Archives MS-2-130, Box 15, Folder 3, Item 9

Stan Annanak holding a fish and a rabbit near Ungava Bay, Dalhousie University Archives MS-2-130, Box 8, Folder 13, Item 9

Chapter 14

Inuit grave in old Fort Chimo, Quebec, Dalhousie University Archives MS-2-130, Box 15, Folder 2, Item 22

Chapter 15

Max Budgell on a boat in Port Burwell, Northwest Territories, Dalhousie University Archives MS-2-130, Box 16, Folder 9, Item 9

Rosemary Gilliat, Bill Larmour, and Barbara Hinds in Port Burwell,

Northwest Territories, Dalhousie University Archives MS-2-130, Box 8, Folder 13, Item 11

Chapter 16

Barbara Hinds typing while sitting on a boat on the Koksoak River, Dalhousie University Archives MS-2-130, Box 8, Folder 13, Item 8

A cove in Port Burwell, Northwest Territories, Dalhousie University Archives MS-2-130, Box 15, Folder 3, Item 21

Family standing outside of their house in Port Burwell, Northwest Territories, Dalhousie University Archives MS-2-130, Box 8, Folder 13, Item 5

Henry Annatok in Port Burwell, Northwest Territories, Dalhousie University Archives MS-2-130, Box 16, Folder 9, Item 16

Chapter 17

People on a boat in Port Burwell, Northwest Territories, Dalhousie University Archives MS-2-130, Box 15, Folder 3, Item 24

Chapter 18

Person holding two char in Ikkudliayuk, Labrador, Dalhousie University Archives MS-2-130, Box 15, Folder 3, Item 31

Chapter 19

Three men sitting on a load of sugar in Frobisher Bay, Northwest

Territories, Dalhousie University Archives MS-2-130, Box 15, Folder 1, Item 99

Eetuk smoking a cigarette on a boat in Frobisher Bay, Northwest Territories, Dalhousie University Archives MS-2-130, Box 8, Folder 13, Item 2

Eetuk shooting seal in Frobisher Bay, Northwest Territories, Dalhousie University Archives MS-2-130, Box 8, Folder 13, Item 3

Dead polar bear being towed alongside a boat, Dalhousie University Archives MS-2-130, Box 8, Folder 13, Item 1

Chapter 20

Mosesee standing next to a boat, Dalhousie University Archives MS-2-130, Box 16, Folder 11, Item 1

Chapter 22

Houses in Cape Dorset, Northwest Territories, Dalhousie University Archives MS-2-130, Box 15, Folder 3, Item 39

Women and children watching an airplane, Dalhousie University Archives MS-2-130, Box 15, Folder 3, Item 102

Stone wall at Tellik Inlet, Northwest Territories, Dalhousie University Archives MS-2-130, Box 15, Folder 3, Item 52

Two men with rifles in Cape Dorset, Northwest Territories, Dalhousie University Archives MS-2-130, Box 15, Folder 3, Item 54

Chapter 23

Mountainous landscape near Cape Dorset, Northwest Territories, Dalhousie University Archives MS-2-130, Box 15, Folder 3, Item 93

Bank of Montreal in Frobisher Bay, Northwest Territories, Dalhousie University Archives MS-2-130, Box 15, Folder 1, Item 121

Man drawing with a pencil, Dalhousie University Archives MS-2-130, Box 16, Folder 5, Item 12

Jolua, Luktor, and Eejiuudluk [Iyola Kingwatsiak, Lukta Qiatsuq and Eegyvudluk Pootoogook] making prints in Cape Dorset, Northwest Territories, Dalhousie University Archives MS-2-130, Box 16, Folder 9, Item 14

Kenoyuak [Kenojuak] and Anaco in Cape Dorset, 1960, Dalhousie University Archives MS-2-130, Box 15, Folder 3, Item 106

Sheowak [Sheouak], Dalhousie University Archives MS-2-130, Box 16, Folder 9, Item 12

Sculpture of a bear, Dalhousie University Archives MS-2-130, Box 15, Folder 4, Item 26

Chapter 25

Church and several tents in Cape Dorset, Northwest Territories, Dalhousie University Archives MS-2-130, Box 15, Folder 3, Item 69

Chapter 26

Young woman carrying a baby in her hood, Dalhousie University Archives MS-2-130, Box 15, Folder 1, Item 117

Woman chewing sealskin boots in Cape Dorset, Northwest Territories, Dalhousie University Archives MS-2-130, Box 8, Folder 13, Item 7

Chapter 27

Oshoweetuk of Baffin Island, Dalhousie University Archives MS-2-130, Box 16, Folder 9, Item 10

Stone sculpture of a woman and child from Cape Dorset, Northwest Territories, Dalhousie University Archives MS-2-130, Box 15, Folder 4, Item 25

People looking at a helicopter in Cape Dorset, Northwest Territories, Dalhousie University Archives MS-2-130, Box 15, Folder 3, Item 64 Pudlat, Dalhousie University Archives MS-2-130, Box 16, Folder 9, Item 19

Chapter 28

Cape Dorset taken from the Rupertsland, Dalhousie University Archives MS-2-130, Box 15, Folder 3, Item 83