

ARCTIC ATMOSPHERE

Kugaaruk, Nunavut

December 18, 2011, Issue 20



John reads his Amazon Kindle Dec. 17 after setting up a replacement for the 18-inch tree the Miseks brought to Kugaaruk.

Advent Blizzards

Stormy weather in Kugaaruk this week threw a wrench into the final days of the school semester, holiday travel plans, and search and rescue efforts.

Aine's Journal ~ Dec. 13, 2011, Tuesday ~

Another blizzard struck the hamlet sometime during the night. The howling wind alerted us to the storm when we awoke, but the fact that the south end of our duplex was chilled by a draft coming from under the front door and wall also clued us in to the change. The thermostat in the chilled house kept the furnace running all night while the bedrooms cooked behind closed doors on the north end.

When we looked out the living room window that faces the school, all we could see were the security lights above the main door and gym door plus the streetlight near John's classroom. If the power failed, the building would vanish completely into the darkness and whirling snow.

Needless to say, school was cancelled. This is the final week of the semester for John's high school students. The last round of exams were scheduled for today so they will be postponed until tomorrow.

Visibility is much worse than it was during last week's blizzard; it wouldn't be safe to venture outside. The lights are the only reference points in town, even during the twilight hours. We didn't go anywhere. Without electricity, everything would disappear and one could easily get lost.

On days like this, it's easy to imagine we dwell in a submarine or spaceship — warmth and comfort inside, death outside. We even have to "suit up" to venture outdoors.

Aine's Journal ~ Dec. 14, 2011, Wednesday ~

The health centre closed yesterday because of the storm so Mari and I waddled over today to settle some of our Yellowknife travel arrangements. She and I are scheduled to fly to Yellowknife in early January to await the baby's arrival.

The nurses were recovering from a busy night — they delivered a baby. The blizzard prevented the medivac (medical evacuation plane) from coming. When a

medivac is sent from Yellowknife, two airport locations up here must be open because the plane has to refuel at one; the second airport is the backup stop in case weather prevents the first. Kugaaruk, Gjoa Haven and Cambridge Bay were all closed last night because of the bad weather, it seems, ruling out the possibility of an



LEFT: John and Mari admire the Christmas display in the school's foyer. Mari enjoys the tree, even if it is artificial, because it's the first she's seen since July. **RIGHT:** Aine decorates gingerbread Christmas trees Dec. 15. **BOTTOM:** Jesus, Mary and Joseph find shelter in an igloo surrounded by an arctic hare, caribou, wolverine and some buildings, as depicted in papier-mâché by Kugaaruk School students.



Ups & Downs

Dec. 10 – Dec. 16, 2011

Maximum = -21.0°C/-5.8°F Minimum = -25.2°C/-13.4°F

Source: Environment Canada, Station Kugaaruk A, Nunavut [Dec. 11]

Blizzards with strong winds and 2 to 4 cm of snow

Dec. 18 **Sunrise** and **sunset** times not reported



Kugaaruk School grades 4, 8, 9 and some senior high students sing "We Are the World" Dec. 15 during the school's annual Christmas concert, which was held in the gym.

ADVENT BLIZZARDS CON'T. — evacuation.

The patient was in week 36 of her pregnancy and the delivery went very well, the nurse said. While happy for mother and babe, I wasn't exactly comforted by the news. Saturday will mark the thirty-third week of my pregnancy and I am counting down until I am settled into my hotel across from the Yellowknife hospital.

The baby born last night was the third emergency delivery in Kugaaruk this year. All pregnant women are normally sent out for delivery, either to Yellowknife or to a midwife centre in Cambridge Bay, which opened in 2010.

Teachers voted today on whether to have the school's Christmas concert tonight as originally scheduled or delay it until Thursday. Another storm is supposed to arrive and tomorrow is the last night they can have the concert because school officially closes for the holidays on Friday. The staff chose Thursday.

Aine's Journal ~ Dec. 15, 2011, Thursday ~

Another stormy morning with blowing snow closed the school until 1 p.m., but the weather finally cleared in time for last-minute Christmas performance preparations.

Tonight's concert was a mix of everything from *Jingle Bell Rock* in English to *Amazing Grace* in Inuktitut and the *Kyrie* sung in Latin with a bit of drum dancing, throat singing and modern swing between times. I was most struck by the fact that *Jingle Bells* appeared in various forms three times during the evening, yet little could be less likely to appear in Kugaaruk than "a one-horse open sleigh."

Aine's Journal ~ Dec. 16, 2011, Friday ~

Incredibly, the search and rescue teams that have been out since Dec. 8 have finally found signs of the man who has been missing since Dec. 5. They discovered his cooler, camp stove, some footprints and a shelter built from snow, which likely mean he survived last week's blizzard and probably Tuesday's. The search continues.

Some planes finally made it to town today,

allowing several teachers and some other folks (who've been waiting all week for the weather to clear) to make their holiday getaways.



Fuzzy Fingers

By John Misek

Our order for mitts came in just as the cold weather arrived. A local lady made them and we are very pleased with the results. They're constructed from waterproof sealskin and other types of fur.

I brought a pair of store-bought gloves from down south when we moved up here — the fancy high-tech type with glossy tags showing chiseled men sporting three-day old stubble while clambering up stark snow-packed slopes in the warm comfort of their gloves.

The price on the gloves matched the glitzy tags and promises of warmth even in the coldest places on earth. Well, like all advertising — designed to get you to buy things you either don't need or things of such inferior quality they wouldn't sell without a massive marketing program — the gloves didn't keep my hands warm even when temperatures were relatively balmy back in October.

At the risk of sounding like a sales pitch, cold hands are thing of the past now that we have Alina's handmade mittens.

Temperatures haven't reached their lowest yet, but taking my mittens off when it's -32°C/-25.6°F to cool my hands in a good stiff arctic breeze indicates the mitts will at least be contenders when temps hits -50°C/-58°F. Kugaaruk holds Canada's coldest wind-chill on record (-78°C/-108.4°F) so good hand protection is essential.

I'm not chiseled — unless you consider the way my shape increasingly conforms to the contours of our couch "chiseled," though "molded" seems more appropriate — and I've given up on facial hair, so my testimony lacks proven marketing requirements, but take it from me, you can't beat real sealskin.



The Miseks' collection of Kugaaruk-made custom mittens represent four arctic animal species. Clockwise from top: Aine's sealskin (with inlaid flower pattern) with red fox cuffs, John's sealskin with wolf cuffs and Mari's sealskin with hare cuffs.