ARCTIC ATMOSPHERE

Kugaaruk, Nunavut March 4, 2012, Issue 31

Surrounded by three roads, the Miseks' new abode sits across from Koomiut Co-op and Kugaaruk's busiest intersection.

Surreal Move

You never know what tomorrow may bring. When we woke up Monday in our cozy duplex, we had no idea we'd be falling asleep in a different place that night.

Aine's Journal ~ Feb. 27, 2012, Monday ~

Malodorous fumes from under our house indicated a septic problem shortly after our return from Yellowknife. Last winter, the house's septic tank froze and raw sewage ran through the inside of the place. Fortunately, we didn't see anything indoors, but a frozen pool of brownish liquid next to the front steps didn't bode well.

Repairmen made diagnostic trips to the house last week and John and I knew a move would probably be upcoming, considering the duplex will likely smell like an outhouse come the spring thaw, but nothing prepared me for today.

Around 11 a.m. our landlord appeared to inspect the situation and mentioned that we'd be moving. When John came home at noon, I learned — to my surprise and chagrin — the move was immediate.

We had three hours until the keys for the new place were delivered and four hours until the Kugaaruk School bus appeared to haul our stuff away.

Two weeks postpartum to the day, I truly felt overwhelmed and kept hoping I'd wake from this nightmare as I looked at Mari blissfully playing in her bedroom — glad to finally be home after six weeks in Yellowknife — and little Nora dozing in the living room.

No amount of pinching ended the dream, and at 3 p.m., Mari, Nora and I climbed into the "old, ugly truck," so named by Mari last autumn (see photo Page 3), and were driven by two Inuit repairmen down the hill to our new home. John had to stay at the house to prepare for and pack the school bus; I gave him a despairing look as we backed down the driveway. I had no idea where we were going.

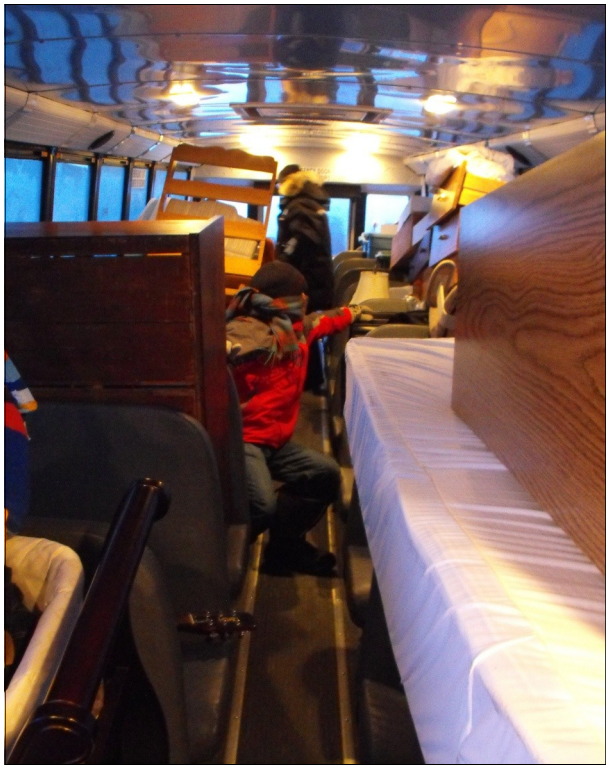
Winding along "Shoreline Road" (Kugaaruk's roads are nameless so everyone invents their own creative titles like "Airport Road" and "School Road"), the truck stopped at a house located directly to the west of the Co-op. We basically moved from the most remote house in town to the most downtown location. A row of Co-op sea cans conceal more than half of the detached house. A broken window, held together with duct tape greets those entering the front door.

I slid from the truck with Nora in her carrier and Mari panicked — she thought I was leaving her in the "old, ugly truck," poor child. The repairmen kindly carried the diaper bag and Mari's doll inside while I

Kugaaruk School staff volunteer their time and load the school's bus Feb. 27 with the Miseks' household goods.

SURREAL MOVE CON'T. — brought up the rear.

Alone with the girls, I took stock of our new living quarters — the only available house in the hamlet. A bigger house, but left in a disgusting state: broken beds covered in dirty linen, a pop can full of cigarette ashes, desiccated cabbage rolls and big bowl full of crusty chocolate JELL-O pudding keeping the fridge company. Popsicle and candy bar wrappers littered the floor. Let's not talk about the bathroom…



A teacher holds the Miseks' goods in place as the school bus rumbles into downtown Kugaaruk Monday evening.

The house, which, in it's many roles, used to be part of the hamlet's only hotel, a lodging for students, and a family residence, now usually serves as a crash pad for construction workers, many of whom come on short-term contracts, as in six or so weeks, before heading home to southern Canada. After touring the house, I concluded that they live like pigs while they're here.

I ignored the mess, corralled Mari in the living room and waited for the school bus to arrive. When it did, I lifted Mari to the broken window, which is covered in clear plastic inside and told her the bus had brought our things.

"Oh, thank you, school bus!" she shouted. She just loves that bus! I was touched to see John's colleagues hauling our goods through the door. Others were at the duplex packing more items. We're not the only ones who have gone through housing troubles — a part of life in the North.

Just among the school's staff, two have had raw sewage run though the inside of their homes; one had sewage leak underneath and stink like crazy come spring; another had a furnace blow up and yet another had a water tank overflow and flood her entire house.

Miraculously, Mari and Nora went to bed early so John and I cleaned like maniacs until midnight when we fell into bed.

Aine's Journal ~ Feb. 28, 2012, Tuesday ~

I admit it. Today I called Kugaaruk a hellhole.

A quote from Asen Balikci, the anthropology professor who made a documentary here in the 1960s kept coming to mind.

"Certainly this is one of the most desolate environments on earth, particularly inappropriate for human occupation," he said. Honestly, housing faces huge obstacles in the Arctic.

John received the day off work and this morning he and two Co-op employees used the Co-op's cube van to move the rest of our stuff to the new house. This hasty move wasn't made any easier by the fact that we're lugging a giant quantity of groceries with us.

If this house was clean when we moved in, I might not have thought so harshly of everything.

I nearly flipped when I heard that we might be moving *back* to our duplex within a week or two, though I could do without the cigarette stench permeating this place. Sewage odours and who-knows-what on

SURREAL MOVE CON'T. — your boots or third-hand smoke? Take your pick.

John is my hero. He moved, cleaned and came to the rescue like Superman, allowing me to focus on caring for the girls. This day certainly tested our mettle.

Aine's Journal ~ Feb. 29, 2012, Wednesday ~

What a difference a day made
Twenty-four little hours
Brought the sun and the flowers
Where there used to be rain

Ok, maybe there aren't flowers and rain vanished five months ago, but the glorious sun is here daily and we are all doing much better. Mari, Nora and I escaped from our new house — and the move-in mess — for the morning by visiting some friends and regained a bit of sanity. John is back to work.

The lack of a vehicle hampered moving efforts a bit — we forgot some things when the school bus and cube van were available — but John did retrieve a few forgotten much-needed items by hauling two of our trusty blue Rubbermaid tubs in the sled.

This evening the RCMP corporal helped John haul another small load of items over in his pickup truck, including the narwhal tusk, which can't be exposed to extreme cold because it could crack.

After Mari went to bed, I walked up to the duplex with a friend to say goodbye to our little shack — I hadn't been there since leaving Monday afternoon — and to pick up a few forgotten items.

Temperatures are so low this week. I haven't been outside much since our return from Yellowknife; I'd forgotten how the cold here stings. My face and legs ached by the time Kim and I returned to the new house.

The new place is almost clean. The main problem is the smoky residue. Hopefully that will vanish soon. I hate subjecting Mari and Nora, in particular, to it.

Aine's Journal ~ March 1, 2012, Thursday ~

Nora weighs 4.1 kilograms/9 pounds now, surpassing her birth weight. I am so pleased that she is thriving amidst all of these changes.

The house is coming together, but our storage room is complete chaos and I can't cook yet because the food is in disarray.

Aine's Journal ~ March 3, 2012, Saturday ~

Life's returned to normal — almost — in the Misek household. We still have settling to do, but we've rounded the bend. I felt cabin fever take hold something fierce this morning. The beautiful sunshine taunts me by making it look warm and inviting, but with wind chill temperatures this week felt cooler than -50°C/-58°F.

I did manage to get out of the house after receiving an invitation to an Epicure Selections spice party. A few herbs work wonders on bland ingredients available in a barge order or from the Co-op!

John and Mari went ice skating this afternoon and tonight John won both of the poker games. Not a bad end to a wild week.

Ups & Downs **Feb. 25 – March 2, 2012**

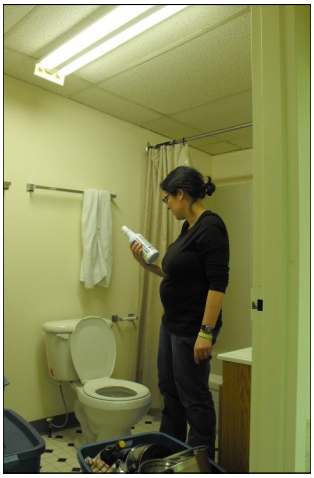
Maximum = -36.0˚C/-32.8˚F Minimum = -42.0˚C/-43.6˚F

Source: Environment Canada, Station Kugaaruk A, Nunavut [Feb. 18-22]

Clear, windy and cold!

Wind chill -51 [March 3 at 11 p.m., -37˚C/-27˚F]

March 3 **Sunrise** = 6:10 a.m. **Sunset** = 4:12 p.m. MST



LEFT: Not exactly inspiring — a can of deodorizer found in the new house lists kennels, veterinary clinics and public transportation among its applications. **RIGHT:** Aine sceptically checks the germ-killing ability of a cleaner before tackling the bathroom.

If Kugaaruk had an ugly auto contest, this Ford F-350 would win. Mari and Aine discovered the interior is even more unsightly than the exterior during their ride to the new house.

The rear of the Miseks' new home faces the west end of Kugaaruk and the bay. John and Aine's bedroom window is boarded up, thanks to the window-breaking kids in town, but the sunshine from Mari's room and the kitchen brightens the house.