ARCTIC ATMOSPHERE

Kugaaruk, Nunavut March 11, 2012, Issue 32

John and Mari brave the cold and slip their hoods off momentarily for a photo op March 11. Wind chills later dropped to -56/-69.

# Clear Skies by Aine Misek

Looks deceive.

Incredibly clear bright days promise warmth when looking outside through a window, but just open a door and the cold bites skin while the humidity from inside forms a swirl of vapour as it hits the frigid air.

I don't think temperatures climbed above -30°C/-22°F this week — that's not counting wind chill.

Amazing to see how the human body adapts to a climate. I remember Mari crying because she was cold back in September while we watched the Coast Guard ships in the bay. Those days seem balmy in hindsight.

Now she tromps along in temperatures that feel like -50°C/-58°F as if she's perfectly warm — granted she's bundled in her Canada Goose snowsuit, fur mittens, wool socks, snow boots and, on occasion, her balaclava.

Despite the cold that accompanies them, clear skies pay dividends.

Last night I saw the beautiful Northern Lights dancing in the southwest around 10:30 p.m. I'd seen them on a slightly overcast night in Yellowknife, but this was my first truly unobstructed view.

The jade green swirls and streaks appeared and disappeared unaccountably as John and I watched them from the kitchen window. Even the stars and planets take on a new life up here.

How I wish I could experience camping on the land and view the Arctic night sky from a silent and lightless location. Last night, the hamlet's electric lights somewhat diminished the view's vibrancy.

I can only imagine how mysterious and spectacular the Aurora Borealis must have appeared on a moonless night a hundred years ago from a settlement of igloos, lit only by the tiny flames of oil-burning lamps.

According to a display in Yellowknife's Northern Frontier Visitors Centre, the Inuit around Hudson Bay explained the Northern Lights this way: *The sky is a huge dome of hard material arched over the flat earth. On the outside there is light. In the dome there are a large number of small holes, and through these holes you can see the light from the outside when it is dark. The spirits of the dead pass through these holes into the heavenly regions. The way to heaven leads over a narrow bridge which spans an enormous abyss. The spirits that were already in heaven light torches to guide the feet of the new arrivals. These torches are called the northern lights.*

Glimmering northern nights draw my thoughts heavenward too.

Ice fog — a weather phenomenon the Miseks didn't encounter before coming to the Arctic — sometimes appears on what would otherwise be a clear day, as it did Saturday March 10 when sunset occurred around 4:30 p.m. MST.

## Ups & Downs March 3 – March 9, 2012

**Maximum = ˚C/˚F Minimum = ˚C/˚F**

Source: Environment Canada, Station Kugaaruk A, Nunavut [DATA UNAVAILABLE]

Mostly clear and cold; some ice fog

**Wind chill** -47/-53 [March 11 at 5 p.m., -36˚C/-33˚F]

March 11 **Sunrise** = 6:36 a.m. **Sunset** = 5:42 p.m. MDT

# Women's Day Festivities

***Aine's Journal ~ March 10, 2012, Saturday ~***

I overcame the temptation to nap and instead headed over to the school gym at 2:30 p.m. to participate in a women-only event: the Kudlik Ladies Group's celebration of International Women's Day (March 8). I'm glad I did.

Laughter and conversation filled the following two hours. A clothing competition commenced the celebration. Participants arrived with detailed outfits they crafted at home from garbage bags and tape. A second contest, which turned out to have only one contestant, was held for those who'd made wooden dolls (shown left).

Numerous group games followed. The biggest laughs came during the game when participants had to attempt to put a random piece of children's clothing over their own — size 3T pants anyone? How about a 2T nightshirt?

I played a game based on musical chairs. Each lady got a playing card, which she placed on the floor. We then walked around the circle of cards, grabbing one when told to stop walking, and then scrambling to find the other three people who had a card of the same number. The last foursome to crouch down was eliminated.

I certainly didn't feel sleepy by the end!

**TOP:** Contestants line up for the Kudlik Ladies Group International Women's Day clothing competition in the Kugaaruk School gym March 10. The clothes had to be made from plastic bags or table cloths and plastic tape. **LEFT:** Two toddlers model plastic parkas for the contest. **RIGHT:** The young woman on the right takes first place with her garbage bag sundress, complete with parasol, hat, handbag and sandals.

Nora dubiously examines the Miseks' new home March 10, the fourth lodging of her short life, if counting Stanton Territorial Hospital and Nova Court hotel in Yellowknife and Unit 888 in Kugaaruk.

# Re-establishing Routine

Though our move last week took shocked us, we've almost settled in our new home. Life with a newborn requires modifications — even without a house swap in the mix — so we're trying to be patient in our attempts to get back on a schedule.

Time flies as we find ways to cope with being indoors so much of the time. We had friends over to visit a couple of times and made our weekly trip to the health centre for Nora's weigh-in Thursday. She tipped the scale at 4.25 kilograms/9 pounds 6 ounces.

Aine is a bit wary of venturing out with the two girls on her own until the hamlet's trouble with rabid foxes subsides. Nearly half a dozen infected foxes have been killed in Kugaaruk during the past month or so.

The small but ferocious-when-infected animals have bitten dogs and attacked a few humans. Some people have taken to arming themselves with hockey sticks during walks, but the chance of encountering a fox is quite slim.

John has hit the midway point of the spring semester. Aine and Mari miss waving to him in his classroom from the living room window of the duplex on the hill, Unit 888.

John is teaching three new classes this spring:

- *9-10:30 a.m.* ***Grade 10 Science***
- *10:40-12 p.m. Grade 11 Math*
- *12 p.m. to 1 p.m. Lunch Break*
- *1 p.m. to 1:40 p.m. Prep*
- *1:40 p.m. to 3:10 p.m.* ***Grade 11 Biology***
- *3:10 p.m. to 3:45 p.m.* ***High School Art***

Instead of watching the activities in front of the school, we now watch kids skating and playing hockey on the road in front of our downtown house. Yes, *skating*. The snow that covers the hamlet's roadways is now packed into a pseudo ice-skate friendly surface, if you don't mind bumps formed by heavy snowmobile traffic.