

Answering the Call of the North

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I have been an associate of the School Sisters of Notre Dame for the past 21 years, and what a journey it has been! In 2001, I was asked by the leadership team to keep **Sr. Joan Liss** company for the month of February in Fort Resolution on the eastern coast of Great Slave Lake in the Northwest Territories of Canada. I felt the “Call of the North” very strongly and fell in love with God’s people who live there. Later, Sr. Joan phoned and asked me if I would be on the Board of On Eagles Wings (OEW), a non-profit organization that ministers to the people of the North.

Part of their mandate was the call to teach Summer Bible Camp and “walk-with” the people, encouraging them to be leaders in their own faith culture and community. Every year a multi-denominational group of Christians from Canada and the United States volunteer to travel to the North to do this. So far around 30 places have been reached.

During all my trips North, I secretly hoped that I would be assigned to Grise Fiord, the northernmost community in Canada, but I kept quiet and went where I was sent. God rewarded my patience, and in June of 2017 the directress phoned me and asked if I was interested in going to Grise Fiord and Resolute Bay. I did not hesitate! I was over-joyed!

I drove to Edmonton, the OEW headquarters, and on April 13 flew to Calgary and met Terry, my teaching partner. Thus began our trip of 5500 kilometers one-way, which after many stops got us to Grise Fiord. Here we were welcomed by the Inuit community, who shook our hands and greeted us with “Ood La Koot” (Inuk-tuk-tuk for hello), or “Welcome to Grise Fiord.” Even toddlers would shake our hands! Terry knew most of the people, having previously lived in Grise Fiord and Resolute Bay for 34 years.

We were transported to the Arctic College up on a hill and were given the suite upstairs. We taught Bible Camp in our living room, because the church we were to use had had a fire the week before. As Terry and I began setting up, Geela, our liaison, and her husband Jimmy came with two boxes full of good, healthy food to use as snacks for the children. I happened to glance down the stairwell and there was a young boy, so I went down and shook his hand as I introduced myself. He said “I am A.J.” Then he



A camper in Grise Fiord shows off his creation.

gasped as he looked up, saying, “You have BLUE eyes!” “Yes, I replied, and you have beautiful brown eyes!” Every child in both Grise Fiord and Resolute Bay commented on my eyes, my fancy glitter fingernail polish, and spiked white hair.

The next day we began Bible Camp with 15 children, ages 5 to 12. They all were very eager

and happy to learn about the Bible. They were totally focused. In all my years of teaching, I never had such good pupils!

Grise Fiord is a hamlet of 130 people and is situated on the shore of the Arctic Ocean. Terry and I walked a lot, and one of our trips took us towards the mountains to an impressive statue of an Inuit mother and her daughter, which is carved out of a huge rock. We welcomed people who came to visit and met other many other people on our walks.

The time went by very quickly. After our last lesson we invited the community to come and celebrate another successful Bible Camp. At the start of the first class, the children had been given hand-sewn bags to decorate. As they held the bags, I told them how the bags came to be. “For many years, Annie, an OEW board member, visited a women’s prison in Edmonton and asked the women in jail to sew bags for the children in Bible Camps. They make over 500 a year. So each time you pick up your bag, pray for that woman so that she may soon be free and live a good life.” The children were touched and so were the adults.

Terry and I handed out a Bible to each student along with a prayer card signed by us. Terry spoke her thanks to the people. Then it was my turn. First of all, I thanked the children and praised them for their behav-

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ior and eagerness. Then I praised the parents for bringing up such good, respectful children. Finally I spoke to all in the community with tears in my eyes and a

choked up voice. “I have never seen a community as nice as yours. I was a stranger and you took me in. You welcomed me. I will always hold you in my thoughts, heart and prayers!”

What valuable lessons I learned from my experiences to the far, far North. First of all, being present to all God’s people, no matter where or who they are; being open to listen carefully to them, walk with, encourage them to “Trust and Dare,” and compliment them for their efforts. Finally “Love Cannot Wait.” AND A BIG SMILE IS ALWAYS WELCOME!! □

