Long Arctic Night for Teenagers

Canada's vast Northwest Territories are locked in the long, dark Arctic winter.

Five Rochester lads will be close to Santa's take-off as they continue their year as mission helpers to Father Bernard Brown at an outpost of the Church about twenty-five miles above the Arctic Circle.

Oblate Father Brown is "pastor" of a string of missions in this area.

His teenage helpers are Robert Mastrocola, Barry Hastcke, Frank Wrentzi, Bryan Martin and Francis McDermott.

Following is their day-to-day account of how to survive in that remote land.

Sunday, Sept. 23 — Besides bringing Christianity to the natives of the North our Missions have also benefited the Indians and Eskimos in many other ways. Our sisters have developed and taught sewing skills and in some forts preserved for the natives handicraft arts that would have been lost. Our Lay Brothers have taught skills in boatbuilding, in farming, in logging, fishing and many other industries now taken for granted. Besides bringing the Mission itself to the Rabbit-skins of Colville Lake and all that this implies we were bringing other lesser benefits like medicine and wireless communication and better transportation.

This last item must be explained. "Transportation" in the Canadian Arctic still means dog teams to the natives. Every family at Colville had at least one team of sled dogs, some enough for three teams of six each. With us we brought seven magnificent specimens of the Arctic Huskie, one a pure-bred registered Alaskan malemute and another female named "Duchess" who, although old, still was capable of whelping pups and did in fact give birth on this date to six pups whose father is a magnificent Malemute named "Gus" who is the pride of Mr. Ed Olsen and the famous kennels of the Wood Buffalo Park outside Fort Smith.

It was Mr. Olsen who had given us Duchess when we passed through Smith en route north in July. We had anxiously awaited her litter as the beginning of a new strain for the Colville Lakers. It is quite probable that within ten years every team of dogs in this area will be related to Gus and Duchess.

Monday, Sept. 24 — We were successful in completing our vast 24 foot roof last Saturday and so now the pressure is off in case bad weather comes in from the north. Our work crew was reduced to five natives plus Father Brown and his two Rochester helpers: Frank Wrantzi and Brian Martin. Northwest Territorial Airways, working from Yellowknife, began to ferry the balance of our freight which had arrived recently at Fort Good Hope. The first Otter load carried 2400 lbs. of green sheet roofing for next year's church. Succeeding loads carried plywood, insulation, tar, nails, windows etc.

Tuesday, Sept. 25 — Our aircraft continues to come and go every three hours making four round trips a day to the Fort six hundred miles south. We are busy putting roofing on our fish house by the lake which will be used temporarily as a storehouse for the freight coming in off the aircraft. We sheeted the porch today with plywood and as the sun came out we took a chance and painted it orange, the color of all our floors. A crew of four crossed the lake to look for more fire-killed spruce for wall partitions and bunks etc.

Wednesday, Sept. 26 — Low visibility and driving snow could not keep our pilot Bob Inglis from flying in with the owner of our trading post, Billy McNeely who arrived with the first of eight loads of trade goods to refurbish his dwindling stock. Mr. McNeely is one of a vanishing race of northern pioneers, the free traders. Born in the States and married to an Indian in Good Hope, Billy has spent forty years trapping and trading in this area. It was just two years ago that he saw the opportunity of establishing an outpost at Colville Lake and put Charley Masrumi in charge of it. Charley bought so much fur last year, mostly rich, silky dark martin, that this year Billy was doubling the tonnage of trade goods and had come himself on the first trip to make an inventory.

Thursday, Sept. 27 — The cold night wind had frozen the water around the bay out a couple of feet and was blowing snow on a horizontal line out of the North-West. We hurriedly blocked off our empty window openings in the log walls of the Mission and continued putting the new windows in place and chinking between the logs with fiberglass held with boiled linseed oil. Our bush pilot continued his freighting and brought in a new family with one load, Luke and his wife and child and four sled dogs. Everyone was on hand to welcome these newcomers.

Friday, Sept. 28 — The wind is down today and we are able to visit our nets for the first time this week. Naturally they are full of fish most of which are long dead but still OK for dog food. The pilot and mechanic had spent the night with us as it was too dark to return to Good Hope and this morning their departure for Norman Wells and Yellowknife was delayed until the fog covering the lake "burned" off. As soon as it did they roared away from our dock and were soon all-home carrying with them our last letters before freeze-up. The next plane we would see would be landing at Colville Lake would be equipped with skis and it would be late in November. We lost no time saying so-long. We were busy building a new "cache" to support our thousand pounds of fish suspended over the water's edge in front of the fish house.

Saturday, Sept. 29 — Today the weather was calm, and we took advantage of it to put the logs on the roof to form the steeple base.

Sunday, Sept. 30 — Last day of September. — Father Brown took his weekly stroll around the settlement to visit. Several trips made by the aircraft during the last week carried lumber, doors and windows for the Indians sent in by the Indian Agent as bonus "treaty-money" to help the five of them who were putting up new log houses. They had lost no time in raising their roofs and getting the windows and doors in. Unfortunately the doors were nearly seven feet high and these people seem to be short and stocky. The head-room was totally unnecessary, nor did the idea of cutting those beautiful fir doors down enter their heads.

Other difficulties were encountered which gave the chief, Joe Codzie his biggest headache of the year. There were not enough shiplap boards to cover all the floors and still do the roof sheeting. Joe stood guard over the pile after it was unloaded from the aircraft and tried to dole it out equally. It was a losing battle when the women were sent to get enough boards" by their knowing husbands. The result was that some floors got partially covered, some fully, and some reverted to the ever-present spruce boughs. One of the builders Isadore, was out of the fight completely when he got bitten by a big Northern pike taking it out of his net. The storekeeper, Charlie Masrumi, is also hors de combat since the tried to stop the aircraft from bumping the dock and got his foot squashed between the pontoon and one log broken.

Monday, Oct. 1 — One of the most important items missing in shipment was the Yukon chimney for the Mission. The one for the church however did arrive but the fixed angle for the roof was away too steep. But with no alternative Father had to adapt it to the Mission roof and was up there all day today cutting and tarring and nailing. Brian and Frank took off in the canoe down the lake here a piece and cut green spruce poles for the new corral for the pups who will soon be running around.

Thursday, Oct. 4 — Today we put the last window in the Mission and pray it be removed before the hard cold starts driving down from the Barrens. Our neighbor and founding father of Colville Lake, Louie Ondzie, is throwing an impromptu party at his new log cabin, a housewarming party northern style. The old-time drum singing can easily be heard over here at the Mission tent and no doubt there are spirits to fortify lagging voices.

Friday, Oct. 5 — As the ice floes thicken on the lake we see the long lines of swans w i n g i n g south while the lazy, fat black ducks are still feeding around the lake and are easy to shoot as they have difficulty getting airborne. We are now finishing up the outside chinking of our logs and hanging the three outside doors.

Saturday, Oct. 6 — Finished building our new dog corral and moved Duchess and her litter in and out of the cave in the bank where she had whelped them. Today we got 47 fish in the nets and their average weight is about five pounds. Our stage is rapidly filling up with fish for the winter. On our radio hook-up with Fort Smith we got word today of the hospitalization of our faithful pilot-missionary Father Leising. The boys are consoles of his book "Arctic Wings" and have been reading them. These calm, dark fall days before freeze-up with the heavy fog hanging onto the lake all day remind one of some chilly Norwegian fjord, but it is not altogether depressive, more like mysterious and dreamlike. All it needs is some Wagnerian music in the background.

Wednesday, Oct. 10 — Today we had a freezing south-east wind sending driving snow down our necks, one of our biggest families left town for the winter hunt. There are so many of the Cochons and living in the center of the camp in the biggest tent, their departure furnished an interesting show and the whole village was out to enjoy it. Their method of travel was on foot with most of their dogs carrying back-packs and one team pulling a sled. Up to now there has not been sufficient snow to make good sledding. Skids are very expensive here as the oak boards must be shipped up from the States.

As the Cochons tribe emptied their tent and loaded the dogs, tied yet to their stakes, the speed of their packing increased with the crescendo of the [illegible] having had it [illegible] how little comfort [illegible] and CHRY mem[illegible] of the family went about his task with quiet efficiency. Finally when the last was struck and the dogs loaded, each member of the family took his or her own pack, some of which were so heavy that it had to be loaded on them person by person. A farewell to the grandparents was then lifted to him (sic) the father. Pat atop his huge pack and the tent stove with all the stovepipe tied on. But Mrs. Cochon astounded everyone when she shouldered a huge bundle of clothing and blankets and then put her three-year-old son "Be-John" up on top of this holding a litter of pups tied in a blanket and when there appeared the last minute yet another pup she staggered off carrying this one in her arms to take the trail with the rest.

Antoine followed with a pack sack over which he had the family canoe and a rifle. Hyacin followed them with the dog team. When they finally disappeared over the ridge one of the spectators who had recently come from Fort Good Hope was heard to exclaim: "They're sure a tough people out here!" We all felt the same as we went back to work.

Thursday, Oct. 11 — It was flat calm again today and we took advantage of the chance to visit our nets and haul some firewood by boat. We now have over 2,000 lbs. of fish hung on our stage. Several other families left for the traplines today leaving about 25 people yet in the village.

Friday, Oct. 12 — We have now completed all our outside work. Even our solid log privy is done. After lunch we cruised the lake to try to get a moose as it is the calling season. Four of us got no moose but we did get some water fowl and more remarkable treed a marten in an old hollow spruce and finally, after much excited climbing and chopping, were able to bag him. This intelligent little member of the weasel family is about the size of a tomcat and has beautiful dark silky fur. Trapping this animal is the main source of income for the Colville Lakers, some of whom get several hundred during the winter and trade them for about ten dollars worth of grub and goods.

Monday, Oct. 15 — Ice has formed around the lake shore but not enough to prevent us from using our canoe for one last load of sand and gravel with which to pour two more cement blocks to reinforce the main floor of the Mission. To hurry the set of this last batch of concrete we built the first fire in the new Mission stove and kept it going from this date onward.

Tuesday, Oct. 16 — Today while the Yankees were busy winning the World Series from the San Francisco Giants at Candlestick Park, we Missionaries on Colville Lake were busy building and laying in our winter fuel supply. We have in the nets today excluding a 28 lb. trought caught on the set line with hooks, Frank and Father also went out in the canoe and bagged five ducks and the first ptarmigan of the season.

This beautiful white tundra bird comes in off the barrens in the fall to feed during the winter on the willow buds, and although hard to spot against the white snow as only the eyes show, is easy to kill with a .22 and is really fine eating. Hundreds of them stay around the settlement of Colville Lake during the long winter and it was from melting them that Colville got its real name: "KAPAMI-TUE"—"Ptarmigan net Lake."

Wednesday, Oct. 17 — Although there was some small shell ice drifting around the lake today the wind was nearly calm with a light snow coming in from the East and Father decided to go up the lake fifteen miles by boat to visit Paul Cotchilly and his wife Monica. When he arrived at the tent they were gone hunting, only the dogs were left at home, the huskies chained around the tent and one pup inside. But when Father started lighting a fire in the tent stove he heard some weird scratching and whining from underneath. It turned out to be three smaller pups who had cyclically crawled under the stove which was the warmest spot in the tent.

Saturday, Oct. 20 — FREEZE-UP! The day finally arrived when our beautiful blue-water bay turned abruptly to cold ice and remained motionless and still at last. Brian and Frank sailed the last two nets back in the nick of time and Father came out in another boat to get pictures of them in action. The temperature was dropping rapidly and the ice was forming before your very eyes as a heavy white steam covered the water. The ice was forming in small patches all over the bay and out into the main lake and forming solid ice nearer the shore.

Returning to the Mission the boys were forced to break several hundred yards of ice which had been open water two hours before. It was the last time we launched the canoe and the end of our water adventures for the year. We would not see the open water again now until the end of June or possibly July if it is the late break-up predicted.

Sunday, Oct. 21 — The Mission bell called through the settlement for the regular Sunday High Mass. "High" in this case meaning "with sermon", there was no "high" ceremony or singing. Father expounded warmly on his subject "The Devil" in Slavey while two young Rabbit-Skins ran in and out of the tent during the sermon giving the preacher a "devil" of a time. A brisk southern wind in the meantime broke off some chunks of our ice and swept them out into the main lake.

Monday, Oct 22 — As President Kennedy throws up his blockade around Cuba, we feel far removed from the tense "outside" world situation. Peter Mountain and his family packed their tent and moved out of the settlement for the winter, trapping the same as the Cochons had done. Young teenage Alfred Maserumi fell and cut his knee on the ax and Father put two stitches in it. In the Mission we began laying insulation under the flooring so the heat of the building won't melt the perma-frost underneath. This is our big concern and we are doing a very careful job because if the ice underneath this Mission should ever melt the foundations of Our Lady of the Snows will crumble!

Tuesday, Oct 23 — The thermometer now has touched zero and we see a winter wonderland surrounding us . . . millions of ice crystals suspended from every twig and shrub reflecting the lowering sun like diamonds. Our lake is frozen as far as we can see. This is winter!

Friday, Oct 26 — This morning we had a cruel surprise when we found all five of Duchess' pups killed by Cora, a rival female Malemute. Our plans for raising a new team this winter are now dead. In keeping with our spirits it rained and turned the ice black! In the Mission we put the first coat of orange paint on the floor, but we are completely out of wood and have skirted searing timbers off our dock. The fuel problem is acute due to the fact that we are now keeping three fires going, one in each of our tents and another in the Mission. The wind shifted from south to west at dusk and raised to gale force.

Saturday, Oct. 27 — Today we used our team to haul wood from the bush but the ground is only lightly covered with snow and the trails rough especially for a heavy load of wood. Father Brown finally moved out of his small tent into the workshop end of the Mission.

Sunday, Oct. 28 — We move from the big tent into the Mission to escape the icy blasts and to conserve fuel. Nineteen were present at Mass this Sunday morning but some of them left for the bush during the day. Brian and Frank went out hunting for a huge grizzly bear whose tracks had been seen recently around our settlement. These Barren - land grizzlies come off the tundra in the fall when they get hungry and are dangerous. Nearly every year some member of the tribe has a harrowing experience with one in this area.

Wednesday, Oct. 31 — Halloween — but no one knocks on our door for "Tricks or Treats" because these people know nothing of that juvenile hold-up game and even if they did the below zero weather tonight would soon discourage their rounds. The boys were busy today putting a floor down in the fish house while Father has started the kitchen cupboards. Some of the women who are still in town are busy making winter clothing for us. This morning at breakfast when we were wondering what kind of fish we would cook for supper, we saw a giant black raven flying over the frozen lake and soon he swooped down on a lone straggling duck! Frank immediately ran out on the ice and stole the duck from the raven and we made soup out of him for our supper. Some of the natives set gill nets under the ice today. It is the beginning of the winter fishing.

Thursday, Nov. 1 — All Saints. After Mass Frank and Brian and Father harnessed the dogs and took off for a picnic in honor of the Holy Day. Several miles out they killed four ptarmigan which they roasted over an open fire and had a grand time in spite of the below-zero temperature.

Sports Banquet Set

NAZARETH HALL Cadet School will hold its annual father and son sports banuet Feb. 3 in the Manger Hotel ballroom. Chairman Dr. Peter Carrillo is shown with his son, Peter, looking over the program for the evening.

Life of Christ With Drums

Bombay — (NC) — A missionary priest here is completing a life of Christ featuring Indian storytelling techniques that include chants and the accompaniment of drums.

Father George Proksch, S.V.D., said his "Christ-Katha" (Christ's Story) is a 1,000-page metrical composition that may be sung by a man or a woman.

Father Proksch, who strongly favors adaptation of India's culture and tradition in the catechetical apostolate, said he drew inspiration for his work from storytelling forms used by wandering Hindu ascetics.

He Gave 'Everything'

London — (NC) — "How the Church has given me everything," said the late William Cardinal Godfrey in his memory day just after receiving the Last Sacraments. This was three days before his death.

Msgr. Derek Worlock, the Cardinal's secretary, told about the incident in a broadcast the day the Cardinal died (Jan. 22). He said:

"I told him that we all felt that he in turn had given all that he had ever had to the Church."

Without hesitation, the Cardinal replied: "I hope so—oh—I hope so."

Sacred Heart Retreat Total

A tabulation error in last week's Courier Journal is to be corrected as follows:

A total of 120 men of Sacred Heart Cathedral parish made a retreat at Notre Dame Retreat House, a gain of three over the previous year's total.

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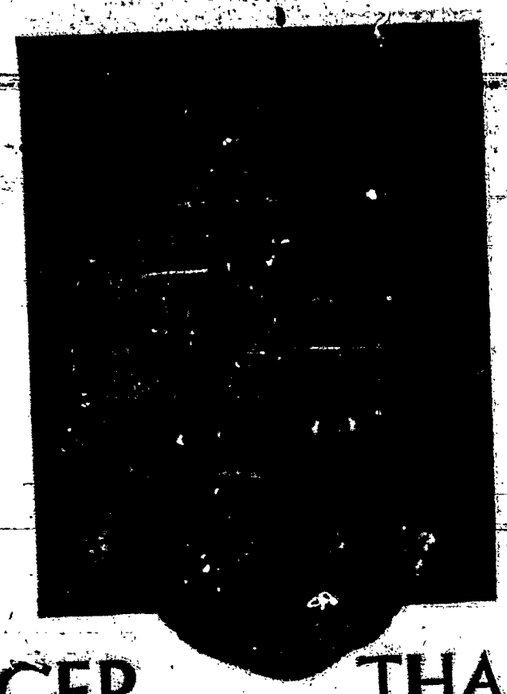

BIGGER THAN YOURS!

Yes, young man if your a member of a Courier reader family that's a pretty positive statement that is well backed up. The 1962 Courier readership survey shows that the average size of the Courier reader family is larger than local and the national family averages. 22% of the families have between 6 and 9 members. Big families mean more food more clothing more of every need . . . that your mother and dad buy from Courier advertisers. They know it pays in real savings.

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