

Day 1 - I Arrive in the Arctic

- Posted by [Kristy](#) on August 12, 2008 at 11:30pm

OH MY!!!! It's only been one day, and already I've had some amazing new experiences! Right now, I'm sitting at a desk in my room (I have my own for at least a few days) on The Sir Wilfrid Laurier, with the porthole wide open, listening to the water lap against the side of the ship, and the sound of the helicopter fade in and out as it continues to shuttle crew, supernumeraries (that's me and other passengers who are on board the ship for roles other than crew), and luggage (transferred in big nets swinging under the helicopter) from the airport to the ship. The airport has one dusty and pebbled runway, and the terminal is a large sort of trailer building – it's easy to see this is an isolated community.

For the last 45 minutes or so of the flight to Kugluktuk, we were flying over very desolate land – the colours are muted, there are many rivers and estuaries snaking through the tundra, and there is a lot of rock. I'm now 249 km above the Arctic Circle – not a tree to be seen. As we landed in Kugluktuk, I caught a glimpse of the Laurier at anchor just off shore – it looked tiny! It took about 2 hours for the very small but sturdy red helicopter to transfer everyone to the Laurier – there's room for the pilot (Len, who is friendly, reassuring, and I'm told one of the very best pilots around) and 4 squished passengers. I was in the last group to transfer over (I was stalling), and was the last to get on the helicopter, which put me in the front seat beside the pilot....my heart was pounding as he handed me a miked helmet and lifejacket to put on! Being a bit of a nervous flyer, I was expecting to be terrified, but it was actually wonderful...we flew fast, quite close to the ground and water and I felt like I was riding a giant dragonfly...I really hope I get to go out again, although I must admit there was one moment, just before we landed on the ship, where the helicopter turned almost on its side, and I found myself leaning as far as I could the other way, and closed my eyes – for just a second. I didn't scream though!

The Laurier doesn't seem small at all once you're on it. It's a bit of a maze to me at this point, I'll have to practice getting around, but I know where my room is (a bunkbed, comfortable chair and ottoman, desk, 12" t.v., sink and cupboard), and where the mess is (that's where the food can be found!)

I've already made a friend or two and met lots of interesting people. My first friend is Jean-Christophe, who sat beside me on the plane. He's from Quebec, and he's the "ice observer"....they call him "Ice Pick". He's not technically part of the Coast Guard, but works with them observing, measuring, testing ice etc. I'll learn more about what he does as time goes by – since there isn't going to be any ice for awhile, he also does many other things.

I've met Barb, who is the Logistics Officer....I think she must be as important as the captain, as she knows everything and everyone, and organizes us all, along with provisions. Rich and Alana are officers who also seem to know everything – already in this short time as people have asked questions, the standard response seems to be "Rich will know", or ask Alana" or "Barb's the one to ask about that". I've also met Captain Tom Hull...I didn't recognize him as the captain until I was introduced, as he was wearing a jean shirt and jeans and looked, well, not exactly like a captain! He's been welcoming and accomodating, and is very supportive of Canadian Teachers Breaking the Ice. Ellen Hardy sailed with him two years ago. This is his last excursion to the Arctic...he retires in 6 weeks, after 40 years in the Coast Guard.

I can tell that this is going to be a fascinating 2 weeks – and like many of you have told me – a once in a lifetime experience. There are so many interesting people to talk with, and there's definitely something special about the far north that is intangible. I don't know whether it's the barren landscape, the cold (it's 8 degrees), the recognition that each community is exteremely isolated from anywhere else, or just what...but it feels different here, and it's more than the obvious. I can hardly wait to explore further.

Tomorrow I may get into Kugluktuk, and the school here...it depends when we start to "steam". I can see the edge of the community from my porthole and hope I'll be able to get there. I asked an oiler (who keeps the engines running down below), how I get to the village, and he laughed and said "walk"! Of course!

P.S. It's now 11 p.m. I watched a beautiful sunset at 10:30 from the outside deck of the bridge. I understand it will be like twilight for the next 4 hours, at which time the sun will once again rise. I forgot that there would be no real darkness at this time of year!

[Share](#)