

Day 8 Gjoa (pronounced Joe) Haven

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If you're bearing with me and reading my journal entries, go make yourself a cup of tea. Today was a full one!

We anchored off of Gjoa Haven sometime during the night, so I started my day by heading up to the bridge to see what I could. The low bank of dark clouds that hung on the horizon throughout yet another spectacular Arctic sunset last night (which can last for hours), did exactly what Jean-Christophe said they would do, and had moved in, chasing the sun away, and keeping the temperature down below 3 degrees. Captain Hull was as good as his word – he had promised me a day in Gjoa Haven and he was ready for me. A zodiac was heading in early to pick up some new passengers, and Seaman Devon – yet another capable sea hand, and a driver of one of the two hydrographers boats – had me speeding on my way into Gjoa Haven before 9.

I spent the morning in the elementary and high schools in Gjoa Haven, Qiqirtaq Ilihakvik and Quqshuun Ilihakvik. I met Agnes Porter, the principal at Quqshuun, and she introduced me to Rob the literacy teacher, Kendall, the math teacher (although they both teach other things), Debbie, the Inuktitut teacher, and Jorni, who teaches a number of subjects, including traditional techniques such as tanning hides.

I shared the books Andrew had given me to bring up to the Arctic and the teachers and students were thrilled. The students immediately reached for the books, and I loved watching them share with each other...as soon as one took a book, three others would cuddle up close, and they would pore over the illustrations and text together (sharing is a way of life with the Inuit). I read a story about trees to a number of students and they listened intently – despite the fact most of them have never seen a tree in their life. I also left clay for them. Judy, a friend and neighbour who is a potter, had taught me how to make a clay tile with an impression (borrowed from the natural world) in it. The idea was to have students in the Arctic make their tile, then I would bring it back for my students to glaze and Judy to fire in her kiln. However carrying clay in a plane and on a zodiac (in rough water) proved to be harder on the clay than I anticipated – but a teacher was very happy to take the tiles and will do the project from start to finish in Gjoa Haven – they will build a campfire to use as a kiln. I will have my students do the project in Victoria. We'll find a way to share our artwork.

Then it was my turn to learn some Inuit culture. Jorni was teaching some students how to tan caribou hides, and had them working with a version of ulu's (a metal scraper with a wooden handle), scraping and softening the leather. Salami, an Inuit elder who speaks the language in a beautifully soft, melodic voice (and doesn't speak English) was helping, and spoke her instructions to the students in the Inuktitut language. She and a few of the students were softening some leather for the soles of mukluks...by chewing on it. After the technique was demonstrated to me I was asked to try....I will post the picture of me chewing on caribou hide...yet another first. I also learned that heather grows rampantly on some parts of the tundra, although I haven't been able to find any yet, and has two important uses – firewood, since there isn't much wood available, and as a mattress to put under hides to keep them from getting damp, when out on the land.

I then met with Jonathon, the principal from the high school. While Agnes has lived in Gjoa Haven her whole life, Jonathon came ten years ago. Jonathon and I talked for a long time and I learned a great deal from him. We talked about the challenges for students in the Arctic – one of the biggest being the conflict between the traditional way of life and the influence of the "outside" world, and the things they have going for them ...one of the best being the closeness of family including the extended family. I asked Jonathon many blunt questions and appreciated his perspective and honesty. He loves it here.

Jonathon, Agnes, Rob and I have many ideas and are keen to be connected. I'm really looking forward to working with them over the next year, and am confident that their students in Gjoa Haven and my students at Lansdowne will produce a project that will reflect the similarities and differences of life on the West Coast and

life in the Arctic.

Agnes recommended I go to the Roman Catholic church, which has a lovely altar shaped like an igloo. Upon opening the door to the church I was swept in by Sister Dorica, a nun who runs the church. She would hear of nothing less than my staying for lunch...so I did! She had another guest, a priest from Slovakia who now lives in French Guyana and doesn't speak English. It was fun to chat with them – and sign language – and to get yet another perspective on life in the Arctic. Sister Dorica said that if you are not born in the Arctic, to live here for a long time you must have joy in your heart.

After lunch with the Sister and Father, I struck out to explore Gjoa Haven. I wandered the dusty roads that join crazily with each other...remembering that they're covered in snow and ice most of the year... and looked at the airtight boxes that are home to the locals. From the outside, houses in the Arctic are not fancy...Jonathon told me they have no eaves or porches because, when you frequently have winds that sustain 70km/hr with gusts up to 130km/hr., eaves and porches would blow off! The houses are functional for the weather up here and keep people warm. I checked out the Co-op and the Northern store – two fixtures in Arctic towns. I saw the small cemetery, and had many people smile and say hello to me, or wave as they zoomed by on their ATVs. The ATVs are the main mode of transportation in the Arctic, and it's not unusual to see a mom zip by with a baby tucked into the back of her coat and another child sitting in front, an older child driving younger ones, or a family of 4 squished on together. The only downside to Gjoa Haven, as in Cambridge Bay, are the dogs who remain tied up outside with little attention. They break my heart.

I then struck out on the tundra. I could see the Laurier's helicopter and crew in the distance working on a navigational aid, and Jonathon and Agnes had told me to head in that direction. The wind was coming up as had been predicted, and it was getting quite cold, but I loved walking the tundra as the wind whistled in my ears. It was covered in lichen and resilient tiny flowers, and I was surprised by the diversity of the land. Gjoa Haven has a lovely sandy beach, then rises in a hill that has not only the flowers and lichen but rough grasses, rocks, wetlands and rivulets. I walked for close to two hours, and felt like a bit of an explorer myself. I carried a radio from the ship so they could call me when it was time to come back in – Captain Hull is terrific about giving me opportunities to see as much of the Arctic as he can, and humours my pestering him for more time on the tundra. The call came late in the afternoon – I had spent the whole day in Gjoa Haven, and it was an Excellent Arctic Adventure (I got that from Bruce!). But it still wasn't done. By now the wind was really up and there were some pretty serious swells and whitecaps in the protected harbour. Devon came in on the zodiac to pick up myself and three others who met us at the dock. Expertly maneuvering the boat, he took us two at a time back to the ship, where rather than climbing the accommodation ladder (which I'm really good at now – or at least I think so!), we had to be winched up the side of the ship because of the waves!

I was now ready for the feast that I knew Bert and Rick would have prepared...getting fed well three times a day is a real highlight for me! At dinner I met our three new guests – an archaeologist who is also the Director of Culture and Heritage for Nunavut, an archaeologist from the University of Waterloo, and Robert, the head archaeologist for the Franklin expedition, who has now joined Ryan and Jonathon (the archaeologist, not the principal) as they prepare to start the search for the Terror and Erebus in earnest. There has been international attention on this quest, and I was interested to hear Robert say that the search for Franklin's two ships is the most well-known search for a wreck in the world. Robert commented that if a list was made of wrecks yet to be discovered, the Erebus and Terror would be at the top as the most desirable.

The wind is still wailing away outside, and we are steaming back through Simpson Strait. The search will have to wait until the wind subsides, and in the meantime, the crew will continue to work hard on ensuring the coasts of the Arctic are well marked and safe. I will not be in another community until we reach Cambridge Bay again, but I'm looking forward to each day nevertheless. The ship is a wonderful place to be, there is still much to be learned, observations to be made, conversations to be had...and Captain Hull has assured me there will be more adventures. He's made sure of that so far!