

The Sound of Silence

A Call to Canada's Arctic

by Trina Hayes



No, not me, I am not going to the Arctic. After all, I am the lover of sun, surf, and sand. I could never possibly live without the sun, the water, and the beaches. My white and my black angel, who both have permanent landing permits on either shoulder, were enmeshed in one of the largest arguments of my life. The one angel – the black one, that is – was determined to convince me that I could never live in the cold and the darkness without my friends. While the other angel, the white one, sat quietly, patiently waiting to get a word in edgewise to say, *Listen to me. Stop and listen. You will never be sorry. Listen to that small still voice within that will never lead you astray. The call is strong, the call is true, the call is for your highest good.* How could I possibly discern at this time in my life when I was in a constant battle with my head and my heart? How could I decide which one was right? I fought the call; I fought it with everything I had within me.

A series of events in my life challenged me to take care of myself, to honor myself and what is of the highest good for me, something that had been foreign to me most of my life. How could I possibly leave everyone and everything I knew to “take care of me?” I had been offered a gift without knowing it. It would take some months later before a dear friend reminded me that I had been offered the greatest gift in my life and that was... to “take care of me.” That was my call to the Arctic.

I arrived in Cambridge Bay, Nunavut on Victoria Island, latitude 66 on December 14, 2007. It was one of the coldest days of the

year, and we had almost 23 hours of darkness on that day. It was almost surreal. How could it be that within one week I could go from walking the beach, swimming the Gulf of Mexico, to dressing in multiple layers to just keep warm? I had done my research and knew the amount of layers I had to wear to keep warm. There were days walking to work that I had to remove my glasses because they were frozen and I couldn't see, and then the tears from my eyes would freeze before they hit my cheeks. I have been lost in a blizzard at -62 degrees, being only steps from my hotel. I have gone snowmobiling on the Northwest Passage and stood inside an ancient iceberg that moved last year during the first movement of the passage since the last ice age... Ice fishing for lake trout with an Inuit elder, discussing her life while sitting in a hole that had been hand dug with picks and shovels... Flying across the Arctic, peering out the window of a Dash-8 in awe of the various shades of white. I never realized that there were different shades of white until I lived in the Arctic. Now, I sit in awe of the ice, the snow, the animals that live and thrive in this beautiful wonderland I now call “home.”

I have been listening to the stories of people my age who have born in igloos or caribou tents... Listening to their struggles to move “off the land” and into the settlements that the Canadian government has developed... The stories of anger, resentment, frustration, appreciation, gratitude, and happiness.

I have come here to listen, to listen to the

sound of silence, the sound of walking on the tundra on New Year's Day when there is no one around for miles and miles, to listen to the sound of stillness, without birds or beasts, the sound of listening to my own voice. I watch people come, and I watch people go. Some come because they felt called, but once they arrive, they soon realize they are not ready to adapt to the harshness of one of the world's most difficult climates. They leave, not knowing what happened, but they can't stay. Maybe they were not ready yet to listen, to be silent.

We have come to the north for various reasons. Some have come to run away from their lives as they knew then, and others have come to run to their lives as they watch them unfold. No matter the reason, one cannot get away from the sound of silence. It will either drive you crazy, probably back to the south where silence has to be sought, or it will cause you to embrace the silence, the call to the north, the call to look within and let go of that which you thought you knew and open to the possibilities of that which will support you on your journey in life.

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