

Hi folks

Eleanor Millard has been kind enough to forward a story from her soon to be published book, *River Child*. I have encouraged her to give us information on how to obtain her book once it is published.

I hope you will enjoy her story as much as I did.

Sherron

Thanks for all your work on the Moc Tel. It is a wonderful resource for me and I love it all, especially the pictures which bring back many memories. I am writing my memoirs of nearly 40 years in the Yukon, from 1965. I have had a collection of short stories published by Caitlin Press, Prince George, called *River Child*, based on my experiences as a social worker in Dawson and the memoirs are just about ready for publication. Here is one of my pieces from the memoirs, about flying to Old Crow.

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**Arctic Wings
By Eleanor Millard
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A cluster of men and I puffed cigarettes and gazed into the empty mid-day sky. Standing on the tarmac of the small air terminal in central British Columbia, we heard a groaning motor to the south. Someone pointed to a large plane coming towards us on the horizon. "There it is! See? That has to be ours."

We had been unloaded from the Canadian Pacific Airlines DC-6 en route from Vancouver to Whitehorse, Yukon. As the plane took off south, leaving us on the ground, the stewardess said vaguely the pilot wanted to test out something mechanical. We would have to wait only a few minutes, she assured us, four hours earlier.

This was my very first flight, the middle of May, 1965. I was thrilled to be the only person in my family to become a sophisticated traveller, flying rather than taking the train or Greyhound. Along with one other woman and a male bartender, I was going to Dawson City for a summer job as a barmaid in one of the old Klondike hotels. We were all students at the University of B.C.

When the counsellor at the Vancouver Manpower office had telephoned me offering me the barmaid's job, I exclaimed, "Dawson Creek! That's so far away!"

"Dawson City, not Creek," a bored woman's voice said. I sensed her frustration with the educated university student who didn't know her geography.

"Oh, Dawson City! Oh yeah. The Yukon. It's that gold rush place, right?" I had grown up in Yale, B.C., which was the first staging area for the miners headed up the Fraser Canyon for Barkerville and its Gold Rush of the 1860's. Later, we had lived along the Barkerville Road near Quesnel and often visited the ghost town. I felt well acquainted with Nineteenth Century gold rush architecture and can-can girls.

"It's the Klondike," the Manpower voice said. She clearly had other things to do--most likely, to immediately phone and offer the job to someone who at least knew the location.

"Wow! That sounds far enough North to be interesting." Without hesitation I said, "I'll go." The Occidental Hotel would pay our way up, but we had to pay them back if we left before the end of the summer. If we stayed the whole summer, they would pay our flight back to Vancouver. We would have a room in the hotel and meals in their cafe. It paid \$350 a month and the tips were supposed to be very good.

We three new employees had met each other for the first time at the Vancouver airport before boarding the DC-6. Nila and John were very friendly and I was pleased to find they had both flown before. They advised me what to do with my luggage and what was happening at every step.

"Well, looks like we're headed Inside," John smiled with authority in his voice when we gathered together in Vancouver.

"Inside?" Nila and I both asked.

"Sure. I hear up there in the Yukon, they call anywhere not in the North 'Outside'. That is, anything north of the 60th Parallel. My roommate told me that. He's from Watson Lake."

"We are Outside and we are going...Inside?" I asked.

"Looks like it, if CPA ever comes back to pick us up," John said.

"Sounds like it's being in jail," Nila commented, her enthusiasm waning.

"Sounds to me like they have their own language," I said. "Do they really call it Inside?"

"Well," John said, "I don't think they actually use the term Inside for the North, but my roommate uses 'Outside' a lot for the rest of the world."

"Where's the 60th Parallel anyways?" I asked, beginning to realize my knowledge of geography wasn't as good as I thought.

"Around Watson Lake, I think," John said. "A long way from Dawson City. A long way *south* of Dawson City. My roommate was upset that I didn't know anything about the Yukon. I asked him if I could get a ride with him to the Yukon in his new car and get dropped off in Dawson City on his way to Watson Lake. He gave me the map then. And a big lecture. Look at this." John took a map out of his pocket and we gazed at the thousands of empty miles without any cities between

Prince George and Dawson City. I breathed hard with excitement. I was going to the True North Strong and Free. And getting paid while I was at it.

When we finally took off from Prince George in our tested-out plane later that day, there was a party atmosphere on board, with free drinks for everyone. As we played cards and smoked, John pointed out (with a logic that I was to remember on later flights), that now the plane was safer than ever, since they had fixed whatever it was. It was unlikely, he said, that two things would go wrong with the same plane. That assurance gave me the courage to unbuckle my seat belt and walk to the back to use the women's washroom. Another two stops and five hours of flying later we arrived in Whitehorse, twelve hours after leaving Vancouver. My old life was left Outside and I was starting a new one, North of 60.

The location of that washroom I had used on the DC-6 was to strike me with sudden clarity seven weeks later. On July 8, we learned that the very same plane we flew to the Yukon had exploded and crashed near 100 Mile House, south of Prince George. The explosion "occurred in the toilet bowl in the port side rear lavatory of the plane," the Whitehorse *Star* reported. The women's washroom. A cleaning lady said there had been a strange man come from that washroom when she was cleaning the overhead bins, just an hour before take-off. Security was not considered a priority in those days. All 52 passengers and crew on board Flight 21 were killed, five of them from Whitehorse. There has never been a satisfactory conclusion as to who was responsible for the explosion, or why, but it was definitely a planted bomb.

The photograph of the CP Air DC-6 in the Whitehorse *Star* horrified me. Taken from above, the crumbled pieces of metal clearly showed the shape of the cabin and wings, flattened. It was obvious the plane fell straight down, crashing between untouched trees. No one stood a chance of survival.

The CPA flight crew stayed overnight in Whitehorse at their staff house but sometimes, for a break in the routine, they would catch the connecting DC-3 to Dawson and overnight there. The crew had become quite friendly with us at the Occidental Hotel. They had brought me news of my graduation from UBC on their last trip, with a copy of the Vancouver *Sun* newspaper listing all the graduates that year. The congratulatory drink they bought me was the only celebration I had for my university graduation.

As the time drew closer for me to leave at the end of that short summer, I knew I would miss Dawson terribly. It had been an exciting time, with new experiences and always fun despite much hard work. I intended to return to UBC and take a year's teacher training after my B.A but I realized that being one of the thousands of students at UBC made me feel lost. My only identity was my student number. That summer in Dawson, I was recognized and treated as a real person for the first time since leaving high school.

Two weeks before I had to head Outside, a friend urged me to apply for the social work position in Dawson which had been left empty for six months. All that was needed, he said, was a Bachelor's degree. I had mine, in a suitcase under my bed. A year's work in a government job would help pay off some of my debts from school. I mailed a letter to the Department of Welfare in Whitehorse and secured an appointment for an interview on my way through to B.C. I hoped

they were desperate enough to have a social worker in Dawson that they would take someone who had majored in Fine Arts and English and knew nothing at all about the profession.

Flying to Whitehorse from Dawson would be expensive, and I was happy to take the bus. Thoughts of the horrible plane crash in July still paralyzed me. I attended my interview in Whitehorse and was told they would wire me to my grandmother's address in North Vancouver about the social work position. The White Pass train to Skagway, and the Alaska and BC ferries down the coast through unforgettable mountain and ocean landscapes increased my desire to stay in the North. When I arrived in North Vancouver, a telegram from the Territorial Department of Welfare was waiting. If I could get my driver's licence, it said, I could have the job. They would pay my flight to Whitehorse and for shipping my belongings. I took eight hours' driving lessons and received my licence within a week.

"I just can't fly up there, no matter what it's for," I told my grandmother. "I'm too afraid." She understood, but the supervisor in Whitehorse laughed when I said I would be taking the bus to Whitehorse. It was a continuous two and a half day trip north along the Alaska Highway.

Until the end of October when I would take over the Dawson office, I was trained in the Whitehorse office and stayed in the CPA staff house along with the overnighing flight crews. Some of them knew the Flight 21 crew that had perished. I was amazed at their courage, choosing to fly for a living.

As the Northern Area Social Worker, I was to be responsible for Dawson City, Mayo, Elsa, Pelly Crossing, and also the community of Old Crow, inside the Arctic Circle. There was no road to Old Crow, and I would be flying there. I breathed easier when they said there were no cases yet in Old Crow, and that it might be a year before I went. I was certain that by then I would have paid off some of my university debts, and would be training as a teacher.

But a year later, I found myself shakily climbing the stairs leading to the door of the Great Northern Airlines DC-3, CF-CPY, which is now a weather vane at the Whitehorse airport. The medium-sized plane could hold about twenty passengers. I had been given all kinds of advice about flying to Old Crow from the RCMP Corporal (who piloted a DC-3 during the Second World War and obviously had survived) and from the Public Health Nurse, a veteran of flying in the Eastern Arctic. They said a DC-3 could fly with only one motor and could land "anywhere", even with two failed motors. It could glide for miles without power. They said the worst that could happen, if we had an "unscheduled landing" between Dawson and Old Crow, would be that we might have to wait a couple of hours for rescue on a riverbank where the plane would have slid to a gentle stop in the gravel. I added matches and chocolate bars to my suitcase, just in case. The night before the flight, I dreamed about war planes being blown up and crashing to the ground.

Climbing the shaky metal stairs for that first flight to Old Crow, I stared at the two propellers on the wings, mentally urging them to work their hardest. "This is my last chance," I told myself as the doorway loomed closer. I could turn around right then and not go if I chose. I would only suffer embarrassment, nothing else. But I could lose my job, which by then, I thoroughly enjoyed. I strapped myself in, only half believing that none of the other passengers--all men--

had a bomb hidden in his suitcase, ready to commit suicide with a flare. The Anglican bishop was also aboard, and I took assurance from that. His prayers might help keep us in the air. I did some heavy bargaining with his God, a sudden conversion on my part, and told myself as long as I could see out the window to the ground, we would be safe. The squealing engines precluded conversation, and I spent the two-hour flight identifying safe crash sites as we flew over the Richardson and Ogilvie mountain ranges.

Bouncing and screeching, wavering side to side, sand and stones flying up behind us, we landed on a gravel bar on the side of the Porcupine River in front of the nursing station in Old Crow. A laughing group of short, dark haired Vuntut Gwitchin men and women wearing their distinctive dark blue parkas trimmed with wolverine fur ran to the plane. They welcomed all the passengers with a handshake and then busily helped to unload freight. Their energetic warmth added to the thrill of survival. I was in the real North, really Inside. The tiny First Nation village of log cabins with dog teams howling and barking behind them in the distance fascinated me.

Not all flights to Old Crow were so uneventful. On my second trip, the next spring, CF-CPY flew blind through a whiteout in a snowstorm. The force of the wind made the flight turbulent. It was as if we were in a swerving car driving through large potholes. To add to my nervousness, half the seats had been taken out and the forward section was filled with a rubber bladder full of fuel oil. We were told we couldn't smoke. We landed on the frozen river in front of the village, just short of a hole in the ice that was twenty feet long and a yard wide with water clearly rushing under the ice. I was so relieved, I walked over to the pilot and thanked him for his ability to fly us safely. His hair was grey and I happily noted that Great Northern Airways pilots survived to a ripe old age.

"Well," he said, "it's not the landing that's difficult. It's taking off, with that hole in the ice."

"Taking off is harder?"

"Yep. Takes more space to get airborne than to land." I tried to forget his words all week while I was there. The return flight, empty except for me, was on Good Friday. The village nurse had mentioned in passing that Good Friday was considered bad luck in Jamaica, where she came from. She would never fly on Good Friday. I forgot she said that until we were in the air, having luckily escaped upward before the dark hole in the ice loomed below us. We did make it to Dawson where I joked that I had kept the plane at the right altitude by gripping the arms of my seat.

One flight should have forced me to quit smoking years before I finally did. The DC-3 was infamous for its lack of heat. It would take about two hours of flying to get a little warmth out of the heaters, and they flew in any weather. Once I flew at fifty-five below and I was convinced it was colder inside than out. It was no comfort to hear from a fellow passenger that the air temperature was actually warmer at higher altitudes than it was on the ground, and that the "warm" plane descending into colder air sometimes made ice form on the wings. He said that even a thin coating of ice deformed the wings, changing the air flow above and below them. Proper air pressure around the wings kept the plane in the air.

The Public Health Nurse told me I'd feel less cold once I left the plane, if I unzipped my parka while I was in it. We had just taken off and I lit my inevitable cigarette. I remembered I should undo my parka, and balanced the cigarette in the tiny ashtray on the arm of the seat. As I drew my arms out of the sleeves of my parka to leave it around my shoulders, the cigarette dropped to the floor. Or I thought it was on the floor.

One of my flying superstitions was that if I undid my seatbelt, the plane would crash, and another rule was that I had to sit next to the window. I awkwardly searched around my feet with my hand, leaning, still buckled, into the tiny space between me and the seat ahead. I couldn't find the cigarette. The woman next to me undid her belt and knelt down. "Not here, I guess," she said. But there was smoke wafting from between the wall of the cabin and the arm of my seat. We took a magazine and tried to use it to shuffle the thing out from the space. The magazine got stuck and we ripped it taking it out. I dug in my purse for my long comb and shoved it down the slot. It went into oblivion. A tiny curl of smoke still rose from my side.

"Maybe it'll just go out, eh?" I said hopefully. We waited. I needed a cigarette badly, but under the circumstances, I didn't think it would be exactly acceptable.

By this time all the seats around us knew about the dilemma. The man behind was poking and shuffling under my seat. There were stifled grins and jokes about burning up the plane. Finally the steward came by, and I asked, "Don't you have a fire extinguisher? Or some water? I'll just pour it down the side here."

"Are you kidding?" he said. "It's forty below in here. Everything that's liquid is frozen. And our regulations say I don't use the extinguisher unless it's a real emergency." A picture formed in my mind of my seat burning out from under me and the plane blowing up as the fire went through to the gas tank, in the wing just on the other side of my window. It would be another hour until we landed.

I had become fatalistic about the situation, noting that at least the smoke wasn't getting any thicker, when the steward appeared with a small metal cream jug. "This is frozen," he said, "but I'll thaw it with my lighter." He stood in the aisle, holding the jug in one hand and the lighter under it with the other, until he was rewarded with liquid cream. He handed it to me, and I poured it down the side of my seat against the wall. The smoke disappeared and we were all visibly relieved. I told myself I would quit smoking in gratitude. The next day.

When I mentioned my flying phobias to my doctor, he gave me some tranquillizer samples, and on my next flight north to Old Crow I took one. I stared out the window the whole time, forcing my eyes open and fixing them on the mountains and clouds below. I was totally exhausted. But absolutely terrified. When we landed, I gratefully crawled into bed at the nursing station at 2:00 in the afternoon and slept until supper time.

I have never taken another tranquillizer in my life, but I was tempted to try two instead of one while I waited on the river ice with my baggage for the return trip. I noticed the pilot was busy working as he stood under one of the wings, swearing to himself. I went over to him. He was wrapping what looked like white cloth round and round the aileron, the moveable flap on the rear

edge of the wing that controls sideways balance. Never one to trust my fate to Great Northern, I laughed nervously, "What's that you're doing? Something missing?"

"Hole in the damn thing," he said, not looking at me.

I recognized what he was using. "Is that adhesive tape?"

"Yep. Nursing station helped me out." He stepped away and admired his patchwork, his cheery eyes smiling. "Good thing they had something that might do."

Close to hysteria, I asked, "You sure it'll work?"

"Gotta try." He started to walk away.

I pursued him. "But how'd you get a hole?"

"Flying so low, I guess," he laughed. "Get it? Flying solo?" and disappeared inside.

I couldn't walk to Dawson. Nervously resigned, I climbed on board and found a window seat where I could keep an eye on the injured wing of our bird. A minute later, with Old Crow still in sight, the bandage tore off and blew away. I gulped, closed my eyes, and held onto the arms of my seat with both hands. Nothing changed. The groaning motors kept their steady pace and the body of the plane was gently rocking as usual. My eyes opened. The wing was still there.

"Hmmm." It was the co-pilot leaning over my seat, looking out the window, smiling. "Guess it didn't work, eh? Thought I saw something white floating down." He went back to the cockpit and left us to our fate. I watched the aileron the whole way home to keep it in one piece and attached to the wing.

Sometimes I was the only passenger. Freight at a very high price per pound was the company's mainstay and passengers were only a secondary income. The First Nations in Old Crow told me they hated flying and only did it when they had to. I sympathized. I would choose my seat by the wing, (telling myself it was the strongest and therefore safest location), strap myself in tightly, and hold on to the arms while the plane thumped along the Porcupine River ice or gravel bar depending on the season. It churned its way upward with a familiar buzzing sound, the whole interior shaking in its struggle. When it reached flying altitude it groaned and the noise lessened. For a people whose survival in the bush depended entirely on human strength and cunning, the Vuntut Gwichin must have felt completely helpless flying inside that huge tin monster.

Alone again on one flight south to Dawson, I had just undone my parka in the hopes that the interior would warm up somewhat and lit a cigarette. I glimpsed out to the wing. There was a hole in it! It wasn't torn or broken, but a round-shaped hole that looked like it should have a cap on it.

As we levelled off, the steward came by to see if I wanted some coffee and I pointed out the window. "Look! There's a hole in the wing!" I tried not to sound in a panic.

"Oh?" He leaned over me for a look and straightened up. "I'll see what the captain says," he commented without emotion. He wandered forward much too slowly to the cockpit, opening and then carefully closing the curtains separating the passengers from the pilots.

What seemed like a long time later, he came back and said, "Looks like our man on the ground in Old Crow forgot to put the gas cap on again after he checked the fuel level. Couldn't have filled the tank or we'd see gas coming out."

"Well, are we going back for it?" I nearly yelled.

"Nope. Captain says you keep an eye on it for us. If you see anything leaking out, just tell me."

"What? And what's this about 'again'? Has he done this before?" My eyes must have been open as wide as my mouth.

"Just once before I think."

"Well, can't we go back and get the thing? You'll need it, won't you?" I pictured the pilot after landing in Dawson, searching for an airplane gas cap before heading off to Whitehorse. Surely there had to be some kind of Federal regulation about the necessity of having a gas cap.

He thought for a moment. "My guess is that the captain doesn't want to go back because if we had to land on that rough ice the gas could spill out onto the wing. It might be dangerous with the heat from the motors." He was very academic about it all. "We'll be better off landing in Dawson when we've used up some fuel. And that's a graded gravel runway. Smoother. Just keep your eye on it." He smiled.

"You can bet I'll watch it!" I said, torn between anger and fear.

"And, by the way, I'd put out that cigarette." I did just that. Again we landed safely, and I swore I would find some reason not to fly to Old Crow, as much as I loved being there.

After three years of bobbing and churning along at under a hundred miles an hour through the sky, I knew all the regular sounds of old CF-CPY. Even with my eyes closed, I could tell what stage of the flight she was at from the sounds of the motors taking off, levelling, or the thump of the wheels being lowered for preparing to land. Only periodically did an unexplained sound make my heart skip a beat and my hands tighten on the arms of the seat. I was able to calculate the amount of time we were away from landing even with a headwind. It was usually three cigarettes to Old Crow.

One Christmas, Jane Strong, a friend and probation officer in Whitehorse, called me, trying to convince me that we should go to Old Crow for New Year's. "It's Johnny Abel's wedding, New Year's, and his twenty-first birthday all rolled into one," she said. "We can't afford to miss all that fun. Only once in a lifetime will this ever happen."

"Once in a lifetime is right. We may not have any lifetime left after flying there."

"Aw, come on." Jane was from Maryland, and her soft southern tones were convincing. "I've already made arrangements for us to stay in the trailer down by the Territorial garage, you know, the little one that the Wildlife Service uses."

"But I have never flown for actual fun before," I pointed out weakly. If work demanded that I had to fly, I would be relatively safe. It would be tempting the gods of the skies to fly for sheer enjoyment.

But, a week later, fortified by a drink stronger than our morning coffee, we were on the DC-3 headed north from Dawson above white clouds that meant it was snowing below. We were the only passengers for Old Crow; a few others were going on to Inuvik. Three cigarettes after taking off, I looked out at the perpetual white and said, "Jane, we should have landed by now."

"Are you sure?"

"We're fifteen minutes past the time it takes." I knew she could hear the alarm in my terse statement.

Jane looked at her watch. "Yeah, you're right I guess." She was twenty years older than I, and her motherly instincts took over. "When the steward comes back from up front, we can ask him," she said, her voice soothing.

"He never comes back after he takes the coffee cups."

"Hmmm," Jane said non-committally. She didn't seem to understand the seriousness of the situation.

A minute later, I said, "We should have landed by this time, Jane."

She looked at my face and said patiently, "All right. I'll just go on up to the front there and see what's up." Her calm southern drawl was comforting. She returned to her seat after popping her head through the curtains ahead and said, "Guess we're going to Inuvik."

"Shit! Inuvik! Can't we land in Old Crow?" I asked. It would mean an additional flight the next day, from Inuvik to Old Crow. That would be pushing our luck.

"Can't see anything in Old Crow apparently."

"But can they see anything in Inuvik? It'll be afternoon, dark by the time we get there." It was just days after the longest night of the year. Above the Arctic Circle, which was between Dawson and Old Crow, that meant twenty-four hours a day with no sun.

"Dark's probably better than this whiteout. They'll have lights on the runway. It's flat country, a big airport, like Whitehorse." Despite my contagious fear, her flying experience in the States and

overseas helped her stay undisturbed. "Don't worry your head off like that," she said. "We'll be just fine." She had long ago learned not to relate to me all the scary flights she had been on that had successfully landed. My memory and imagination were too good.

We landed safely with only one bounce between the runway lights in the mid-afternoon dark of Inuvik and were taken to the Eskimo Inn. "Phone us tomorrow about noon," the driver said, and left us. We found a restaurant, ate, and went back to our room. With no TV or radio, we read for awhile, had a bath, and fell asleep early.

I woke up suddenly and looked at the clock. 8:00. "Jane," I said, "It's eight. We'd better go to breakfast in case they come for us early."

Slowly opening her eyes, Jane said, "Breakfast? Is it morning already? Damn. I don't feel like I've slept hardly at all."

"Yeah, time to get up." I leaned on the window sill and gazed at the grey ice fog outdoors. Everything was still and no one was walking on the street. I chuckled, "You know, it could be eight at night. You'd think there'd be somebody out there, though." Smoke from chimneys along the street was drifting rather than going straight up as in the severe cold. "Looks like it's only about 30 below. What do you think?"

Jane offered her solution: "We'll just have to wait and see if it gets lighter or darker. Go back to sleep. Should only take an hour." She turned her back and closed her eyes.

"I doubt if the light will change much away up here," I said. I felt as if we were in limbo.

We tossed a coin to see who would be the one who had to go to the hotel desk and find out if it was day or night. I lost. The incredulous clerk said it was night.

The next day about noon, completely rested and bored, we were picked up in a van by a young pilot who introduced himself as Jim. A few minutes later we unloaded luggage and food beside a single-engine yellow Beaver sitting on skis on the Mackenzie River ice. Jane pulled herself up into the front, saying, "This is great. I want to see as much as I can."

"Only if it's not another whiteout," I said. The twilight of Arctic noon and the endless white sky didn't look any better than the day before. "Think I'll be safer in the back," I said gratefully.

"Don't worry," Jim said, "We'll get you there today for sure," and slammed his door shut. He said some things into his headset, listened to a scratchy reply, and revved the motor. All chatter ceased as the propeller whirled and squealed in the cold, sounding as if it were going to fly off the plane by itself. The body of the plane pulled and struggled to move, almost leaning forward.

"Damn!" Jim said. He turned off the motor. "Stuck to the ice again." He jumped out and took a two by four that was lying on the ground, dug under the skis of the plane, and used it as a lever, bouncing us a little. He got back in. No luck. This time he got out and poured gasoline around the skis. That loosened them, and we took off.

In a less than half an hour, we were again in the middle of thick white snow clouds, about fifteen minutes out of Old Crow. Jim opened his map and squinted at it. He folded it, grunted, put it away, opened it again, and coughed. "Either of you been to Old Crow before?" he asked.

"Eleanor has, many times," Jane offered.

"That's good," Jim said. He turned halfway around in his seat to me. "Do you know what Old Crow Mountain looks like?"

"You mean you don't know what it looks like?"

"Nope. First time to Old Crow, this trip."

My heart pounded. What would the mountain look like from this direction? I had never come into Old Crow from the north. We couldn't see anything but billowing whiteness. I had read about pilots in a whiteout suffering vertigo, not knowing if the plane was actually flying level or not, and not trusting the instruments. We could be upside down, flying in any direction and not know it. I leaned forward to look at the dial that showed the plane's image. The wings appeared to be horizontal. Jane and I exchanged glances and frowns in silence. It did not comfort me to note that finally Jane's complacency was being tested.

I had a vision of landing somewhere on the Porcupine River and sitting out the snowstorm. It was better than crashing into Old Crow Mountain. We had brought lots of food with us for the holiday, and sleeping bags. I had my trusty matches. We even had some whiskey. It might be fun. "Maybe we should just land and sit it out?" I offered hopefully. No one said anything.

"Look!" Jim yelled. "Dogteam on the river!" We looked down just ahead of the left wing through a crack in the clouds. There it was, a few hundred yards below us, a brief glimpse of seven dogs running in a line ahead of a sled and someone standing up behind. It quickly disappeared under the cloud.

"Do you think he's going toward Old Crow or away?" Jim asked me.

"Afternoon. He's got to be going home," I guessed. I hoped.

"OK. We'll keep on in this direction." I closed my eyes in despair and hoped Jim could see the Porcupine River below us every time he leaned and strained to look out his window.

Suddenly we burst through the clouds just a few yards above the frozen river in front of the nursing station. We landed in a whoop of joy from all of us. The Great Northern agent came running down the riverbank, zipping up her parka. She said, "We heard the plane for twenty minutes, circling. No one ever landed before when the weather was this bad. You can't even see Old Crow Mountain. We were scared!" she said. Our fears weren't altogether unfounded. There had been a few crashes in my short time in the Yukon, some fatal, and all in small planes.

Later that night, settled into our little trailer, Jane was reading a magazine and burst out laughing. "Listen to this!" she said. "This bush pilot is flying in the North, and his passenger asks him if he follows Instrument Flight Rules--IFR. Yes, the guy replies: I use IFR--I Follow River!"

It was a wonderful four-day holiday of feasting, dancing, and laughter. Our terrifying beginning was pushed aside for awhile. The wedding and birthday celebration were first. It went until about 5:00 a.m. the next morning. The next night was to be New Year's. At about supper time, a little boy knocked on the trailer door and said, "No New Year's tonight. Too tired. We have New Year's tomorrow." We were the only people on earth celebrating New Year's Eve on January 1st, 1968.

One summer, just before I arrived in Old Crow on a regular visit, a Search and Rescue team from the Royal Canadian Air Force had called off an unsuccessful search for a downed plane that had disappeared close to the Alaska border. Two women teachers and I were invited for supper at the RCMP residence and the Corporal showed us the survival kits the RCAF officers had left him. He went to the kitchen to make us coffee and we broke one of the packages open. It was fascinating to see how much could be crammed into the small box: matches, a small compass, bright survey tape, drinking water tablets, string, tea, sugar, a signal mirror, fish hooks, fishing line, and first aid supplies.

"Look," said one of the teachers. "There's even dried meat." Dried caribou and moose were a staple with First Nations. We each took a piece of the hard square and began chewing.

"Kind of rubbery."

"Yeah, and oily."

"Maybe it's got a preservative in it."

The Corporal came into the room and burst into laughter. "Hey, you guys," he said. "You're chewing up the fire lighter!"

We spit into our serviettes and wiped our mouths out between spurts of giggling. "It's a good thing we aren't in a plane crash and lost in the bush," I said. "We'd be putting sugar on the fire lighter to make it taste better and trying to light the water tablets! You can tell we're all from Outside."