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Jennifer Branch, Teacher-Librarian, Inuvik, Canada: A Day in Her Life

Jennifer L. Branch was a teacher and teacher-librarian at Samuel Hearne Secondary School in Inuvik, Northwest Territories, Canada between 1991 and 1998. Inuvik is a town of 3,200 located about 250 kilometers north of the Arctic Circle on the east channel of the Mackenzie River. Samuel Hearne Secondary School serves a student population of about 300 students from grades 7 to 12. Inuvialuit, Gwich'in, and non-Native students make up the population. The school library has five networked computers and a small collection. The school library is supported by the Inuvik Centennial Library, a member of the NWT Library Service, located across the street from the school. The school year runs from the end of August until the end of June with holidays at Christmas and Easter. Jennifer has Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Education, and Master of Library and Information Science, and she is currently a doctoral candidate in the School of Library and Information Studies at the University of Alberta in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

The alarm sounds. It's dark, really dark. I struggle out of my warm bed and dial 777-4183. I know the number off by heart. The familiar voice says, "Weather conditions at 3:15 a.m. Inuvik. Cloudy. Temperature -34 degrees Celsius. Winds from the Northwest 15km/h. Gusts to 25 km/h. Barometric pressure falling to ... "

I hang up before he finishes. I don't really care about the barometric pressure. It's 5:54 a.m. I pull my longjohns on, tuck in the wrinkled T-shirt I just slept in and grab a pair of wool socks. I head to the bathroom to brush my teeth. I grab my school bag and my clothing bag, close the door, and head down the stairs. I open the door to the mudroom, and hear Shadow, our Black Labrador, moving in her kennel. She knows it's time to get up and stretches in her confined space. I pull on my snow pants, slip my feet into a pair of Sorels-tall, white winter boots-add a fleece jacket and a neck warmer and zip up my parka. I add another neck warmer, an earband, and grab fleece mittens and my moosehide gloves.

I let Shadow out of her kennel and attach her leash. It must be after six by now and I'd better get a move on. We race out the door, Shadow pulling me. I don't feel the wind right away. I head down the street, breathing through the neck warmer, and feeling the wonderful tingle of a cold morning on my cheeks. I am not wearing my glasses, so I struggle to see any movement in the dark. Shadow knows before I do that my friend Cheryl and Sako, her Norwegian Elkhound, are coming up the road. She starts to pull and strain against the leash so I let her go. There are no cars or trucks to worry about at this time of day.

The sky is dancing with a little bit of Northern lights. We usually see them once or twice a week on our daily morning walks. But the best time to see

them is in November-usually just before midnight. You would think I wouldn't notice them any more, but they still are a wondrous sight to see. The dogs know the way and race and tumble in the snow past the Midnight Sun Recreation Complex. They run past the swings in the Sir Alexander Mackenzie School playground and under the utilidor (the above-ground water, sewage, and heating pipes that stretch throughout the town).

Cheryl is a grade 8 teacher at my school. We chat about our plans for the day. Her class is working on an integrated unit on Ancient Egypt. Her students have been down to the library several times and are now using the junior high computer lab to search the Internet. The current project is on Pharaohs. The lab is located in the junior high wing of the school and is equipped with 25 networked Pentium 11 IBM computers, so a whole class can work there together. She is planning her next unit on Japan, and I mention several novels that I have seen reviewed in recent journals.

We talk about exams that are coming up and how great it feels to be up and about before most of the rest of the town. We see the same familiar people going to work: the waitress from the Sunriser Cafe, an RCMP officer walking to the detachment, a nurse who starts at 7:00 at the Inuvik Regional Hospital, and a teacher getting an early start at the elementary school. Cheryl talks about taking out some moose meat to make stew for dinner. Her husband bagged his first moose in the fall.

After the walk, I leave Shadow outside in her doghouse, grab my bags from inside the door, and head to the school. It is a three-minute walk to school through the willows that separate our house from the school, and I cut through the well-used path to the back door. I follow the skidoo trails so the snow isn't too deep; by this time of year it can be three feet deep. I turn on all the computers-there are five of them-and open the door to the office. I hang up my parka, shove the Sorels into the corner, and get ready for the day.

It is January 6-just another ordinary day in the school library at Samuel Hearne Secondary School in Inuvik, NWT. Students start to arrive about 7:30. They cluster in the foyer waiting for their friends to arrive. The doors are open early because it is too cold for them to be outside. Some will come into the library and surf the Internet. A few will return a book and sign out another for today's Drop Everything And Read (DEAR) time in their junior high class. A teacher or two will stop by and sign up to use the library for a class or two or five depending on the project, leave a request for materials, or chat about an upcoming unit they are planning. Others will just stop by to say hello on their way in. The library is well situated at the front of the school.

Today a group of boys come in with an interesting question. They want to know about fireworks. You may be surprised that on a cold January day students are interested in fireworks. But let me explain. Today is the 11th Annual Inuvik Sunrise Festival.

Each year the town of Inuvik experiences about 31 days of darkness. From about December 5 to January 6, the sun does not come up. So about 10 years ago, the town decided to celebrate the return of the sun with food, festivities, and fireworks. Because of the 24-hour sunlight in the summer, we cannot have fireworks for Canada Day or the Midnight Sun Festival, so our yearly fireworks display takes place in January. Instead of sitting at a park or beach in shorts and a t-shirt, we bundle up in our warmest clothes, bring along blankets and thermoses full of hot chocolate, and watch fireworks explode over the frozen Mackenzie River. Many people come by skidoo, but others walk or drive their vehicles down onto the ice road.

For about 30 minutes, the dark sky will be lit up. And then people will trudge off home or to Ingamo Hall for an old-time dance. At Ingamo there will be coffee and tea, and men will be tuning up the fiddles and guitars ready for a night of jigging. Women will be dressed in traditional parkas of calico trimmed with Delta braid and sunburst ruffs of wolverine fur. Small children will be there as well. The dancing can go on into the early morning hours.

So it wasn't all that surprising to be greeted with such a question on that early January morning. We searched the Internet and found many sites of interest. I located a book, *The Illustrated Dictionary of Pyrotechnics* (ISBN889526-01-0), that should become a part of our collection. It includes scientific and craft terms about fireworks, explosives, rocketry, and pyrotechnic special effects. The boys worked quietly at the computer for about 30 minutes.

At 8:30 the first bell rings and the library empties while students race off to homeroom classes. The science teacher brings in her grade 8 class to start thinking about Science Fair projects. I had located several Web sites earlier in the week and bookmarked them for her class. Several of the students are interested in doing a project related to the North. One interesting idea is to study the different kinds of materials used to make coats to keep us warm in the North. The student makes a list including wool duffel, goose down, duck down, Thinsulate, Gortex, and fleece. He gets started right away writing out his experimental design.

Later in the day, a grade 7 teacher brings her class to the library to work on a social studies project. Her class is interested in finding out about the tilt of the earth and why Inuvik receives 24-hour darkness in the winter and 24-hour sunlight in the summer. It seems like a perfect day to be working on such a project.

It is 11:00 a.m. and when I look out the window, it is still completely dark outside. On the window, reflections of faces of the Inuvialuit, Gwich'in, and non-Native students shine back at me. We begin with encyclopedias and atlases and then move to the Internet where students work in small groups to find information about the tilt of the earth. The students are able to enter their latitude into a site to find out the number of hours of sunlight in the summer and the winter for different places around the world. They make a

list of the cities and towns in the Circumpolar world and determine the number of hours of sunlight they have today.

The bell rings for lunch at 12:00. Parkas, boots, mittens, and neck warmers go back on. The sky is grey and so is everything else. Ice fog hangs in the air. Several of the teachers walk to a local cafe to pick up lunch. I walk about a block to Colin and Rita Allen's house for our weekly lunch. It is one of my favorite things to do. The Allens are Inuvialuit, and their children and grandchildren gather every Tuesday for sourdough pancakes, bacon, and sausages. The grandchildren range in age from 5 to 21 and there are usually 20 people there. We crowd into the small house to enjoy our get-together. Colin always says the grace in Inuvialuktun and I know to say "Amen" following the only word I recognize, *Jesus*.

On the walk back to school I notice the light. I think about the people who will gather at the highest point in the town to see if we can glimpse the sun at 2:00 p.m. Photos will be taken of the full two minutes of the very top of the sun.

The afternoon classes bring the usual questions. Can you recommend a good book to read? Can I go on the Internet? How do you spell Motley Cruel Is there a Metallica Web site? Where can I find out about the newest skidoos? Can you help me check out some college and university sites? Can I hang out in here until my next class? The questions are answered, some books are put away, the color printer is refilled with paper, and the encyclopedias are arranged in order. I water the plants under the grow lights and pray that they will survive another dark season. I glance out the window at 2:15 and think about the sun returning although it is still grey.

I fix a computer, find an empty disk, pick up my mail from the office, and chat for a second with the secretary. I glance through some catalogues that just arrived, put my Emergency Librarian on my desk, and place the latest magazines in their plastic covers. Another group comes in doing a social studies project in grade 11. I recommend trying the Dick Hill Northern Collection at the Inuvik Centennial Library for books for a project on Inuvialuit and Gwich'in self-government. I give three students permission to go across the street to look and make a call to one of the librarians to let them know the students are on their way. It is wonderful to have access to another library and to the whole collection of the Northwest Territories Library Service.

At the end of the school day, the library begins to fill with kids in the Homework Club, students who want to use the Internet, and teachers once again booking time, asking for resources, or just stopping in to say goodbye. Several tutors are available to help students. Two grade 7 girls are putting books away for me. Cheryl drops by to pick up the reviews of the novels I mentioned this morning.

I glance out the window. It is dark again. I hear the familiar thudding sounds of indoor soccer practice; it's the music and the balls as they bounce off the gym door. Girls run past in shorts and T-shirts.

Maybe it is a perfect day for fireworks after all.

This day in my life as a teacher-librarian was created from a collage of experiences of my seven years at Samuel Hearne Secondary School. The library has a small budget, and we have a big problem with theft and loss of books. There hasn't been a full-time teacher-librarian for at least 10 years. Teacher-librarians are often assigned teaching duties, or other administrative duties such as Program Support Teacher or Guidance Counsellor-or both. The library is now used as the Program Support center too. There are excellent computer facilities, but they are not integrated into the school library facility and program. Unfortunately, there is not a lot of cooperative program planning and teaching occurring at the school.