

(ADA'S STATEMENT TO E. R. JORDAN, ABOUT FEBRUARY 6, 1924)

Stefansson's Expedition

Fall of 1921

Sent exploring party to Wrangell Island. Arrived in Nome, Alaska, September 1st, 1921, and were looking for a seamstress to take along with them, whereby U. S. Marshall Jordan, introduced Ada Black-jack to Mr. Crawford, who was head of the Expedition. During their short stay in Nome they chartered the boat Silver Wave, the Commander's name was Jack Hammer, who had spent many years in the Arctic waters.

Before we left Nome I bought some sinew, needle, thimble and some linen thread. We left Nome about September 9, 1921, and arrived at Wrangell Island September 16th, 1921. On our way to Wrangell Island we stopped on Ace Cape to get some sinew and white seal skin, we also bought a small Eskimo skin boat. After we left East Cape, about six hours out the engine broke down and we had to lay over about a half day and night.

When we got to Wrangell Island the mainland looked very large to me, but they said that it was only a small island. I thought at first that I would turn back but I decided it wouldn't be fair to the boys so I felt that I had to stay. Soon after we arrived I started to sew on some snow shirts for the boys. We brought some reindeer skin parkies and all I had to do was to fasten the hoods on to them, for it was very cold and the boys needed them to go about in.

They used to haul lots of wood to get wood piles for the winter, they made the frame for the snowhouse for winter and about the last part of October they put the snow blocks in, we were living in a tent at first and it was rather cold.

The first fall only one of the boys was trapping fox. He was the only one that I know of that was trapping. After Christmas the rest of the boys did some trapping but I don't think they got many fox though. Just before Christmas two of the boys, Maurer and Crawford, went to the East of our camp. I don't know how many fox they got; they didn't get many though for they didn't have bait for fox.

When spring came in 1922 we saw some geese and ducks, then we had some good meat. That spring the boys got over 30 seals and over 10 polar bears all together including the young ones and mothers. Not many of the skins could be used for the weather was so damp and we had no way to dry them, so only one or two were saved.

The summer 1922 Mr. Knight took a trip to the East of our camp, about 60 miles. On that trip he said he crossed a river called Skeleton River, which he had to swim across. He said it was quite a large river. After he came back the other three boys left to take the same trip. After his trip Mr. Knight was never well, complained of a sore back and said he felt weak. When Knight took the trip he took a dog along to carry his small things. While the other boys were away

Mr. Knight killed a big polar bear, but we didn't touch the meat for we didn't care for it because we had ducks and geese and brant. After the boys came home, Maurer said he was going to fry some of the bear meat, but I never cared for it before, because it tasted strong, but in that summer of 1922 the bear meat tasted fine, it tasted just like beefsteak to me, for we had had no meat for some time. Galle fried some of the polar bear blubber and got one barrel, one coal oil tin and one twenty-five pound lard tin full, this oil is very good. They use that oil to fry the hard bread in; it is very good, but I couldn't hardly eat it because it tasted so strong to me all the time.

After the boys came later on they killed another polar bear, and oh! he was so fat. Then they saw some walrus out in the broken ice. They went out after them and got two of them. They had a great deal of trouble getting the meat to shore. They couldn't get the boat up to where the meat was, so they took a sled and put the meat on it and when they were crossing two ice cakes the sled got between the ice cakes and tipped over. They lost all of the meat in the water, but they saved some of it but not all.

We were expecting a boat every day that summer (1922) because sometimes the ocean clears out so that the boats can come in, the ice goes out but comes in again. It cleared out the most the summer of 1923, when they rescued me. In about August, 1922, I was wondering how far out the ice was into the ocean, so I thought some day I would take a trip out there and see. Well, one day I decided to take this trip, so I started and I got just to the foot of a mountain when a heavy fog came up and night fall together I had to turn back, and I didn't find out how far out the ice was or ran.

The boys expected a boat up until the last of October. Around about November they knew the boat wouldn't come. About the middle of November we moved up to the west of our present camp, about four miles I think, so they wouldn't have to haul the wood so far. After we arrived in our new camp I started to sew skins for the two boys, Knight and Crawford, who were going to take a trip to Siberia. They were preparing the rest of their things and helping to haul wood so the other boys would not have so much to do after they left.

At ~~after~~ Christmas time we had some salt seal meat and some hard bread and tea for our Christmas dinner. That time when we had dinner I wondered where I would be if I lived until next Christmas. After Christmas, about January 8th, the boys, Knight and Crawford, left for Siberia. They came back about the 21st of January. They were only gone about 13 days for Knight became sick and they had to turn back. When they got back Knight was very sick and weak. Then they talked about the other three boys taking the same trip to Siberia and Knight said it would be better because the three boys could make a camp, a snow-house easier at night than two boys could. So about January 28th the three boys, Crawford, Maurer and Galle, left for Siberia. They promised that they would come back after they got to Nome, with a boat, and if they couldn't get there with a boat they would come over with a dog team next winter. They left with a team of five dogs and a big sled of supplies. After they left I started to do some tramping. After about one week Knight seemed to be getting along all right. He could chop a little wood, but after a week he had to bring some wood in the tent to chop and

while chopping it he fainted and was unconscious about five minutes. He was so weak that I told him he had better stay in bed, that I could chop the wood and bring in the snow for water. I told him I was used to chopping wood and doing that kind of work fown home, so he finally consented to let me. I went out to Maurer's trap line. Before he left he had given Mr. Knight his trap line map. When I went out the first day I only found about six or seven of the traps but later on, about three or four days afterwards, I found the rest, but therewas no fox in any of them. I trapped for about a month but I never caught a fox. When I was out I was afraid of meeting a polar bear and every little while I would turn and look around to see if one was in sight and if there had been been one I would havefainted, for I only had a snow knife with me and I didn't know what to do to defend myself, for I never carried a rifle when out on the trap line.

I went out every day for I knew I had to get something to eat, for Knight was sick and we had nothing in the tent. I just got weak from tramping around and I thought I would give it up, but one day I noticed some fox tracks around one of the traps so I dig the trap out of the snow, for in setting the fox traps up there you bait them and then cover them with a little snow. But I guess I covered them too much and that is the reason why I didn't get any fox. Then I baited it again and just left it on top of the snow, didn't cover it up at all. The next morning I got up and looked out and I saw a fox. I didn't know for sure enough it was a white fox in my trap and that was the first one I had caught, and that was on the 22nd of February, 1923. After that I caught some more. In March I caught quite a few, one day I caught three. In killing them I would take a stick and hit them on the head until I stunned them, then I would bend their heads back until I broke their neck. Then I would take them home and skin them.

Later in the spring, around April, the foxes got very scarce and I couldn't trap any more at all. After I couldn't get any more foxes Knight became worse, he got very faint every time he moved. I forgot to tell you that none of us had ever eaten a white fox before but I remembered of reading in a book that the people up north said that they were very good to eat, so when I caught the first one we tried it, and liked it very much. Around about May, I think, I took a walk across the other direction towards the small islands in the harbor, and a seagull flew over my head. I had brought a shotfum with me this time, one that belonged to Knight, and I took a shot at it with my gun and killed it. I took it home and made some broth with it for Knight, for he could eat very little. That was the first bird I ever shot with a shotgun. I have shot them with a twenty-two rifle down home but never with a shotgun.

One morning about the 10th of May, I think, I woke up and heard something dripping and I thought it was the water dripping from the tent, so I got up and I saw that it was Knight's nose bleeding. He had a one-pound tea tin half full of blood from his nose. He had been bleeding for some time - it was about ten o'clock in the morning when I found him. His face was just blue. He turned his face away from the can and he looked just like he was dead, he was half dead. I called him four or five times before he answered, then he said he was better. I asked him if he would eat some hard bread soaked in oil and fried. He said he would, so I fixed

some, for that was all that we had. That was the day I got the seagull. The next morning he said that he felt much better so I cooked the seagull and gave him some of the broth. Around in February when he first got sick he gave me his Bible which belonged to his Grandfather.

Along in June, about the first week, I took a walk to the west of our camp and when I was coming back across the harbor I noticed some seagull along the beach and I wondered what they had. I thought perhaps it was some walrus meat or something like that. But when I got there I found they were building a nest and I found one egg. I tried to kill some of them but couldn't, so decided not to waste any more time. I had one egg for the night anyway. While on the rest of my way home across the lake, some white geese flew over my head. I took a shot at them and they went on for about one hundred feet, then one of them dropped and I sure was glad. So when I got home I called to Knight, "Look what I got." He opened his eyes and said, "What is that, seagull?" I said, "No, it is white geese and one seagull egg." He wanted to know if the egg was fresh and I told him it was warm when I found it. So I fried it for him but first I had to break it in to a cup to show him it was fresh. I cooked the wild goose until the meat fell away from the bone, but Knight had very few teeth because they were falling out from scurvy. About three days afterwards I went back to the place where I had found the egg and found nine more in the same nest, and Knight ate those eggs while he was living because he couldn't eat meat on account of his throat being so sore. He was so weak that I had to hold his head to give him a drink of water. I made a canvas bag and filled this bag with hot sand to keep his feet warm, every morning and night for two months I heated this sand and put it to his feet.

About three or four weeks before he died I had to make a bag from oatmeal sacks and filled it with cotton to put under his back because he said it was so very sore. He told me that if anything happened to him, if he was to die, to put his diary and some papers he had written in his trunk, and that I would find the key to his trunk in his trousers' pocket. He also told me to look after his camera and rifle, be sure and keep them dry. I don't know how many times he told me to be sure and care for his camera and rifle. About the day before he died I knew that he couldn't last much longer. He was unconscious and I was standing looking down at him and the tears were in my eyes, for I thought he was going to die. He looked up at me and said, "What is the matter, Ada?" And I told him that I thought he was going to leave me. I just couldn't help but cry for I knew he wouldn't last until the boat got there and then I would be all alone. He told me to try and get along some way until the boat arrived. He died June 22, 1923, I found him dead the next morning after he saw me crying. I don't know what time he died but some time in the night. After he died I wrote a letter to Mr. Stefansson and told him what day, month and the cause of Mr. Knight's death, because I thought something might happen to me, then they wouldn't know what happened to him, because a wild animal or something might get me before the boat arrived. I also wrote a letter to Mr. Galle who I thought was in Nome, Alaska. I left the letters in the typewriter so if I was not there when the boat arrived they would find the letters and know of our deaths. I left Mr. Knight in the tent, for I could not bury him, and I moved into another one that we had used mostly for storing things in.

Three days after Mr. Knight died I got some seal, and about a week afterwards I got another seal. I shot those with Knight's rifle. So

one day I went out again, it was the 4th of July (I made a calendar out of typewriting paper cut into small pieces - I had one for 1922 but I had to make my own 1923 calendar which I still have in my trunk). When I went to get my third seal I was crawling and crawling along on my stomach to get up close enough to shoot it and I was just ready to aim when it moved so that a large ice cake extended in front of me and the seal. So I was moving around to get a better aim, and I had my finger on the hammer, and in moving I must have pulled it down and BANG! went the gun and down went the seal into the water and I didn't get any meat. I thought, well, I had my 4th of July celebration anyway.

The beach was only a few yards from the back of my tent. The third seal I got I went out and about two hundred yards out from the beach on the ice was a seal, so I went out to take a shot at it and I got this one. It was so far out that I knew that I couldn't get it to the tent without something to help me. So I went back to the tent and got a poling line for seal and then started after my seal. I was nearly to it when I looked up and saw something that looked just like a yellow ball coming towards me. Finally I realized it was a polar bear and I was four hundred yards from my tent. I turned and ran just as hard as I could until I got to my tent. I was just about ready to faint when I got there, too. I had built a high raft at the back of my tent and I climbed up onto this and took my field glasses and watched the bear and her young one eat my seal, at least I thought she was anyway. It finally got dark and foggy so I decided I had better not take a chance and go after it that night so I waited until the next morning. I went out and took a look but my seal was gone, all that was left was a few blood marks. The old mother bear and her young later came up to about one hundred and fifty yards from the tent.

One day just after I had cleaned my second seal I heard a noise just like a dog outside of my door and I looked out the door and about fifteen feet from the tent was a big bear and a young one. I was very scared but I took my rifle and thought I would take a chance. I knew if I just hit them in the foot or some place where it would only injure them a little they would come after me, so I fired over their heads and they turned and ran a little ways and turned and looked as if they would come back, so I fired five more shots at them and they ran away for good then.

One morning after I had built a fire I opened the door and I found a large polar bear track right in the door way and I went out and looked and he had been all around the tent. I had a twenty-five pound lard tin of oil outside of my tent and about three days after the first bear had been there another bear came one night and ate all of that tin of oil. I think it was only one for the tracks all looked the same size.

Not very long after that the boat came. It was one evening about the 19th of August. I was making my lunch or supper. I heard a funny noise like a boat whistle but thought it was a duck or something. It was foggy and I couldn't see so I didn't think any more about it until the next morning. I took my book after supper, for I couldn't go to sleep until I had read a while, then I went to sleep. The next morning about six o'clock I heard that same noise again and it sounded more like a boat whistle this time so I grabbed my field glasses and went out on top of my raft, and sure enough there was a boat and the master and the people were walking around on the beach. I had only home tea for breakfast that morning, for I watched the boat to see if they were going to come up to my camp. I thought it might be just a whale boat. I didn't know what to do,

but finally the boat started up towards my tent and I was sure tickled. I went down to the beach to meet the boat, and the master which was a Native came to me and ask me where the rest of the people were and I told him there were no more, that I was the only one left. I didn't know what to say to him, I was so tickled. I told him that I was alone, that Mr. Knight had died and that the others had gone to Siberia, and asked him if he had not heard from them in Nome. But he said that Stefansson had sent him after them, so I told him they were gone, that I was the only one left. The next day they buried Mr. Knight, for I told them that I had not.

We stayed there about two or three days, they were unloading the boat they had brought a lot of supplies for the people that are up there now. They had brought supplies for two years but were only supposed to stay one winter.

The only letter I had got from George Ely was the one that I got on that boat. I was expecting letters from my sister but that was the only one that I got while I was up there. As soon as I saw some of the boys from Nome on the boat, I asked them how Bennett, my little boy, was and they said he was fine. I had left him in Nome in a Home where he had been for some time before I left on this trip.

We sailed for Nome from Wrangell on the 23rd of August, the last day of August we got to Nome and my sister told me that they heard at Nome that we were all dead up at Wrangell, and I guess that is why my sister did not write to me. I don't know what happened to the boys that left for Siberia, I have never heard any word of them since. When I came back I found out that my Stepfather had died. My sister had had a baby while I was gone and when she heard that we were dead she named the baby after me. The native boys that were working on the boat Donaldson that came up there and got me, told me that if Mr. Noice had not been Captain they would have turned back long before they got to Wrangell Island.

I want to thank Mr. Noice many, many times for saving my life, for I am sure that I would not have been alive now if he hadn't, and I will always remember it. Although it was no one's fault but my own that I went up there, for ~~no~~ no one would have forced me to go, but I wanted to go and thought I would never have another chance to go so I took it.

Very Respectfully,

(SIGNED) MRS. ADA BLACKJACK