

NOTES FROM GREENLAND  
Ukkusissat 1983 – 1984  
Maria Bittner

Tuesday evening, December 27, 1983

...I did go skiing today, though, which is what I want to write about. The temperature is down to  $-10^{\circ}\text{C}$  again, on my thermometer, which probably means  $-12$  to  $-13^{\circ}\text{C}$ , in real terms. The visibility is still very poor though the wind has stopped. I set off at 2 pm and got home at about 4 pm, which meant skiing in the dark all the time. This wouldn't have bothered me except that I had an unpleasant adventure in Torssukataq fiord, on the intended route for me New Year's hike. No more and no less but one of my ski poles went through the ice. I am not sure whether it would have continued all the way down, but it went in deeper than I liked, and I heard and saw water coming up around where it had gone in. I didn't feel like probing any further, especially in the dark, [so I] just turned in my tracks and, carefully testing the ice with my ski poles, went back as fast as I could.

Scary. Not what actually happened, but as a symbol and reminder of what could happen. Don't you underestimate the ice—just a few moments of inattention and you can be in deep, very deep trouble. Bother it, I don't like the word “deep” in this context. Still, if the alternative is not to go at all?...

I wonder what it was. A sporadic patch of very thin, new ice? open sea? This seems unlikely: that fiord has been iced over for quite a while now. Just before I got to the trouble spot, I had strayed into some very uneven ice, almost like small icebergs. I know that the ice around big and giant icebergs is always thin and dangerous. When the ice is new, perhaps it is like this around the little ones too—that could explain it. Which way is safer to go? Between the iceberg and the shore? Towards the middle of the fiord? I know that, in general, the middle is safer, but what if there are icebergs on both sides? Today I got into my trouble zone because I was trying to give wide berth to a giant iceberg towards the other side of the fiord. What on Earth—or on the sea rather—was it? A result of the last two days of thaw? I'd really like to know. As it is, I don't even know whether there really was a hole there, or whether it was one of those strange ice phenomena: snow on top, then melted plushy snow in the middle, but still ice on the bottom. They're common around icebergs, I understand, when the snow is deep. It didn't seem though that deep in that particular spot: I got to the water part, I think, by the ring part of my ski pole. Somehow, when one stands right next to a spot like this, alone and in the dark, one doesn't feel much like hanging around to poke and investigate. Because, especially now when the ice is still new, there is the nagging thought: what if it isn't just a point spot, but even just a minor patch of trouble, threatening to give way at any moment at the slightest further provocation?... No, I don't want to provoke you, damn you—it doesn't take a large patch to drown a man. Even on skis.

Midday Wednesday, December 28, 1983

A day with clear weather, and the growing amount of light is again very palpable. Today, at about 12:45, the sky at the north west horizon was only very slightly pinkish—hardly noticeable unless one looked for it.

Thursday evening, 29th December, 1983

On my training ski run today I went back to the trouble zone from two days ago. I left Ukkusissat at about 2 pm and had some light until about 4 pm, which was the last occasion I had enough light to read the dial of my watch. It used to be phosphorescent but that was a long time ago. By 4 pm I was back at Akuliaruseq having been out as far as and beyond the area where my ski pole had gone through two days ago. I was nervous, of course, in my usual light headed fashion of real and reasonable fear but this time the obstacles I encountered were no more serious than a stiff head wind on my way out, and very poor visibility due to overcast skies, with no moon, stars or northern lights, and hardly any daylight penetrating through the cloud cover to go by. Also, I again skied into that rough, almost miniature iceberg-like ice, which was somewhat difficult to tackle, but this time only because of the unevenness of the terrain, rather than its watery nature. especially on my way back, with the visibility almost as bad as it ever gets here (which is still lighter than on a moonless night in the tropics), and because I was moving with, rather than against the wind. Since the drifting snow also moves with the wind, until it gets stopped by an iceberg, it is harder to see the boundaries between the ice and the icebergs from that side. The often get covered up and smoothed over by snowdrifts, so that—especially in the dark—one is liable to ski up onto a minor iceberg, and discover it only when the time comes to tackle the sudden drop on the other side. This, being sheltered by the body of the iceberg does not get drifted up with snow.

Still, the ice in that area seems to be OK now, at least it is possible to get through onto the other side without hearing any watery sounds—which is good to know. Every day, several times a day, I anxiously check the thermometer like a doctor or a relative worried about a patient. The ice—I am mortally afraid of thaws at this time of the year. Once the ice has gotten properly thick it won't matter so much; but until then I am praying inwardly—outwardly I wouldn't presume—for a spell of good hard frost, with little or no more snow to insulate the surface of the ice. Let the ice get strong and healthy first; then let the weather do what it likes.

Following the most recent thaw, with temperatures up to 0°C, the temperature has been hovering around -10°C for the past two days. Which, as long as it's stable or on its way down, seems alright. Today the wind brought the temperature down to -13°C on my thermometer, which probably means ca. -15°C in real terms. With it stay this way though? We'll see.

One way or another, I am going out for the New Year, and, unless something drastic happens (e.g. heavy thaw of +5°C from tomorrow onwards), I am going out on the ice along the route I've been planning to take. It may not be quite as safe as I would like yet but, from what I've heard and seen, it is reasonably safe to tackle, if I take equally reasonable precautions. Which, of course, I intend to do.

How do I decide what is “reasonably safe”? I don't know, or rather I do know, but I can't give a hard core rule for it. It's a balance inside me between: a strong wish to do something or go somewhere; a knowledge of the risks involved; and an estimate of the severity of those risks, expressing itself (= the estimate) by the intensity and the quality of my fear. With regard to the New Year's hike I am planning now, I certainly feel nervous, but I also feel equally certain that I want to face it. It is not clear to me why I

don't want to protect myself out of this, nor even what it is that I don't want to protect myself out of in this hike. But I do know, my instincts tell me, that it is take it or leave it. That is, take it as it is with the fear(s) involved; or if I choose to protect myself and don't go, I will by that token cut myself away from whatever it is that this hike has to offer. Without knowing (yet?) what the offer is, I do know that I want it. So I will go out there and try to get it—we'll see what will come out of that.

It is hard for me to say what it is that I want or get from the ice. Easier to say some of things it is not. For instance, I am not looking for challenge or danger. I will accept either, but only if I have to. If there is an easier or safer way to get where I want, and the other, the difficult, route is not part of what I want to see, then I will certainly take the safer way. I get no kick out of feeling afraid. Or do I? I certainly don't enjoy feeling afraid. But, on the other hand, it is true that many of the things I want can only be learned, or experienced, or whatever, while one feels afraid, or on the other side of fear. Sometimes it is intense and well-reasoned fear, but still, to get those things, I willing to take the fearsome path, for any one of them. It's only when the danger is empty, which for me I guess usually means self-created (e.g. by omitting to take some obvious precautions), that I will shrug my shoulders and say: "Not interested". Where is the boundary though between empty and meaningful danger? If I go out on the ice without being sure yet it's safe, and suspecting that in parts it is not, is the danger I am facing then "self-created"?

We've come back to the starting point so let me start somewhere else. One of the things which always fascinate me on the ice are the endless mysteries of perception. I feel that this fascination is related to my linguistic work (what isn't?). Just like the physiology of speech is obviously a superimposed function on the physiology of one of the most basic and survival motivated body functions—breathing—in the same way I feel certain that the semantic, and this probably includes also the discourse, organization of language will be found to be a superimposed function on some equally basic features of perception. Something everybody (every human being) has, has to have—in order to survive. How do I, presumably people in general, perceive things when our very basic comfort, sometimes life, depends on it?

Take skiing on the ice in the dark. The ice around Ukkusissat is fairly even, but it still has some patches with a fair amount of snow on them, and some where the snow has been blown very thin by the wind. These last look darker in general, but especially in the dark. The snowy parts also have indentations, hollows, etc, but most of this information gets lost in the dark. The contrast between the snowy and the less snowy, or snow less patches remains. From the beginning I associated this contrast, correctly, with gradients, but at first I assumed, subconsciously, that I would have to go up on the dark patches while the white stuff would be flat. It's mostly the other way round actually because, on the ice, the darker patches represent as I said areas where the snow has been blown away, wholly or mostly. So these are the valleys on the ice, and one usually goes down when crossing into them from the white snowy stuff. It took a while for my feet and body to correct that first, erroneous, assumption and readjust. Even longer for me consciously to understand where I had gotten that first, erroneous idea. I think I do understand it now: it's from walking in the dark in the mountains. There too, in absence of color

variations—which get lost in the dark—my perception of gradients switches over to be cued by contrasts between black and white. Interpreted as I first interpreted them on the ice. In the mountains it makes sense, and is usually correct: the dark, snow less patches are usually rock faces, too steep to hold any snow on them; the white snowy patches, on the other hand, tend to be gently sloping or level. The level ones usually collect more snow, so the size of the patch enters into my subconscious estimate of the gradient as well. Of course, it's not full-proof. In the mountains, too, there often are surprises causing one to stumble, but the general hypothesis works better than on the ice.

I have a feeling that stuff like this somehow or other enters into language. But where? how? I will probably spend the rest of my life trying to understand such questions. What do we focus on under different conditions? What contrasts do we go by? What determines the relative prominence of the available information? Just how are the extrapolations, estimates, etc, actually made? I am looking for something very basic, very general—the most fundamental properties and principles of perception. That's where I believe that the biology and language are going to meet. It would be nice to know how, though—some day. Will I?

*My New Year's hike.* [transcription of a recording]<sup>1</sup>

Today is the 2nd of January 1984. I've just got back from my...from my New Year's hike. I can't write about it because I came back with five of my finger tips frozen but I'd like to record...try to record some of the things I remember. Not only my hands are in a rather bad shape. My feet got frozen, rather badly frozen too, though they don't seem to hurt quite as much as my hands.

I changed my plans in the last moment, and didn't go to Itilliarsuk as I had planned, but set off for Perlerfik instead. That was Saturday, Saturday morning. I hadn't made detailed inquiries amongst the hunters as I had planned, which may have been a mistake; relying instead on information from Aaron who had stopped me on the road the preceding day and advised [me] not to go to Itilliarsuk because the ice is apparent quite thin...still quite thin in the bottom of the fiord, near the house where I would have to cross. There is a big glacier coming down there, and it has icebergs falling off it which keep the ice unstable. So I decided not to go there and go to Perlerfik instead, which he assured me would be fine. Well, for the future I will know that when people say things like "Oh, it's fine, no trouble" without thinking about it—well, they probably don't know much about it. It's best to be cautious.

I left at about 9 o'clock in the morning. I wanted to start at 8, but there was some last minute business—washing up and things. So I set off at about 9:00—the light was just beginning, there was very little of it. It was high tide so getting onto the ice was a bit tricky. I had to...the ice at the...the water...at high tide the water still seeps onto the...onto the ice at the shore, through the cracks I suppose, and there can be some 10–15 cm of it at the high tide. But since it was only a question of one or two steps perhaps, I didn't even notice any wetness—at that time.

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<sup>1</sup> This was recorded at 3 am. I couldn't sleep the night I got back until after I had made this recording.

Everything went fine until about noon. I made...I was slower than without the rucksack, but I still made reasonably good speed, and when I found myself in about...by about 11:30—that means after 2 1/2 hours of skiing—roughly one third of the way to Perlerfik I thought I had a good chance of reaching the hunting hut there that day. Even if I had to make part of the...of the way in the dark. I had no trouble until then so I wasn't too worried. And I had been informed by Aaron, and by Ani, who is also not a hunter so her information is also second hand, that the ice would be fine all the way. And it was fine—until about 11:30.

I took a very short break then, just took off my rucksack and had some frozen seal live, on the ice. The temperature was quite low [should be: high], about  $-10^{\circ}\text{C}$ ... $-10^{\circ}\text{C}$  I think...Centigrade. I made it very quick because I wanted to make as much progress as possible while there was still light...to go on by. And then I pressed on.

I could see some darker patches on the snow around me, but from my experience in the...on the other side of Ukkusissat, in the Torsukattaq Fiord, I was used to dark patches meaning reasonably safe ice without...well, where the snow had just been blown off. I had one warning signal of the trouble to come. It was when my skis...sank in rather deeply, and I could hear some splashy sound. But I...since it was isolated...I didn't...and there was no confirmation of it, for quite a while afterwards...I ignored it. So it took me quite...by surprise...when...suddenly I found my skis going down, through the snow. Not just going down—it was as if they were sucked down. First the front part—I struggled to move on but found that I couldn't. I was sucked down, and there was clearly water around me. And then from behind. I tried to find support with my ski poles...looked for...support...tried to see whether there was any ice around, but found...I don't know...they...they must have slipped or something...but I found that the...it was as if I was both sucked down and pressed by the...from behind. It wasn't...of course, it's subjective and since I was very frightened it's...but I'd like to describe that subjective feeling. It was a very strong impression of...of power...of a...nut just the weight...it wasn't just the weight...the impression was not just of the weight of the rucksack pressing me down, dragging me down, bending me on my...on my fours...but as if...it was some...I don't know, the sea...or...something almost animate, sucking me, bending me: "Onto your knees, down on your knees!"...It was like an order. I said something, I remember it was in English, I don't remember the exact words. It think it was something like: "Oh no!" [embarrassed laughter] "Oh my God!" I didn't laugh then. I actually thought about God. Not as a prayer. I remember it was...it was more like a question, wondering: "Could this be real? Is this true, God?..."

Having lost the support of my ski poles I went down on my hands and knees—and then I touch the ice. And put down my hands very flat on it—and touched it. It was solid, and firm, not wavy, or moving. And I moved my hand...and I moved my hands around...and there was water pouring into my gloves and I could feel my...it had gone through my trousers, of course, up to my thighs [because I was on] my knees. And it was pouring into my boots—so much for the reputedly water-resistant cover. Though I suppose it probably came in round the side[s]. But I remember putting my hand down very flat—the palm of my hand down very flat on the ice, touching it, and then moving it [my hand] around under the water. I could feel it [the ice] under my knees too. I didn't

know how big it was, whether there was sea-water on the sides, whether it was an ice floe or what...what it was. The phenomenon looked a bit like what people call *putsineq*, and it was confirmed to me afterwards that—or at least that’s what a hunter thought that it might have been. Though it surprised me that it was so deep. The water was up to my ankles. And it was water, not just mushy snow.

Anyway I...I don’t remember how long I was...on all fours, touching the ice...Not very long, clearly I had to get out of there as quickly as possible. Not just because of the possibility of the ice breaking down under me, but simple because I was...likely to...it was the problem of freezing afterwards. Before I had discovered there was ice under me, my first...my thought was what to get rid of first, my skis or my rucksack since both made any kind of maneuvering practically impossible. But once I had realized...there was a moment of...not of panic really...it was terror—sheer animal terror. It was...”On no, my God...”—it was unthinking, unthinking terror...

But by then it was...it was gone, the terror was gone. And I said “Easy now”. I said [it] loud to myself. I often talk loud to myself in difficult situations, and very...very gently, very reassuringly. And it helps...it’s very...it usually helps...always. I said: “Easy now, easy does it.” And I took up my poles, took off my skis under the water. My hands were wet already so it didn’t matter getting the gloves even more...they couldn’t get any more wet, they were wet already. Collected the skis, decided to keep the rucksack on because I needed the stuff in it—I had my sleeping bag and everything in it—if I were to...it was a question not just of getting out of...the water...but also of trying to get warm afterwards. And I needed the stuff in the rucksack. And using one ski[pole] as a...to test the ice underneath...waded through the water towards the...towards the nearest patch of white amongst the darkish snow I could see. Testing the ice under me. It seemed quite...it seemed alright actually. And it felt quite hard under my feet. When I got onto that white stuff which was still mushy in the beginning, then got onto some harder...as soon as I could put my rucksack down...as soon as I trusted the surface under me enough to take the rucksack down I...fortunately I had a spare pair of mittens...or of gloves...so I put those on. They were highly recommended as the kind of gloves which elite skiers use, and they were absolutely useless. I suppose elite skiers don’t ski in the Arctic in the winter. But anyway they were certainly better than the other pair, which would have been warmer if it hadn’t been soaked through, completely. Unfortunately I didn’t have any spare...I had spare socks but not...and I also had spare trousers as a matter of fact, spare skin trousers, but I didn’t have anything...any long stilongs to put underneath. Perhaps I shouldn’t have bothered about the stilongs and just changed. But I don’t know, because the boots...I didn’t have and spare boots, and the boots were soaking wet, so if I changed the socks I would get the other pair—my spare pair—wet as well, and it didn’t seem like a very good strategy. Also as long as I moved I didn’t feel the...I didn’t see to get frozen, I didn’t feel the cold so badly. The temperatures as I said were only  $-10^{\circ}\text{C}$ . It was very mild. That’s probably why the...the patch of water I had gone into was so deep.

So I decide to move on, get out of that area. Because there were still some murky, darkish looking things...patches on both sides. I didn’t move back...I didn’t go back at that point because it didn’t seem any safer to go back than ahead. As a matter of fact I...I guess I was almost out of that dark spotted region by then. Anyway I was in a kind

of...stupor I think, emotionally. Or not stupor but just didn't feel very much, just wanted to press on. I moved quite fast, using...I took the rings of my ski poles so I could test the ice as I went. And it sounded ok, which was very reassuring. But still I thought to myself that if there's any more of that monkey business and I need to go through a dark patch like that again then I'm going back. Not that it would have done me much good, but I could try that, as an option.

Well, I managed to navigate a rather narrow bridge between two patches like that and then I was out...of that area. I still wanted to...now that I think of it I think I was kind of dazed, emotionally. I was obsessed with the idea of pressing on towards Perlerfik, and possibly spending the night on the ice. There was...I no longer considered traveling in the dark. I was told that the...on the one hand I was told by Aaron and Ani that the ice was fine all the way towards Perlerfik, but they had told me that the ice was fine all the way from Ukkusissat, and obviously it wasn't so I wasn't inclined to rely on their judgment any more. On the other hand...and I had heard...I remembered what...Enoch had told me that when the ice forms it forms between Ukkusissat and Marmorilik first and goes towards...moves towards Perlerfik only later. Which is contrary to what Hans once told me about...that Perlerfik freezes first. So there's...[one] get conflicting information, which is quite typical. One way or another I wasn't going to tackle that stuff in the dark. That much was certain.

By then it was about...I think 2 perhaps, half past one. So there wasn't any question of my getting to Perlerfik before dark, of course, but I thought of spending the night on the ice, trying out my new sleeping bag or whatever—crazy notion. Wouldn't have been crazy if I had been dry and warm, but under the circumstances... Fortunately there were no icebergs, on the ice towards Perlerfik. It was clean, completely flat. And there was very little snow on the surface, which was reassuring, of course. Or it may not be obvious but snow is...a deep cover of snow on the ice is dangerous for several reasons. One is that snow acts as an insulator so that the ice underneath is usually thinner than if there is no snow. Secondly, it makes it harder to test what's...what kind...what the ice is like underneath. Sometimes it [the snow] forms bridges over gaps or cracks in the ice which you can't see because of the snow cover. So it presents all kinds of dangers. The particular...on the particular distance between the trouble zone and what I covered from there on towards Perlerfik the ice was quite...had quite a thin cover of snow, which meant...and this in conjunction with the fact that there were no icebergs of course meant that there was difficulty in getting water. So that I faced not only a night on the ice, but probably going to bed without a warm meal, which didn't seem very advisable under the circumstances. I could try to get onto land but that's...that's always tricky. The ice is generally less safe near the land than it is towards the middle of the fiord, so. And then...I was so spent then. I didn't want...I...I had to digest what had happened...I didn't want any more danger right then.

So after some meandering in the direction of Perlerfik I turned the corner and headed for Akuliarusersuaq which...I realized was actually quite near. It took some time getting there. I suppose I was weakened by the...by the fear, and possibly also [by] being...traveling wet. I guess it takes a lot out of the body without...generating the extra amount of heat which is needed...probably takes a lot out of the body without one

realizing it. Also when I started traveling across the fiord rather than along with it, the ice which had seemed quite smooth until then suddenly developed a pattern of ridges and valleys. Which makes sense if you consider that the wind...the wind always blows along the fiord...otherwise it would get stopped by the mountains on one of the sides. So...which of course...if you're traveling along with the...with or against the direction of the wind, you can follow a valley or from one valley to another, or from one ridge to another, and don't notice the irregularities of the terrain so much. If you travel across, then it feels much more mountain...much more hilly. Which is a useful cue to notice and remember, for instance, when there is fog.

Anyway I got to the house...which was empty. Fortunately, because I didn't feel like company right then. And all I had the strength...mental I guess and physical...to do was to drag the...dragged the sleeping bag out of my rucksack and get into it. Oh, and drag some candy...I...a supply of candy I take with me. I had a couple of chocolate candies and crawled into the sleeping bag and didn't want to know about the world for the next...well quite a few hours. My socks and stilongs were completely wet, of course, and so were my boots, skiing shoes...I don't know [what] to call them, they're a kind of an in-between thing between shoes and boots. So I took everything inside [the sleeping bag with] me...to get it dry...or at least not frozen stiff since I didn't have any spare equipment. Two things I certainly missed and will make sure I carry the next time is a complete change of clothing, and also a pair of warm...I don't know, either skin boots or foot warmers, for situations such as these. Because like this I had...I didn't want to put my frozen feet into the still wet skiing boots when I had to go out at night—as I had to several times of course—and the following day. So I ended up going barefoot which probably wasn't a very good...a very good alternative. I don't really know which is better. Anyway I took it very easy the...the whole...it was about maybe 3 or 4 o'clock when I got to Akuliarusersuaq. I just stayed in the sleeping bag and tried to get warm. Which I managed...I got...I have a very good sleeping bag...and I managed to get warm...most of me got warm quite...reasonably soon. Except my feet, which stayed cold all night. [end of blue tape]

[ctd. on red tape] Ok, this is the continuation of my story about my New Year's hike. For quite a long time I...I just...don't know, refused to face...all I could think of was try[ing] to get warm. Didn't want to think about getting back, didn't want to think about going back to the ice, didn't want to think about going anywhere, didn't want to think about getting...going...leaving the sleeping bag even...didn't want to have anything much to do with the world I guess. It lasted until about 10 [am]. I didn't get up until about 10 the following morning. Then I got up enough to cook myself a decent meal, a good meal: soup...warm soup with seal meat. And when I had both cooked it and eaten it I felt I was on the right track, was getting better. Then I slept. Not just toss around...tossed around as I had the preceding night, but slept...really good, calm sleep. About six hours I think: I finished eating about noon and...and woke up when it was getting on to 6 [pm]. Feeling nicely warm all over me now, including my feet.

I didn't go anywhere that day. I was taking things easy. Didn't want to rush. Still had some...obviously had some thinking to do, about what had happened and how to...how to handle it. And of course still had the way back ahead of me, either the

following day or the day after. I did quite a lot of thinking. First tried to understand what it was I had waded into. I had heard various theories about this phenomenon *putsineq*. One is that when the snow is very thick, then the top layer acts as an insulator to the extent that the layer below it melts. And there is still ice...there is of course still ice underneath since it's just a snow phenomenon. While I might be inclined to believe it—this theory—in the spring when the sun is out and quite intense at times, I have my doubts about it in the winter, the conditions being as they are now, without any sun. It seems unlikely that such a thin cover of snow as there was in that area would generate so much water underneath. Also...so the hypothesis I formed then, which I...which I am inclined to stick to, is that it probably means...that it probably happens when the ice...in areas where the ice is quite thin. It was thick enough apparently to carry my weight but it can still be quite thin. And it probably has cracks not too far from areas like that—maybe somewhere near the center—where the sea water seeps through. Just as it seeps through at the shore, also through cracks in the ice, near the shore. And...just...just stays there under the...erodes the cover of snow and stays there. The amount may vary with the tide, I...I don't know the details but it seems that if this theory is correct then there are very good reasons, more than one, to stay out of such...stay away from such areas. This theory is...this theory rather than the snow theory...is confirmed by...I confirmed it on my way back when I waded into something similar but not quite as drastic as the first one. I had a taste of the water and it was salty. It was no snow water, it was no melted snow—I don't believe that. It was salty, it was like sea water.

But anyway that was the first thing I thought out. And decided to...[that I] wasn't going to go through patches like that at all...again. So the question is what were the alternatives, or how to avoid it. One thing was to take the rings off my ski poles and use them [the poles] as guides. And I decided to do that. And I could go...I could head for Marmorilik, try to get them to give me a lift with a helicopter. But...Which I am sure they'd do. I didn't want to do it because I felt that it would mean the end of hiking, really, if I...Maybe that's putting it too drastically but...I decided on the compromise of...if...of trying to make my own way back. If I got into any more of that stuff...if I got into an area where I couldn't move on without passing through a patch of watery...of ice with water on top of it...of watery ice like that, then I would go back. But until then [I would] try to make my own way back to Ukkusissat. Also I decided that if the weather was alright the following day—the second day, the day I stayed at Akuliarusersuaq, the weather was snowy and the visibility was quite poor, even at noon—that if the weather cleared, if it was alright the third day, they I would try to make my way to Ukkusissat that day. There was no telling of course...I had to get back by tomorrow since the school begins the day after tomorrow... and there was no telling what the weather would be like tomorrow. If the ice had been stable, or if I hadn't been so...so...frightened...been through such an intense fear just shortly before, I wouldn't have minded the weather so much. But as it was...I tried to give myself as good...the benefit of as good weather conditions as possible.

Well, today was fine—the weather was fine. Already at night when I...when I went out I saw the stars, the sky was covered with stars, and even at night you could see the mountains on the horizon quite clearly. And I thought [that] it seemed likely that there

would be a clear day, and it was. Really beautiful, calm, clear day. I guess I...I must...I must have still been very much afraid because I didn't feel at all hungry, I couldn't eat. Tried to make myself get some seal liver...frozen seal liver...down myself and it was almost impossible. I was nibbling on it and could hardly get it down. Had some chocolate, not very much either. But I had some warm tea. It was cold work packing the rucksack, very cold on my hands and feet. I guess that's probably when most of the damage was done.

And then I set off. It was a bit tricky getting from the shore onto the ice because of the shoreline wetness, but I managed that alright. And then...just set off, without the rings on my ski poles. Most of the way...I got way...quite close to Saattut...Saattoq, which is near Ukkusissat, without any trouble at all. [My] ski poles sounded fine. Sometimes they would dig quite deeply into the snow, but [they] sounded dry—dry, grinding sound—sounded beautiful, beautiful. My skis sounded fine too, gliding smoothly—again [which a] dry, dry, gliding sound. Before I had set off I thought it would be scary to travel through an area where you had to use the ski poles to test the ice underneath. But on that particular occasion I found it very reassuring. Really beautiful music in my ears.

And then I came across some sled tracks, and thought [that] if a sled could get through so could I...I would be able to do so [too], so it was just a question of following them to Ukkusissat. And [I] started following them. It was alright in the beginning and then I...there was a trouble spot...not a very big one or a very deep one, it was halfway frozen. Actually the temperature today had suddenly dropped to  $-25^{\circ}\text{C}$ , a change of  $-15^{\circ}\text{C}$  over just two days, but the advantage of it in this particular context was that the mushy stuff underneath was almost completely frozen. Although I still had to take off my skis and got my hands a bit wet in the process. Pity I hadn't taken the gloves off before I did that...I actually took the skin mitten off...I just remembered it in time [so] it got just a little bit wet. I took it off with my teeth, so that was when I tasted the water and found out it was salty. But anyway I took them [the skis] off and got them out of the mush. It was quite tiring. I realized I was quite weak, weaker than usual. I had trouble getting the skis out of the mush, had trouble managing the rucksack, had trouble getting it on although it was lighter than when I had set off. When it was...well, I [had] felt it quite clearly on my back, but it was certainly manageable. Whereas now I found it difficult to get it on. And was moving quite slowly. And then [I] moved on for a while, and then again there was another trouble spot where I had to take off my skis. And so the...it was getting darker by then. I had covered most of the distance in full daylight, a lot of it in clear daylight, [but] by then it was about maybe 3 o'clock and—yeah, I think so, half past two, three o'clock—getting darkish. So there was the perspective of covering...even with the sled tracks I didn't really...I thought it would be very tiring if there was a lot of that mushy stuff ahead, trying to negotiate it tired as I was, frozen, very cold—partly because of the sudden change in the temperature, and partly I guess because I had lost so much heat, probably so many reserves, my capacity for producing heat, over the past two days. Without eating very much.

So when I saw a sled on the horizon I decided that if at all possible...to hitch a ride. I thought first of approaching him, but he was way off and I thought he might head

off before I reached him, without realizing that I wanted anything from him. So [instead of that] I followed the sled tracks ahead of him, thinking that he would have to pass by—or would be likely to pass by—and then I could try to sop him. And [I] kept an eye on his movements while I was doing that. After a while he did move. In the beginning I thought he would make a turn so that he would join the sled tracks ahead of me, but then the dogs...apparently the dogs...as I later found out, apparently the dogs themselves had made a turn towards me. When he got quite close I hailed him and asked him whether I could join him to Ukkusissat. It turned out to be Tikkili, one of my friends here, Ani's husband.

So then there was...I don't know how long the drive home took but it was certainly much shorter than I could have made it on skis. From the point of view of my feet it was...sitting on the sled was not very healthy, my feet got very cold. From the point of view of my hands, which I realize now are in much worse shape than my feet, it was certainly advisable to get home as quickly as possible. I guess the frost bite would have gotten in much deeper during those extra...well, it would have certainly been a good couple of hours extra if I had to make it on my own.

So that's how I arrived, with Tikkili, on the sled. And then Ani suggested and took me to the nurse, who took a look at my hands and feet and didn't like them very much [embarrassed laughter]. [She] put some bandage and stuff around them and said they would probably swell up, which I feel that they are doing, especially my hands. Gave me some penicillin and some pain-killers. And we'll see what happens next.

What do I feel about it? There is something strangely symbolic about that hike. It was...almost dying...thinking I was dying on the last day of the old year. And then that long ski run across very new, fresh snow which [had] fallen just the preceding night and hadn't been blown...blown away nor even touched by the wind or by anybody, very clean. The air very crisp and clear. Very sharp contours of the mountains on the horizon. The sky very clear, also very new. A sense of being reborn—in spite of frozen fingers.

That's all I guess for the time being.