

Book Review

Book Title: KEEWATIN Into the Ice Box

ISBN: 978-1-8382823-0-2

Author: Martin Curzon

Reviewer: Shalini Kanagasingam

With an illustrious career in research and academia, Professor Martin Curzon has undoubtedly shaped the specialty of paediatric dentistry. For colleagues who are more familiar with Professor Curzon's essential paedodontic textbooks and research articles, this memoir offers a fascinating insight into his adventurous spirit. 'Keewatin Into the Ice Box' traces the author's journey into the Northwest Territories of the Canadian Arctic, braving sub-zero Fahrenheit temperatures and barren landscapes, in his quest to deliver dental care to the local Inuit communities. This book invites the reader to step back in time to experience the highs and lows of this major undertaking circa 1969.

The introductory chapters provide a good historical and geo-political grounding on the Keewatin District and its remote settlements. Aging aircraft and severe snowstorms resulted in unpredictable flight schedules, as well as the risk of being stranded for days in inaccessible villages. The likelihood of a plane crash is discussed in a matter-of-fact manner, with a candid account of how to prepare for and manage such a situation. A harrowing incident when an aircraft engine stalls at 6000 feet is alluded to in the book's blurb. This sets the backdrop for the challenges and complexities of delivering high quality care during the transient outreach visits to the different settlements. Besides having to rely on rickety old planes, the author had to contend with the lack of basic equipment and materials.

The text is interspersed with captivating photographs (including remarkable scenery and unique art pieces), maps and charming illustrations. These draw you further into the stories and mythology of the First Nation tribes. The deep deference and respect for the local dental team, patients and their families are always at the forefront of the narrative. The Inuit population come across as a resilient, resourceful and close-knit community. No doubt attributes which allow them to thrive in the harshest of landscapes. It would seem that Professor Curzon and his young family at the time, reflected similar qualities as they made the transition from London to the extreme temperatures of Keewatin to procure 'gainful employment' as he puts it.

Be prepared to be enthralled by Professor Curzon's anecdotes and tales of venturing into the unknown as a young dentist. We could all emulate this luminary figure in dentistry, in his empathy and respect for patients, with an unwavering commitment to providing quality care even in the most adverse circumstances. As an educator, I would highly recommend this book to students and colleagues alike. As much as it is an entertaining read, it reminds us that we are privileged to be able to help improve our patients' quality of life. Should an opportunity come up for you to do this in an underprivileged region or indeed a distant country, think of Professor Martin Curzon and take up the challenge!

