



10/22/02: The Story of the Patch

I feel honored to be the 2003 “Teacher on the Trail”. I am looking forward to creating lessons for teachers while on the trail and keeping students updated on the adventures of the race. It will be an exciting experience flying with the Iditarod Air Force, crunching through the snow at each checkpoint and speaking to all who help make this “Last Great Race” happen.

When I was informed that I was selected I immediately received warm congratulations from my buds, Donna Finner and Diane Blain. I really wished we could all go on this adventure together. We were such a team at the workshop. We were known throughout the workshop as the “3

Stooges”. I decided I had to include them on my patch for the sleeping bag. Note the three different colored dogs on the patch. Diane is the blond, Donna is the brunette and I am the redhead. All of us had a howling good time at the workshop!

Each year the “Teacher on the Trail” is asked to design a patch for the Official Iditarod sleeping bag they use on the trail. There are already four patches on the sleeping bag. My patch will be the fifth one! I wanted my patch to reflect the wonderful time I had during last years Teacher’s Workshop. I met two very nice people, Donna Finner from New Hampshire and Diane Blain from Michigan. They were also finalists for the 2003 “Teacher on the Trail”. We never felt like we were competitors. We became the best of buds on the field trips, the interviews, and the presentation process. You would never see one of us without the other two following and giving morale support. We all knew we had worked hard to become a finalist, so we decided to relax, enjoy the experience together and whoever was chosen would be great.

1/15/03: Iditarod Read Aloud Time!

My classroom began studying the Iditarod in October. I started out by reading them the history behind the Iditarod Race. The first picture book I read to them was *Togo* by Robert J. Blake. The vocabulary is challenging so don’t shy away from it if you have older students. This book gave a very good account of the serum run in 1925. They will enjoy the adventurous story and the compelling teamwork it took to save the children in Nome.

Another great picture book I read to the class was *The Great Serum Race* by Debbie S. Miller. This story gives you a clear picture of what the mushers and their dogs went through to save a city of children. The pictures were done by Jon Van Zyle. VanZyle is the official artist of today’s Iditarod Race. Both stories and their illustrations will give you the real sense of cold and danger that the mushers dealt with during this heroic race.



After reading the two books to the class we made a large Ven Diagram to compare the two accounts of the same story. This created wonderful discussions with the class. Often students shared their personal stories of helping others. I grabbed this opportunity and let the students write about a time when they helped someone else. If you have younger, ELL or special needs students have them document their special moment through pictures or tape record their stories

You can buy *Togo* at www.iditarod.com. Click on merchandise and enjoy your shopping. You can also find both books at www.amazon.com. These are great books to add your library

1/23/03: Where's the Boss By Lois Harter

The wind is howling and the snow is racing down from the darken clouds. A musher is all-alone in the vast whiteness of the Iditarod Trail. He becomes horribly ill; he faints and falls off his sled. The snow keeps falling and there is no human help near by. What is going to happen to him? Find out in this true adventure about a musher Joe, who is saved by his warm and caring companions.

This is a "MUST" read book that you need to share with your class. Each year I read this wonderful heroic tale to my students. It is such an exciting story! It truly teaches the meaning of teamwork and caring for others. Last year, I wrote to Lois Harter and asked if I could adapt the story to a play format. She graciously gave me permission. THANKS LOIS! You can buy this great book at www.iditarod.com or www.amazon.com.

As part of my literacy program I use "Reader's Theater". It is a wonderful way to use scripts for students to practice fluency and voice inflexion. It gives students confidence to speak in front of others. It builds listening skills among the readers and their audiences.

While creating their voice for their part the students also work on other activities to go along with the story. Students create simple costumes, backdrop and tickets for their performance. A student can easily direct this project. For more information about "Reader's Theater" and the script take a look at the lesson plan on *Where's the Boss* .

My students were very inspired by Lois Harter's book! They decided to write their own story about being a dog on the Iditarod Trail.

2/28/03 The Start of My the Iditarod Adventure!

It began with the excitement of the Jr. Iditarod Race! The race was located on the beautiful Lake Louise. I stayed at the very warm and friendly Wolverine Lodge. The weather was perfect not too cold, but just right for the dogs. The junior mushers were busy lining up their dogs. They were concentrating on the race ahead of them. It was great watching entire families out there cheering on the happy mushers.

The night before the race, around mid-night, I arrived at the Wolverine Lodge. I had to be real quiet and set up my nest for the night. I shared a very warm and comfortable space with other volunteers. I had to make sure to keep my spot neat and tidy so it would be easy to pack up the next morning and run down to see the start of the race. I'm glad I listened to my mom when she would to tell me to clean my room.

There were many famous mushing families hanging out at Lake Louise. I met Dallas Seavy and his father Mitch Seavy, Tessa King and her father Jeff King, Nikolai Buser and his father Martin Buser. They were all working together before the race. These famous fathers will be in the Iditarod on March 1st. There were 16 other junior mushers who also working very hard to be in this race. They are important too! You must check out the Jr. Iditarod biographies at the www.iditarod.com . Also check out who won the race. Most important we need to congratulate all of them for reaching their goal. Take a look at the two lessons about the Jr. Iditarod. Read about another young Jr. Iditarod racer named Dusty and learn how he fulfilled his dream.

3/02/03: A View Like No Other

Saturday had the sounds of singing dogs, sloshing of snow and cheering crowds. I was lucky enough to be an Idita-rider! What is an Idita-rider? In November, people can go to the website and bid to ride in a sled. They are bidding on all of the mushers' sleds. The money generated from these bids help the Iditarod Committee continue to hold this race year after year.



Wells Fargo Bank honored me by presenting a gift of being an Idita-rider! I was so excited! My musher was Clint Warneke. He was very nice and his dogs were wonderful runners. As I sat in the sled I was able to watch all of the dogs working and enjoying pulling the sled.

Fans both at the start and along the trail were cheering us and wishing Clint a safe trip to Nome. Clint shared his excitement by waving and thanking fans along the way. I was very impressed how much Clint adores his dogs and gave them positive comments along the trail.

I had a smile on my face all the way to end of my ride. We went 11 miles in about 45 minutes. I wonder how fast the dogs were going. Maybe your class can figure out the answer to this problem. Happy Tracks!

Happy Tracks! Mrs. Wilson



3/03/03: Fabulous Fairbanks!

The crowd at Fairbanks was friendly, helpful and excited at the restart of the 2003 Iditarod Sled Dog Race. Dogs were ready to roll down



the trail. Everyone used great teamwork, which made for a smooth exit from Fairbanks.

I was lucky enough to be right up front of the start and watch each team line up for their take off. There were last minute checks of booties and harnesses, hugs to love ones and of course a good pat for each dog. The teams were then off to Nenana!



3/04/03: Marvelous Manley Hot Springs

I left Fairbanks and headed out to Manley Hot Springs. Jeff Schultz (the official Iditarod photographer) and I are traveling on the trail again with pilot Dan Davidson. We had a nice view of the Tannana River as we flew into the checkpoint. Thank goodness it's frozen so the race can go on. Be sure and take a look at the map on the Iditarod website to locate where the Tanana River is located. What river does the Tanana River flow into? What direction is this river flowing?



As we arrived in Manley I had a quick chat with Ramy Brooks. He had rested for several hours and was ready to head out. His dogs were eager to get back on the trail. I also had a brief conversation with DeeDee Jonrowe. She was chatting cheerfully as she was feeding them their breakfast.

3/05/03: Tanana Tuesday

I moved from Manley Hot Springs right into the Tanana village. It was an interesting and fun flight. It may look foggy in this picture, but we were able to see clearly enough to fly safely into the Tanana checkpoint. This is a picture of the frozen Yukon River.



This is the first time the Iditarod Race has gone through the village of Tanana. The citizens were happy to welcome the mushers and their dogs! The community center is being used to house the mushers for rest and get a good meal. The aroma inside the community center is superb. There were good hardy stews, muffins, cookies and much more. All made by the local villagers. Both the mushers and volunteers are thankful for Tanana's hospitality.

Back in 1925 the Serum Run went through the village of Tanana. I had a terrific visit with Julie Roberts-Hyslop. She belongs to the tribe Bidzytunotnaa. This is known as the Caribou Clan. Julie is the granddaughter of Edgar Nollner. Edgar was one of the original mushers who ran the serum to Nome to save the children. Happy Tracks!

3/ Jewel of the Yukon: Checkpoint Ruby, Alaska

We flew down the Yukon River into the checkpoint named Ruby. The snow sparkled as we landed in this beautiful village. I hiked up a very steep hill to Ruby's community center. This is where the mushers had to check in. The musher Robert Sorlie from Norway had rested and was already getting ready to move on. Minutes later John Baker and Martin Buser arrived. The checkpoint was an active place all day long.

It was a beautiful day to walk around the village and meet the local people. I met Annie Honea. She gave me a great tour of the village. We rode on a snow machine. This is the best way to travel around the rolling hills of the village. Annie took me to the village school. It was located up on a high hill overlooking the Yukon River. It goes from grades K-12. I was invited to a blended classroom of 1st, 2nd and 3rd graders. I would have liked to visit more classrooms but they were busy taking their state tests. Ruby School looks just like the schools in the lower 48. They have a big gym, hallways, classrooms and lots of things hanging on the walls made by students.



We left Ruby and headed back down the Yukon River. We were heading towards Nulato. From the airplane I could see the Koyukuk River run into the Yukon River. As I looked down I noticed a small crowd ready to cheer the mushers as they slipped by. The plane landed and I was able to meet the fans of this race. They invited me to roast a hotdog with them. I did and it was great having a warm meal along the Iditarod Trail! As I was roasting my hotdog John Baker, Jeff King and Charlie Boulding swiftly slid right in front of us! The dogs were wagging their tongues and trotting gracefully along the trail. It was fun cheering them on as they continued their journey to Nome.

It has been a lot of fun absorbing all the excitement along the trail. I am moving right along at a pretty good speed. There are so many things to see and experience. I go to bed pretty late. I write my stories with very sleepy eyes. In the classroom you have time to do a rough draft, edit and then have someone else check it too. Out here on the trail I don't have time to do any of those things. So, please excuse my mistakes. Teachers, you can use these articles for some extra editing practice for your students.

Happy Tracks,

Mrs. Wilson

3/09/03 Hopping Down the Trail

The sun was up bright and early Saturday morning in Galena. I checked on the doggies that were resting in Galena. They were snoozing the morning away.

After visiting with the dogs I was off in the plane. We soared down the Yukon with just a few bumps from the wind and landed in Nulato.

I walked up the bank of this huge river. It was a very steep bank and luckily there was a strong wind that pushed me up the hill! All the homes are built out of hand cut logs and put up on stilts.

They build their house on stilts because of the permafrost. In the summer the upper layer of the permafrost melts and in the winter it refreezes. If the house is built directly on the ground it will sink in the summer.



After Nulato it was a quick flight to Kaltag. First stop was a warm home and a treat of smoke salmon sticks and good strong coffee. I was surprised to meet a St. Bernard named Kayoto. He is an eight-month-old puppy. I wonder if he would like to be a sled dog. What do you think?



With my stomach full I decided I needed to go for a walk. On the way I saw some boys playing basketball and they asked me to try a few shots. They had a good time laughing and watching me try to make a point or two.

Onward and upward—through the village I went. I stopped at a tall log building. It was Kaltag's checkpoint!

I walked behind the checkpoint building and met a nice young man named Cameron. He is 4 years old. He was intrigued with my digital camera. He said he had never seen one. I showed him how to use the camera. He had a good time taking pictures of the musher's dogs. Bill Pinkham, an Iditarod musher, saw Cameron and took the time to visit and explained what he was doing with his dogs.



We left Kaltag in the afternoon and zipped across the sky to Eagle Island. There is only a small cabin marking the Eagle Island checkpoint. However, volunteers had put up tents and filled them with warmth and refreshments! I was tickled pink when John Baker offered me my first taste of pickled muktuk. It was pretty good! As I was chatting with the communication volunteers Dee Dee Jonrowe walked in. She always has a smile on her face and kind words to share with everyone.



3/14/03 Variety of Volunteers

At every checkpoint there is a lot of food! The villagers and Iditarod volunteers bake and cook many specialties from their culture and bring it to the checkpoint. When a musher walks in and sees the food they get a big grin on their face. They fill their plates and bellies with warm food.



I noticed that all of the mushers are friendly with each other. I over heard what the trail conditions were and how their dogs were doing. I saw lots of respect throughout the race too. Many of the veteran mushers gave the rookies a few pointers. It was wonderful to listen to the abundance of “thank you’s” in the air given by the mushers to the volunteers.

I like the teamwork I’ve seen on the trails. Yes, we know there is a lot of teamwork between the musher and their dogs. However, there is another world of teamwork that happens along the trail. There are many, many types of volunteers that keep this race going. Without them the race wouldn’t even be in existence.

Here is a list of the different types of volunteers:

- Checkers
- Computer Room
- Communications
- Dog Food Drop
- Dog Handlers
- Email Room
- Judges
- Logistics
- Musher Food
- Phone Room
- Pilots
- Trail Guards
- People Food Drop
- Photographer
- Postal Work
- Start Festivities

- Straw Drop
- Trail Cooks
- Transportation
- Vets
- Vet Techs

There are thousands of volunteers who are behind the scenes both in Alaska and the lower 48. When you begin writing to your favorite musher you might want to consider writing to a volunteer. Send a quick note to Zuma at Zuma Paw Prints. I'm sure she'll be happy to pass your gratitude along to the volunteers. Stop and think how you can volunteer to help others. It could be a fellow peer in your classroom, your parents or a community center. You'll feel great!

Happy Tracks,
Cassandra

3/16/03 Kaltag to Kaltag I spent several days flying up and down the Yukon River from Kaltag to Anvik. Then back up through Eagle Island and ending the loop at Kaltag. The plane, that I was in, landed and took off many, many times on the Yukon River. From high above the river I noticed many moose and wolf tracks criss-crossing the big wide river. I haven't heard if any mushers had problems with the animals. I lost count on how many times we landed and took off from the river!

The next morning, the pilot landed smoothly on the small slippery icy runway above the village of Anvik. I hopped out of the plane, waved goodbye and was off to a quiet walk down to the village. As I was walking down off of a very slick and steep hill I was delighted to see all the cabins nestled in drifted snow. I felt like I was walking into a storybook. As I walked I heard a faint chopping sound. As I rounded the curve of the path I saw a villager working hard getting wood for the morning fire. He stopped, looked up and saw me. He came over read my jacket that I was "Teacher on the Trail". He asked me all kinds of questions. Then I continued down the path. As I passed each cabin a villager came out to chat with me. It was a wonderful way to meet the people of Anvik.

After visiting Anvik, I caught a ride on a 4 wheeler that climbed back up the slippery steep hill where I caught the plane. I was off to do more amazing swooping along the trail and catching the mushers in action while they zoomed along!

Along this stretch of the trail the mushers are traveling both north and south. The mushers would pass each other. I saw many of them wave or give each other high fives. I saw such good sportsmanship along the trail. I tried to catch some of these high fives on camera, but I didn't quite push the button down fast enough.

It was afternoon as we landed in Eagle Island for the second time that day. It was a little too warm to run the dogs. However, it was a good time to visit with mushers Jessica Hendricks, Ray Redington, and Vern Halter. They were back in Eagle Island for the second time too. All of them were in fine spirits! The dogs were given plenty of water, food, rest and belly rubs. From Eagle Island I went back to Kaltag to catch the first musher off the Yukon River. The first musher off the Yukon River gets a seven-course meal of very fancy and tasty dishes.

Robert Sorlie was the first musher off the mighty Yukon River! He and his dogs looked great as they came to a halt in Kaltag. I'm sure Robert was looking forward to a fresh and hot cooked meal!

Kaltag villagers greeted Robert Sorlie in their roundhouse community center. The audience was given ice cream bars to munch on while they watched Robert enjoy his meal. I had forgotten how good an ice cream bar tastes.

3/26/03: Unique Unalakleet

Unalakleet is the first village on the trail that is on the coast of the Bering Sea. The first musher who reaches Unalakleet wins the Gold Coast Award. The sun cast its bright light on Robert Sorlie as he soared into the unique village. Another triumph for the Norwegian!

After the celebration of Robert's arrival I ambled around Unalakleet. I was prepared for the famous high cold winds, but the wind didn't blow, the sun was shining and it was about 20 degrees. With my warm clothes it almost felt like spring time in my home state of Oregon. I got that "coffee time" feeling and low and behold I found an espresso shop. Look out Starbucks! This quaint village coffee house greeted me with a large cup of java at a very good price.

It was a marvelous day of exploring. However, I had to get to the checkpoint to see how the race was going. Of course, the race was doing fine. I sat down for a snack and was absorbed by the sights around me. There were vets talking to the dogs, mushers trying to catch a nap and children from the local school visiting with everyone.

I walked down a slender road towards my nest for the night. I ended my last evening in Unique Unalakleet gazing at the glow of the sunset.

3/26/03: Sightseeing from the Sky

As I flew from Unalakleet to Nome, I was delightfully surprised to see that it wasn't completely white along the Bering Sea. In fact, as the sunlight touched the hills, mountains and flat areas below it created many textures and colors of soft blue hues. The villages looked like they were neatly stitched along this vast frozen land.

When I saw all of this beauty I thought of an idea for an art project. Use watercolors or pastels. Make various shades of blue and create a landscape. Display the artwork like a quilt and hang it in your room or hallway.

My travels are just about over, but there are still more articles coming your way.

3/26/03: End of the Trail

It was a sunny afternoon when I arrived in Nome. The Arch was up and ready for all of the winners to cross underneath. I say all the winners because anyone who can make it to Nome is a success. Think about a time when you had trouble understanding a concept in school. You had to go through some steps and try your best. When you finally understood the concept, you reached your goal and you were a winner too!

I believe even the mushers that scratched are winners, too! I spoke to Perry Solomonson. He told me his dogs became ill on the trail. If he would've pushed them forward they might have gotten worse. Perry had to make the right decision for his team. He will try again next year. When you listen to the mushers that scratched they did it for the safety, respect and responsibility they have for themselves and their dogs.

As I was waiting for the first musher to arrive I did some nosing around Nome. At the local church, there was a superb arts and crafts show. There were many villagers who shared their crafts for the public to buy. I spent a couple of hours just admiring the beautiful work of ivory carvings, fur mittens, beadwork, paintings, and food products.

After I warmed myself up inside the church I took off again looking around this old gold town. Around the town there were lots of old shovels from gold dredges and wagons that they used to mine the gold. Look at this picture closely...can you see some tiny trees in the background. That's the Nome National Forest! Actually, there are no trees in Nome. The people of Nome take their Christmas trees and stick them out on the sea ice. When the summer arrives the ice melts and the trees float off into the sea.

I had the experience to co-host the local talk show called "Hello Central". The host was a gentleman named Richard. We had a good time sharing the many interesting points about the race and how I incorporate the Iditarod in the classroom.

The town of Nome is a very busy place. Many of the restaurants were busy too. I managed to find a table at Fat Freddie's and ordered lunch. I noticed a couple of ladies waiting for a table so I invited them to join me. I am so glad they did! They were originally from an island off the coast of Nome called King Island. I listen to their interesting family history. I also admired Rose's traditional Alaskan parka. Rose explained how she made it both beautiful and warm.

The trail was lined with fans as Sorlie zipped under the famous arch. Robert was the winner! A little over an hour later, Ramy Brooks was greeted by a friendly crowd too. Robert gave his congratulations to Ramy, in fact Robert congratulated each musher who came across the finish line.

I quickly entered the "Businessman Race" that was put on by the Nome Kennel Club. I was given a sled and three dogs. A few quick pointers on how to use the drag and off I went. It was amazing to feel the power of three dogs running up a hill. I fell off. I can't imagine controlling 16 dogs! I got up and got a ride to my team. I got on but fell off again. It was good to experience how hard mushing was.

The race is over, but the experience will never be forgotten. I found a role model in the Iditarod to share with as many students as I can. The race is not about winning but setting a goal, working hard and reaching your dream.

End of the Trail?

No...just a leap away to the next adventure!

Happy Tracks to All of YOU!