

# Life at the mission was exciting, but nothing could top seeing Mom and Dad

by Theresa Demientieff Devlin  
for the Tundra Times

When it was time to stay in the mission at Holy Cross, I would become a little sad. Lumpy, Irene, Sugar, Tootie and I would pack a few things and go with Dad and Mom to the mission.

There they turned us over to the care of the nuns. The nuns were kind of an unresolved mystery in my mind. I didn't quite know what to think of where they came from. I figured that they just belonged to the mission.

They were all dressed in black, they jingled when they moved and they usually had their hands folded and tucked behind big black bibs!

I never did see any legs on them. They looked like they floated over the ground, and they were all called Sister. I didn't much mind calling them Sister this and Sister that. They seemed to be OK.

It was as if they could possibly be related to the saints, like a link between us and the saints.

They were always talking about saints, angels and martyrs. They worked very hard, and if they weren't praying they were helping people. They certainly made a great impression on me.

I had a wild imagination. It usually carried me away! I was sure we were to remain in the mission for the rest of our natural lives. Irene would scold me for such thoughts and reassure us that Mom and Dad would soon return.

Lumpy and Irene stayed with the big girls. Sugar, Tootie and I would stay with the little girls. We slept in little wooden beds and would rise up with sleepy eyes to claim our little toothbrushes, shake out our portion of toothpowder and clean up at a big long common sink.

After we scrubbed our faces we would go to breakfast. In the dining room there were long rows of tables with long wooden benches. We would enter the dining room in silence and sit at the tables and bow our heads to God. "Bless us, O Lord, and these Thy gifts. . . ." After the loud resound-

ing *amen*, we burst forth, chattering, laughing and just being busy. After breakfast we would all set off in different directions to carry out our morning chores or whatever.

I loved to go to Sister Mary Edwards. She was in charge of the dispensary. She administered m-e-d-i-c-a-t-i-o-n-s! She would open the big wooden door with a key and out would come the smells of cleanliness, medicines and getting better, all rolling out at the same time.

Then she would open the cupboards and there were rows and rows of bottles. Some had pills, some had liquids, such as castor oil and all sorts of things.

Everyone in Holy Cross relied on Sister Mary Edwards for their medications. Sister Edwards was my favorite. She was older, jolly and had a smile that was always accompanied with a chuckle.



Every morning, one of the girls was lucky enough to ring the big golden hand bell that announced it was time for medicine. When I had the great privilege, I took it very seriously. I rang the bell as loud as I could up and down the halls, up and down the stairs, all around the building and out the front door! After all, it could save someone's life, I thought.

I would watch Sister Mary Edwards carefully dispense all of her little pills. She was comfortable to be around. She was always talking. Her speech had a rolling sound. The words had kind of a swing. Later I would learn that the accent was French. It was really neat. I enjoyed her.

When she looked at me, it was as though I was the only one in the world, and I was very important! She would question me on everything: How are you feeling? Are you OK? Where does it hurt? How much does it hurt? She

always ended her little quiz with the reassurance that I was going to be just fine.

After the morning activity we would go out to work in the gardens. There we would play and play between the

rows of potatoes, carrots, cabbage and peas. I would pick peas and eat until I was satisfied, then I would work. After we picked for awhile we gathered the peas and ran them through an old wringer to pop out the peas.

When it was time for lunch we would get cleaned up and again march into the dining room and once again ask for blessings. After lunch we would take a nap. I would wait until it was quiet, then sneak over to the window and look at the Yukon River. I would cry quietly as I looked downriver and wonder whether I would ever see Mom and Dad again.

After the nap we would play outdoors. Sometimes, if it was raining we would just stay inside and do whatever we wanted. One time I went up into

One time Sister Mary Alice took us "little ones" for a swim in the Yukon. Sister Alice was young, and she spoke something like Sister Mary Edwards, only she took a little longer to think of her words.

sat in front, and we would drift off into movie-land with all of the famous faces, cowboys and Indians. I could never identify with them Indians! Why they were *savage*. They had almost no clothes. They were mean, killing and all. They certainly were not civilized like us, not at all.

Anyway, the big girls all sighed over Alan Ladd, and thrilled over Ma and Pa Kettle. After the movie we would all go back to the main building, running to get to the outhouse first. There was a long row of outhouses built over a creek. After the quick visit, we would come back into the house by way of a long hall.

One time the movie was kind of a scary one, so a couple of us decided to frighten one of the smaller girls. We

were in the hall. All along the walls of the hall were coats hanging, and we just hid amongst the coats, and when the next person came into the hall we all jumped out and hollered at the top of our lungs! It turned out to be one of the nuns. We were just as surprised as she was.



Sometimes she would roll her eyes up, and it was as if she were searching for words from the ceiling of her mind. She would put her right three middle fingers over her lips to stop her words and search. Then she would tap into the right words and pronounce them very carefully.

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Anyway, we had a good time. We played in the mud, splashed each other and made a complete mess of ourselves. She called for us to get ready to go back to the house. We were having such a good time no one paid much attention to her. We were running in and out of the willows, and suddenly she got real loud and said, "You must come out of there or you will get muckinjuks all over you. . . ."

It got real quiet. It was like we all got struck with something we never even heard about before. We were all paralyzed and moving in slow motion, reviewing our own source of knowledge. *Muckinjuks!*

Nothing, just the fear of not knowing what she was talking about made us listen. We all were out of the willows in nothing flat. *Muckinjuks!* We all went quietly back to the house kind of stunned. I always wondered about them muckinjuks.

As time passed slowly by, I would count the days to Mom and Dad's return. If they were one day overdue I would run to Irene and cry.

"Maybe they sank. Maybe they fell overboard. Maybe they got lost. . . Maybe. . ." Irene was good about

grounding my wild imagination. She knew my fears would not help Sugar and Tootie. She would reassure us that Mom and Dad would be returning. . . perhaps the next day!

On Sunday nights we always had a movie. We would file into the movie house and sit on the long wooden benches. The mission kids usually all

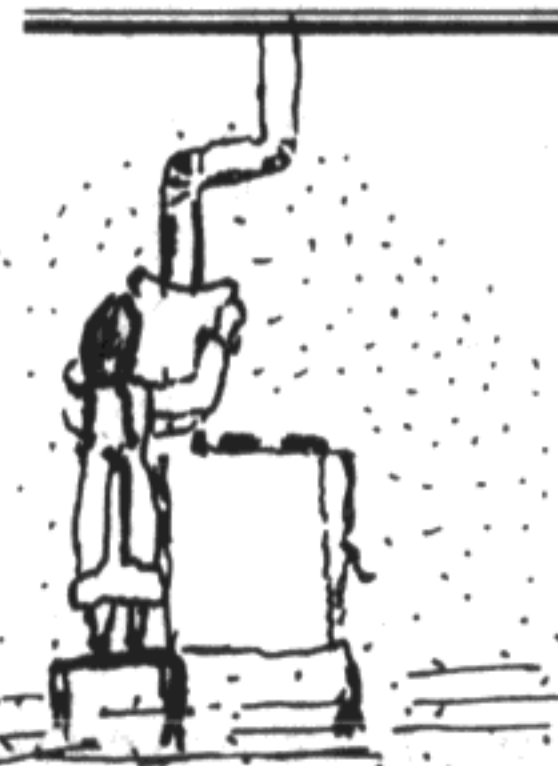
During the summer days, we would now and then have a picnic down in the meadow. There was a natural meadow with trees bordering a grassy field. Perfect for a picnic ground.



We would parade down the road, through the village and down to the meadow. There we would eat to our hearts' content. We would explore the river's edge and run through the tall grass. Then after the day's outing we would gather everything and put it on to the back of an old pickup truck. Only later on would I learn that the truck was a gift to the mission from Bing Crosby.

Life in the mission was different and exciting, but nothing could top the feeling that I would enjoy when I would see Mom and Dad!

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the Big Girls dorm. Their beds were much bigger, and they had an air of seriousness to them.

I remember this one girl named Emily. She was always dressed real nice. She had some beautiful colorful nylon scarves. We used to iron our hair ribbons on the stove pipe. It was just warm enough to smooth out the wrinkles. It was quite a trick.

This one time I thought I would do Emily a favor and iron one of her scarves. The irons in those days had wooden handles that would clamp onto irons that were set on the stove to warm up.

Well, I heated up an iron and made sure it was good and hot. I got the scarf and just as I set the iron down on the material, it sort of melted. I couldn't believe it. In terror I pulled the iron off, but it was too late. The scarf was ruined. I don't remember what happened after that. I just remember that the only way to take care of the wrinkles was with the pipe!