

A Mentor Story

By James Barefoot

One fall when I lived in Noorvik the high school principle notified me that they had a senior who needed help in accomplishing an elective to graduate.

He knew that I was building a church youth center and the principle asked me if I could include this young man in the project, keep track of the hours, and help him learn some carpentry. I agreed.

I was already acquainted with this young man through normal village life. When he joined me on the building project it was just about freeze up time. The weather was cold and the work was slow in an unheated building.

I was amazed that this high school senior did not even know how to read a measuring tape so my instructions to him started with the basics.

This time spent together, two or three days a week lent to a stronger friendship between us. It took a considerable amount of patience and self discipline for me to let the young man participate while he made many mistakes and needed to be reminded often how to accomplish a simple task. The construction work went much slower than I wanted it to.

We were alone most of the time on the project. As we worked together side by side there was much opportunity for discussions about life. Many of these discussions came out of the young man making statements about his own life to me. He was not happy with circumstances in his life. He had a very poor self image as a man and as an Eskimo. He had come to believe many lies about himself and blamed others for his condition.

At some point we did pray together and he accepted Christ as his Savior.

Much of my time with him was spent in affirming who he was in Christ and what he could become if he would apply himself.

I emphasized the need for him to take responsibility for himself instead of blaming others. The "building project" strengthened our friendship to the point that I would take him out on other activities like getting fire wood by boat away from the village.

The mentoring, times of prayer and spiritual guidance happened as we worked, took breaks sitting together and later as he showed up at my door many times to visit me in my home. Very little of the mentoring happened in what some would call a formal "sitting across the table from each other with a text book" setting.

Looking back it was a real stretching process for me in which I grew spiritually by staying committed in patience (by God's grace) to the mentoring process. This experience was more rewarding for me than preaching many sermons to a large congregation in those same years.