

Called to the Top of the World

Kayy Gordon has braved subzero weather and harsh living conditions for 40 years to bring the gospel to the Inuit people of Canada's northern Arctic region.

Young Kayy Gordon of Vancouver, British Columbia, couldn't escape the burden that God had placed on her heart. While praying one Saturday night in 1953, the 19-year-old received a vision of herself ministering to the Inuit people of the frozen Arctic—a land of snow and ice, subzero temperatures, polar bears and caribou, reindeer herders and the aurora borealis. This was a land where few missionaries had dared to tread.

The Inuit, known to Westerners as Eskimos, have inhabited the Canadian Arctic for 5,000 years. They are relatives of Arctic inhabitants in Russia and other lands above the Arctic Circle. Their spirituality was founded on spiritism and occultic shamanism, except for some inroads made by ritualistic Anglican missionaries and others in Canada's north.

Kayy had her work cut out for her. Her first test was to withstand the protests of Reg Layzell, pastor of Glad Tidings Fellowship, an independent Pentecostal church in Vancouver that she attended.

When Kayy told Layzell that God had showed her she would be a missionary in the Arctic, he chided: "Well, Kayy, God knows your address and your phone number. When He wants you, He will call you." That retort sent Kayy, now 67, scurrying out of Layzell's office in tears.

"Pastor Layzell was a disciplinarian, but a real revivalist at the same time," Kayy said of her now deceased pastor. "He was the way he was because he was so anxious to develop ministry

that would last. He was my mentor, and I have tremendous respect for him.”

Though Kayy’s pastor was more interested in supporting missions that had a chance to survive, during the next two years he watched her endure ridicule from family and friends. He also saw that her deep, inward passion for the Inuit people was not shaken. Layzell finally realized that this young woman, now in her early 20s, would not be swayed from answering God’s call to the Arctic.

Before Layzell would release Kayy to missions work, however, she had to meet one requirement: have direct contacts in the Arctic. On the very day that he was going to tell Kayy she couldn’t go without having developed those contacts, a couple wandered into Glad Tidings Fellowship.

Anna and Mikkel Pulk had lived in the Arctic for 30 years, herding reindeer from Alaska into Canada. They were vacationing in Vancouver and looking for a church to visit. Just moments before the Pulks entered the church lobby, Layzell was impressed by the Lord that strangers from the north were arriving.

“You people are from the Arctic, aren’t you?” Layzell inquired of the amazed Pulks, who wondered how he could know that. With their white skin and modern dress, the Pulks gave no clue they might be Arctic dwellers.

Kayy had her contacts. Layzell released her into ministry with his blessing and support. In 1956, at age 22, Kayy left her world for the icy territory of the Inuit.

FARMING SOULS IN A FROZEN WORLD Kayy arrived to a then primitive Arctic, gradually learning the customs of the Inuit, living in their tents and traveling with these nomads of the north as they herded reindeer. In most villages, no running water or electricity was available. Sometimes, however, she was blessed with the use of a few electric generators.

As an outsider, Kayy found adjusting to Arctic living conditions challenging. As an evangelist, she sometimes felt she was trying to farm frozen ground.

“Forty years ago, it wasn’t easy,” she said. “The Inuit were pretty steeped in religious and cultural traditions. It took them a long time to see the need to be born again—to have a Spirit-filled life. We had many years of sowing before the real harvest began to come.

“There [were] what they called shamans—like the medicine men of Africa. They felt they had special powers to cure or bless, which might include healing. But it great move of the Holy Spirit in the 1980s that really broke the power of shamanism for many.”

Kayy says she met only minor resistance as a woman missionary. That resistance faded quickly when the Inuit saw that her prayers for their healing were heard and that her words of prophecy came true. She also noted the generous nature of the Inuit and how this often made her work easy.

“When you live with them, they often have a wonderful way of yielding themselves to the Lord and to the moving of the Holy Spirit,” Kayy said. “That yielding permits God to bring great change in their lives rapidly. Because of that, they grow quite quickly as Christians and the qualities of humility, love and compassion become very evident in their lives.”

WOMEN LEADING THE WAY Today, Kayy is president of Glad Tidings Arctic Missions, which has established 12 churches and two Bible schools in the Arctic. Kayy’s goal to raise up Inuit leaders to evangelize and disciple their own people has been met beyond her expectations. She’s especially pleased that her presence as a woman minister inspired Inuit women to take on leadership roles in their villages.

Hattie Alagalak, an Inuit and wife of the mayor of Arviat, a village on Hudson Bay’s northwestern shore, emphasized Kayy’s

influence. Hattie, who is pastor of Glad Tidings Fellowship in Arviat, first met Kayy in 1975 shortly after having accepted Jesus. The two began traveling together in 1977, and Hattie became a pastor in Arviat in 1990 after years of mentoring by Kayy.

“I really had a desire to work for the Lord and then seeing a woman who had a ministry gave me more urge to give myself to God,” Hattie said. “Being a woman, that amazed me that [Kayy] would come, that she would be a missionary.”

Another leader to emerge from Kayy’s missionary efforts was Lynn Patterson. Lynn was 28 years old when she first traveled north with Kayy, and she spent the next 20 years serving in Kayy’s ministry.

Now 48, Lynn is pastor of Glad Tidings Fellowship in Yellowknife, the capital of the Northwest Territories, and she serves as supervisor of Glad Tidings Arctic Missions—a job that requires frequent trips across the Arctic.

“We travel by plane—Kayy traveled by dogsled,” Lynn said. “We can’t forget what people like Kayy Gordon did. She blazed the trail.”

Kayy says because of God’s favor to her, she has faced little persecution as a woman minister. On one occasion an Anglican bishop sought to have her banished from preaching in a village, but Kayy attributed that incident to her delivery of the Pentecostal message, not prejudice against women in ministry. But what few incidents she did face—she overcame by staying focused on the mission God gave her.

“My attitude has been whenever anything negative is said, I don’t respond to it,” Kayy said. “I just get about doing what God has called me to do.”

Kayy has been courted a few times but has never married. “It’s true I did have others show an interest in me, but I simply

felt too fulfilled in life to get involved," Kayy said.

Forty-four years ago, one young woman heeded God's call to the Arctic tundra. Today, as a result of her faithfulness, an entire people's ancient culture has been penetrated by the good news of Jesus Christ.

Billy Bruce is news editor for Charisma magazine. He traveled with Kayy Gordon on a ministry tour of six Arctic villages in March 2000 along with evangelist Rodney Howard-Browne.

Austere beauty and severe weather mark the Canadian northern arctic region—the homeland of the Inuit people, commonly referred to as Eskimos.

Following a move of the Holy Spirit in the 1980s, many of the native people began seeing their need for Christ.