

A Christmas Story From Antarctica: A Moment Frozen In Time

“Great God, this is an awful place.” Robert Falcon Scott, 1912

During this “Season of the Heart”, my wife Sandi and I wish you and yours a gentle, peaceful and loving Merry Christmas. May you celebrate the birth of Christ for which we celebrate the season. While I write about all the ills occurring in the United States weekly as well as around the world, I try to make a difference in the direction of our country by alerting every citizen. My mission: to educate Americans as to the consequences of endless immigration-overpopulation, and, to help each of you take action by joining the websites offered. I hope you may enjoy collective empowerment with others who want America to change course toward a viable future for all citizens. Right now, NumbersUSA.org features 7,000,000 (million) Americans who feel the same way you feel. We can and must stop mass immigration into our country.

In the end, I love writing books on adventures around the world. My latest published in May, **Living Your Spectacular Life**, educates, inspires and encourages every reader at any age to live a “Spectacular” life as he or she chooses it. It makes for a fabulous gift for anyone you may want to enhance his or her life. Copies on Amazon.com and/or direct from publisher: [1 888 280 7715](tel:18882807715).



As a writer, I would rather be writing positive, energetic and inspiring works for all Americans. This Christmas, I share a story about meeting a family of Emperor penguins on the ice in Antarctica, where I worked for six months. This

Christmas story will warm your heart and give you hope that the world might sing and celebrate.

In the morning, a whiteout howled across McMurdo Station, Antarctica with 150 mile per hour winds and minus 80 degree temperatures. I had been confined to my barracks for two days as a "Condition One" storm worked its way over the icepack before me.

By late evening, the weather turned placid but a biting minus 40-degree temperature kept most people inside. I, however, bundled into my cold weather gear—insulated boots, heavy mittens, five Thermax layers, fleece, three hats, face protection, along with ski goggles—and headed out the door to ride my bicycle over the ice runway.

Yes, there were bicycles at the scientific station for me to ride. Operations reported some emperor penguins on the ice. I had to see them no matter what the cold. I jumped on my bike looking like an overstuffed bear with all my cold weather gear on. My breath vaporized as I pedaled toward the ice-covered ocean. My lungs burned with each inhalation of polar cold.

About a mile around the cove, the setting sun glinted off the

roof of Robert Falcon Scott's Discovery Hut. He had died 90 years ago on his last attempt to reach the South Pole. The hut had stood on the point of McMurdo Sound since 1902. It gave mute testimony to the courage those men displayed in their polar adventures. This proved a cold, miserable place.

I rode along a path that led toward the ice pack in the sound. It's hard to describe pack-ice, however, it features a bunch of jumbled, broken ice chunks being heaved and smashed into multiple shapes such as triangles, domes, squares, tubulars, and wedges—like an Erector Set gone crazy. However, near the shore, it was reasonably smooth with a thin veneer of snow from the blizzard.

Above me, a gold and purple sky glowed brazenly in its final glory into the crevasses of the Royal Society Range across McMurdo Sound. For once, a rare quiet softened the bitter edge of the crystal white desert before me. One of the glaciers, more than ten miles across at its terminus, radiated liquid gold from the setting sun. Stepping through some shallow snow drifts, I sank knee deep until I pulled through and gained the edge of the ice. Even with polar weather gear protecting my body, the numbing cold crept through the air as if it were trying to find a way into my being.

The bike frame creaked at the cold and the tires made a popping sound on the snow. The big boots I wore made it hard to keep on the pedals. But I persevered and kept moving forward. Across the ice, I looked through the sunlight and saw four black figures approaching. I shaded my eyes with my gloved hand. They drew closer; their bodies were back-lit by the sun on the horizon. A family Emperor penguins waddled toward me. I dismounted from my bike. From our survival classes, I learned to sit down so as not to frighten them. By appearing smaller than them, they might find me interesting.

Slowly, I lowered myself into the snow cross-legged like an Indian chief. Minute by minute, they waddled closer and

closer. Three big birds, about 80 pounds each kept moving dead-on in my direction. The smallest followed behind them.

Another minute passed and they were within 30 feet of me. The lead Emperor carried himself like a king. His silky black head-color swept down the back of his body and through his tail. A bright crayon yellow/orange streaked along his beak like a Nike logo. Under his cheek, soft aspirin-white feathers poured downward glistening in lanolin. His wings were black on the outside and mixed with black/white on the front. He stood at least 40 inches tall and his enormous three-toed feet were a gray reptilian roughness with blunted talons sticking out. He rolled his head. He looked at me in a cockeyed fashion, as if I was the strangest creature he had ever seen.

I don't know what made me do it, but I slipped my right hand out of the glove and moved it slowly toward him. The rest of the penguins closed in. The big guy stuck his beak across the palm of my hand and twisted his head, as if to scratch himself against my skin. I felt glossy feathers against my hand. He uttered a muffled coo. The rest of the penguins cooed. Their mucus membranes slid like liquid soap over their eyes every few seconds. I stared back, wanting to say something to them, but realized I could not speak their language. However, at that moment, we shared a consciousness of living.

My frozen breath vapors hung in the air briefly before descending as crystals toward the ground. I battled to keep from bursting with excitement. Within seconds, one of the other penguins pecked my new friend on the rump. He drew back. With that he turned and waddled away. Following the elders, the little one gave one last look at me, as if he too wanted to scratch my hand, but was afraid, and turned with his friends. As they retreated, their wings flailed outward, away from their bodies like children trying to catch the wind in their arms. The baby Emperor departed as the last to go.

My hand turned numb so I stuck it back into the glove. As I sat there, I remembered once when a hummingbird landed on my finger in the Rocky Mountains. I remembered the sheer delicacy Nature shared with me that warm spring day in the wilderness. Here, in this frozen wasteland beyond the borders of my imagination where humans do not belong, nature touched me again today with its pulsing heart and living warmth. I only hope my species learns as much respect for our fellow travelers as they show toward us.

I stood up, tightened my hood and looked for the penguins. They had vanished into the frozen white world in front of me. Only the pack ice rumbled toward the horizon. I turned to my bike. It's hard to believe that two rubber tires laced together with spokes and rims, and attached to a metal frame could carry me from the Amazon Jungle, to Death Valley and on to where the bolt goes into the bottom of the globe.

That simple machine lying in the frozen snow had taken me to far flung places on this planet and it had allowed me magical moments beyond description. That moment with the penguins probably was the best it had ever done by me. I remounted it and turned toward the barracks.

The ride back didn't seem so cold.

Merry Christmas from Sandi and Frosty Wooldridge

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