

THE WOMAN OF MARY'S IGLOO

A true and delightful story appeared years ago in a publication named *The Pathfinder*. It was about a woman who had an enormous impact on her community.

If you look at a map of Alaska, you will see a thin, wavy line about midway between Nome and Teller, Alaska. This line is known as the Mary River. It was named for an Eskimo woman many years ago who lived along the shores of the river with her husband and two children.

Their little village was hit by a deadly flu during the gold-rush era when men were frantically searching for gold in the Alaskan wilderness. The flu took the lives of the woman's children and her husband. Fourteen other children in the village lost their parents to the disease. Out of compassion, the woman adopted all 14 of those children.

She also extended her hands of kindness to gold prospectors who had a difficult time pronouncing her Eskimo name, and opted to call her simply Mary, as suggested by one of the miners, who said, "It's a grand old name." She welcomed miners, trappers and others into her home for coffee.

To honor her kindness to them, the miners named the stream that passed by her home the Mary River. During that period, Mary's Igloo was a transfer point for supplies for the gold fields upriver on the Kuzitrit and Kougarok rivers. The supplies were offloaded from ocean boats onto barges, which were towed to their destinations. By 1910, Mary's Igloo was a large community of miners, innkeepers, missionaries and support crews for the barges. It had schools, a post office and other services.

But there is more. When teachers from the United States founded schools in the little river village, they, too, heard Mary's story, and they named the settlement Mary's Igloo. As the village grew, other things were named for her – Mary's trees and Mary's reindeer.

Mary married a second time and, of course, he was known by one name only – Mary's husband.

So Mary River and Mary's Igloo, which is now abandoned and used as a fishing camp, are monuments to the power of this woman's love for her family, for neighbors and for strangers.

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We all know how important love is to our lives. In an incident in the life of Jesus, the Pharisees got together and one of them, an expert in the law, tested Him with this question: “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”

Jesus replied, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments” (Matthew 22:37-40 NKV).

We’ve heard those words many times, but they are still breathtaking. Everything that it means to be a Christian can be boiled down to these two simple commandments.

And, of course, they are the foundation of the work we are called to do in Life Care and Century Park.

– Beecher Hunter