

Episode 4

Teacher I Pooped!

This is Michael, your Alaskan cultural chef and today's episode is entitled "Teacher I Pooped!" It also includes a recipe for walrus curry. You might substitute moose for the walrus or buy beef at the store.

From 2014 through 2016 Pam and I had been requested by our superintendent to relocate to Little Diomed Island to see if we could increase test scores for a school that was at the bottom of the 15 schools in Bering Strait.

Getting to Little Diomed could be a struggle and our first trip had us landing on the top of the island until the fog lifted enough for the pilot to see the helipad below us. We took off and my crew chief experiences kicked in as I cleared the helicopter left and right until we reached the landing pad safely.

We found our apartment on the second floor next door to what was to be my classroom. The high school a part of the school we didn't use was a separate building attached to us by a long sloping ramp enclosed with some stairs about half way there). The other classrooms were down stairs adjacent to the kitchen and multi-purpose room.

Little Diomed contained a very small population with 40 or so residents and around 20 students. It was important to assign teachers to certain grades to cover what grades were and weren't needed.

Pam was principal and taught the upper grades. I was appointed by her our first year to teach 4th and 5th grade. We brought with us two other teachers that combined taught pre-school thru 3rd grade. There were no 6th graders that year. Under Pam's leadership the school did finish ranked in the middle for testing this first year. The second year we did even better!

The 2nd year we lost one of our teachers, so Pam asked me to teach kindergarten thru 1st grade. I had 5 students and the other teacher had about the same number. Pam took the larger share teaching 7th thru high school.

One could literally see Russia from out our living room windows and this is the sight I awoke to every morning. Another interesting tidbit is that our island is the main nesting location for a number of migratory birds. It was amazing to see so many thousands of birds flying in front of our school windows until the first snow settled in and they began their journey south.

Episode 4

Teacher I Pooped!

Diomedede also had a lot of marine mammals and polar bears. The small community had to send villagers out with rifles to protect children as they made the trek to school and back home after. It wasn't unusual to find polar bears near the school. There is an actual photo out on the internet of this occurrence. Later in the spring they would hunt seal and walrus.

Because Diomedede villagers hunted seal and walrus during the spring is why I am able to share my curry recipe with you, but first I have a story to tell.

My second year entailed teaching kindergarten and 1st grade. I had about 5 kindergarteners and one first grader. Teaching this class was probably my most challenging and rewarding of my career so far. I had been a part of teaching my children at home, but I never knew in a million years how important the first few years of education was to students. It isn't like I was ignorant but wow the levels of abilities and diversity became apparent. A teacher literally does become an additional parent to these kiddos. Luckily, I had an aide in my classroom. I don't know how I would have done without her.

First, there is a certain amount of testing at the beginning of the year. Our school was so small that we didn't have a person to administer these tests. In Koyuk another village school the superintendents wife came to my room to administer those tests. Getting to Little Diomedede is more difficult and expensive, so I was left to study and navigate through to testing myself. Boy, did I learn a lot! I looked at and read the testing manual. Then put the test into action. Some of it was physical and some of it was identifying things in a book.

We got through that and now it was time to set class rules. I had set up a large carpet in front of a large white board that doubled as a smart board. I taught my students to sit cross legged and raise their hands to ask questions. A couple of my kindergartners had not been bathroom trained and I asked my aide to escort them to our bathroom nearby to help them out.

One of these students kept having accidents and struggled with number two! My aide worked with him to limited success. One day as we returned from the gym for a little PE I found we were missing this student. Just as I had approached my aide to ask where this student went, he came bounding into the classroom exclaiming "Teacher I pooped!" He had a huge smile on his face and was so proud of himself. I asked the aide to watch the class as I took my proud student back to our bathroom and asked him to tell me how he accomplished this amazing feat. Mostly I was waiting to hear that he had used the toilet paper and also verified that no mess was left behind. He had checked all the marks and I smiled and told him I was proud of him.

Episode 4

Teacher I Pooped!

The experience of teaching on Little Diomedede really doesn't compare to teaching anywhere else. This same year our helicopter that brought supplies to us broke down and later when it was flyable, we were hampered by bad weather. During that time the community ran out of toilet paper, diapers and formula for babies. It became news worthy and Pam talked to the radio station in Nome over the phone. Pam and I had a small amount of toilet paper and we had to use it sparingly. We were saved by our pantry which I had stocked from our one visit to Nome and then amazon thru the mail system when the helicopter was flying. Wow what an adventure!

Before I knew it the school year progressed and my kindergarteners had achieved counting to 100 and skip counting by twos. I also had work sheets with the numbers in dashes that they filled in using crayons. They were leaning abc's and writing them as well!!

It was spring and the birds began returning and subsistence hunting had begun. One of the first sea mammals caught were seals. I remember this because Pam had done a class on first-aid that included CPR. I found our students one day trying to give CPR to seals that had been harvested and were lying on the dock near the helipad. Pam took short movies of the students practicing their CPR! I hope someday they will remember this first-aid should it be needed.

Our cook was amazing and brought Pam and me presents like blue king crab. She also helped cook meals for Holliday celebrations. She did a marvelous job feeding our small group of students. She made cakes and cookies to serve and provided the classrooms with snacks from the district office.

One day the school cook presented me with a hunk of walrus meat and told me I'd find it very tasty. I thought about this and how I might prepare it. I remembered that I had some Japanese curry cubes in a box. Our helicopter was finally flying again and an order of food had just been received: I purchased fresh carrots, celery and Yukon potatoes. I looked at the box and decided to follow the directions on it using walrus instead of beef. I also halved this recipe for 2-4 servings. Here is the recipe and a picture of what it looks like finished.

Episode 4

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Ingredients

2 pounds of Walrus (or beef, lamb, shrimp)

2 large carrots chopped

1/2 cup sliced onions

2-3 stalks of celery chopped on the bias (angled) into 1/2 pieces

2-3 Yukon gold potatoes chopped into one inch pieces

2 - 3 cups of water

3-4 cubes of curry cubes

Directions

Chop the meat into 1 inch chunks. Heat a large fry pan over medium heat, add meat and veggies with oil and sauté over medium heat for about 5 minutes.

Begin with adding 2 cups water to cover mixture leaving about 1/2 inch from the top and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat, cover and simmer until ingredients are tender about 12-15 minutes. For wild game I simmer the meat a lot longer until it is fall apart tender.

Turn the heat off, break each cube one at a time into pieces and add them to the skillet. Add one cube at a time until you have the flavor and thickness desired. Stir until melted and then simmer for an additional 5 minutes.

Note: replace half of the water with coconut cream for a more tai type flavor.

** If using wild game cook the meat until it is tender.

**For vegetarians and vegans tofu may be substituted.

Serve over noodles or rice

Thank you for listening in and please try my recipes.

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