

by Michael Kusugak  
art by Vladyana Krykorka

# Baseball Bats for Christmas



**annick press**  
toronto • berkeley



© 1990 Michael Arvaarluk Kusugak (text)  
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We acknowledge the support of the Canada Council for the Arts and the Ontario Arts Council, and the participation of the Government of Canada/la participation du gouvernement du Canada for our publishing activities.



### Cataloging in Publication

Kusugak, Michael, author

Baseball bats for Christmas / Michael Arvaarluk Kusugak  
; illustrated by Vladyana Krykorka.

Previously published: Toronto: Annick Press, 1990.

ISBN 978-1-55451-928-6 (softcover)

I. Krykorka, Vladyana, illustrator II. Title.

PS8571.U83B3 2017

jC813'.54

C2017-902267-9

Published in the U.S.A. by Annick Press (U.S.) Ltd.

Distributed in Canada by University of Toronto Press.

Distributed in the U.S.A. by Publishers Group West.

Printed in China.

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To my son, Graham  
Kusugak, and to  
Jimi, who read it first  
and said, "It's great!"

—M.K.

To my husband,  
Jack Johnson

—V.K.

It was a glorious time, even for a very asthmatic boy. Arvaarluk was seven years old and Arvaarluk was very asthmatic. He struggled when he walked and struggled to catch his breath when he sat down. And Arvaarluk loved Christmas.

In 1955, Arvaarluk lived in Repulse Bay.

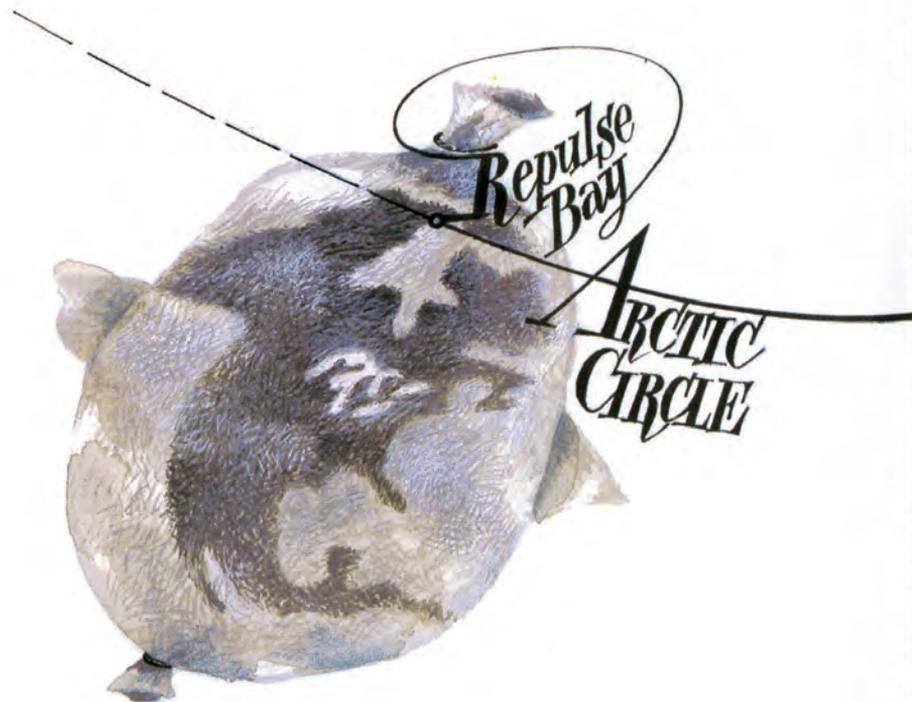




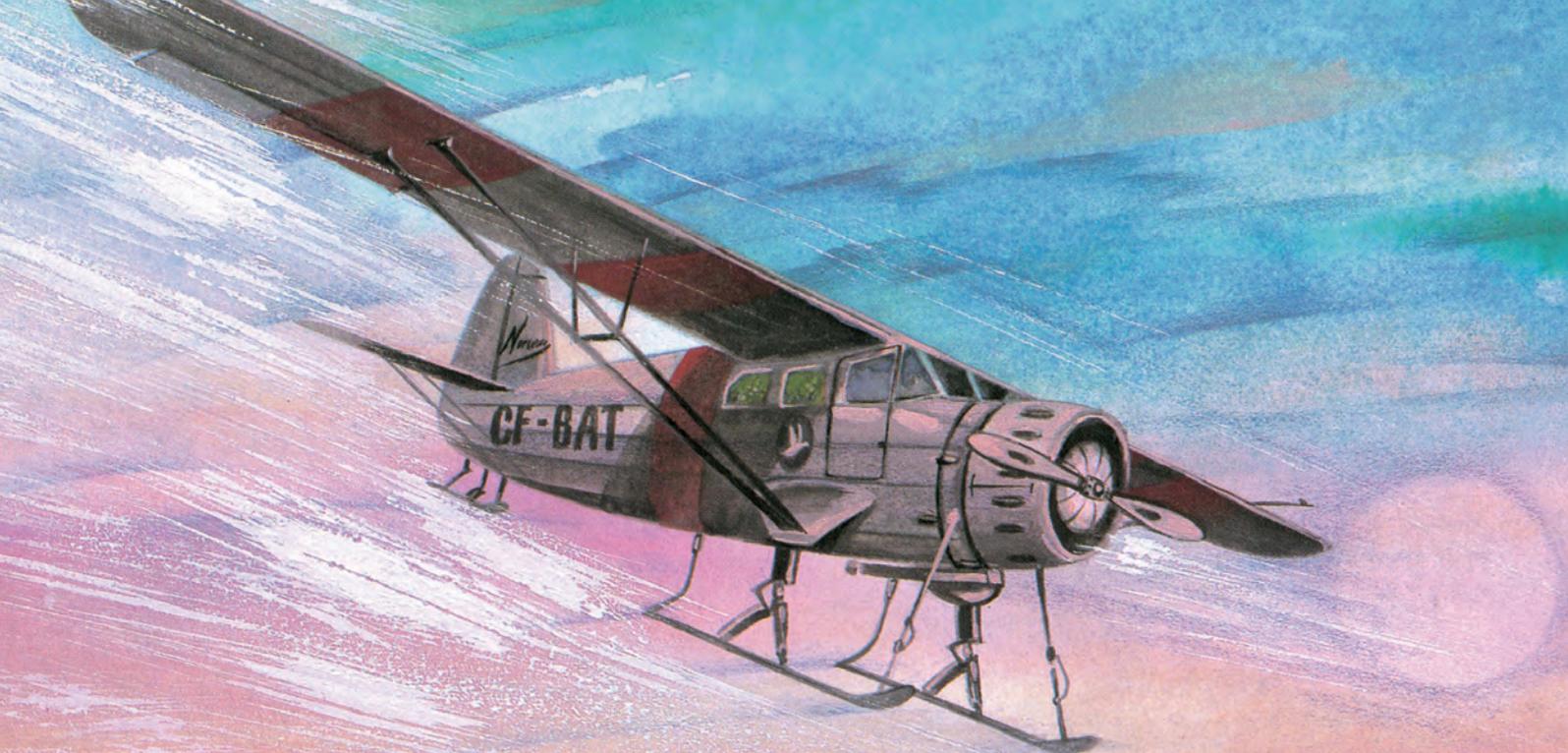
Let me tell you thing or two about Repulse Bay: There is a brass plate on a rock outcrop that was put there when Arvaarluk was just a baby. And, no matter how many times you hit it with another rock, it will not come off.

Arvaarluk's mother would say, "If you knock that brass plate off that rock, the whole world will come to a terrible end." Arvaarluk imagined the brass plate coming off and the whole world blowing air out through the hole like a giant seal float, bouncing around and around, all over space. He hit it time and again but to no avail. It sits there, still, declaring for all the world that Repulse Bay is smack dab on the Arctic Circle—way up at the north end of Hudson Bay. Less than a hundred people lived there in 1955 and, in winter they all lived in igloos and sod huts.

Another thing about Repulse Bay is that there are no "standing-ups" or, as Peter, Jack, Yvo, and Arvaarluk later found out, things commonly known as trees. There is not one single tree to be seen anywhere. The land is as bald as the belly of a dog with newborn puppies.







In 1955, though, trees arrived in Repulse Bay. There were six of them.

They came in by airplane. As usual, the Union Jack had been hoisted up the flagpole just before they arrived. The Union Jack always went up before an airplane came. Then Rocky Parsons flew his trusty Norseman over the Arctic Circle and ran out of gas. His engine went, “PUTT, PUTT!” and quit, way up there in the sky. His propeller stopped going around. But Rocky Parsons glided his airplane, ever so gracefully, and plunked it down in front of the Hudson’s Bay Company store. The trees were brought out of the airplane and dumped on the snowbank in front of Arvaarluk’s hut. And, there they sat.

Rocky Parsons was our hero. When people were sick, he always brought a doctor. And when we needed stuff, he always came. He appeared in fair weather and foul. All the manager of the Hudson’s Bay Company store had to do was to hoist up the Union Jack and Rocky Parsons would come. But we could not talk to Rocky Parsons because we did not understand any English at all. We just smiled at him a lot and dreamed of someday flying with him.



Rocky Parsons smiled back as he pumped gas into his airplane from a 45-gallon drum. He pushed and pulled the lever on his pump back and forth, back and forth, “Squish-chuck, squish-chuck, squish-chuck . . .” Then he jumped back into his airplane and sat down on his pilot seat. The Norseman spit out a lot of thick smoke. Then the propeller started going around with such a big “BANG!” that it made your ears dizzy.

He went way out on the ice with the skis on his airplane bouncing over the snow drifts, “Flop, flop, flop, flop . . .” Then, turning around, he took off with a deafening “Rooaaarrrr!” just over our heads. He would not come back until the Union Jack went up the flagpole again.

But there were the things he had brought, sitting on the snowbank in front of Arvaarluk's hut. They were green and had spindly branches all over.

"What are they?" Jack asked.

"Standing-ups," Peter said confidently. "I have seen them in books at the church. Father Didier showed them to us."

"What are they for?" Yvo asked.

Peter shrugged his shoulders. "I don't know."

They did not have too long to wonder about them, of course. Christmas was coming. There were things to be done. There was church to go to at midnight.



