

THE ARCTIC CIRCLE RESIDENCY

SUMMER 2018

A TRAVELOGUE BY ALAN OLEJNICZAK



Strangely, I've never been drawn to journaling and disliked it when teachers or college professors would require it for assignments. Later, when I became an educator myself, I often spared my students this annoyance. So why attempt one now? Because I knew this trip to the Arctic would be one to remember. I would say I'm fairly well-traveled, but I knew this trip would be different. This artist residency mattered to me personally and I believed it would be a turning point for me as a playwright. Since journaling is not one of my writing practices, I tried my best to write something every day when I was on board the ship, if only just bulleted ideas. Other bits of information for this journal were pieced together from shared memories from other artists, including parts from our guide's log book. Some pictures were shared among the group and Beth Miller, a friend and fellow writer on the residency, helped me with clarifying details and proofing.

As an emerging playwright, the idea of a residency like this one seemed out of reach. In fact, I never considered applying to one before I learned about The Arctic Circle Residency from an online article. I was also reading *The North Water* by Ian Mc Guire at the time when I became obsessed with the idea of applying. The Arctic Circle Residency invites twenty-eight artists, twice

a year, to the International Territory of Svalbard. The actual residency takes place aboard a wooden tall ship that sails the waters around Svalbard for a fifteen-day voyage. This residency always seems to be on the top ten list of cool or unusual artist residencies worldwide. For my submission, I crafted several rather academic essays about why I wanted to attend. I eventually scrapped them for something a bit more poetic. David, my husband, felt my application was a bit too romantic, but I submitted it anyway. If I was going to submit as a playwright, I should at least write like one. I knew I was already too invested in this application and I had to temper my expectations.

Several months later I received notification that I was shortlisted. I was thrilled, but wondered if this was some kind of cruel joke. Why bring me this far to only tell me “no” later? As a playwright, rejection is always my first expectation. When I received the final confirmation email, I let it sit there in my inbox for at least a day before opening it. While my application was rejected for 2017, I was offered a spot the following summer in 2018. I would have to wait for a year and a half to visit the Arctic. I was overwhelmed and not ashamed to admit I cried. This residency was a lot of validation.

The delay was a blessing, actually. I had time to think about the play I really wanted to write. My original proposal, a play about scientists who are threatened by climate change deniers, was not working out. No actual scientist was willing to talk to me. No surprise. Why would they trust me?



Although I received a lovely email from Dr. Michael E. Mann wishing me well and informing me that his story was already optioned. I also kept wondering if this was even the best story to tell. The science is settled and my approach would simply preach to the converted. Finally, I decided to take a different approach. I would set the play in a hotel in Longyearbyen with scientists of my own creation. Before I left for the Arctic, I was determined to have enough of the play researched, written, and developed so I could complete the first draft on board.

I planned to arrive in Svalbard two days before we set sail. I wanted to shake off the jet lag from my flight from San Francisco and an overnight layover in Oslo. Strangely, Norway was gripped by a heat wave when I arrived and I packed no warm weather clothes. It was their hottest summer on record and I spent a sweaty night in a hotel near the airport with no air conditioning.



While I expected near freezing cold and twenty-four hour sunlight, other things surprised me about Longyearbyen.

Caribou grazing near the town center, plush upscale hotels, and several fine dining restaurants with extensive wine lists. This was not a tourist destination for the budget traveler. The morning I arrived in Longyearbyen was dramatic. A polar bear had climbed boldly into a window of a hotel near the harbor. Everyone seemed very excited and helicopters flew overhead. Thankfully, no one was hurt and the polar bear was eventually sedated and released back into the wild far from town. I would learn that the residents of Svalbard never lock their homes or cars as a safety precaution against pursuing polar bears.



I checked into the Coal Miner's Cabins, where all the artists would gather before we set sail. This hotel and the plush Funken Lodge would be the models for the hotel in my play. It was pretty exciting to have a beer in the lobby and write for a few hours in the setting of my next play. Later that day, I met Bradley, my cabin mate, and we had dinner and settled into our shared room. Thankfully,

Bradley was friendly and super easy to be around. Good thing, given the close quarters on the ship. The next day we had an orientation meeting with Sarah, our expedition leader, followed by a bonfire and dinner of vegetable curry on

the beach near the harbor. Sarah would lead us with her crew of three guides: Kristen, Marte, and Benja, along with her dog Nemo. Nemo is a retired sled dog who only had one master - Sarah. This work dog was tolerant of us and would reluctantly accept pets. Benja is a Chilean from Patagonia and an expert in whales and Antarctic mammals. Kristen and Marte are both Norwegian guides and all-round badasses, if you ask me.

DAY ONE: MONDAY, JUNE 11TH

YOLDIABUKTA – WAHLENBERGBREEN

NORTHERLY WINDS. PARTIALLY CLOUDY. 45.4°F

17:05 – LEAVING LONGYEARBYEN.

18:00 – BLUE WHALES!

22:00 – ANCHOR DOWN YOLDIABUKTA

78°30,3' N, 014°23,47' E



At long last, the day arrived when we would be boarding the *Antigua*.

I met several of the artists for breakfast at the hotel and then lunch in Longyearbyen. On the way back a few of us picked up last-minute things from the Co-Op. At 1:30 we all gathered outside the reception building of Coal Miner's Cabins to board the bus that would take us to the dock. I wanted to post a picture of our ship on Instagram before losing cell signal. Why does this external validation on social media continue to be important to me? I sent my last "I love you" text David and signed off for the next fifteen days. I would now try to take in as much as I could.

Mario, the captain, not quite thirty, introduced his crew – all nine of them. Among his crew was Britta, a striking-looking woman, an experienced sailor and his First Mate. A captain in her own right. Never judge a book by its cover. There was Second Mate, Martin, and Deckhands, Maik and Caia. While Maik was an experienced sailor, Caia was a good natured fifteen-year old, who looked much older. He was onboard with his high school program and learning the ropes as a young sailor. There's a long tradition of boys on ships,

but it never occurred to me that this still might be a thing. There was Piet, the cook, and the service crew: Nanou, Caroline, and Emma. All three women were artists who'd been on previous residencies and were drawn back to Svalbard to work on the ship.

By now it was hard to listen and take in the safety information. I was both exhausted and over-excited like a small child who needed a nap. I knew I would miss leaving the dock and setting sail, but I was already falling asleep. I crawled onto the top bunk and closed the porthole. I remember the ship moving for a time, but woke to find the boat was stationary in the water. I bundled up and headed top-side. Apparently, I missed two blue whales that circled the boat. #neversleep. The captain waited to see if they would resurface again - they did not, and we eventually sailed on.



At one point, nearly all the artists were at mid-ship and braving the frigid winds and taking in the splendor of floating blue ice and the wall of a jagged glacier before us. I crawled up to the forecandle and tried to take it in. I could not. Tears were streaming down my face and it took me a while to realize I was crying. Humbled by being invited on this voyage. Honored to bear witness to this indescribable beauty.

But what words could I use? The words “wonderful” and “awesome” have now been rendered insipid - ruined by vernacular and overuse. It was the first time in recent memory that I was truly overwhelmed by both wonder and awe.

After dinner, many of us sat in the lounge and a few stood out in the sunshine and beauty of the roiling sea. I didn't drink that night. I wanted to get my sea legs and not ruin my first day at sea. We anchored for the night in Wahlenbergreen Bay and by 11:30pm, I decided I needed some time alone to adjust to the small cabin before settling down for sleep. Privacy was slim on a ship this size and I continued to feel disoriented by the constant daylight. Today was unexpectedly emotional. Restful sleep was still hard won and I hoped I didn't keep Bradley awake with my snoring. Occasionally I woke in the night in a dreamlike state to the gentle rocking and the lapping of waves against the sides of the ship.

DAY TWO: TUESDAY, JUNE 12TH

WAHLENBERGBREEN – BLOMESLETTA – FLINTHOLMEN

LIGHT NORTHERLY WIND. CLOUDY START OF THE DAY, LATER CLEARING UP TO FULL SUNSHINE. 48.2°F.

08:30 – ANCHOR UP, MOVING CLOSER TO WAHLENBERGBREEN.

09:30 – ANCHOR DOWN 78°29,8' N, 014°16,7' E

MORNING - LANDING CLOSE TO SURGING GLACIER

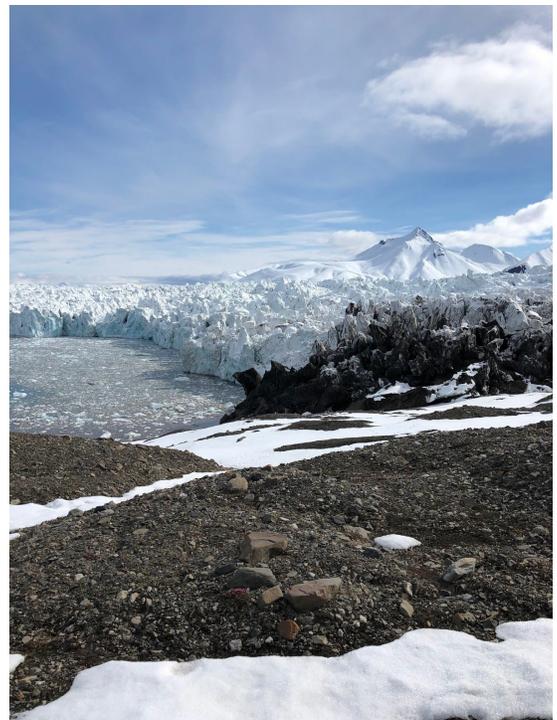
WAHLENBERGBREEN.

AFTERN. - HIKE UP THE MORAINES.

18:00 - ANCHOR UP, SAILING NORTH TO NORDFJORDEN.

21:00 - MOTHER POLAR BEAR WITH TWO CUBS, 78°37,2' N, 014°44' E

22:00 - ANCHOR DOWN FLINTHOLMEN 78°38,13' N, 014°34,28' E



Today we anchored at Wahlenbergreen, a beautiful bay near a surging glacier. Jagged with crevasses and tinged blue, this glacier looks formidable. Surging glaciers are rare and most are found in Svalbard. While most glaciers are smooth and take hundreds of years to run their course, surging glaciers are gagged, for reasons unknown, race to the water – 16 meters a day. Today we had a "stationary hike" in the morning and after a lunch of pumpkin soup, we had an afternoon hike (that could be either fast or slow) where we climbed higher and closer to the glacier. Getting to shore was no simple

matter and required several trips back and forth on two Zodiacs, a sturdy inflatable boat that could hold fourteen people.

After we set sail, near Blomesleta on a long patch of ice, we spotted three polar bears. A butter colored mother and two healthy cubs in their second



year, traveling along the shoreline. Everyone was super excited and pulled out all their best camera gear. I only had my iPhone to take pictures. I'm not much of a photographer and buying an expensive camera didn't seem practical. I got a few miserable shots of the three moving creatures in the distance. Thankfully the other artists were kind enough to share their pictures.

The Arctic landscape is otherworldly. The air is super clean and there is really nothing to help you with scale - like trees or buildings. I was constantly tricked by distance and size. Even the time of day was difficult to determine when the sun circled high overhead. I've yet to get used to the constant and even stream of sunlight.

The world beyond the ship existed only in shades of white and hues of blues and grays.

Depending on the weather conditions, the water would go from crystalline sapphire to shimmering mercury, to obsidian. Tonight, I'll force myself to go to bed early and screw down the porthole and pretend it is night. I admit, I'm still overwhelmed that I'm even here at all - sailing in the Arctic Ocean.



DAY THREE: WEDNESDAY, JUNE 13TH

FLINTHOLMEN – BOHEMANFLYA – SAILING NORTH

SOUTHERLY WINDS. CALM SEA IN THE MORNING, LATER WIND PICKED UP BRINGING AN OVERCAST SKY WITH LIGHT SNOW. 37.4°F.

MORNING – LANDING AT FLINTHOLMEN. CIRCUMNAVIGATING THE ISLAND, HIKE THROUGH THE MORAINES, LANDING.

14:15 - ANCHOR UP.

16:45 - ANCHOR DOWN BOHEMANFLYA 78°22,7' N 14°47,3' E

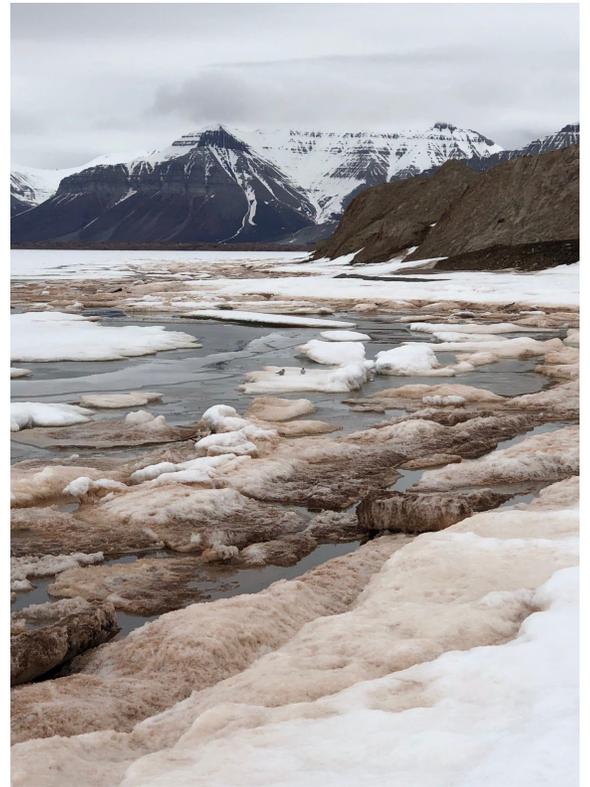
AFTERN. - LANDING BOHEMANFLYA, BOHEMANNESET.

20:50 - ANCHOR UP, SAILING OUT OF ISFJORDEN.

Today we woke to light snow in Flintholmen, an island with low hills, moraines, melting snow, stony piles and mud. Two groups as always: one fast and one slow. I chose the



slow hike again. I wanted to take in as much as I could and these treks were not a race for me. We landed with Kristen, a Norwegian guide who was always excited to share her knowledge of geography. She knew her stuff and I could listen to her talk for hours. I remembered on this landing to make a few recordings and I captured the sounds of Arctic Terns and the warning calls of a scrappy and territorial Arctic Fox looking for goose eggs. I've yet to capture the birdsong of a Snow Bunting. This area is not as beautiful as yesterday, but is just as interesting. We did see a few ringed seals and the larger bearded seal. I also managed to see bear tracks, which I walked through and didn't notice them until Kristen pointed them out. We returned to an excellent meal of Thai Chicken Curry and fresh-baked brownies. I have to give it to Piet for his inventiveness and imagination when it comes to cooking.



We sailed on to Bohemanflya, another low island, in the afternoon – it was just a landing this time and no hike – which was fine by me. The *Antigua* had a difficult time anchoring with a shallow rocky bottom which made for slow going. All the artists got onto the beach, surrounded by piles of driftwood, large logs, and great blocks of fractured rock. Littering the beach were small, brittle, and brightly-colored weathered plastic. This was disheartening. My belief that the Arctic was a pristine environment was only in my imagination. We all got to work and we picked up three large bags of plastic off the beach. We did a bit of exploring beyond the beach and found a small hunter's lodge and a small weather tower. Once onboard we found dinner waiting. This time, a lamb tagine and chickpea flatbread with hummus! So good.



That evening we all talked and got to know each other a bit better. I finally cracked open the bottle of aquavit I purchased in the Co-Op. Aquavit is the Nordic equivalent to gin, flavored not with juniper berries, but with dill or caraway. It's strange and a little goes a long way. Tonight I was satisfied with two

fingers' worth. I called it an early night and I had my first shower onboard before crawling into my upper bunk to sleep.

DAY FOUR: THURSDAY, JUNE 14TH

SMEERENBURGBREEN- SAILING NORTH OVERCAST. SOUTHERLY WIND. SNOW IN THE AFTERNOON. 33°F.

07:00 – SQUARE SAILS SET.

11:00 – TOP GALLANT SET. MAINSAIL THROAT HALYARD BREAKS.

12:00 – INNER JIB UP. LANDING NEMO ON DIESELSLETTA.

13:00 – MAINSAIL WITH NEW HALYARD UP.

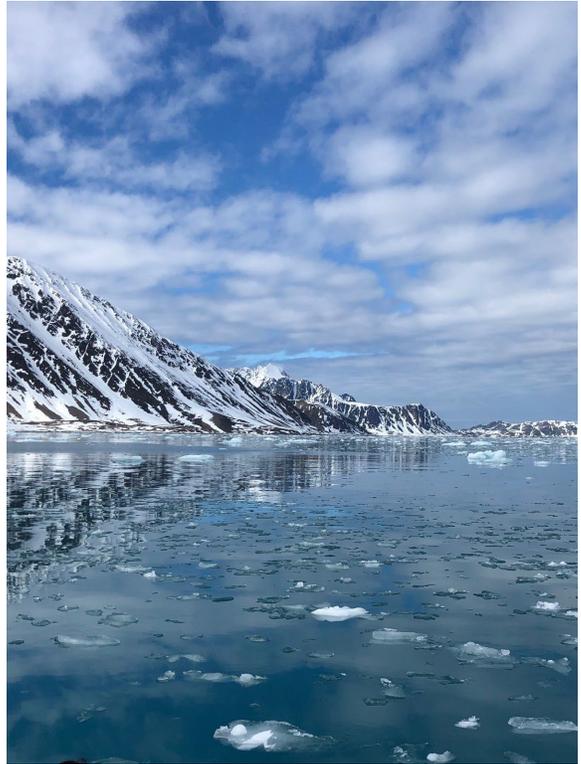
16:00 – CAKE AND STORIES; HOW ONE BULLET KILLED FOUR MEN: MØKLEBY AND SIMONSEN.

17:00 – MAIN SAIL DOWN.

19:00 – SQUARES DOWN.

20:00 – ALL SAILS DOWN. CRUISING SMEERENBURGBREEN.

21:00 – ANCHOR DOWN HAVHESTBREEN 79°37,3' N 011°26,8' E
SAILING THROUGH SØRGATTET, INTO SMEERENBURGFJORDEN.



The *Antigua* sailed north throughout the night, past several islands to the west. I was up early again to find coffee waiting and I got some solid writing done before breakfast. My play *Helt Texas* was coming together slowly.

After breakfast, we were called out to the deck for a demonstration by the captain. Mario took several pieces of colored chalk to draw the outline of the ship on the wooden deck. He explained each of the sails and how they functioned. Honestly, it was far too complicated for me to fully understand the rigging in two dimensions, so I simply let the information wash

over me. It's sometimes hard to pin down the dry charm of the Dutch. Mario reminded us all that being on a ship this size required the help of everyone and we would be called on to help at times.

At his direction, we all attempted to raise the mainsail. But after several pulls, the halyard broke. We were a bit shocked when the boom fell to the deck. Well, none of us artists knew how to fix that. Martin temporarily did a fix by climbing up on the boom, and then Mario went all the way up to the top of the mast with the harness to replace the line. It was dizzying to watch him effortlessly climb to the top of the mast to replace the broken rope.



Around lunch (spinach and hazelnut pasta) we cleared the island to the west and the waves swelled. Many of the artists got a bit queasy. Thankfully, I never got seasick on the trip. While a few bundled up on deck and sat in the Zodiac to watch the horizon, I laid down on my bunk, letting my body take-in the rocking of the ship. Ginger tea helped. Of course, this led to a hard nap. I felt immeasurably better. Dinner was roasted pepper soup and a creamy Flemish fish stew. Afterwards, we also sang Happy Birthday for Roopa. Piet made a large bowl of chocolate mousse.



We dropped anchor in Smeerenburgbreen and on the starboard side, there was an amazing blue glacier near an old Dutch whaling settlement. Occasionally you could hear snaps and cracks as the ice broke away. Somehow I never thought of glaciers making sounds, like distant thunder. I got some good writing in today and despite my misgivings about not leaving the boat for a hike, I felt productive.

DAY FIVE: FRIDAY, JUNE 15TH

SMEERENBURGBREEN – FRAMBUKTA – RAUDFJORDBREEN

MOSTLY CLOUDY. LIGHT WIND FROM THE SOUTH. 39°F.

09:00 – ANCHOR UP. ANCHOR DOWN 79°37,2' N 011°26,7' E
HAVHESTBREEN.

MORNING – ZODIAC CRUISES AND LANDING

SMEERENBURGBREEN. SWIMS!

13:50 – ANCHOR UP, SAILING OUT.

15:15 – DRIFTING FRAMBUKTA 79°43,5' N 011°09,0' E

AFTERN. – LANDING FRAMBUKTA.

20:30 – PRESENTATIONS.

22:00 – ANCHOR DOWN RAUDFJORDBREEN
79°39,4' N 012°16,7' E



I went to bed around 10:30 the previous evening and slept until 7:30. I usually wake around 5:30. I clearly needed sleep. I spent about two hours hanging out near the fjord and watching the other artists work on their projects. Mario then took us on a Zodiac tour near the glacier. The sun eventually broke through and the landscape and floating ice went totally blue – turquoise and azure. Back on the ship, with the sun shining warmly, an idea broke out. We had to go swimming! I hesitated at first, “perhaps another time.” But what if there was not another time. Screw it! I grabbed my blue towel and striped down to my thermal bottoms. I climbed down the ladder, but hesitated. No more thinking! I jumped into the icy water. It was strangely out-of-body: both painful and

exhilarating. I dunked my head and swam back to the ladder - I didn't last long in the water, only a few seconds. But I did it! Perhaps I checked another box I didn't know I wanted ticked. Swimming in the Arctic Ocean – done!

I skipped another landing that afternoon. Honestly, I enjoyed the quiet and I got some solid writing done. I continued to make headway on this play that has eluded me at times. Frambukta Bay, with a pebbled beach, is named after Norwegian scientist Nansen's ship *Fram*. His crew became stranded here in 1896 after drifting in the polar basin for three years. They died waiting for their rescue.



Tonight was tuna salad for dinner and the first night of artist presentations. I continue to be impressed with the caliber of artists that undertook this adventure. A few were emerging artists like me, but most were seasoned professionals with decades of experience. There was also a wide age range, from artists in

their early twenties to those in their seventies. They were sculptors, photographers, painters, novelists, performance artists, an architectural critic, and a former war correspondent. Honestly, I felt out of my depth and sometimes questioned how I got to even be on this ship. I guess all artists have occasional impostor syndrome.

DAY SIX: SATURDAY, JUNE 16TH

RAUDFJORDBREEN – SAILING NORTH EAST.

SOME CLOUDS BUT SUNNY. NO WIND. 57°F.

MORNING – LANDING RAUDFJORDBREEN – EAST SIDE. LONG ZODIAC RIDE.

AFTERN. – LONG HIKE UP THE HILL. SHORT HIKE OVER GLACIER.

STATIONARY HIKE CLOSE TO RAUDFJORDBREEN.

20:30 – PRESENTATIONS

20:40 – ANCHOR UP. SAILING THROUGH THE NIGHT.



I got up early again to write. It's nice to be the first one up and to have others wake and slowly join me in the salon. Most slowly woke to coffee and a bit of reading, but many wrote. It's interesting to me how many of the visual artists keep handwritten journals as part of their practice. Lots of sketching, of course, but mostly writing. Did they learn this in college? Again this is my first

time keeping a travelogue, but mine was typed on a laptop. I'm a creature of habit.



I skipped another morning landing. I was kind of in the writing zone but hated to miss an opportunity to see more of Svalbard. The other artists spent three hours on the beach at Raudfjordbreen, which translates to "Red fjord glacier," I guess for the color of rocks. Lunch was lamb pot pie with a spicy

pumpkin soup and homemade bread. Afterwards, I joined the group hiked in the afternoon with the slow group. There is still much to take in and process. On most landings, we artists would sometimes sit for hours silently, taking in the cold, the sound of the wind and birds overhead. No other place has it been so easy to quiet the mind and become transfixed on the scenery.



DAY SEVEN: SUNDAY, JUNE 17TH

MOSELBUKTA - POLHEIM

08:30 - ANCHOR DOWN MOSELBUKTA
79°53,3' N 015°59,9' E

MORNING - LANDING POLHEIM, WALK TO THE REMAINS
OF OLD STATION POLHEM. SAFE AREA AND GARBAGE
WALK. BEAR SHOWS UP. EVACUATION.

14:30 - ANCHOR UP.

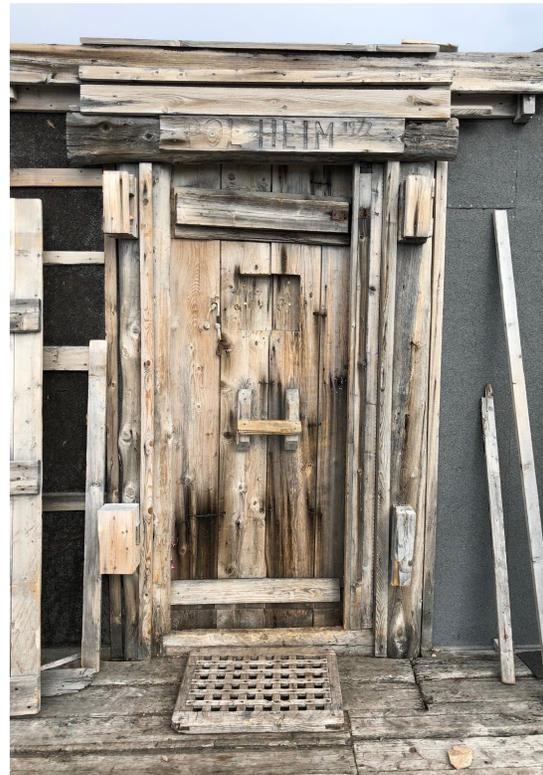
15:00 - S1 AND FOR STAYSAIL UP, LOWER TOPSAIL UP,
ENGINE OFF.

18:00 - UPPER TOPSAIL UP.

20:00 - JIBE S1 AND FOR STAY SAIL.

23:00 - INNER JIB UP.

SEAWATCHES.





We woke in Mosselbukta Bay and after breakfast we landed near where Swedish explorers were forced to winter in 1887. There was a hut, built in the 70's and is still there for those who need it. It was called *Polheim*, which translates to "home at the pole." We hung out for a while on this beach of round smooth stones scattered with millions of colorful bits of plastic. As I walked along, I filled my pockets with brittle bits. Why would it all just wash up here in one area? Eventually, I gave

up. I got tired of stooping over and I had difficulty picking up tiny pieces of plastic with my gloves on. It was overwhelming by the amount of plastic and I wavered between wanting to cry and throwing a tantrum. At some point on the landing, Beth casually spotted a male polar bear on a small rocky island about 100 yards away. He had a brown spot on his head, once the bloody remains of a seal. All of us artists were pretty excited and we took pictures of the creature, not fully taking in the danger of the situation. The guides were outstanding and acted calmly and quickly to get us back in the Zodiacs and back onto the *Antigua*. The bear eventually got in the water and swam towards us. Fun fact: Polar bears can swim up to 25mph and run up to 50mph. You can never outrun or outswim a polar bear. As we were waiting anxiously, Kat and I decided jokingly that if this was going to be our final moments, what should we do? We decided we would both be the idiots whose final pictures on their iPhones would be selfies before their bloody dismemberment and grisly deaths. This could have been our last picture. Sadly I could not even get the polar bear in the frame.



It's worth noting that days after returning home, a polar bear attacked a guard from a cruise ship and was shot dead. Much was made of it in the

press and everyone felt entitled to weigh in on it on social media. While climate change continues to be the largest threat to the Arctic, it's also tourism and cruise ships. Honestly, one of the best things we can do for the high Arctic is to simply not go there. A point not lost on any of us artists.



We all made it safely on board, but the polar bear was too close for the crew's comfort and we lifted anchor and sailed away. The Captain announced that we would be leaving for the most northerly islands on Svalbard, the Seven Islands, of which are actually nine. The weather shifted and there

were strong winds and lots of rocking. The artists were called to help set the sails and I helped, feeling like I somehow contributed. That evening I hung out in the wheelhouse with the crew and all of the guides, who all enjoyed knitting. I listened in, but eventually asked them questions about what it was like to live in the Arctic. Things I could use for my play. One must be careful what you tell playwrights. They will steal stories of your life, and I'm often surprised at what interests me sometimes. Marte eventually helped me out that evening by listening to parts of my play to get my Norwegian character right. I loved hanging around Marte.



DAY EIGHT: MONDAY, JUNE 18TH

PHIPPSØYA STRONG WIND IN THE MORNING, OVERCAST.

CLEARING UP DURING THE DAY. OVERWHELMING
SUNSHINE IN THE EVENING. 48°F.

03:00 – UPPER TOPSAIL DOWN, INNER JIB DOWN.

07:00 – LOWER TOPSAIL, S1, FOR STAYSAIL DOWN, DRIFTING.

09:00 – ANCHOR DOWN PHIPPSØYA 80°40,54' N 20°53,33' E

09:40 – 11:45 ANCHOR UP, ANCHOR DOWN, 2ND ANCHOR

DOWN, PHIPPSØYA, ISFLAKBUKTA

80°41,25' N 20°55,76' E

11:00 – ARTIST PRESENTATIONS.

AFTERN. – LANDING PHIPPSØYA, AT THE NORTHERNMOST HUT
ON SVALBARD.

EVENG. – MIDNIGHT SUN HIKE HYTTEBERGET, 235 MOH.

SEA WATCHES



The ship rolled wildly that night and I woke several times. Rather than focus on the reality of being on a wooden boat in the high arctic with high winds, ice and roiling waves, I simply thought about being rocked to sleep like a baby. It sort of worked. Still, it was nice to have no motor and to travel under sail. The *Antigua* anchored in the morning and waited for the weather to change. Rather than present our work that evening we would make the best of the time and I presented them before lunch. As an emerging artist I felt I had little to share and was self-conscious. I rambled through my presentation, but think I did okay. I actually ran out of time to read and was going to read aloud Arthur's monologue about the Arctic fox.

The sun came out and the water calmed and Sarah decided we would make a landing. A mile from the boat we began to rethink this small adventure. Wind picked up and the water was choppy with white caps. Most of us were soaked from splashing water. I did not get the brunt of it, but my gloves and hat were soaked. No point in complaining when others were fully soaked through.



Once ashore, I helped Adam with a project. Recreating points on a climate change map with oranges being thrown into snow. I didn't completely understand what he was going for, but it didn't matter. It seemed that the art created by others was about responding to the environment by either

the juxtaposition of unexpected objects in snow or documenting themselves naked to the elements.

Today we picked up more garbage on the beach. Most of it was fishing nets and was too large and heavy to simply haul away. It's estimated that 46% of the ocean plastic is fishing gear. Slush up to our knees made the clean-up slow going for everyone. For our work of cleaning up ocean plastic, Benja assured us that in our next life, we would be reincarnated as soaring eagles, rather than lowly cockroaches to be squashed.



We got back to the ship and I had a quick nap before dinner. Sarah decided we would go for a long hike afterwards. I just didn't have the energy and a

few of us stayed behind and we drank wine and cognac on the deck with the warm bright sun that circled overhead.



It was these moments that I remember most fondly about this residency. Talking to other artists, laughing, and exchanging ideas and sharing our practices. I feel I grew stronger, wiser, and more self-assured being around more experienced creatives. For a writer who is an extrovert but has a solitary practice, I loved talking to everyone.



By 11:30pm, it was still bright as day, but I called it a night and went to bed. The hikers were not back yet. Well past midnight, Bradley came back with the others. Always a keen observer, he would fill me in on what I missed. Apparently, there was some excitement when a curious walrus approached the returning Zodiacs.



DAY NINE: TUESDAY, JUNE 19TH

PHIPPSØYA – ROSSØYA – SAILING SOUTHWEST MOSTLY CLOUDY. WIND PICKING UP FROM THE EAST IN THE LATE MORNING. 42°F.

08:30 – ANCHOR UP. SAILING UNSURVEYED WATERS.

NORTHERNMOST POINT! 80°49,84' N 020°20,35' E

11:00 – ANCHOR DOWN ROSSØYA 80°49,69' N 020°20,35' E

MORNING – CIRCUMNAVIGATING ROSSØYA BY ZODIAC.

AFTERN. - ATTEMPT TO LAND ON VESLE TAFLEØYA OR ROSSØYA. REJECTED.

16:30 - ANCHOR UP, SAILS UP: MAINSAIL, S1 FOR STAYSAIL, INNER JIB, LOWER TOPSAIL.

23:00 – UPPER TOPSAIL, LOWER TOPSAIL DOWN.

SEAWATCHES. ANTIGUA ANCHORED AT ROSSØYA.



Today we reached the Sjuøyane, the northernmost islands of Svalbard. Again it was sunny and warm, the water calm - it was going to be a glorious day. I was one of the first up by 7:30 and I managed to get some good writing done on my play. *Helt Texas* continued to develop nicely.



We anchored close to Rossøya, but it was slow going as these waters were shallow and still uncharted. I had a passing thought of the beached cruise liner *Concordia*, but Kat called it out first. Perhaps we didn't need to be that close and bottom-out.

The morning plan was for the guides to find a landing spot and then later, spend time on the island. As time passed, the weather changed and the sky clouded over. The water began getting choppy and Sarah decided it was not safe for a landing. It was kind of a relief. We did however, take a boat tour to circumnavigate the island. The sky dark with clouds and the tossing black water made for a dramatic trip. These rocky islands jutted from the sea and above, Arctic Terns, Eider ducks and Guillemots circled and swooped and



skimmed the waves. It had been days, but I began to fight rising emotions again. I was overwhelmed by the isolation and beauty of this unforgiving place. A place never meant for humans. A place that wanted you dead. That afternoon, after lunch of curry and lentils, everyone was hanging-out or napping. I got a bit of editing done on my play and watched the others play backgammon and knit. Benja finished his hat. Unwashed brown and gray spun wool that smelled of lanolin. Marte was meticulously knitting a brown sweater with a pattern of mustard and red.

DAY TEN: WEDNESDAY, JUNE 20TH

MUSHAMNA OVERCAST. STRONG WIND DURING THE NIGHT.

CALMING DOWN IN THE MORNING AND DURING THE DAY.

CLEARING UP. 46°F. SEAWATCHES.

02:00 – ENGINE OFF, MIZZEN DOWN.

03:30 – LOWER TOPSAIL UP, UPPER TOPSAIL UP.

04:00 – LOWER TOPSAIL, UPPER TOPSAIL DOWN.

06:00 – S1 UP.

08:45 – ANCHOR DOWN MUSHAMNA 79°39,6' N 014°16,3' E

MORNING – LANDING AND ZODIAC CRUISE WITH SEA ICE.

AFTERN. – LONG HIKE TO MUSHAMNA TRAPPER STATION AND

ON, SHORT HIKE TO THE STATION

EVENG. – MIDSUMMER NIGHT BONFIRE NEAR MEAT RACK AT

MUSHAMNA TRAPPER STATION.



Last night was a crazy night of rolling and strong winds. I volunteered for a 4:00am night watch - or maybe was a morning watch. Time of day seems irrelevant on this trip. The top sail went up earlier, but I came just in time to bring it back down. As the morning wore on, the weather became calmer, and by breakfast it was smooth sailing. We carefully maneuvered into a small lagoon called Mushamna or

“mouse harbor.” Honestly, I did not think the *Antigua* would fit through the small opening, but eventually she did, and we anchored. It was a pretty spot with thankfully less plastic, but more driftwood – lots of it.



The artists were offered a shorter, slower hike or a longer, faster one. Needless to say, I took the shorter one, (which was not really short) but still a slog over small rocks. We encountered a meat rack and stack of driftwood. We also discovered two different cabins, a sauna, and doghouse. We hung out for a while, perhaps too long, and we became a bit punchy. Roopa found just about everything funny and we found ourselves in stitches. We walked back, carrying wood along the way for the fire on the beach to find dinner of wraps waiting for us. Norwegians celebrate summer solstice with a huge bonfire.



There was lots of good cheer and drinking. I gave up around 10:30 pm with a few others and we headed back to the ship. Beth and Mark and I had a nightcap and we called it a night after 11:00. Bradley came in around 3:30 and the beach party broke up around 4:00. Apparently, I missed a great

deal.

DAY ELEVEN: THURSDAY, JUNE 21ST

MUSHAMNA – FUGLEFJORDEN – SAILING SOUTH.

OVERCAST MORNING, CHANGING TO CLEAR SKY AND FULL SUNSHINE IN THE AFTERNOON.

LIGHT WIND FROM THE NORTH. 45°F.

07:55 – ANCHOR UP.

09:30 – BREAKFAST NOW

15:00 – DRIFTING IN FUGLEFJORDEN..

LANDING ON SPIKEØYA. IN FRONT OF SVIDJOTBREEN.

20:00 – NICE WEATHER CANCELS PRESENTATIONS.

BEARS WHEN LEAVING FUGLEFJORDEN.

SLOWLY SAILING WITH THEM, INTO KENNEDYBUKTA. BEARS SWIMMING.

23:00 – WALRUSES AT SMEERENBURG.

00:00 – SAILING SOUTH.



I woke up around 7:30 to the first day of summer and went up the wheelhouse to get coffee. I think most of the crew was a bit wrung out from the night before. I hung out for a while and chatted with Britta, waiting for Sarah to explain the plans for today. We would hang out on Spike Island

before the calving glacier called Svidjotbreen. No map will be labeled with Spike Island. This small island was newly revealed when the glacier retreated

and an artist (named Spike) from a previous residency was inspired to perform a piece. Now I want an island in the Arctic named after me.



Today was a glorious day with unexpected warmth and sparkling sunshine. We spent three and a half hours on Spike Island. We swam, chatted, considered the state of the world, and listened to the glacier call to us. Several of the artists worked on individual projects. At one point I drifted off and snoozed on the rocks – six people filmed me snoring. Not my finest moment, but certainly funny. We eventually packed up our gear and headed back for dinner reluctantly.

From Antigua we watched a polar bear and her cub walking along the shore. We sailed close and they were seemingly unperturbed by our presence. We watched them for almost three hours. Eventually the two bears swam across the fjord and



climbed to the other side and went on about their business and we sailed on. In many ways, today was kind of an all-around perfect day.

DAY TWELVE: FRIDAY, JUNE 22ND

NORDVÅGEN - BLOMSTRANDBREEN – NY ÅLESUND

BEAUTIFUL SUNSHINE ALL DAY, LIGHT WIND FROM THE NORTH. 53°F.

09:15 – ANCHOR DOWN NORDVÅGEN – BETWEEN BLOMSTRANDHALVØYA AND BLOMSTRANDBREEN, 79°00,7' N 012°01,9' E

MORNING – SUNNY MORNING LANDING ON THE BEACH. NAPS.

14:24 – ANCHOR UP. ZODIAC CRUISES.

15:23 – ANCHOR DOWN, BLOMSTRANDBREEN 79°00,26' N 012°13,28' E

AFTERN. – LANDING NEXT TO BLOMSTRANDBREEN.

19:45 – ANCHOR UP.

21:00 – MOORED NY ÅLESUND 78°55,7' N 011°56,4' E



We spent the sunny morning in a lovely fjord called Nordvågen, in front of Blomstrandbreen Glacier. On the morning hike, I walked along the beach, considered the waves, the birds, my playwriting career and returning home. There was no Wi-Fi or phone service and the growing disappointment of not being able to call home. I was beginning to miss my husband and wondered, perhaps too often, how David and my dog, Duchess, were doing.



After lunch, I stayed in my cabin, washed out clothes, organized my suitcase, and finally finished the first draft of *Helt Texas*. I celebrated with a cocktail, Bombay Gin and tonic with a chunk of glacier ice. Tonight was pork ribs for dinner. We arrived later

that evening in Ny Ålesund and several of us walked briefly around this charming town of wooden structures. Kongsfjorden is a beautiful bay with two glaciers that feed into it. It was a former mining community and named

after the company's headquarters in Ålesund, Norway. "New Alesund" is now a scientific community. There is a museum, a post office, and a kiosk that sells waffles and coffee. I look forward to exploring more tomorrow.

DAY THIRTEEN: SATURDAY, JUNE 23RD

NY ÅLESUND – SARSTANGEN – DAHLBREEN CLEAR START OF THE DAY, FOG IN THE LATE MORNING. CALM SEA. WIND PICKING UP FROM THE NORTH IN THE AFTERNOON. SUNNY EVENING. 43°F.

MORNING – WALK THROUGH TOWN. SHOP OPEN.

11:45 – LEFT NY ÅLESUND.

16:00 – ANCHOR DOWN SARSTANGEN 78°43,6' N 011°26,5' E
AFTERN. – FOG. ATTEMPT TO DEFINE LANDING AREA IN FOG.

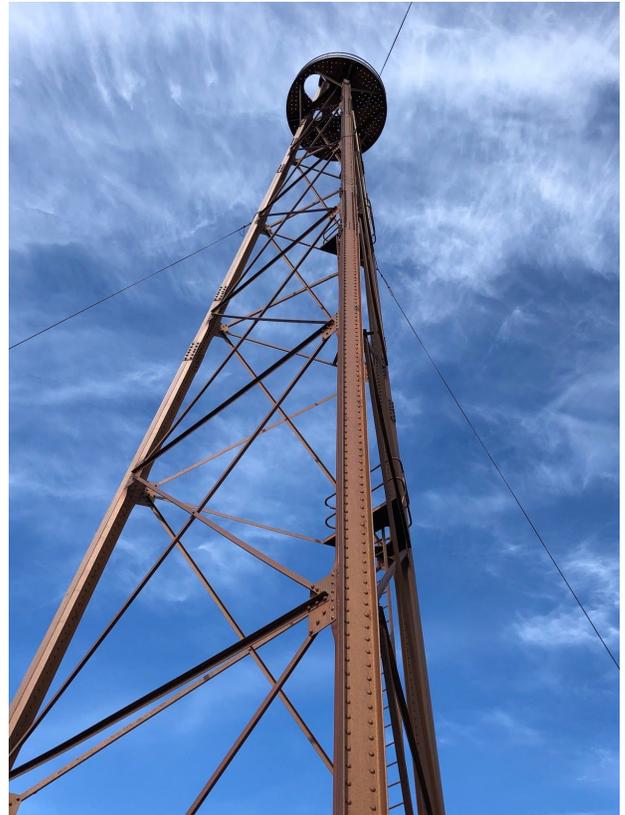
FOG LIFTING. MANY WALRUSES.

19:15 – ANCHOR UP.

20:30 – PRESENTATIONS.

23:00 – DRIFTING DAHLBREEN.

00:25 – ANCHOR DOWN DAHLBREEN 78°34,2' N 012°25,4' E



Woke up early to start on more rewrites. For me, there are days when I write and there are days when I edit. One or the other - I cannot write and critique my work at the same time. After breakfast, we spent the morning taking a walking tour of Ny Ålesund. Marta and Benja walked us out to the zeppelin tower, where Amundsen, Nobile and Ellsworth left for the North Pole in 1926. The King's Bay coffee kiosk was

open; I think just for us. We had coffee and waffles and I bought a gift of a

hand knitted cap for Zelda, my copyeditor. I enjoyed the conversation I had with two Norwegians who asked about the play I was working on. They loved the idea of comparing Svalbard to the American Wild West and laughed at the notion of it. A few of the artists wrote postcards and posted them from the Post Office - the world's northernmost. Most things in Svalbard are "northernmost," and by this time the idea had become less impressive. We visited the telegraph office, post office, museum and the gift shop where I got two t-shirts and tea-towels for gifts.



Today was my anniversary and my thoughts returned home. It's disappointing there's no cell phone coverage in town. I was told Wi-Fi

interferes with scientific equipment. This is now the longest period of time David and I've not communicated in our thirteen-year relationship. I really thought I was prepared for this.

We sailed out of Ny Ålesund and traveled to a long spit of gravel called Sarstangen. It took some time for the crew to prepare for the afternoon landing in the dense fog. Once we landed on the beach. Captain Mario told us if we encountered wildlife, it was best to remain quiet and not react. As we approached the pebbled beach, two curious walrus swam nearby. It was pretty thrilling. When the second Zodiac arrived, one of the walrus came very close. Clearly there was some concern if the walrus' tusks would puncture the craft. Sometimes, not knowing its great weight and strength, a curious walrus can cause accidents. He lingered for a time and came close to shore.



It felt alien to have this large creature take such a keen interest in us. To everyone's credit, we all held back and remained calm and quiet. The walrus eventually lost interest and joined her companion nearby. Further down the spit there was some activity and we realized it was a bask of about three



dozen walruses all piled up together. We walked in a line behind the guards, slowly and quietly forward. No pictures on my iPhone will capture the thrill and excitement of being so close. I did my best to just take it in and experience it rather than record it.



After dinner, the sun came out. At one point around 10:00, the sun behind the mountain created the impression of a sunset with a pink-tinged sky. Later the sun moved again and the deck was filled with warm light. It was gorgeous. We had a marathon of the last of the artist's presentations. We sailed on to anchor at Dahlbreen, a beautiful glacier that kept booming and calving. I jokingly complained to the captain about not seeing a narwhal. I wanted to see a narwhal! He quietly closed the wheelhouse door on me. Later on, he pointed out a curious seal floating near the ship and asked if that was good enough. It was. By 11:30, I was done for the day and still not to the bottom of the aquavit.

DAY FOURTEEN: SUNDAY, JUNE 24TH

DAHLBREEN – SAILING SOUTH OVERCAST MORNING,
LIGHT RAIN IN THE AFTERNOON. CALM SEA,
NO WIND. 41°F

MORNING – LANDING DAHLBREEN.

ACTIVE GLACIER, CALVING.

AFTERN. – HIKE ALONG AND ON DAHLBREEN.

ZODIAC CRUISE.

20:30 – CREW PRESENTATIONS.

22:25 – ANCHOR UP. SAILING HOME.



We spent the morning near the Dahlbreen Glacier. It was unexpectedly fascinating with lots of booming and calving. Large chunks of blue ice the size of cars dropped into the fjord. The air got colder and began to drizzle. I skipped the last landing of the trip. I was totally fine with that. I took a

nap, a shower, cleaned up the cabin and organized my belongings. I tweaked my play again and brought my journal up-to-date. That evening we had a steak dinner and the crew presented their work. I was super impressed, particularly with Benja, our guide who does research work in marine ecology in Antarctica. He also started the Natural History Museum of Río Seco with his brother. I mean, who does that? Rowan then read aloud a piece we writers composed as a thank you to the crew called *"The Spirit of the Antigua."* This trip must have been exhausting for them all. They had a few breaks and they worked hard to accommodate all of us artists. They did an amazing job.



DAY FIFTEEN: MONDAY, JUNE 25TH

LONGYEARBYEN OVERCAST, NORTHERLY WIND. 43°F.

07:50 – MOORED LONGYEARBYEN 78°13,8' N 015°36,2' E

I woke to find we were already approaching the dock at Longyearbyen. Our voyage would soon end - just like that. I grabbed my phone and waited on deck to get a signal as we approached the pier. Once I was able, I called my husband and he picked up on the second ring. David was filled with relief that I made it back to Longyearbyen safely. David told me he was grumpy and angry for the



past two weeks and had not slept well with worry. The dog, who picked up on his anxiety and began peeing on the carpet. Almost as an afterthought, he asked if I had enjoyed the trip. I now felt strangely selfish about taking this voyage. Still we were in communication now and we both felt better. As we all scrambled to prepare for our departure, we took one last group photo before we disembarked and onto the bus to take us back to the Coal Miner's Cabins. As I exited the ship for the last time, I was once again filled with gratitude and mixed emotions.



Once back, everyone called home and we reconnected with our loved ones. A few of us waited hours before opening our emails or reading the news. Everyone dreaded checking-in on social media. I guess, once done, the spell of this trip would be broken. As a way of staying connected, we started a WhatsApp group with most of the artists called the

Arctic Circlers. We all had one more full day together and Sarah our Lead Guide took us for one last hike just out of Longyearbyen. Sarah, who lives in town, kept commenting on how this landscape had changed and familiar trails were now washed downhill with the melting permafrost. The hike was on steep and gravelly hillsides and was at times, more like mountain climbing than hiking. We had our farewell dinner of caribou stew, mashed potatoes with lingonberries. Everyone even sang Happy Birthday to Caroline and me. It was a bittersweet goodbye. All the artists eventually peeled away the next day, flying home, and leaving me alone once more in Longyearbyen.



I planned to stay two more days to take in more of town and have a quiet birthday myself. I checked into the upscale Funken Lodge and Marte surprised me by joining me for dessert and sang Happy Birthday to me in

Norwegian. I took a side trip to Barentsberg, a Russian coal mining town, I only just mentioned in the play. Still I was intrigued and I felt I needed to visit. I ran into Craig, who was on the trip on the return boat trip. He was doing some investigative reporting for Vox. We had lunch afterwards and we had an interesting conversation about what he learned about oil drilling in the Arctic. Stuff that actually made it into *Helt Texas*.



It's hard to put into words what I experienced on this residency. Of course, people have asked about the trip, but I didn't really know how to describe it. In fact, I didn't talk much about being in the Arctic, but somehow, my world tilted and I felt different. I even avoided fleshing-out and completing this travelogue if not at the request of Nic the producer of *The Proscenium*, who wanted to include as an extra with the audio drama. Most understand that journaling is more for the writer, than for any reader. I often daydream about returning to the Arctic. I had an artist residency in Iceland in November 2019 and I've suggested to David we take an Alaskan cruise. Since this residency, I've felt more confident as an artist and have made some unexpected strides professionally. *Helt Texas* was later developed with the help of Faultline Theater in San Francisco and Google's Sustainability Team in Mountain View. It went through four more major drafts with two public readings. *Helt Texas* was Finalist for the Garry Marshall Theatre New Works Festival in 2019, The Third Place Winner of the Playhouse Creatures Theatre Company Emerging Playwrights Contest in September, 2019, and New American Voices Playwriting Festival Semi-Finalist in January, 2020. *Helt Texas* has yet to be produced as a stage play. I'm thankful to Nicholas Atkinson for finally producing it as an audio drama, knowing it will be heard by many more people.

The Spirit of the Antigua: A tribute by the Arctic Circle Writers' Coven, June 2018

Consider Piet's burritos. They are wrapped with love and skill. They are perfect for their moment. They suit all tastes and requirements. They are unexpected. They are heartwarming. They are SOOPa tasty. (As they say in Norwegian) In Piet's burritos is the spirit of the Antigua. This spirit is with us on white mountains and in black Zodiacs, in protecting us from calving glaciers and curious bears, and in bringing us groaning walruses, in pulling pints and baking biscuits, in tales of hot trappers, in navigating mouseholes and running before the wind. It is in the flames of driftwood on the summer solstice. You have brought us adventure. Yet we have always felt safe, reassured by your calm skill. You have indulged our artistic whims and many eccentricities. The collective spirit of crew and guides has united us all. We started as strangers and you made us friends. We always felt your deep love, and knowledge, and respect for the land and the sea, for snow, ice and water, and for the wildlife, from blue whales to ctenophores, to purple saxifrage. And, of course, the narwhals. We've learned that, as Sarah said at the

*beginning, "it is very unusual that you encounter the same situation twice."
So, stationary hikes, landings in motion, whatever. Just react. After two weeks
on the polar sea, under the midnight sun, our voyage has come to an end.
We will never forget you, nor the wonder you have brought us. Who knows
when and how we will meet again. As Sarah also says, it depends on the
wind.*

Some of the pictures in this travelogue are not my own. Thank you to Rachel Honnery, Kat Roma Greer, Beth Miller, and Rowan Moore for the use of their pictures.