

Coast to coast with Katimavik: Erica Meekes

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Erica Meekes is a Cramahe Township resident who has taken a year to participate in the federally-funded youth volunteer Katimavik program. She has agreed to relate some of her experiences on this life journey with us. The following is the second article she has written on her activities.

Katimavik British Columbia - welcoming change

Katimavik is a federally funded program I joined about five months ago. Our group of eight participants recently completed a three-month rotation in Saint John, New Brunswick. We travelled to Merritt, British Columbia two months ago.

Travelling to a new province and experiencing a new environment has been a positive experience for our group. The mountains (or what natives call hills) of Merritt are a vast change from the relaxed waterside community of Saint John.

The rotation from New Brunswick to British Columbia I found more difficult than initially joining the program and leaving home. It was difficult to say goodbye to everyone from the Saint John area because, like living in New Brunswick, they are part of an experience that has ended and will likely not be revisited in my life. I made two very good friends from different Katimavik groups. Currently one has rotated to Manitoba, and the other, Alberta. We are still in close contact, but nothing can replace physical and visual contact with the people who change your life.

Changing values

I have noticed most since our arrival in Merritt the change of the group dynamic and personal changes in myself. During our last rotation, I found smaller groups had formed within our larger group. Many people simply felt more comfortable with certain participants, and were less apt to step out of these comfort zones. Re-forming our group in a new community

helped motivate many participants to strengthen bonds with different individuals.

This has created a closer group, as everyone is making new bonds.

Personally, I find that my values and attitudes have changed since my initiation into the program. Katimavik has given me an opportunity to work on becoming the person I wish to be as opposed to the person I feel I have to be. Never having been exposed to different ethnicities, races, or lifestyles, many attitudes and opinions I held were adopted from secondary sources such as people I looked up to, influences from my community and school, or media influences. The end result was that I have not formed many of my own values based on my own exposure to life.

Since my participation in Katimavik, I have been asked a very valid question. "What is the measure of normalcy?" Even now, I cannot personally answer this question to my own satisfaction, and because of this, I am re-evaluating my opinions on all issues of difference. Experiences like this have led me to discover more about myself in these last five months than at any other time in my life. Surprisingly, not because of any answers I've found, but because of all the questions I have discovered.

Media influence has been largely eliminated from the Katimavik household because we don't own a television. This has eliminated a lot of media control over the opinions of participants in the house. Suddenly the pressures to be skinny, popular, rich and famous have greatly diminished.

Prior to Katimavik I placed much importance on physical attributes, the end result being that I had become a fabrication of our society. It took removing myself from my environment to work on becoming my own person. That was when I could set goals toward who I wanted to be without the media influencing my decisions. Upon arriving in



MEMBERS OF THE KATIMAVIK TEAM IN MERRITT, B.C. take a few minutes for a group photo. With Erica Meekes, left of the back row, are: Beeka Hunt of Ontario, Holly Lockhart of Alberta, Ray Anthony, Project Leader from British Columbia, Rico Esposto of Quebec, and Blair Barrington of Nova Scotia. In front, from left: Gabrielle Marandola and Caroline Piche of Quebec.

PHOTO SUBMITTED

Katimavik I found, and still maintain this opinion, that the person I admire the most is someone who is the least afraid to be herself. This inspired me. I wanted that for myself, to dress like myself, to laugh and act like

myself, whoever it is that I may be.

Merritt, B.C.

Merritt has a large and enriched First Nations community that is also assisting in influencing our group. What

has surprised our group the most is the considerable supportiveness of the community. In Merritt it is rare to walk into a cafe, or store and not be given a discount, or free merchandise. New job placements also introduce new community contacts, as well as life skills. Most placements are in elementary schools; there is also a placement at the Merritt Humane Society, a Seniors home, the local First Nations Indian Band, and one placement with a local group that helps all non-profit organizations in the area.

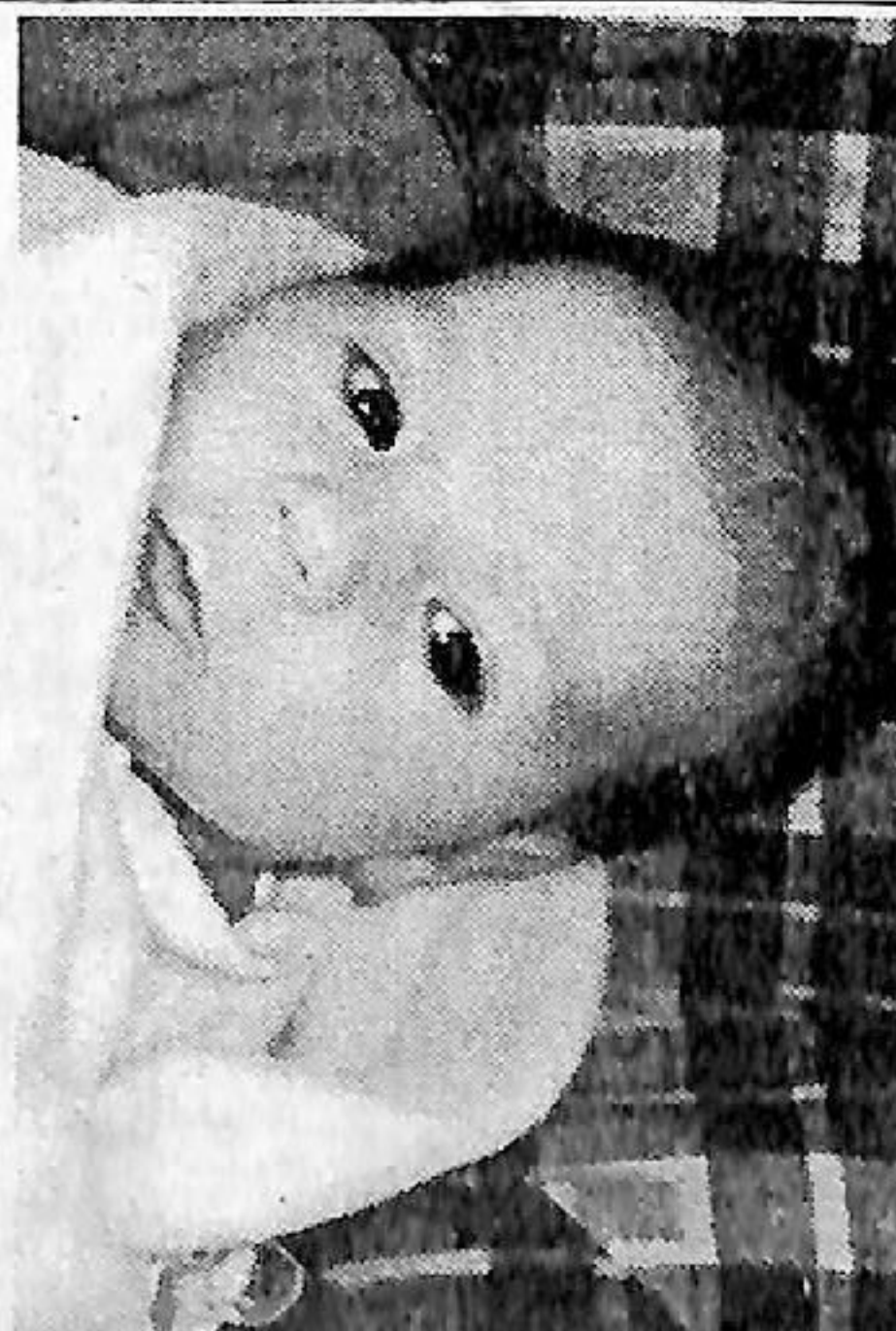
Our group has also found the acceptance, and support of a new project leader, and I believe that without all these new influences on our Katimavik group, we would not be able to sustain ourselves within the program. Some changes are difficult, but in the end they are very beneficial.

If you would like to learn more about Katimavik, Erica encourages you to visit their website at www.katimavik.org, or to e-mail her with any questions at emeekes@hotmail.com.

Her next stop is Bedford, Quebec.

397 BIRTHS

JEFF BARNES AND SKYE HANLEY are proud to announce the safe arrival of Jennifer Catherine Ann. Born on January 22, 2005 and weighs 7lb. 10oz. Proud Grandparents are Brian and Laurie Barnes of Colborne, Ray and Eleanor Hanley of Trenton and Cathy Hanley of Carrying Place. First niece for Mike and Adam and Melissa and Mike in Florida. "A new Toronto Maple Leafs Fan for Grandpa's Brian and Ray."



397 BIRTHS

383 LOST AND FOUND

CAT HAS BEEN FOUND!
Grey and White Cat, Thin,
Answers to Ace,
Disappeared Sunday, February 13
East End of Cobourg, Maplewood
Hawthorne, Fitzhugh Lane area

383 LOST AND FOUND

Feb. 17/05