

The Greatest GED Story Ever Told

By Kathy Hanson

As the day went on, the wind picked up and flights began cancelling. Nikki Evon, waiting in the tiny village of Atmautluak (ath – mouth' – luck) for her flight home, was worried. She needed to get back to Bethel so she could take her last GED test and graduate from high school. This was December 31st, 2013 - the last day she would be allowed to test. Her graduation depended upon taking this test on this day.

All across the United States, students like Nikki were studying to complete their GED diploma and were flocking to the GED Testing Centers in an effort to finish. The GED Testing Service notified its customers in 2012 that they were going to initiate a new set of GED tests in 2014, so all the current tests had to be completed no later than December 31, 2013. Anyone who had not successfully completed the current tests would have to start over from the beginning in 2014. The new tests in 2014 are computer-based and the test-taker must pay for each test, which is a big change from the traditional paper-and-pencil GED tests which were free most places in Alaska.

Nikki, seeing the weather closing in and finding out that her flight home probably would be cancelled, knew she had to contact her teachers back home. She was only eighteen miles from Bethel, but without transportation her opportunity to graduate was slipping away. Her teachers realized that there was a test she could take in the nearby village of Nunapitchuk (new – nap' – uh – chuk). Could she get there? Would the GED Examiner in the village be willing to administer a test late in the evening on New Year's Eve? More calls were made and the texts flew back and forth. Yes, the GED Examiner Jacquie Wood would give her the test, but Nikki had to travel seven miles across open tundra to the village of Nunapitchuk to take it. Nikki had no snowmachine or four-wheeler at her disposal, nor did anyone she knew in Atmautluak have enough gas to get to and from the other village. More phone calls; more texts. Jacquie had both a snowmachine and gas, and was willing to go to Atmautluak and pick Nikki up. Almost ready to go, she looked out her window and saw that the windy day had turned into dark night and that the blowing snow was causing an ugly whiteout. It was snowing so hard and thick that visibility was severely limited and traveling was dangerous. Now what?

Nikki and Jacquie, now talking directly, determined that Nikki's cousin in Nunapitchuk was at the school watching a basketball game, and was willing to drive Jacquie's machine to pick up Nikki. Off he went into the darkness, returning with Nikki an hour or so later. He took Nikki to the school in Nunapitchuk where she and Jacquie found a quiet classroom away from the noisy game going on in the gym. Finally, Nikki sat down for her GED test.

At 10:42 PM, Nikki finished her final GED test. Exhausted after a day that had begun waiting for an 8:30 AM flight, Nikki arrived back in Atmautluak at 11:30 PM. She later described the ride home as "scary and cold".

Finishing just one hour and twenty minutes before the deadline, Nikki took the last GED test that was administered in Alaska in 2013, and she graduated. She received the good news three days later when her test was scored electronically.

Nikki's determination and the dedication of Jacquie Wood were representative of the work done by the staff of the Bethel Regional ABE program, which is a partnership between Yuut Elitnaurviat and the University of Alaska Fairbanks - Kuskokwim Campus. The program has the responsibility of delivering adult education and GED testing to a region the size of the state of Illinois, which includes the hub town of Bethel and 56 villages that are not connected by roads. Despite this, staff and students working with a can-do spirit have made it the largest and most successful program in rural Alaska. Our hats are off to Nikki Evon and Jacquie Wood for following the advice of local elders which tells them to "Never give up."