



by Tyler Fish

Bungee jumping is crazy. I've never done it and I'm not interested. It seems risky, with consequences that are not so ideal. People find that interesting, because I'm willing to ski to the geographic North Pole. Nor can I be an explorer in the historical sense of the word; the North Pole has been reached. Not by an American skiing unsupported, but it's been done. This expedition, and even more difficult trips have been accomplished. It's not a "first" to be explored.

I was giving a presentation on the North Pole '09 expedition and a guy said to me, "It's clear you're just an adrenaline junky." Funny. His statement couldn't be farther from the truth. I've never liked roller coasters, although I've always had a soft spot for the Flume, an icy waterfall and gorge in Vermont. I guess that's why I'm going to the Arctic Ocean? Cold and wet is okay. Friends of mine have skydived, and I'm not sure that's for me, either. No, it's definitely not about adrenaline.

Am I an explorer? The historical explorers were amazing people. They didn't just do hard things with old, by-gone equipment. They strived and accomplished and even failed and sometimes died NEVER knowing where they were or what was next. If there had been detailed maps or guidebooks, they wouldn't have been truly exploring! It's a little more complicated than that, the definition of explorer, but no, I don't consider myself one of those in the historic sense.

My reality is more subtle. I've thought about it a lot. People have often wonder why I've worked for Outward Bound for 13 years. I am impassioned by working with and thinking about kids. As part of my job, I am constantly thinking about my high school and college experience. My students silently demand that I undertake that kind of introspection. So I've come to this conclusion, its not about adrenaline or being an explorer, it's about engaging life by following my heart and imagination. Like so many of my expeditions, my life is a mental experience. This thread started unknowingly when I was a child and continues today.....

Years ago my parents would drop me off at my grandparents farm in eastern Minnesota, and I would peek in the kitchen to say hello and grab a handful of grandma's homemade cookies. As nourishing for my soul as they were, the real sustenance came from the long wanderings around the farm. Through fields, in barns, over machinery and under old trees, I would follow the old beagle that traced mysterious scents with her nose.

At the other grandparents' house on the lake, I would check the garage for any kind of tool or plaything, put it in a bag and off I went. My destination was nowhere; my path was in my imagination, my mental perspective defined my experience. There was always somewhere to go, someplace to see, perhaps something to find and of course always something to imagine.

And on it went...I walked around Europe with my parents when I was seven. I walked miles home from school for reasons I don't remember now, but I think I just felt like seeing my world. I just wanted to be engaged in my world. That's the core of this. The best life is one that is fully engaged. I don't need adrenaline to do that, but it does make it fun and vibrant sometimes. Nor do I need to be the first person to go someplace in order to be amazed. However, I do allow myself to imagine that no one has been here, or that it's been a long time, and that this is MY place for the brief moment. I like to be active in my world, not just an observer of it.

So when the months fly by and I find myself on the Arctic Ocean, I will fully engage my senses and myself in my world. There will be enough adrenaline now and then to keep it interesting, and there's no doubt I'll feel as though I'm somewhere entirely unique. But unlike my wanderings around my grandparent's farm, on the Arctic Ocean and as with past expeditions, I won't have to imagine that I'm someplace strange and powerful. I'll know.