

## .. CHILD'S FIRST KOMATIK RIDE

This story is based on an actual account of a seven year old's experience of his first komatik ride. The related gestures and movements came from a group discussion of the subject, by myself and my group of Grade Two's.

- Alicia Eaton

"I knew a lot about dogteams before I went for my first ride. My father told me how the lead dog always leads the other dogs. Where the lead goes, so do the others. Each dog has a name, but if you want them to start running, you don't call out their names, you either crack the dog-whip over their heads, or cry 'HUT, HUT!'

"(laugh) But, you must be careful, even with those words because sometimes the dogs just don't listen.

"First of all, Mom made me put on more clothes - an extra sweater, socks, my mukluks over my socks and my mittens. All this under my big heavy parka. My parka hood is edged with fox fur, so that it protects my face from the icy wind and frostbite.

"The komatik had a sled-box put on, especially for me - without this sled-box I would fall off when the dogs are going fast. The ice is very rough and bumpy - one good bump and off I would go. I put blankets in the bottom of the box, to make it soft and use a fur skin to cover me up and keep me warm. It gets really cold when you can't run behind the komatik and shout "HUT, HUT", like Dad.

"I snuggled down under the skin, held on to the top sides of the box tightly and waited expectantly for Dad's whip to crack.

"CRACK", I was all ready to go. But, instead of going forward, the dogs backed right up into the sled, pushing it back, tipping it over and me, out! There was a lot of barking and shouting, and the lead dog raced away. There was a big spruce tree in the direction he ran: instead of going around it, he went straight up the tree. The other dogs were behind him, running around, trying to follow him and got all tangled up in the harness. Dad had to climb that tree to get the dog down, shouting and cracking his driver's whip all the time.

"Mom was standing in the doorway, watching all this. When she saw I was safe, she laughed and told Dad, he had better work some more with the lead dog, before going on a trip. Didn't he know yet that his lead dog wouldn't move unless he said, "HUT, HUT", and not when he cracked his whip? You never crack the whip and shout "HUT, HUT" at the same time.

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"Dad was so mad, the lead dog hid away, under the tree. Dad had to go and get him. When he brought him back, I got back into the sled-box and we started again. Dad shouted "HUT, HUT" as Mom had told him, the lead dog went off like a shot, in the right direction.

"I was scared at first that I would fall out of the box, but it was great fun when I got used to it all. So I snuggled down under my furs, protecting myself from the cold frosty air, to enjoy my first dogteam ride."