

Christine Dano Johnson

WE BLEND OUR FAITH

When I was alone and you were in Tok I would often drive the van to the library. The parking lot was cold and white, but not clean at all. There were ravens picking at frozen orange peels, and usually a half-dozen homeless men wearing coats that didn't look thick enough for the biting wind.

There was something pretty. A large fountain, with sculpted metal arches a story high, was allowed to freeze over once the sun dipped below the horizon for good in December. Colored lights were pointed towards the sharpest points, and the ice and snow hugging the curves of the arches flickered all starry in the twilight. In the summer the ice melted into a pool below and our son would run around the perimeter, throwing the pennies I had given him to wish on high up into the cascading water.

In the basement of the library was an old wooden page's cart, piled high with musty books (free for the taking) that couldn't be circulated in the system anymore. In the warmth of radiant heat, wealthy patrons in Patagonia jackets stood shoulder-to-shoulder with ancient Inuit ladies in careworn kuspuks and soft mukluks, briskly pushing and pulling books out of the cart to take home or ignore.

Library books often were dropped in slushy puddles of mud and ice; your hands are slippery when they're wrapped in wool. Once I found a small copy of the Tibetan Book of Prayer, printed in Tibetan on whisper-thin leaves of paper. It was so yellowed and water-damaged that it couldn't be salvaged in its current form, so I took it home and made a paper chain to put on our Christmas tree.

We blend our faith, you and I.