

BEZAL JESUDASON (1941 – 1995)



Bezal and Terry Jesudason

Bezal Jesudason died in Resolute on 9 August 1995 after a brief illness, and chose to be buried in the Arctic he loved. He is survived by his devoted wife Terry. Bezal was born 1 April 1941 at Palayamkottai in southern India. Tamil was his mother tongue, but he also spoke four other Indian languages, was fluent in German and English, got along well in Inuktitut, and commanded a smattering of Japanese, which betrayed his love of people and acceptance of many cultures. He was a devout Christian all his life.

Bezal attended Madras Christian College and became an engineer, eventually moving to Germany to further his career and gain practical experience with diesel engines. In 1968 he moved to Toronto because he felt that Canada offered new opportunities, but he had no idea just what unique opportunity would in fact be in store. He worked at the Crothers Caterpillar plant for a year, then joined the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs. After a short stay in Iqaluit (then Frobisher Bay), he was stationed in Lake Harbour as the settlement power plant operator and mechanic. It was here that he began his special attachment to the North and began to learn Inuktitut. He was transferred to Grise Fiord in 1970.

It was also in 1970 that Terry DiPasquale came to Grise Fiord to start a kindergarten/play school under the sponsorship of her hometown United Church, and Bezal was a big, if unofficial, help in the endeavour. They were married in Grise Fiord the following year, and it goes without saying that none of us ever thought of one partner without the other. They were a supportive team for life.

In 1975 Bezal received a promotion to High Arctic Supervisor for all Government of the Northwest Territories Public Works facilities. After two years, he was told his position would move to Frobisher Bay, but by this time he was tiring of the bureaucracy (one of the few things Bezal disparaged!), and he and Terry were “at home” in the High Arctic, so he

became a construction inspector for the Housing Corporation in Yellowknife. Bezal had travelled extensively with the Inuit and had the germ of an idea for starting his own business in tourism. He had already met and assisted several North Pole expeditions in the mid-1970s and had spoken with many international travellers who were eager to explore the High Arctic, but had a hard time going about it. In October 1979 he and Terry left the security of the civil service and launched High Arctic International Explorer Services Ltd. in Resolute.

Bezal began with well-organized sled trips between Resolute and Grise Fiord, about a five-day journey each way, with local Inuit guiding and servicing the expeditions. Of course, the guests needed some place to stay at the beginning and end of the trip, so the International Explorers’ Home in Resolute was started as well. Under Terry’s efficient hand, it really was more a “home away from home” than a hotel. Over the years the business slowly evolved, with organized package tours and day trips to Bathurst Island, Beechey Island, Ellesmere Island, and the North Magnetic and Geographic Poles. One could not help but be impressed by the apparent ease with which people, some of whom had literally never seen snow, would be met at the Resolute air terminal, outfitted to meet the rigors of travel across broken sea ice at  $-30^{\circ}\text{C}$ , and transformed by the end of a week into knowledgeable, enthusiastic supporters of all things Arctic. And of course every year there were major geographic expeditions that invariably involved Bezal, usually for logistical and radio support. With each expedition, knowledge was gained and handed on to the next group, whether for assaults on the pole (by dogsled, snowmobile, ultra-lite aircraft, skis, foot, or what have you), windsurfing to the North Magnetic Pole, or just a horseback ride around Cornwallis Island. Bezal often joked that he was going to be the first to reach the Pole by elephant (he was never without a keen sense of humor).

Bezal loved people and had a deep appreciation for the basic goodness found in everyone regardless of their cultural background. When business was slow in midwinter, he travelled extensively around the world, giving slide shows wherever he went. Bezal was a tremendous ambassador for the North: he put the High Arctic on the tourism map, and never tired of showing it to visitors. Not only did he collaborate with Inuit in these activities, but he delighted in showing the elders sights he had seen in his travels, even taking his old friends Pijamini and Kalluk to Las Vegas (an annual outing) and to India. Helping people achieve their dreams and potential gave him much pleasure, and he always said that God had brought him to the Arctic for a reason.

Canada owes a debt to Bezal for his work in making the North accessible and friendly for all who ventured there. His efforts produced benefits for the airline, communications, and travel industries, the physical and social infrastructure of the North, Nunavut, and the scientific community. But in the long run it is the person we will remember. The eulogy written by Ben Hubert captured Bezal for all time:

Your life was a demonstration of how human kind can live together with respect, despite our very different cultural roots. You were an example for strength of character complemented by a quiet and practical faith in God. You shared with us your love for the land and its people. Your business style and hospitality promoted peace and the brotherhood of humankind. Your ever-present smile, punctuated with laughter, proved your joy of living. You faced your challenges with confidence and self-control. You could always find something good, and often something funny, in the most trying situation. Your control in exasperating circumstances

proved the value of patience. You kept your feet on the ground regardless of who had signed your guest book.

He will be missed.

*Harold E. Welch  
Freshwater Institute  
Fisheries and Oceans Canada  
501 University Crescent  
Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada  
R3T 2N6*



Bezal on the sea ice with his sledge and snowmobile.