

## A very safe place to be

The TV documentary, 'The polar bear family and me,' has had my family gripped over the last few weeks. With Gordon Buchanan – a wildlife cameraman -we have followed a wild polar bear family over three seasons in Svalbard. This is one of the world's most challenging environments in which to exist. It's a tough job being a polar bear on the move that's for sure - but it was the beginning of their journey that caught my attention.

Before a mother polar bear gives birth she digs a den in the permafrost. Once the cubs are born this den is their home for up

to five months, before the mother leads them on a journey to the sea and beyond. The mother remains in the den with her cubs all this time. Gordon climbed into an empty den and told us that, no matter what storms are raging outside, the temperature inside is always 3 degrees above zero. It's a very safe place to be.

My learning heart connected with this idea of safe places to be. Like an Arctic wind, the New Year swept into our home with a flurry of anxieties and difficulties. One big factor was that my older two girls have had A level and GCSE modular exams. These have brought a new level of emotion into our home. There have been tears, stress, worry, frustration and exhaustion. And like the polar bear's den, our home has been a safe place for my family to be. A sanctuary. A welcoming place to return to, after a difficult day at school. When exams haven't gone the way they expected then there have been their mum's tasty food to comfort, their dad's motivational talk's to lift their spirits and their little sisters cuddles to console. The ordinary stuff of families.

In the Gospel of the second week in ordinary time, Jesus performed a miracle of great generosity at the wedding feast at Cana . He turned gallons of water into the very best quality wine. The raw materials for the wine? Well – empty stone jars, and plain old water. The ordinary stuff of life.

Ordinary things seems to receive little credit nowadays, but Jesus was showing us that they are the places where God's abundant love is present. God chooses ordinary and unexpected places to appear and our homes are the most ordinary of places. In his poem, 'My Room,' Patrick Kavanagh tells us that this very ordinary place was his safe place to be. His place to meet God:

*My bed in the centre, so many things to me – a dining table, a writing desk and a slumber palace.  
My room in a dusty attic, but its little window lets in the stars.*

Our homes are filled with the ordinary stuff of life - God's raw material of choice. It is obvious then that God's loving presence is already within them, at the heart of each day. My learning heart is deepening in its understanding that we are not outside of God, but already within the divine. God's heart is in each of ours and when we learn to place our hearts with growing trust into Gods, then we begin to realise that this is the true place of shelter, our den, our home. Each one of us has a contemplative dimension to our nature – I never would have thought this about myself but as I have begun to engage with mine there is a growing sense of a place within me where I 'just know' something of God's intimate presence. A very safe place to be.

When we discover this place within, this polar bears den, this bedroom in the dusty attic where the starlight pours in from the tiny window, then something of its beauty begins to emerge into our daily lives. A greater awareness of God in the ordinary – mum's food, dad's motivational talks and little sisters cuddles – all can be recognised as the places where God's abundant love is present.

A view from inside the den:



Polar bear den clip - [click here](#)

The ordinary stuff of life – **God's raw material of choice.**