



Annah Hanthorn, 16, roller skis last weekend to train for her cross-country skiing competitions in the winter.

Sixteen years and counting

Fort McPherson teen says she wouldn't call anywhere else home

by **Nathalie Heilberg-Harrison**
Northern News Services
Tetlit' Zheh/Fort McPherson

Annah Hanthorn, 16, is an older sister to Ruth, Judah, Jesse, Esther, Naomi, Gracie and Jane, and a younger sister to Sarah and Joel. She likes to cross-country ski in the winter, old time dance in the summer and hunt in the spring. She hates mosquitoes, loves the cold and makes sure to go hiking with her grandfather whenever he visits from Ontario.

But, perhaps most of all, she loves living in the North and wouldn't call any other place

but Fort McPherson home.

"I feel like I'm part of the Gwich'in culture," she said.

"When I was younger the other kids would touch my blond hair, because it was so different ... But now I'm one of them."

Hanthorn has lived in the Mackenzie Delta her whole life, and shares a home with her pastor father, teacher mother and nine siblings. She said because of everyone's different personalities, it isn't hard to stand out. "Throughout the house

there's always something going on, everyone as different personalities. You walk into one room and someone might be singing, but in the next one they're quiet and reading, then you go downstairs and the babies (Gracie and Jane) are crying and hungry," she said.

"Rarely is it just quiet and you're like, 'Woah, this is boring.'"

Hanthorn is incredibly active, and if you were to drive through Fort McPherson on a sunny summer afternoon, you might just catch her roller skiing back and forth across town.

"The majority of cross-country skiers roller ski, but I have really big tires, because of where I live. I use the same ski poles I use to ski in, strap the same boots on. It's a little bit more difficult, it's harder to balance, but I enjoy it," she said.

"I like it because sometimes in the summer I'm like, 'Ahh! I can't wait to ski!'"

Hanthorn competes in cross-country skiing and soccer at a high level, which has allowed her to compete in different regions of Canada.

In the past, the sports have taken her as far as Yellowknife, Whitehorse, Canmore, Alta., Halifax and the Kenai Peninsula in Alaska, where she competed in the 2006 Arc-

tic Winter Games.

"I love the competition, the travelling, the meeting new people," she said.

Because Hanthorn and her other siblings are homeschooled, she never has to worry about missing out on class when she competes.

"It's given me a lot of flexibility," she said.

For the most part, Hanthorn's favourite pastimes – cross-country skiing, soccer, hunting, hiking and old time dancing – are a melange of things she couldn't do anywhere else in the world.

"I do like the 24-hour sun in the summer and picking berries, and I like going out on the land and things like that," she said.

She often visits her family's cabin, by the Peel River at Eight Mile, for an escape.

"I find it's really busy down south. There's a lot of action, so I find it more relaxed living up here," she said.

"You know more people here. You know everybody on the street. It's really friendly. Not that people ignore you down south, they just don't know you."

Hanthorn, who is going into Grade 11 this fall, isn't sure where she'll head after high school graduation – she's toying with the idea of going into a medical field – but knows that, for now, Fort McPherson is where she wants to be.

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