

OKAK: SPANISH FLU 1917

This play was written by students of grades 5, 7 and 8, and was done by interviews with the survivors of that terrible time. Special thanks goes to Rev. & Mrs. Hettasch, Emelia Merkeratsuk, Rosie Ford, Mata Joshua, and Bella Lyall for their stories and help. In some cases, we used the stories but changed the girls to boys due to the number of boys we had.

Today, Okak is a pile of rubble where in 1917 there was a thriving community of 350. Outside of the mission people, the oldest man to survive was a 16 year old boy, so most of the children were taken in by foster homes up and down the coast.

THE PLAYERS

Amos Sillett	_____	Philip Igloliorte
His wife	_____	Heather Denniston
Isaac Sillett(15)	_____	Sidney Igloliorte
Amos Sillett (7)	_____	Paulus Nochasak
Captain of the Harmony	_____	Jimmy Evans
Rev. Wildemann	_____	Junior Ford
Mr. Wide,(store keeper)	_____	Richard Leo
Mrs. Wide	_____	Natalie Thomas
Survivor - The Spirit of Okak	_____	Heather Denniston
Paulus,(The Grand father)	_____	Angus Andersen
The Uncle	_____	Jimmy Evans
Johanna,(the Grand mother)	_____	Sarah Leo
Levi & Adam (2grandsons)	_____	Jerry Tuglavina & Philip Igloliorte

Slides	-----	Rev. Hettasch, Leo Ehrenberg, Evelyn Winters
Costumes	-----	Evelyn Keener
Directors	-----	Linda MacPhee, Tim Borlase

Note:

This play was taken from an incident in local history. There are many incidents along the Labrador Coast which are certainly dramatic enough to have plays made from them.

We feel that this play has done a great deal to arouse a curiosity and a sense of pride of students for their own region.

The Play takes Place in 8 Scenes

1. Wharf at Okak
2. Hill overlooking Okak (evening)
3. Okak Moravian Church -next day
4. Okak
5. Simmikutak, a small place
6. Mission House Okak
7. Simmikutak - one month later
8. The present

The characters in the play changed from early rehearsals.
In the script the following characters should read the lines:

Angus

Boas

Toby Kojak -- Paulus, the Grandfather

Jerry -- Levi, the Grandson

Adam -- Adam, the Grandson

Toby Pijoggie- Isaac Sillett

Natalie -- Georgina Wide

Richard -- Anthony Wide

Heather -- Spirit of Okak

Junior -- Rev. Wildemann

Paulus -- Amos Sillett

Jimmy -- The Uncle

Sarah -- Joanne, the Grandmother

Okak Spanish Flu 1917

Characters

Paulus, the Grandfather
Paulus the Uncle
Mr. Sillett
Mrs. Sillett
Issac Sillett (12 years old;
Amos Sillett (7 years old)
Rev. Wildemann
The Captain of Harmony
Anthony Wide, the storekeeper
Georgina Wide, the storekeeper's wife
Johanna, the Grandmother
Levi, her grandson
Adam, another grandson
The Ghost of Okak

Scene 1 The Wharf

- sound of a cannon
- lots of noise on beating instruments and people
- horn of the boat
(people start running down to the Harmony on the wharf)

Boas: It's the Harmony (shouting)

Adam: Yea maybe I'll be able to go at last to Nain.

Jerry: Me too.

Adam: You're not going any where with me you are too
piujuck. (they start fighting)

Natalie: Hooray, my food is here at last. Help me get onto
that little punt darling. (she slips)

Angus: You boys, nuKak (pulls them apart)

Richard: Don't get so excited my dear, watch your step.

Junior: Well praise the Lord, the boat has arrived. Let's
welcome her band. (the Moravian Mission Band starts
to play)

Boas: (pulling up his boat) Come on Sorutsit help me get
the people into the Umiak. Help the lady ...there...
there.

Adam: Make way for Rev. Wildmann.

Paulus: Wait for me atata. (but he does not get in) (store-
keeper, his wife, Mr. Sillett, and the Minister are
in the boat)

Jimmy: (with megaphone) Alright mate, lower anchor (big noise)
Shoal water is shallow, Stern to the leeward. (to
people in boat) Well its good to be in Okak again.

Jerry: But I want to go on the boat anasiak. (starts to cry)

Toby: Kaitlanak.

Sarah: Issac, you look after him.
(lots of noise and pushing and shoving)

Richard: Captain lower the rope and chair and we'll climb
aboard.

Captain: I'm sorry Mr. Wide but there's a sick man on board,
and we believe it might be the Spanish Flu.

Boas: I'm going on board anyway, Kavunga.

Junior: Don't be in such a hurry Mr. Sillett, we don't want people in Okak to catch the flu.

Jimmy: I'll let you up but you will have to take your chances. People in St. John's are dying of it and they may die of it here, too.

Boas: Everybody is always sick in St. John's (everybody laughs)

Natalie: Did you bring fresh food. I'd love to taste an orange its been two months. The poor Harmony is looking a little less for wear. What will happen if she is repaired this winter. We may have no supply ship next year - and then Anthony I will not be able to leave this place. I just know I'll be stuck here for ever.

Boas: Kavunga, let me up. I've waited a long time for this. (a rope is lowered and Boas and Paulus climb in)

SCENE 2 That night outside Okak

(all is dark on stage the sky is red and moving)

Sarah: Paulus, it's going to be hard to leave Okak and go sealing. It gets harder each time I leave you.

Angus: We are too old to be apart now, Johanna. We should spend our last few years together.

Sarah: But when my family goes, I must go too, you know, I have to look after my grandsons, while my daughter and her husband go out on the ice for seals.

Angus: (standing) Look at the sky. The atsaniks are red. The last time I saw them that color was when my wife died. Something is going to happen for sure.

Sarah: I have a strange feeling I am not well. (she coughs) Take me home Paulus.

SCENE 3 Okak Moravian Church, the next day

Men sit on left side of the stage, women on the right. Jerry and Adam are already in church. Enter Angus, Heather and Sidney.

Sidney: Where is Johanna?

Angus: She's got a cough and not feeling too well. She may come later.

Heather: Is she eating alright?

Angus: Aukak. (no) All that food that came in on the Harmony yesterday and she wouldn't even look at it.

Sidney: We visit you after church, eh?

Natalie and Jimmy come in arm in arm. Natalie is coughing. The captain comes in (Jimmy) and Richard moves over after shaking hands.

Sarah enters very slowly. She coughs constantly as do most people in the church. (As stated in the Okak church record "Parts of the sermon could not be heard due to the excessive coughing")

(When people kneel they kneel with their backs to the minister). The minister enters. Everyone rises.

Junior: Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near.

All: The Lord is nigh unto all that call upon him, that call upon him in truth.

(words to hymn on next page sung in English and Inuttitut)

Now thank we all our God,
With hearts and hands and voices,
Who wondrous things hath done,
In whom the world rejoices
Who from our mother's arms,
Hath blessed us on our way
With countless gifts of love
And still is ours today.

(Everyone wears white silipaks and skin boots to church. The womens sillipaks are ornately decorated and have tail pieces.) The service is solemn, punctuated with much choir singing or violin baroque music there occurs hand shaking after the prayers.)

Junior: The sun goeth away, the shadows of the evening are stretched out;

All: And it shall come to pass that at evening time there shall be light.

Junior: Let us all join in Hymn
(Everybody sings)

Junior: We should all praise God for the Harmony's safe return to Okak. It has brought us much to be thankful for, enough food and supplies to carry us through the cold winter. We should also offer our prayers for the sick man on board the boat, and for all those who have died of the Spanish flu in St. John's. We are grateful for our good health here in Okak.

Grant us, O Christ, thy peace this night, and watch over us until the morning comes. Then may we be endowed with vigour of body alertness of mind and strength of spirit, to give thee loyal obedience for thy names sake. Amen.

All: God be in my head,
And in my understanding;
God be in my eyes
And in my looking
God be in my mouth
and in my speaking
God be in my heart
And in my thinking
God be at my end,
And at my departing.

Paulus: Come to my house this afternoon.

Jerry: Can't. We're going out on the Harmony back to Cuthroat Island.

Adam: Yeah, we're going sealing.

Heather: Amalia, you heading home, eh?

Sarah: See you. We'll be back when it freezes over. I hope it comes early.

Angus: Ice is here already I believe.

Toby K: Come on Abia. Paulus, take care of your wife.
Jimmy: Well, captain, good luck on your return. And thanks again for everything.
Captain: You're welcome. Hope you have an easy winter. Goodbye Ma'am.

SCENE 4 - Nex day in Okak - On stage there are three houses stage right is where Abel, his wife, Amos and Issac live. Stage left is where Paulus and the Uncle live. Stage centre is where Anthony and Georgina Wildemann live (the store keeper).

Toby P: (gets up and stretches). Annak, tupagit. (Mother does not react). Tupagit. (starts shaking her).

Paulus: Mummy stop fooling.

Toby P: Attata, Attata. Mummy won't wake up.

Paulus: He's cold.

Toby P: (starts to get worried, listens for breath) - He's not breathing.

Paulus: How come they not waking up.

Toby P: I think ...he's ...dead.

Paulus: I'm going to get annak up. (He pulls her arm up and falls down limp).

Toby P: Amos, leave them alone. Mummy and Daddy have gone on a long sleep.

Paulus: But I want them to wake up.

Toby P: Don't touch them. Come here. We go to atatsiak's house. (Toby drags him out of the house). (Paulus starts to cry). (Grandfather is out chopping wood).

Angus: SiluKet. You don't look too happy. What's wrong. Amos, did Issac beat you again. Isaac, tell me what happened?

(He starts to cough and drops dead).

Paulus: (Jumps on him and starts playing with him) Atatasiak, me fight you eh?

Toby P: Akkak, Kaligit.

Jimmy: (comes running out) KailiKunga. Oh no. (pulls Paulus off - he starts to cry again). He's ... not living. He's dead. Issac, quick help me. We'll put him outside. Later we'll take him to the dead house.

Toby P: Atata and Annak they died.

Paulus: Why have they died?

Jimmy: Atsuk. We'd better go to Mr. Wide's house. He got lots of food in the store and I can't look after you. I'm only 16. (they go over to storekeeper's house and knock).

Jimmy: Mr. Wide.
(Natalie is inside combing her hair, Richard is unpacking)

Richard: Yes boys.

Paulus: I'm hungry.

Toby: Everyone died.

Jimmy: Old Paulus, too.

Richard: Oh, how awful. I'll get Mrs. Wide to cook you some breakfast, so run quickly, go tell the missionary.

Maybe their not dead. (Jimmy runs off.)

Toby P: (coughs)

Richard: You two stay here. (He goes into the house)

Richard: Georgina, Abel's boys are here - Abel and his wife are dead. So is the old man. Can you put some soup on for them.

Natalie: Keep those dirty boys away from me. (she coughs) I don't want to get sick. Anthony I want to leave here. Promise that we will go back to the Island in the spring.

Richard: Don't worry dear. (He kisses her cheek lightly - 46 times) You'll will be fine. I won't let them in. Just cook them some soup or something. (he goes out - while Natalie mimes putting some soup on the stove).

Richard: Boys you can stay in the warehouse, until we find somebody to look after you. My wife will cook you some soup. I'll bring it ...

Natalie: (screaming) - Anthony, come here.
(she collapses on the floor - Richard runs in and holds her up).

BLACKOUT

SCENE 5 - a house on Cutthroat Island - 2 weeks later
(Adam and Jerry are hiding, Sarah is counting)

Sarah: Atautsik, magguk, pingasuk, sittamat, tallimat, saksit. I'm coming. (She looks for a few seconds then starts to cough - she coughs and coughs) ErniKa come here. I will tell you a story. Last night, I seen a big old star, after you was in bed.

Jerry: What was it, anansiak.

Adam: Grandfather, you look sick.

Sarah: Maybe it is only that I am old. But last night I saw a wonderful strange star. First star I seen since your mummy died. And now I feel that I am just about done. There is nobody else left on this island but us. All died. We have no food or wood left. I'm going to leave you and walk and take Jefta's boat to Okak.

Jerry: But grandmother its ugly old weather.

Grandmother: But I must go now while I have some strength.

Adam: But there's lots of wood yet.

Sarah: Listen, I'm going to die and I have to get some help for you.

Jerry: I'll go for you.

Sarah: No. Stay here and take care of your brother. There's a little seal meat left for you. Don't eat too much and don't go outside. Too much dogs. Get snow from the window for water. Save what you have. Goodbye my boys. (she kisses them and steps out - then looks back) (When she opens the door you can hear the dogs howling).

Sarah: (calling out to one of the dogs) - Nanook, I know you don't understand...but... look after the boys, even though I won't be back. First, take me to the boat, I can hardly see. (She climbs into the boat and starts rowing).

SCENE 6 (Okak mission house) (sound of storm)

Toby P: Rev. Wildemann, we have no place to put the dead people.

Junior: Do you mean the dead house is full.

Richard: Yes. He used Semigak's house, too.

Junior: Well, since we are all that is left I don't suppose it would matter. We will all move into the hospital. We will put them in the hospital staff house. If only the doctor hadn't been away in Makkovik. You boys will have to help Mr. Wide and I. Go with him and dig graves for the Sillett family. The sooner we we get everyone buried the less chance we will have of getting the flu.

Mr. Wide: But please, sir, the cemetery is full, too.

Junior: All right then we will have to dig one large grave for everyone. Try to find a place where the ground is not quite so frozen. Amos, thank the good Lord you are still alright. How is your cough?
(Everyone else has left) I wish the weather would improve.

Paulus: All right. Sir, there's a boat out in the bay.

Junior: How could it be? Maybe it's the doctor. My eyes are failing me. Quick, tell me is there somebody in it?

Paulus: I believe there's a woman. It's stopped moving.

Junior: We must go out and meet it. (they throw a line to it and go out to meet it) (they pull the boat in and pull Sarah out of the boat - and carry her to shore).

Sarah... Grandsons are still ... out... there... Nobody ...else.

Junior: Where - talk - you must tell me.

Sarah: at Cutthroat. (she dies)

Junior: She's gone. Amos, go get the rest. (he blesses her)
He shall feed his flock like a shephard; he shall gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom.

The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.

(Jimmy, Paulus, Toby P. all come running back).

(Richard, too)

Jimmy: How did she do it?

Junior: God works in mysterious ways. She was a brave woman. Some of us must go up 10 Mile Bay to Cutthroat. There are still 2 small boys alive. Mr. Wide you stay here and look after the women and babies. We'll start out. I don't know how she could have made it through this ice. God being with us we should be back in 3 days.
(Paulus, Junior, Jimmy, Toby P. all get in the boat)
(The wind howls and the boat rocks).

Jimmy: Too lippy, ice pans are hitting the boat. Watch out.

Junior: We'll have to turn back.

SCENE 7 Cutthroat a month later

(a lot of dogs howling)

Jerry: I'm awful hungry.

Adam: Uvungalu.

Jerry: How many days we been here alone.

Adam: Atsuk. A month I suppose. (he coughs)

Jerry: I can't stand up.

Adam: I don't think we can last much longer on these few berries we have left.

Jerry: I can't wait until anansiak comes back.

Adam: I hate flour.

Jerry: Especially raw flour. Look (he's eating some). What's that.

Adam: Only an Asihauk. I counted 48 yesterday.

Jerry: Kill it.

Adam: Don't kill it, it will keep snowing and granma won't get back.

Jerry: I'm thirsty. Awful sick of old snow. Can't get enough to get me unthirsty. Adam, your bigger. Go get some water, before it all frozen.

Adam: Not without the dog.

Jerry: But listen I can't run as fast as you. Nanook should stay with me.

Jerry: You go.

(Adam goes and kicks Jerry as he goes out with a pail)

Adam: Nanook, you stay here.

(a few seconds later there is a big dog fight - Adam screams)

(Jerry runs to the window, then turns around and covers his face with his hands) (after a while he goes to the door)

Nanook, stay here ... Don't let them get me.

(Noise off stage)

Junior: I believe it's this way. (dogs barking)

Jimmy: No that way. Listen to those dogs. (he shoots a couple of shots)

Jerry: (Yelling) Ikajulaunga. Ikajulaunga.

Paulus: I heard something.

Toby P: Let's go that way.

Jimmy: We can't get near the house because of the dogs.

Junior: We'll have to shoot this dog here. It won't let us pass (shot)

(They break through the door)

Junior: He's still alive. (He lifts him up, Jerry cries into his shoulder)

SCENE: 7

Heather: I represent the living:

Amelia Merkuratsuk

Bella Lyall

Rosie Ford

Mata Johua

Scene 7 continued..

Heather: These could well be their thoughts as I quote the minister's birth and death account book of Okak 1917.

These members of the Okak congregation from number 1532 to number 1739 to judge by the dates from the 14th to the 22nd of November 1917 were snatched away by influenza which had turned to pneumonia. For those who died outside Okak the dates may not be the exact ones but they are recorded here according to the announcements of the survivors.

It was a very sad time for us all and heaven seemed close. The sickness was brought in by the Harmony. A few showed a very happy death. This was surprising since it was a type of sickness that came upon them suddenly.

The congregation shrank from 263 to 59. The 94 which died in Okak, were buried on the 4th, 6th and 7th of January, all in one communal grave.

And on the 8th, 7 more members from SimmiKutak were fetched and added to this grave.

May they all have found eternal rest after their poor and difficult life.