

MUD LAKE SCHOOL

presents

"Looking Ahead: Looking Back"

CAST: The old man Pat, and the young man PatPat Callahan
Miss Johnson, the politicianSandra Dee Hope
Miss Hatch, the schoolteacherJennifer Best
The old woman Sevilla, and the
young woman SevillaSevilla Hope
The old woman Roberta, and the
young woman RobertaRoberta Best
NelsonNelson Hope
PaulaPaula Rose
VirginiaVirginia Hope
CharlesCharles Rose
KimKimberly Best

Recorder Players: Roberta Best, Jennifer Best, Paula Rose

Guitar and Direction: Virginia Ryan

Mud Lake is a very small community, and its school population grows smaller by the year. In our play, we are imagining what may happen to our community in ten years time, when most of our young people have grown up and moved away. We also consider what will happen to the Churchill River, which plays an important role in all our lives, if the proposed plans to use it as a disposal for Happy Valley-Goose Bay sewage go ahead.

We created the play by discussing how we felt about our community, its chances for continuing as a community in the future, and how we would feel if we had to leave it. Then we began improvising the arguments for and against leaving Mud Lake. When we were satisfied with our improvisations, we began writing them down.

We also took four folk songs - two from Labrador, one from Newfoundland and one from the U.S., changed their words, and included them to help us get our message across.

Whether or not you are familiar with our little community, we hope this message of ours will reach you all.

"LOOKING AHEAD/LOOKING BACK"

Introduction

Recorders begin playing "Homeward Bound". Half-way through, Pat walks slowly out in front of curtains, as an old man.

Pat: Do you know that tune? That's "Homeward Bound". I used to play that when I was a boy going to school...
It's funny they should be playing that, because I'm taking a trip home, myself. In my mind, that is--I'm trying to figure out whatever happened to Mud Lake.
Mud Lake was my home, you see. I left it a long, long time ago. That was in--1992, that's right. That's the year they closed the school... (he laughs) Some of you out there probably weren't even born yet, in 1992.
I didn't want to leave my home, you see. None of us did. It was kind of -- forced upon us. I was only a young man, then, and it seemed like the only thing we could do was leave.
But now that I'm old, I'm not so sure we did the right thing. I'm not so sure at all.
See, it all got started at a meeting we had at our community hall. Come on -- I'll show you how it happened...
(he disappears behind curtains)

Scene 1

th Nine community members come on stage casually, as they would to any public meeting. They joke, gossip, settle into chairs in a semi-circle, in the community hall.

Pat: How'd you do at darts this week, Nelson?
Nelson: Not too good, boy. Got skunked one game.
Paula: Any tons, Nelson?
Nelson: Are you kidding? I wouldn't know a ton if it came and bit me.
Virginia: The Hall's looking really good.
Charles: Yep. The women did a good job of painting it this year.
Roberta: What's this meeting about, anyway?
Paula: It beats me. I don't even know who they're sending out.
Sevilla: (looking at watch) -- Whoever he is, he's late.

Miss Hatch: This one's a woman. She's our new Minister of Labrador Communities. Her name's Miss Johnson, I think. She called last night to ask me to bring the school register along.

Kim: School register? Then that's what it's about! They're going to try to get us to send the children up to the Valley for school, again...

Miss Johnson walks in briskly, carrying a briefcase. She looks at her watch, and smiles at the crowd.

Miss Johnson: Good evening, everyone. Sorry I'm late. We had trouble crossing the river. It was awfully stormy. I must say, you people have it hard, depending on that river for transportation. And that road is in terrible shape. It nearly broke my back. [As she says this, she is sitting down and opening her briefcase. She takes out a note pad, which she positions on her lap].

Anyway, I'm glad to meet you all at last.

I'm your new Minister of Labrador Communities.

My name is Gloria Johnson.

The crowd murmurs: Hello, glad to meet you, etc.

Miss Johnson: (A little nervous) Well. It's a pity I had to arrive here after dark. I've heard you have a lovely community here, one of the tiniest communities left in this province, I believe....

How is everything going out here, anyway?
(She gets her note pad ready.)

Virginia: Well, we have been having trouble with the phones lately,
Miss Johnson.

Kim: Lately? I can't remember a time when we didn't have trouble with the phones. Calling someone right here in Mud Lake is just like calling over to China somewhere.

Miss Johnson: (writing) this down) - I see Trouble with the phones...

Nelson: Uh, there's been some trouble with the power lately too,
Miss Johnson.

Miss Johnson: The power, eh? What seems to be the problem?

Pat: The problem is, for 15 years now we've been asking them to fix the generators here, and for 15 years they've been telling us, "In a few months we'll be getting power direct from Churchill Falls. Don't worry about it."

Miss Johnson: (busy taking notes) Yes indeed...that was the Churchill Falls extension project, wasn't it?

Roberta: You know something about it?

Miss Johnson: Oh, yes...we discussed that at our last meeting, the other night---Any other complaints? (she says this quickly not wanting to answer any more questions about the project).

Charles: Well, yes, as a matter of fact. Did you happen to smell the river as you were crossing it tonight, Miss Johnson?

Miss Johnson: Smell the river? You'd better believe I smelt the river! Worst stench I've ever come across. I don't know which was worse - the waves threatening to knock me into the water, or the smell threatening to drive me out!

Charles: Well, we've been wondering when the government will begin the clean-up project they've been promising this past two years.

Miss Johnson: That's the problem with this province, I'm afraid. Why didn't you pressure the township to prevent the pollution ten years ago, rather than pressure them now to clean it up? It would have cost far less money...

Miss Hatch: Why didn't we do something 10 years ago? Miss Johnson, we did everything we could to fight the Terrington Basin Waste Disposal. We wrote petitions, we held meetings, we advertised on T.V.... why didn't you do something?

Miss Johnson: You must remember, Ma'am, I wasn't responsible for Mud Lake, 10 years ago. As a matter of fact, I wasn't even living in this province, then...

Paula: What is this meeting about, anyway, Miss Johnson?

Miss Johnson: (nervous) - Well, now, that's a good question. A very good question. I was just getting to that. Ummm... is the school teacher here?

Miss Hatch: Yes, I'm the school teacher, Elizabeth Hatch.

Miss Johnson: Glad you could make it, Miss Hatch. Were you able to bring the register?

Miss Hatch: (taking it out) - Yes, here it is.

Miss Johnson: Fine, now could you please read us the present enrollment in Mud Lake School?

Miss Hatch: Yes, there's Sandy Best, grade 7, Amy Rose, Grade 8, Pat Broomfield, grade 5, Luke Brown, grade 2, and Tom Brown, in Kindergarten.

Miss Johnson: Is that all?

Miss Hatch: Yes, I'm afraid so. A number of families with children have had to move away these past few years, because they wanted their sons and daughters to finish high school. The dorm in North West River closed 12 years ago, and for some families, no other arrangement ever became available, except to leave.

Miss Johnson: (sighs) Yes, I'm aware of that. And this brings me to my main reason for coming here tonight, ladies and gentlemen.

What's that?

Miss Johnson: Well, the government has advised me that in June this year, it will be closing the school in Mud Lake.

(The crowd gasps -- there are words of shock and anger)

Miss Johnson: I'm sorry. I'm sure, it comes as a great shock to you. But I'm afraid that with only 5 children going to school, we can't afford to keep the school running, any longer.

Pat: That's ridiculous, Miss Johnson. We've always had a school in Mud Lake.

Sevilla: You can't ask 7 and 8 year-old children to board in the valley.

Paula: My boys are too young to cross the river each day to go to school.

Roberta: Well, if that's the way the government feels, let them keep their money. The people here in Mud Lake can hire their own teacher.

General voices: Yeah, that's right, etc.

Miss Johnson: Have you got any idea how much it costs to pay a teacher's salary now? Plus the upkeep of a school for an entire year?

Charles: She's right you know. We'd never be able to pay a teacher at today's salary.

Kim: Well, maybe someone would volunteer to teach - you know, for room and board.

Roberta: Are you kidding? Who's going to do that?

Paula: Anyway, I want a qualified teacher to teach my children. No qualified teacher is going to work for nothing.

Virginia: Well, what are we going to do? We can't just pack up and leave!

Miss Johnson: Ah, but this brings me to my good news. You can pick up and leave - every single one of you!

Several Voices: What do you mean? Now what? etc.

Miss Johnson: Ladies and gentleman. I've listened to your complaints, phone, power, polluted water. Do you think those things are going to improve? They can't improve. And do you know why? Because Mud Lake is too small, that's why. There aren't enough of you left here to make it possible to provide you with good services.

Look at what you have to put up with. You must cross that river in storms and dangerous conditions, even if you're sick or old. Imagine a sick person crossing in a boat or kamatik in freezing weather!

Pat: Miss Johnson, we've been doing that for years and years, and we don't mind. If we minded that, we'd have left years ago, and we wouldn't need anyone to come here and suggest it to us.

Miss Johnson: Let me go on a bit, please. Consider your children. Think of the benefits they'd have, going to a larger school. Think of the swimming pools, the science labs, the ---

Paula: Yes - and think of the teenage crime in the larger schools. Think of the families moving in among strangers, leaving their homes...

Miss Johnson: (interrupting) And think of the better nutrition you'd be able to offer them, in a larger town. What shape is your fresh fruit in, by the time you get it from Happy Valley to Mud Lake?

Kim: You should've seen my bananas this week. Frozen to mush! And it's only October...

Others: (cutting her off) Shhh!

Miss Johnson: Yes, I'm sure it's very difficult to get fresh foods here. You would find life so much easier and healthier in a place where you could shop at the stores...

Sevilla: Miss Johnson, we have plenty of fresh food in Mud Lake, nearly every family has a vegetable garden.

Virginia: And all kinds of berries - redberries, blueberries, wild currants, raspberries.

Pat: And wild meat. Moose, partridge, ducks, geese rabbits.

Miss Johnson: Ah, but there's more than nutrition to be considered. What about jobs? Where do you work, sir?

Nelson: Goose Bay.

Miss Johnson: And you, Ma'am?

Sevilla: Happy Valley.

Miss Johnson: And you?

Charles: Well, I don't have a job this fall, Miss Johnson.

Miss Johnson: Ah-ha! No jobs! And you, ma'am.

Roberta: I run the Post Office.

Miss Johnson: Well, I'm afraid that as of August, there will be no post office in Mud Lake. You don't have enough people living here, anymore.

Paula: Wait a minute! What's going on here?

Miss Johnson: Which is yet another reason for leaving Mud Lake at this time. Think of the job opportunities available in larger areas!

Charles: Larger areas? What places are you talking about?

Miss Johnson: Why, Goose Bay, St. John's, Corner Brook.

Miss Hatch: Miss Johnson, we read the newspapers, just the same as you do. The chance of getting work in those places is just as slim these days as getting work here.

Miss Johnson: (ignoring her) And then there's Quebec, Ontario, B.C., Alberta/...

Roberta: You know what they're trying to do? They're trying to resettle us!

Charles: We know all about resettlement. We've seen what it does to families in other parts of this province, Miss Johnson. The government moves people to larger towns. They can't find work there. The government ends up having to pay their way.

Pat: No one's going to re-settle us, Miss Johnson. They tried to convince us to leave Mud Lake in the 1960's, and we wouldn't go then. And we're not going now. We love our homes.

(Song - "Hard, Hard Times")

Miss Johnson: Ladies, gentlemen, I'm sorry I've caused such a stir. I haven't come here to force you to do any-thing. I'm just giving you the facts. The school will be closed in June. The post office will shut down in August. The government is cutting back on services to small communities. I'm just offering you a chance to have better lives - to give your children better lives.

Charles: Better lives, yes. And I bet I know what's coming next. You're going to offer us a few thousand dollars to give up our homes and heritage for this "better life". Well, thank you, but no thank-you, Miss Johnson.

Miss Johnson: \$50,000.00.

Everyone: What?

Miss Johnson: We're offering \$50,000.00 to every family willing to move from Mud Lake to Happy Valley.

Kim: \$50,000.00! Are you kidding?

Miss Johnson: Absolutely not. And we will pay for all moving expenses, too.

Nelson: Where is the government going to get all this money?

Miss Johnson: From various sources. I'm not prepared...

Paula: (interrupting) If the government has that kind of money, why can't they spend it on making it possible for us to stay here in Mud Lake? I'll bet it would be cheaper...

Virginia: What about our houses?

Miss Johnson: Well, we've been advised that many people in Happy Valley-Goose Bay are looking for vacation homes. The government will be accepting bids on your houses, to help re-pay the cost of moving you out.

Paula: You're moving us out of our houses so you can move someone else in?

Miss Johnson: Strictly for vacation use.

Pat: Miss Johnson, you're talking about our homes, the places we all grew up in, you don't just shuffle people around...

Miss Johnson: (looking at watch and cutting in) - Ladies and gentlemen, I have have to get back to Goose Bay for a night-flight to Halifax. And I can certainly see that you need time to think this over. I'll tell you what. I'll be back in 2 weeks. You can give me your decisions then. It was nice to meet you all... (starts to walk out).

Charles: Miss Johnson, what if we don't want to leave? Will you take our part, down in St. John's?

Miss Johnson: Well now, really - I don't know...

Charles: Miss Johnson, what would you do if someone asked you to leave the place you'd loved and worked for all your life, and gave you reasons as shallow as the ones we just heard?

Miss Johnson: I have to run, now - We'll discuss matters further in 2 weeks' time...

Charles: (as she leaves) You can't answer me, can you, Miss Johnson? I thought politicians were supposed to have answers....

(Long, shocked silenced)

Kim: Well, let's go home. I need a cup of tea, after that.
(She starts to leave, and Virginia and Nelson join her)

Paula: Hey, wait a minute. Two weeks isn't much time. Don't you think we'd better talk this all over, among ourselves?

Roberta: I hate to say it, but Johnson did have some good points.

Kim: Yes, I just can't stop thinking about my poor bananas...

Charles: You think about your bananas much more, you're going to turn into a banana....

(Charles and Kim look like they're about to fight)

Sevilla: Come on, guys, this is no time to argue. We've got to do some serious thinking.

Various People: It's true/You're right/Okay, etc.

Virginia: The river is bad, and that's a fact.

Roberta: The children can't even swim in it anymore.

Pat: And the fish aren't fit to eat...

Miss Hatch: Is is really that bad?

Others: Bad?

Paula: Show her, Pat....

As others look on, Pat appears from behind the "flat". He is jigging for trout. Everyone sings "The Dirty River Song" (to the tune of "Grand River Song")

(Pat, Nelson, and Roberta return to the group)

Virginia: The River's pretty bad, alright.

Charles: It's too bad they didn't listen to us 10 years ago.

Paula: I'm not even thinking about the river! What about our children? How can they just close the school on us?

Sevilla: Well, you heard her. You really can't expect them to keep it open for 5 children.

Nelson: I guess we should have seen this coming, all along.

Paula: It's a smaller group every year, isn't it, Miss Hatch?

Miss Hatch: It sure is...

Pat: What's it like teaching only 5 children, Miss Hatch?

Miss Hatch: Well, come out to the school and I'll show you.

(Kim, Miss Hatch, Virginia, Charles, Roberta, and Sevilla disappear behind flat. Miss Hatch appears on side, ushering in "children".)

Miss Hatch: Good morning, children. I'm sorry we haven't got any chairs for you this year, but the school board can't afford to let us have chairs, any-more. So sit on the floor, please - Kindergarten and grade one here, grade five here, and grade 7 and 8 here. Now, grade 8, take out your geometry book - page one... Grade 7 literature, page 11, Grade 5, your speller, please, Unit 1.... (faces Kindergarten & grade two) and we'll do our "A,B, C's". Are you ready?

(Mud Lake Alphabet Song)

Miss Hatch: That's what it's like teaching only 5 children. Class dismissed.

(Students and Miss Hatch return to the semi-circle)

Nelson: Well, it looks like we've got to leave, doesn't it?

Roberta: That's what it looks like, alright. The river is ruined, the school's going to be closed, the post office....

Virginia: Miss Johnson had another point - In this day and age it is shocking to have to risk your life crossing the river, just to get your groceries.

Pat: That's foolishness, Virginia. That river's never been too much for us to handle, before. You just have to have the skill and the courage to put up with the bad times. That's part of what makes us Mud Lakers.

Miss Hatch: Well, I can say one good thing about Mud Lake. I've done a lot of traveling in my life, and Mud Lake is definitely one of the most beautiful places I've ever seen.

Kim: And it's good knowing your neighbors, and knowing that you don't have to keep your doors locked all day...

Paula: It's certainly a good place to bring up children. Children spend more time with their families here than they do in bigger places. They learn to help out more at home. There's no teen-age crime keeping them out late at night.

Charles: And people can do more for themselves, here. We can grow or trap a lot of our own food. We don't have to pay big heating bills, because there's more than enough firewood for everybody in Mud Lake.

Pat: And where else can you go skidooing right out your back door? Mud Lake is one of the best places around for hunting and trapping...

Nelson: (cuts in) Yeah, but what about the school, the post office, the jobs we don't have, the money we could get for our families? There's more to life than hunting and trapping, Pat, and you may as well realize it. Wake up, boy! It's the 1990's!

Pat: You wake up, Nelson. We'll never have it as good as we have it here!

Nelson: Well, maybe that's right for you, buddy, but it's not right for me. 50,000 dollars is a lot of money. My family needs that money.

Pat: (Standing) Go on, then. Sell yourself for 50,000 dollars. Sell your wife and your children, too...

Nelson: (cutting in) I'm not selling anything, Pat -- I'm just facing the facts, which is something you're gonna have to do too someday.

Pat: Facing the facts, eh? I'll show you some facts --

(they start to fight)

Sevilla: (breaking in) Come on - this is no time to be fighting. We can't solve things like this...

Nelson: (after a long pause) You're right, Sevilla. The only way to solve this is for each person to do what they think is right. And that's what I'm going to do, Pat. Please don't try and stop me.

(He walks out, as music starts. Everyone begins singing except Pat, who sits staring down at the floor).

(One by one, people walk out, until he is all alone. Then he, too, walks out).

(See song - "Farewell to Mud Lake")

After Pat leaves, there is a moment's silence. Then, "Homeward Bound" starts again, as Pat, an old man, comes out in front of curtains(or flats?)

Pat: And so, you see, that's what happened back in 1992. Everyone ended up leaving Mud Lake. Oh - a few of us stuck it out for awhile, but the families with children had to leave. And then it just got too lonely...I wish we'd never left our homes...

(Sevilla, an old woman now, walks out).

Sevilla: That's not what happened, at all. Don't mind him- he's kind of old, and he gets confused... We didn't leave. We decided to do what we'd always done before - we all worked together until the government realized they couldn't drive us out. We took up a collection, and got enough together to pay a teacher - not much, of course, but enough to keep one for awhile. We didn't mind about the Post Office - we just took turns going to the Valley for the community mail.

Finally, the government gave in - we got back our school, our post office, and a 5-year program that almost cleaned up the river. Mud Lake is the same old place, today.

(Roberta, also old, comes out)

Roberta: Did you ever see such a babbling pair of old fools?

Roberta:

They're not telling you the truth, at all.
We got ourselves a new sawmill, a Uranium
Processing Plant, and a great big souvenir
factory. Hundreds of people have moved to
Mud Lake over the past 40 years - We've got
two schools, a movie theatre, Mary Brown's, a
shopping mall, and a 3-lane bridge across the
Churchill River. We're a booming metropolis!
Why, just last week they completed a brand new
hi-rise apartment building, here!

(Song)

"Farewell to Mud Lake"

On the bank of a river is a mall, quiet place
Where we've always had freedom, and plenty of space,
Farewell, pretty Mud Lake, I bid you adieu;
But I'll dream of you, Mud Lake, wherever I go.

Where once we had concerts, and in June the church fair;
Oh, how will it seem when there's nobody there?
Farewell, pretty Mud Lake, I bid you adieu;
But I'll dream of you, Mud Lake, wherever I go.

We don't want to leave you, it saddens our hearts,
But the times are against us, and we must depart,
Farewell, pretty Mud Lake, I bid you adieu,
But I'll dream of you, Mud Lake, wherever I go.

HARD, HARD TIMES

1. Come all you good people, I'll sing you a song,
About the Mud Lakers, how we get along
We work all our lifetimes to have a nice home,
Then the government says to give up what we own,
And it's hard, hard times.
2. They say we'd do better to move to a town,
Especially since our old school's closing down
Our river's too dirty to breathe or to drink
But we warned them ten years ago that it would stink,
And it's hard, hard times.
3. They say that our power will soon be shut down,
They're trying to turn Mud Lake into a ghost town
The next thing you know they will cut off our phones
And then we will all have to leave our old homes,
And it's hard, hard times.
4. Is the best thing to do to give in with a will,
Or would fighting to stay here be much better still?
We must think of our children and our future, it's clear,
But we know in our hearts we'd be happiest here,
And it's hard, hard times.

MUD LAKE 1992 ALPHABET SONG

"A" is for all of us still here today
"B" for the Best clan who all moved away
"C" for the Callahans - they could stay
And "D" for the Dysons who left Saturday.

"E" for Evelyn and Willie - their family's all grown,
"F" for Frank Hope's bunch - they've all left home
"G" for the government who left them no choice
And "H" for our homes - we don't get much voice.

"I" for I'm the only one in grade 5
"J" for more jobs to keep Mud Lake alive,
"K" for Kenemich - we'll soon be like it,
"L" is for Labrador - all torn to bits.

"M" is for Mud Lake, growing smaller each day
"N" is for nobody's able to stay
"O" for the outcome - what will it be?
And "P" for the problems we didn't foresee.

"Q" for the question that we soon must face,
"R" for our river that's loaded with waste,
"S" for our school here - it can't last too long,
And "T" for that's all we can put in this song.