

BASQUE WHALER IN MY BASEMENT

Beginning Narration: (Selma Barkham can be seen in the background doing research.)

In the early seventies Mrs. Selma Barkham from Hull, Quebec, out of personal interests, was conducting some research in Spain. While going through the Spanish Archives she found many references to a whaling industry which was located somewhere in North America. Evidence in the form of insurance claims and wills indicated that one of the locations was a place called Butus on the South Labrador coast.

Upon returning to Canada she discussed her findings with officials from Parks Canada and from the Nfld. and Lab. Provincial Dept. of Culture, Recreation and Youth. The site, Butus, was determined to be located at Red Bay. Hence, in 1975 the Provincial Government sent an archeological team, led by Dr. James Tuck of Memorial University, to Red Bay in search of evidence. Parks Canada also sent an underwater team led by Robert Grenier, to look for the wreck of the Basque Galeon - San Juan. Both survey teams were successful. As a result of their success survey teams have returned to Red Bay every year. And every year, new discoveries have been made. It is our belief that as the search continues, even more interesting things will be unveiled.

Thus, the drama of the Basque Whalers unfolds.

SCENE ONE :

(It's Sunday morning. Ma and Pa are dressed and in the kitchen. Pa is drinking coffee and Ma is setting the table for breakfast. Herbert and Lil enter, dressed in bathrobes. They get their morning coffee and sit down to drink it. Pancakes are frying in the pan on the stove.)
Pa (looking at watch): Time for you two to be gettin' up. You young ones is gonna 'ave your senses slept away. Don't understand it meself. Works half as hard as us and needs twice as much sleep.

Herbert: Pa boy, tis Sunday. What's there to get up for on a Sunday morning?

Pa: For good manners if fer nuttin' else. You should have finished school like your brother Phil. He's made a fine lawyer of himself and what's you?

Ma (Getting up to tend the frying pan): Be quiet Pa boy! Yer always puttin' down poor 'Erbert.

Lil: Yes Pa. I think you should be proud of what 'Erbert' is.

Pa: What do you mean - proud? Sure he don't know when to come home.

Leaves at four o'clock in the mornin' and we don't see him anymore 'til eight or nine o'clock in the night. Wouldn't mind it only when he do come home he stinks of fish.

Ma (Taking pancakes out of frying pan): Pa sure you used to do the same thing. But never you mind that now. Come and get your pancakes.

Herbert: Yes mudder ma' d. I'm starved.

(They all sit in for breakfast.)

Pa (Taking a bite): Ma, der jus' like the ones poor old mudder used to make.

Ma(Rubbing her hair proudly): Tank ya' Pa.

Pa: Soggy as a 'ole wet dishrag.

Ma (Hitting Pa): You brazen ting after all!

Lil: That's lies Pa said dere Ma. T's the best ones I ever put in me mout.

Pa(noticing that there are only two slices of bread on the breadplate) Got the bread rationed out dis mornin' 'ave ya Ma maid?

Ma: No boy. Plenty down in the basement in the grub room. I'll 'ave to go down and get some I s'pose.

(Ma exits)

Ma (Voice coming from backstage): Pa! 'Erbert! One of yous come down and kick that dog to blazes! He's down here again diggin' 'oles over around the well.

Pa: "Erbert you go down 'cause if I gotta' go down, this is the morning Ma might lose her dog.

(Herbert gets up to go to basement)

I don't know what he's so interested in but he's always down there lately sniffin' the ground.

Herbert(Voice coming from backstage): Pa! Come quick and see what the dog got dug up.

Pa (Getting up off chair): My oh my. No rest fer me weary bones. Hope he haven't got me case of moonshine dug up! (Clamps hand over mouth as if he has revealed a secret.)

(Pa exits stage. Him, Ma and Herbert come back, Herbert carrying a skull in his hands.)

Herbert(Holding skull for Lil to see): Look what we found! Might be one of them Indians.

Pa: Don't get excited now. Sure look! Got his mouth open. Must be one of your crowd Ma....

Lil: I think we should show it to Jim Tuck. His crowd will know what it is.

Pa: Perhaps they will. But sure what do dey know? They only went to university.

Herbert: Well I'm going to take it over and show it to him anyway. Fer sure he'll be interested enough to 'ave a look at it.

(Herbert exits)

Pa: That boy! Whas I goin' to do wit'n? Haven't even got enough sense to put on a bit of clothes!

CURTAIN

SCENE TWO:

Pa is sitting down whitling. Lil and Ma are washing dishes. Herbert enters.

Herbert: What ya doin' Pa?

Pa: Makin' a house. What's it look like?

Lil: Did you see Jim Tuck?

Herbert: Yes I seen him all right.

Lil: What did he say?

Herbert: He's not right sure. They gotta' do dem tests - you know - the ones they do on bones. He tink the skull belongs to one of them Basque Whalers.

Pa: What ya mean? Like dem ones der diggin' up over on Saddle Island?

Herbert: That's the kind. He might be around to have a look in our basement later on this evening.

Pa: Jim Tuck lookin' in me basement! No 'arm to say - a man's got no privacy these days! And sure the stat's down there, he'll tink Ma's done neither bit of cleanin' for years!

Ma: Pa boy, don't be so foolish. The man's only human. Let him have a look if he wants to. No bigger state down there than he's seen in his days fer sure.

(Aknock is heard at the door)

Pa: Umph! Later on come soon enough didn't it?

Ma; Shut up Pa boy and mind yer manners. (Roars out) Come in!

Jim Tuck enters.

Tuck: Good afternoon Mr. & Mrs. Pike. Herbert (nods toward him). Lil
(nods toward her): How are you today?

Pa: We're all right I s'pose. I guess you're here to have a look in our
basement. Young Herbert here tells me you got a hunch that skull
might belong to a **Basque Whaler**.

Tuck: Don't get excited now sir and jump the gun. Yes, it's true that
the skull might belong to a whaler. But we won't know for sure
until our people do their lab research.

Ma: Dat's right Pa. You gets all excited over nothing. (Speaking to
Tuck) Mr. Tuck, I'll show you to the basement now if you wish to
have a look.

Tuck: Thank you Mrs. Pike. I really appreciate you letting me do a
little searching.

(Ma and Tuck exit)

Pa(Grumbling under his breath): Don't know what he expects to find.
He's fortune I s'pose.

Herbert: Don't worry Pa. Don't go gettin' yerself all worked up! He'll
be down there and back in a jiffy.

Ma enters.

Pa: You left he down there! Give 'en full run of the basement? Next
ting we knows he'll be askin' us to leave so he can 'ave a good
root!

Lil: Leave Ma alone! And he's not goin' to hurt nothing down there. Pa boy! I don't know what would happen to you if you was around strangers all the time.

Ma: Yes Pa. Yer fussin' over nothing. If yer not careful your blood pressure is goin' to hit the ceiling!

Lil: It's just as well to leave him alone. Come on. Let's fix a cup of tea for Mr. Tuck. Sure he'd love to 'ave some good homemade bread and jam before he goes.

Pa; Cup of tea! 'Tis not bad enough that we let 'en in here to tear up our basement! Now you wants to feed 'en too!

Ma: Shut up boy! How bad do you tink the poor man is goin' to feel if he hears you talkin' like dat? You got no tact at all Pa.

(Jim returns from basement)

Pa: So you've done rootin' already. Find anything?

Tuck: Yes as a matter of fact I did. I dug down around where the skull was discovered and I found alot of interesting things. Depending on what the lab reports say when the tests on the skull are completed, we could find that your house is sitting on a burial ground belonging to the Basque Whalers.

Pa: God boy! Frighten the women to death now will ya? I knew nothing good could come of this.

Ma: (Giving Pa a stern look) Well sir(speaking to Tuck) we'll just have to wait and see. Now, would you like to have a cup of tea before you go?

Tuck: Why thank you. That would be very nice.

Ma: Come and sit down here then. (Motions to chair). Tuck goes to chair and sits down after taking off his coat.

CURTAIN

SCENE THREE:

One evening after supper, about two weeks after Tuck's first visit to the Pike's house. Pa is laid back reading his newspaper. Ma and Lil are knitting, sitting at the kitchen table. Herbert has just come in from fishing and is eating his supper.

Pa: Ma maid that bread you give Jim Tuck must have been some bad. Said he was goin' to come back. That was two weeks ago and we haven't seen him since.

(Knock at the door)

Pa: Who's dat agin now?

Lil: Could be anyone. I'll check the door.

(Lil goes to door and her voice is heard off stage. She sounds surprised.)

Lil: Oh, good evening Mr. Tuck. How nice of you to call on us again. Come in.

(Lil, Tuck and Edna Hall enter)

Tuck: Good evening everyone.

Ma and Herbert: Good evening sir.

(Pa sort of glares up over his paper.)

Tuck: Everyone, I'd like you to meet Edna Hall who works for Parks Canada. (Tuck carries out introductions)

Ma; Would you care to have a seat?

Tuck: Thank you. (Him and Edna sit down)

Pa: (Putting down his newspaper) I s'pose you're here to tell us we got dem Basque Whalers in our basement?

Tuck: I'm afraid so. I have good news and bad news. The good news is that your house is indeed sitting on a Basque Burial Ground. The bad news is that we may very well have to ask you to move your house.

(Everyone looks shocked)

Herbert and Pa: Move the house!

Pa: You knows boy I'm goin' to move me house! What foolishness! Can't you jus' go down the basement and dig up what you wants?

Hall: Now Mr. Pike, you wouldn't want an archeological team diggin' in your basement while you were living here, would you? The best thing for everyone involved is for you to relocate your house

Pa: 'Tis not very easy you know movin' a house. The way you talks about it, makes it sound as if you tinks I can jus' pick up me house here and carry it on me back and put it down in the basin somewhere. T'Would be a great life if we was turtles!

Tuck: Sir, we're not trying to say that it's simple. But there must be people here you could get to help you. And as for the finances of it, well, we can get financial help for you.

Hall: That's correct sir. Parks Canada has money put aside for ventures such as this. It wouldn't cost you anything to move.

Herbert: And yes Pa. You've been talkin' about jackin' up the house anyway and puttin' a concrete basement under it. Now's your chance to get it done. Only difference is we'll be puttin' it on another piece of land.

Pa: (To Herbert) 'Tis easy for you to talk. (To Tuck and Hall) The money is only a part of it sir. Me family has occupied this piece of land fer years - me father and his father before 'em. I don't think that it should be allowed that you fellers can come in here and ask us to move.

Ma (To the rest of the family and to Tuck and Hall): Now 'tis not very often dat I agrees wit Pa but I've been sittin' here and listenin' and I tinks dis time I have to agree wit 'en. I don't know as I'd be able to content meself to live anywhere else.

Tuck: Mr. & Mrs. Pike, I understand how you feel but please understand that your moving will be for the benefit of your community in the end. The more burial sites we find, the better. And of course if we can get the Basque Whaling site developed, the tourist industry will be boomong.

Hall: Just think of what a prosperous tourist industry would do for the economy of this town.

Pa: It might do alot for our economy but it won't do much for our piece of mind. If something like that happens we'd never have anymore peace. Just imagine! Lockin' yer doors before you goes to the post office. And worse still lockin' 'em before you goes to bed!

Ma: Yes. There would be strangers here from everywhere. You wouldn't know who you could trust and who you couldn't.

Pa: 'Tis hard to say if we'd be better off or not. I'd say 'tis six of one and half a dozen of the other.

Hall: (Speaking directly to Tuck) Maybe we should leave the family alone to discuss the situation.

Tuck: Yes, I think they need some time to think about this.

Hall: (Speaking to the family) I trust you will seriously consider our request and then make the right decision.

Pa: 'Til be the right one all right but I don't know if it will be right fer you.

Ma: Now Pa, as Mr. Tuck and Miss Hall said, we have to discuss things

and try to figure out the best thing to do.

Hall: We'll be going then. We'll be hoping to hear from you real soon.

(Edna and Jim start walking toward the door)

Ma (Following Edna & Jim): We'll get in touch with you now as soon as we've made up our minds what we're going to do.

(Edna and Jim exit. Ma returns to kitchen)

Pa: Don't know why you're tryin' to be so nice to them. They're wantin' to move us lock, stock and barrel and you talk to them as if they're your friends.

Lil: Well Pa; the least you can do is show some manners.

[Herbert: Well boys what do you think we should do?

Pa: Humph! Knows what I'm goin' to do. I'm stayin'.

Ma: Well, we wouldn't get the wind the same in the basin.

Pa(Sarcastically): No, I s'pose you wouldn't now. Sure look at dat teacher - what's he's name - Paul - went and build he's house in the basin and sure the first good breeze blowin' out the brook blowed the roof clean off of her.

Herbert: Yes but now das the first time dat happened in years and t'aven't happened since.

Lil: S'pose if I was in the basin I could go down to visit Blance more often and see the story.

Pa; Yes and 'ave a little yarn. Why sure she be comin' home soon with a new baby. She'll have enough to do to mind he let alone havin' to entertain you.

Ma; We'd be able to hook into the town water and sewer.

Pa: That might be all right but I've auldwater all these years.

'Aulin' the bit I'm goun' to use in me next few years won't break me bones.

Ma: Yeah, but ~~you~~ don't want to get out and dump the slops do you?

Pa: Now maid, dat won't hurt ya! Only give you a bit of fresh air in the marnings.

Herbert: You know Pa, there's not so much snow lodges in the basin either.

Pa: Here he goes again. Finds it too much trouble to shovel a bit of snow. Why don't you take yer bit of money you made da summer boy and you and Lil go to Florida somewhere?

No, I don't care what anyone says. 'Tis not fair fer us to even 'ave to tink about movin' our house. ~~(Lights start to dim)~~ Goes in the basin somewhere what'll we have? A bit of crown land to put me house on -- mighten even be enough to build a shed. We got plenty of land here -- enough fer our garden and everything. No, I'm not movin'. (Lights go out completely)

ENDING Narration (Pa, Ma, Lil and Herbert are 'frozen' in the background)

The presented scenario, we hope and anticipate, will never become a reality. Although our community welcomes tourism with open arms, we do not want to be lost in its inactment. We want it to be a major contribution to our community's future.

Archeological excavations have unearthed the following:

1. Numerous Spanish Basque Whaling sites, including a burial ground. These date back to the 1500's.
2. Spanish Whaling Ship - San Juan, dating back to 1565.
3. InnuIt and Eskimo sites.
4. 4. French Fur Trading post dating back to the 1700's.

5. Oldest Co - op in Nfld. and Lab. '
6. Buildings used by the Floater Fisherman dating back to th
1840's.

Over the past several months our community has given direction to the Government about how we want the site to be developed. This direction is in the form of a proposal entitled "Developing the Past - Promoting the Future". The document clearly indicates the enormous potential of our community with respect to the tourist industry and states our opinion as to how the Historical Resources of Red Bay can be developed and how such development should proceed. The Red Bay Historic Site, without any doubt, will have not only local implications but regional, provincial, national and international implications as well.

However, as is evident in the preceeding drama, we do not want our community to be lost within its development. We want to maintain our present community the way it now is. We want to maintain and preserve fully, our identity, our heritage, our local traditions, our customs and our culture. The development must blend in and be a part of the community - yet still be a class one tourist attraction in facilities and otherwise.

As Pa indicated "Tis not fair for us to 'ave to even tink about movin' our house"! "The money is only a part of it sir."