

THE LIFE AND DEATH  
OF THE

CRY OF THE WILD RAM

1960 - 1992

AN ORAL HISTORY

WITH

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BY

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FOR

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hundred and twenty people to fill the cast and support people, get some good publicity and I will come over and direct the first presentation and you will have the world beating a pathway to your door." I said, "Is that all we have to do?"

Well... he wanted this to happen, because this was his legacy. This was his contribution to posterity. This is his bit, you know, his great work. If some community would adopt it, especially Kodiak, where a good part of it takes place, as you know, It would fulfill his dream. And so... he even said more he said "I'll even come over and direct it. Anchorage Community Theater will supply you with costumes and lights for the first performance and help you all we can." He was Anchorage Community Theater then.

So... he thought about it a little bit and said I'll come over and help you promote it. We got together and had that first meeting. And I can't remember whether that first meeting at our house was before or after Frank came over to the Chamber of Commerce meeting.

Well anyway the community was sold by one visit. I don't know how he got them so enthusiastic so that a record number of people came to this particular Chamber meeting to listen to Frank Brink describe outdoor drama and what it was like and what it was supposed to be, and what kind of an impact it had, and what kind of an impression it had, and what it did for a community and all of those things.

We did call a special Chamber meeting and we did announce that this author of this Alaska historic drama, much of which took place in Kodiak was coming down to tell the people about it. He talked about outdoor drama, and he talked about some he had seen and he talked about how realistic it was. I remember him talking about, I don't know which drama it was but I think it was in Montana or Wyoming....where they were sitting on the side of a hill..... this was in the day of early development of the west that they were portraying. There was a settlement down here and there were war canoes and Indians coming up a river on the other side of a hill form the settlement, and the people in the audience could see it and the .... and he said it was so realistic... and they knew they couldn't see it and they wanted to get up and say, "Look they're coming." That is just a little thing I remember.

But he talked about them. He talked about this drama a bit, and gee everybody got pretty enthusiastic.

That meeting in 1963, November.... November 11 with Walter Kraft, myself, Larry Mckinley, Erma Denny, Lola Harvey, Ella Mae Warren, Bill Lammey, John Warren, John Kustic, my wife, Marian, and Mary Heifner were there.

Well we met for several months. We formed a corporation in February, a non profit corporation. The purpose of the corporation as stated were several, but one was for the purpose perpetuating historic or outdoor drama in Kodiak and producing the "Cry of the Wild Ram." It also included









they said, yes they thought it would be possible to redesign the road and reroute it. Several letters were traded back and forth without anyone on the City Council hearing anything about it. Then it leaked. Somebody found out about it and oh boy! It hit the newspapers that the theater was going to hold up the road and that was an awful battle. I have the tape recording of the final City Council meeting where they finally agreed, with all the reassurances that we and the State could give them that it would not delay the highway to reroute it. It was the fourth meeting that we had gone to and five out of the six councilmen voted to allow us to go ahead. The sixth one was Fred Brechan. He voted against it, to be "consistent."

B.B The site was city property?

B.J. Yes, it was already leased to us for one dollar for fifty years. For the use producing the "Cry of the Wild Ram" and other recreational purposes.

That hurdle being passed we went ahead and built the site.

Frank came over....what a beast of a director. He came over. We borrowed talent wherever we could get it for nothing. We had people who happened to crop up out of the woods. The first guy who "worked in New York", he said, was the lighting technician...designed a horrible lighting trough right along between the audience and the playing area, a shed, with all the lights in it and the people had to look over the top of it. That was in 1966, the pilot production.





was very instrumental in putting together turnaround tours from Anchorage. Turnaround because there was no place for people to stay, so they would arrange a charter with an airplane. It would come over, land, people would come over see the play and then go back out and fly back the same night. At one time we bartered with the ferry system to get the ferry to stop on its three Saturday trips to bring people over and be a sitting motel for them. They would go to the play and then go back on the ferry. The ferry was packed everyone of those nights. There was one night that the ferry didn't get in for the play. As a matter of fact it was the only storm that the wind blew so hard the acoustics were such that we couldn't put on the play. That was the only night we didn't put on the play, but that night we didn't put on the play because they couldn't hear us it was that noisy. That is the only night.

B.B. It has been put on in some inclement weather.

B.J. Oh yeah!! It has been put on in veritable down pours. I remember one night standing in the castle set getting ready to sing the "Pyesnya Baronov" wondering if anyone is going to be out there, peeking through a little peek hole, see about maybe one hundred fifty people in the stands and a few more straggling down the pathway with capes over them. It was pouring. so we talked it over and I said, "These people came, why don't we go out and say, 'We will put on a special performance next Tuesday for you if you don't want to stay, but if you want to stick it out we'll play' ". They voted to stick it out and it poured all night. All the costumes were soaked all the people were soaked, but they never forgot that experience. Neither







lantern that's the moon" "storms over" comes out of this priest. Oh, dear. so anyway so where were we.

B.B. Well, the next.

B.J. Oh, yeah. That's all I played, I think. Oh no. I played Lozarev whom you don't see often. Nasty fellow. Lozarvev really didn't follow any orders and he gave Baranov a very bad time. He swore out complaints against and he was the reason for the trial. They never did implicate Baranov though of making off with any money. I guess the man was scrupulous honest. He is another one of those dedicated souls who just has to earn his own reason for existence by doing something outstanding at the trial.

B.B. Well now the "Ram" has undergone drastic changes from the play that was written and produced here in '60.

B.J. Yeah. I guess it should be understood that Frank brought the play over, directed the first performance, bought over the instruments, brought over the costumes and helped a great deal. Gave a lot of the instruments and costumes to us. And we finally sort of managed to struggle along and do it on our own without him. Then we decided to pay him 5% royalty and that's all he got. He, in fact, told us that it was ours but he didn't actually legally transfer it to us. But he let us know it was ours and we treated that way so every time a new director came along, it would change. I think Gerry Wilson was probably responsible for the biggest

change. He dressed it up with music and costumes and the Balalaika orchestra. He made it kind of like of like a Hollywood production for a few years and that was all very nice. It wasn't as rustic and it wasn't as rugged and powerful anymore. And other directors came along and fiddle with it, each doing their own thing and each interpreting things their own way and it was influenced by the opinion of the orthodox people and it was influenced by the opinion of the native people. What the directors did and they all wanted to appease everyone. And it became everyone's pageant instead of the powerful historic drama written by a man. It had a point of view, it had its own violence.

B.B. Did the directors then work off of the last production rather than going back to the original one.

B.J. Yeah, often. I don't know if any of them ever went back to the original script. I think probably a few did. I don't think Cliff used the original script.

So it did change. I think the best way saying it got changed was that the high points got leveled off and the low points got pulled up a bit. It became a little bit more professional and a little less dramatic. When Frank directed it and the way he intended it, there were some very poignant episodes that should have been played very carefully and should have had their own dramatic impact. I think you can probably pick out what those were. The initial one was when Baranov finally being in a desperate financial position himself, agreed to take over the managership















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