

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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INSTRUCTOR

BB. Where did the concept come from?

BJ. The concept. Where did the concept come from. Who's concept?

BB. The concept for the Cry of the Wild Ram.

BJ. Well the concept came from the author. The author was Frank O. Brink. I don't know what the "O" stands for to this day. But he was the Associate Professor of Speech and Drama at the Alaska Methodist University at the time I... at the time the seed was sown for the development of the "Cry of the Wild Ram. But prior to that, years prior to that he had been one of five understudies to Paul Greene at the University of North Carolina, who was known as the father of outdoor drama in the United States, who is the author of "Lost Colony" which was being presented, which is still being presented in Roanoke Island, and all of the other four understudies of which Kermit Hunter is one...and the guy who wrote Texas, which is another outdoor drama in Texas that might have been Kermit Hunter... but the other four had all written outdoor dramas but Frank had not.

So when he got to Alaska, as a matter of fact he was in the Navy up here, in the forties when I was a kid. He was in the Navy on Kodiak. He put on a show as a matter of fact, he put on "South Pacific" with all men, all sailors, playing the male and female parts, and shipped all around Alaska and played everywhere there was a military establishment and there were

little ones all over the place. And he also put on a little historic pageant while he was here and my folks met him and I met him the first time. I was probably somewhere between twelve and sixteen at that time, had already gotten interested in...I had already gotten interested in Alaska history but having come from Portland to Kodiak and starting high school here and getting Alaska history in school. It was a fascinating history to me then. Probably more fascinating than it is now. But it was really fascinating then, and it was a little town probably about five hundred and fifty people then but growing rapidly because of the war. So I really got interested in history. Well anyway that is a little background.

Frank produced this in 1960, on stage, wrote the drama because he was the fifth understudy that hadn't yet. Researched it for several years while he was at Alaska Methodist University, which is now I think Alaska Pacific University.....and read a lot of correspondence that he had translated by Baronov to Father Joseph, that was written by Father Joseph to his priest, that was written by Khlebnikov, actually we have Khlebnikov's history of that twenty seven year period when he was here with him. He took much his play from the correspondence as well as from the historic references he used. He used Bancroft which is a little boring. he also used, and I am sure was influenced by Hector Chevigny's "Lord of Alaska". If you read that you will notice the similarities...particularly the part that comes to my mind is the enterprise scene. Where Baronov got Hubble and O'Cane were competing for the cargo by drinking, trying to drink each other under the table.

He did write this drama and presented it in Anchorage in 1960, I knew nothing about it until Yule Chaffin bumped into me on the street one day. Yule Chaffin, you know, was a history buff, still is. She just glowed with enthusiasm, told me about this four hour extravaganza that this wonderful man Frank Brink had written. They had hunters running down the hill firing muskets. In spite of the fact or because of the fact that it was four hours long, I mean in spite of the fact it got a standing ovation.

"Its the history of Kodiak, it should be here", she said. I agreed of course. that must have been 1962 or 1961. But gee we didn't have a hundred foot stage here. It was a stage play in Anchorage, staged at West High Auditorium.

Two years it was presented in Anchorage and then he quit. what he thought was going to happen or hoped was going to happen, Frank Brink, he hoped the community was going to take it over. Which is what it is supposed to do. A historic drama in its own community which has one foot in its own history so to speak, will sponsor a drama and will keep it going for years and the residents will play in it. That is the way it goes historical around the nation. They have about seventeen of these around the country. Probably there were eleven, or twelve, or thirteen of these when this was started.

So we both agreed, and that was that.

In the summer of '62 Marian and I were wondering around Alaska Methodist

University, why we were there, I don't know. We were wondering along and here on a door was the name Frank O. Brink, Associate Professor of Speech and Drama. Inside was the click klack of a typewriter, so I knew somebody was in there and I said, "Marian I want to see this guy". I stepped up to the door, took a deep breath listened, the typewriter was still going. I knocked on the door. The typewriter stopped and this voice said, "Come in". So I went in. I introduced myself. "Oh yes, your from Kodiak. Yes I know your parents well. Yes I think we've met." I said, I wanted to talk to you about the "Cry of the Wild Ram. "Aha," he said, "it belongs in Kodiak".

Now you see it had stopped being produced in 1962. That must have been just before I got to see him. He decided not to do it any more because the community was not supporting it. You must understand, Frank is an egotist, a very egocentric person, a very, I think, a quite remarkable ingenious person. He is a powerful personality and he writes powerfully. You don't recognize it because of what has happened to the drama in the last twenty two years, but it was much more powerful to begin with. Much more rugged and much more rustic, and more appealing to the male population which is interesting because most males don't like theater, at least fishing..in fishing towns they don't, but some of the greatest objectors to this thing when they did see it were surprised that they liked it. I think that it was because it was such a rustic, rough kind of a thing.

But anyway. I said, "Yes yes I think it belongs in Kodiak but I don't know if we can swing it." He said, "All you have to do is find a site for a theater. It has to be an outdoor theater. Build an amphitheater, find about one

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

all other forms of artistic endeavor, including performing arts, visual arts, music, and so forth. In other words the ground work was laid right then for what is now the Arts Council, which is what Kodiak Baronov Productions has become.

BB. The corporation was initially incorporated as Kodiak Baronov Productions?

B.J. Yeah. Initially. It took over... well actually it didn't take over any other function for a while. The business and professional women used to bring in a winter concert series that was called Alaska Music Trail. There would be three or four concerts a year and then they dropped it. And then we in Kodiak formed a very loose organization called Lyceum. No officers, no nothing. We didn't want to get organized. We thought that was inartistic. We took over that winter concert series and then finally it became a function of K.B.P.I. as well. As did everything else.

The summer of 1963 I think we started preparing the site. I remember a meeting in the old Belmont cafe.... at a booth in the Belmont cafe I had a meeting with Russ Wright, Russ Welborn, and Red Blonden, and one other contractor.....Tenny yeah. I said, "Look we're going to build an outdoor theater." We found this piece of property by the way, and Frank came over and looked at it. The slant of the hill above the swamp, and it was really a swamp, was just right for acoustics, he felt. It was surrounded by trees and the beautiful view across the bay and Monashka mountain was right there. There was not a sign of human habitation. He thought it was

perfect.

It was a cemetery site belonging to the city. They had had one burial there. It was Dick Lightfoot, who came to Kodiak with Norm Sutliff in 1939. Neither of them had anything but the small change in their pocket. They tried to bury him there but the water table was so high that the coffin floated and they had to weight it down with a lot of big rocks. So they were a little discouraged about using it for a cemetery site which was very fortunate because about this time our corporation said, "We would like to lease this from you for a recreation site if we can get the use changed from cemetery site to a recreational site. That all happened so then we started to work.

Now, back to the meeting in the Belmont. I said, "We need to build an outdoor theater. We have the site. We have to clear a big area for a parking lot, we've got to fill a swamp to use for a playing area and we're going to need lots of heavy equipment work and lots of labor. Would you guys be willing to let us use your heavy equipment if we promise you if we should ever make a profit, to pay you."

They said, "Yes". They all said, "Yes, if you find the drivers and the labors we will do that. "

I doubt anybody ever seriously thought we would ever make a profit but they might have. We didn't play any games, we just said, "If we make a profit we will pay".

They supplied bulldozers, ditch diggers and what ever you call all those things, pulled down the trees in the parking area shoved them over the bank, and then filled all the gravel in there and leveled off that spot. Then they went down below and they just brought in load after load of fill and filled it right on top of the swamp. They dug that one ditch down through the middle, put in some drainage pipe and we were ready to start building some sets. We used cheap stuff. Remember that old "Enterprise" set? made out of the outer slabs of the trees. We got those free. A lot of the stuff was done that way.

We had a couple of things that almost got in the way. One day we were walking out to the site to take a look at it. That was before we had done much work, We hadn't done any work in the seating area anyway, and there were a bunch of little stakes running right down where the pathway is now, with orange ribbons on them. We find out that this is staking the center line of the Pillar Creek highway, which hadn't been built yet.

What a shock!!!! Nobody in town knew about it.

B.B. The state was doing it?

B.J. The state was doing it. Nobody in the city knew. We knew. We found out and we went to the Department of Highways and said we are planning a theater in that area and your road goes right through the center of it.

Would it be possible to reroute the road? They were very cooperative, and

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.

We rehearsed every single night and there were no scheduled rehearsals for different acts like there were in the last ten years. That was a great improvement. Everybody had to be there. We rehearsed till one or two every morning. That went on for six weeks.

They did bring costumes over. They did bring lights over. It was all thrown together very hurriedly but it came off. Except dress rehearsal was a total disaster. The night before the opening was a total disaster. Boy we were all scared to death on opening night. I was the narrator. I played Khlebnikov too many years. It was a terrible role. Went all the way through the play.

Opening night we started in the castle set. The village was still out in front, a native village with the native people. Nothing proceeded the drama. Frank would have nothing interfere with the setting. The environment had to be legitimate. The building in which the hunters, Baronov and everyone else were... from which they were to depart was closed the front was down, and we started singing "Pyesnya Baranov" inside the castle set. Then the old man came out leaning on Irnia's arm, crossed through the village with all the hunters behind him and all the villagers and the narrator came to the audience and started telling the story, flash back.

It went all the way through. No music except an accordion and our voices. the thing was just that. It was rustic and it had a lot of "goddams" in it

and quite a few drunken scenes. Baronov throwing a whisky bottle once when he got angry with the priest. It was pretty bald and pretty bare but it was a success. That was the beginning

It is really remarkable. It is really the most remarkable thing I think I have ever witnessed. For a number of people in a little town which had a population then of about five thousand to be able to put together something like that and keep putting it together repeatedly, using mostly volunteer people. You know Bill Hickenbotham came over and did it for nothing, played Baronov, and he was good, best Baranov we ever had. Short and stocky and tough, and then he directed and played in it for several years, until his vision went bad. Just for...we'd give him room and board and he would come over and do that. But anyway the whole community was behind it and it kept going and kept going until everybody got very tired. until I quit. I got tired. I think it was about ten years, '66 to '76. Then I quit and the next year it wasn't performed.

Two of the greatest promoters we ever had were Dave Savoy and Cook Kleland. Dave Sayoy was vice president of the First National Bank of Anchorage, Kodiak Branch. Cook Kleland was in the Navy and was a fly boy. he was a real rake. He drank a lot and he pass out the little obscene but very funny cards at all the parties. He was a very entertaining guy.

He and Dave Savoy got together and wow!! They mailed out with the bank's bills and the store's bills notices about the "Ram and gee everybody in town knew about it. We also did some long distance publicity. Lola Harvey

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

did we.

B.B. There were some other people that were involved in the early years.

B.J. There were a lot of people involved. Bob and Margaret Childs were involved in the beginning. They didn't happen to be at that first meeting, but they became involved very soon. We did our initial rehearsals in the basement of the Baptist Church. Margaret became the resident director. She did the casting and got as many things going and underway before the director came over. Yes, she did that for many years.

Lola Harvey was involved from the very beginning. Billy Routzhan was in make-up from the very beginning and lasted all the way through. Roger Page became involved the first couple of years and stayed involved until he left town, and contributed a great deal.

Lola's motto was I think exemplary of what made this work. "The impossible yes we can do it, it takes a little longer". As long as I was chairman of the board we wouldn't allow anyone to introduce an insolvable problem. You really had to do that because if you believed it couldn't be done it wouldn't be done. There wasn't anybody that believed that. Lola's publicity, she was a lot of it, she did a lot of publicity, and she can be very positive and very powerful. She did a good job.

One chap came up from Juneau, Public Information Officer for the State. Rick Kiefer was his name and he wrote a hell-of-a story about the "Ram".

It started out something like, " And there was a terrible blast and people jumped two feet off their seats", and then he went on to tell about this rustic drama. Gee he did a beautiful job. We got some good publicity...free.

B.B. Well you played, you played Khlebnikov. But you played a number of parts too. You played Rezanov.

B.J. That was nice. One scene walk on walk off. I didn't have to get there early and I could go home early. I played Father Joseph two or three years. I did O'Cain once and I enjoyed it, with Bill Hickenbotham playing Baranov, I think. It could have been Roger, I don't know. But that scene was certainly wasted. I don't know if you ever saw it when it played like a concert. It played like an instrumental quartet. Everybody's notes had to be in the right place at the right time. Everybody's lines had to be in the right place at the right time. It had to be timed. It was like we were singing a piece of music and we got so good at times it was really hilarious. The old business of Hubble being overturned in the chair with his rear end facing the audience. It was truly hilarious.

B.B. I remember when you played that one.

B.J. And Don Bullock was the first, Don Bullock was the Episcopal priest. He was the first O'Cain and the best drunk we ever did have in the play. And when he said, "Stay awake Patrick, it's getting critical". He said it in such a way that you couldn't resist it. He was hilarious. "That isn't a

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

of a company and that was played with power and force. He didn't really want to take on this job which he felt was far too big and he would be far too removed from authority and he'd be on his own and it would be a tough job and he really didn't want it but he just lost his trading post to the Chukchi and he had nothing and so that decision was very difficult for him to make and it was played that way to begin with and his making that decision was a dramatic episode. It became less so.

Other dramatic episodes of course, the episode of the priests talking to Anna about a child being born out of wedlock and being, therefore, born of sin and her not understanding that. It probably was played considerably more... well it was concentrated much more than it would have been in real life I think, because it happened all at one time, and the priest was involved in this and he probably said to her over weeks and months and years. At any rate what happened in history was that she did throw her son over the cliff into the sea because she was told to put away sin and she took it literally. She felt she had been told "Antipatr was a sin." So this episode was played out very dramatically and Anna was really hysterical after that scene and ran off.

In the next scene Antipatr was brought back dripping and unconscious or dead. Antipatr was played very dramatically and I think there is still an attempt to do that.

Each one of these episodes have a powerful impact. When Antipatr came back and people fussed around, it was pretty hard to keep the tears out of

anybody's eyes. This was what the author had in mind.

A series of dramatic episodes to illustrate what happened at least from his bias in the Russian development of Alaska. The natives were played down and unfortunately that's what happens when another country comes in and occupies another country. The conquerors always play down the society they overcome. Its a shame that people can't be a little more civilize and see the values that exist there and honor and preserve them while at the same time its a culture to which everyone needs to conform. but that doesn't happen.

The priests, I feel quite certain, were a big thorn for Baranov or any of the Russians. Many of them were very cruel. Now Frank feels that Baranov was the least cruel of all of them. He did some cruel things but by comparison he was a pussycat and so all the things they say about Baranov they could say many more times about the others.

Anyway the priests objected to the way the priests were pictured and they were probably pictured, and as far as I am concerned, pretty accurate. I thinks it nice to have treated Father Joseph better because I'm sure Father Joseph was a dedicated and conscientious priest and really wanted to better things for the native people. So I liked the fact when they made him into a more genuine person. I think that can still happen.

Father Herman was supposed to be a real good influence. But it was always such a little part. I thought that could have been played better.

What you saw was these two old cruel priests picking on Anna all of the time and causing trouble all of the time. A little too much emphasis there. What the author says is, "no committee ever wrote a play", and he, when he was here, heard about getting all of these people together, the Orthodox priests, the church, the natives and tried to make them all like they wanted to make them look. His first reaction was "this is ridiculous". when a author writes a play, granted, its the author's bias but its the author's play. That's his statement and I respect that. He says if you if you mix all these others what you've got is a mixture of biases. Its more confusing than when you have only one, then it dilutes it.

He wrote a letter, all of which I didn't read to the board, when he had received news that this committee was going to get together and do this. He had an Anchorage paper and another friend whom he had heard from before he read my article in the Kodiak Mirror. He wrote a letter and took it out to the postman to mail it to me and the postman had my letter. He lived in Louisiana where he now lives in Arkansas. There was my letter. But he didn't see it until he had already given him the letter to mail to me. So he said, "Can I have my letter back?" The postman said it had already been posted. Frank was aghast but, he gave it back. It was a good laugh

He read my letter, and then, my letter which included the whole text of the birth and death of the Ram, a good share of which was left out [of the paper]. He thought it was a beautiful epithet. That was nice. It was a compliment. Then he understood. Because that said "It had died". And that's what I wanted to say. I wanted to say it had died. Because it had.

It had sort of just aged to the point where it was becoming senile. That's willpower. That's the part of all of the different directors influences and loss of the impact and the loss of dramatic episodes and the changing from a drama to a pageant and that was where it had become senile. It had aged. It was ready to just totter off and be buried.

The other part of it was that the community had gotten to the point where they just took it for granted and said, "Those people are doing that, that's fine. Let them do that". They quit coming and they quit supporting it by their presence. We saw more and more people in the audience we didn't know and fewer and fewer people in the audience that we did know. It was always different. The newspaper didn't even write a critique the last time we put it on. Did you notice that? They wrote it on this committee and future plans. No review of the play. Initially Wayne Kotula should always be mentioned. Wayne Kotula and the Kodiak Mirror were one of the major reasons this survived. We got full page ads in the back of the Mirror for nothing. The man at one point was willing to put together a color brochure with the "Ram" as the background, the history as the background. We never did that but he was willing to do that. He was a very generous guy.

BB: As I recall, when I got here, of course Wayne was running the paper and Lola was writing for him. Lola was doing the reporting for him so there was a lot of stuff from the time.

BJ: Yes, we got good coverage there. But you see those people were

involved.

More and more people from out of town were seeing that. I want to go find that guest book and I want to go back through that guest book and I want to follow it over the years and see what's happened to the attendance from people out of town and see if its worth trying to return it. But I'm a little concerned. I've called Frank about a dozen times since the "Ram" was written and never connected.

B.B. Lets talk about that segment just for a second. This epithet you wrote for the Death of the Ram and the exchange of letters with Frank and his willingness to go ahead and to try and rewrite it.

BJ: Let me go back to one thing. I left something hanging. Remember I told you how he reacted to the committee approach. He was saying no it cannot go on like this, theres no way this can happen. His next letter was after he received my epithet. He said, "Why should I be criticizing this effort. Its a community enterprise, its yours now. I've given it to you. Do anything you want. Its a community enterprise. I don't have the right to criticize." He's pretty grateful to us for doing this. We've done it for 26 years. I can't believe that. But anyway for 26 years we've done his play and he is so pleased. He is so gratified. He is so grateful to us and we, in turn are so grateful to him. We wouldn't have had it if it wasn't for him. We stopped paying those royalties, again, you know, about five years ago, I don't know how long ago.

After this nice letter came and said your doing this, its a community enterprise, which is what its suppose to be. It isn't dramatic as I like it but its worth something. Its a creative effort on the part of the community. Some of the people who see it say, "You know, that's the most significant thing that has happened to me during my trip to Alaska. Its more meaningful.

He did say in the same letter, in fact he said when he was up here for the 25th anniversary that he had a rewrite in mind that was about two hours long and cut out a lot of the narration and put some of the dramatic impact back into it. Sounded good. But you know the guy always underestimates what he is going to do. He said he would have some time in February but its already April and I haven't been able to reach him yet. He talked about cutting the number of characters down so it would be easier to produced. And probably reducing the number of dramatic episodes.

What it is supposed to be, is not a continuous yarn with all the gaps filled by the narrator. You don't need that. I think what he had in mind is a series of episodes that illustrated what happened. That way he wouldn't need the narrator.

If Frank produces I think we can bring it back to life again.