

Modest Heroine— PHS Native Woman Worker Saves Life

A single oar and an air-puffed nylon jacket figured dramatically last Saturday in saving Mike Andrews from drowning in Lake Aleknagik.

Heroine is Offeneshia Yako, long-time employe of the U.S. Public Health Service Hospital at Kanakanak.

Mrs. Yako, 46, was at the lake's edge that Saturday morning to work on the motor of the 13-foot wooden skiff which she and her husband Anuska own.

Suddenly her son George, 11, yelled that Mike, 17, had fallen off his home-made raft some 50 feet out in the lake and was struggling, fully clothed, in the water.

Mrs. Yako and her son shoved the heavy boat out in the water to help the youth. With no motor and but a single oar she worked mightily to reach Mike.

"It seemed eight minutes or something like that," Mrs. Yako recalled as she described the difficulty of making time with only one oar.

By the time she got to him, Mike had stopped moving and was floating unconscious beneath the surface of the water. Mrs. Yako tried but could not reach him from the boat.

Just then, however, water currents caused the boy's body to roll and air inflated the shoulder of his nylon jacket as it came above the surface.

Mrs. Yako grasped this and pulled the heavy bundle to the boat. She managed to get the top half of him over the side so that "a lot of water drained out from his mouth and nose," she said.

"I watched him to see if he would breathe," Mrs. Yako continued. "If he didn't, I would blow him on his mouth." Fortunately, Mike began to gasp and Mrs. Yako then managed to pull him in the rest of the way and with her one oar worked the boat to shore.

There Mike's parents, Fred and Annie Andrew, summoned by watching lads on shore, claimed their son and took him

home to recover further.

The all-important single oar had been missing when Mrs. Yako first came to her boat. When Mike came along to launch his raft, she asked if he knew who might have borrowed it.

Mike did know and, fortunately, as matters later developed, retrieved it for Mrs. Yako before continuing on his mission.

Clumsy though the going had been with the one implement, without it Mrs. Yako could not have maneuvered her craft to save him.

Both Mrs. Yako and another PHS employe heroine, Mrs. Ella Kinegak of Bethel who earlier this summer saved a five-year-old boy from drowning in the Kuskokwim River, work in the laundry department of their respective hospitals.

And just as it was in the situation with the modest Mrs. Kinegak, word of Mrs. Yako's brave deed first came to the attention of hospital officials four days later and through the report of another person.