

Arctic Survival—

WOMAN AND CHILD IN UMIAK DRAMATICALLY SURVIVE TREACHEROUS STORM

Reprinted from Tundra Times
February 1, 1965

By HOWARD ROCK
Times Editor

(Editor's Note: The previous story ended as the windstorm reached gale proportions on the tasipuk (big lagoon). The dawn of the day had just become apparent. Little Olaqroaq had gotten sick from the roll of the umiak and the stench of the bodies aboard. As Siqvoana labored on, she noticed that the skin/craft was being blown ashore).

Siqvoana labored on with all the strength she could command. She tried to head the umiak out from the shore until it was almost 90 degrees in relation to the beach. The craft was now partially headed into the wind and the waves. It began to toss in a corkscrew fashion as the turbulence of the water increased.

Siqvoana sweated profusely from the valiant and strenuous effort even though the wind was blowing hard. It was now getting difficult to properly dig the blade of the paddle into the water because of the writhing of the umiak. This worried the woman because she needed the propulsion to keep from being blown ashore.

The little girl's sickness became worse. The boat tossed violently and the high wind was eddying the stench of the bodies. She wretched time after time not caring where the vomit settled. She was in utter misery. She whimpered.

Shipping Water

Siqvoana did not have time to comfort her little daughter although she knew that the child was in utter discomfort. The job at hand was too serious — urgent.

The size of the waves seemed to grow by the minute making the motion of the umiak more violent. The craft began to ship water. The gale was of such strength now that it was blowing water off the crest of the waves not unlike the start of a snow blizzard.

The Will of the Wind

Siqvoana now realized that she could never hope to keep the umiak from being blown ashore. Nevertheless, she labored on unwilling to give in. She kept glancing back to the shore. It was get-

ting closer at an alarming rate. She tried to think what she would do once the umiak reached the breakers.

The breakers! She now could hear the steady roar of them as they broke on the beach behind her. She, her daughter, and the cargo of the dead — her family, were being blown ashore! How would she maneuver the landing? Would she try to land the craft bow first. She decided against this.

The small woman began to paddle with renewed energy. The fury of froth of the breaking waves was only a short distance behind her now. She dug her paddle deep when she could reach the water that was undulating beneath her. At last she got the umiak into a position she wanted — directly heading the bow into the south wind and the waves. She must keep it that way and land the boat stern first.

Siqvoana was now resigned to be driven ashore, but she must do it right, otherwise she and her daughter could be hurt. She kept the umiak headed straight into the wind.

"Olaqroaq! Olaqroaq! Try to stand up and hold on to the gunwale and keep on holding it!" Siqvoana shouted to her little girl.

The little girl responded although she had trouble staying on her feet.

The Landing

The stern of the craft was in the break of the waves. The breakers broke two waves out because of the shallowness of the water. The next wave shot the umiak almost to the beach. Siqvoana fought to keep it headed into the wind. The on-coming wave was a large one, its crest a solid froth of foam.

It rolled onward and the bow of the umiak met it partially submerging and the shipping a column of water. As the bow rose, the wave pushed the boat shoreward with a rush. As the wash passed them the stern touched the bottom with a thud.

The woman waited a moment until the wash receded. She jumped off the stern and grabbed her child and rushed up to the beach. She was not fast enough and the next wave caught up with them. The force of it knocked Siqvoana down with her child in her arms. The wash drove them up the

beach and then pulled them out toward the breakers as it receded. For a moment, they wallowed in the water at the mercy of the wave.

Siqvoana fought frantically for a footing. She managed to break the outward rush. She stood up, took her child by her left arm and dashed up the beach. They were now out of danger!

Unmerciful Waves

The woman took her daughter on the gravel beyond the reach of the waves. She looked out to the umiak. It was writhing and twisting at the mercy of the furious waves. The wind had blown the bow so that the boat was almost broadside to the breakers. Siqvoana watched helplessly. Even as she did, a large wave came upon it. It looked as if the boat would turn over but somehow it stayed upright. The next roller caught it and a huge column of water cascaded into the craft filling it almost to the gunwales. It looked as if the umiak was caught unprepared.

The bodies in it began to float moving with the motion of the craft. One of them floated high out of the surface. It was the body of the oldest girl. The deterioration of it was far advanced than the others. She had been the first to die.

Gristly Task

The next wave rushed on the umiak and tipped it shoreward. The water poured out of it and the body of the girl rolled off into the wash. Siqvoana, suddenly alarmed, rushed out! She sloshed into the water and grabbed the floating body by the caribou parka. She tried to pull it ashore but the undertow was quite strong. She finally managed to pull it far enough so she could roll it up the beach.

The task was tiring and Siqvoana was now near total exhaustion. When she got the dead girl beyond the reach of the waves, she wearily walked back to the umiak.

The wave action was gradually pushing the boat shoreward. The tired woman was thankful for this. She began to help the wave action by pushing one end of the boat and then the other every time a wave hit. The breakers splashed against her. She didn't heed the wetness — the discomfort. She seemed beyond caring.

Total Exhaustion

This effort was just too much for the doughty little woman. Her strength suddenly gave out. She staggered shoreward. She fell before she got beyond the wash of the waves. The undertow threatened to pull her out. She weakly got on her hands and knees and crawled and collapsed once again. The sweep of the breakers swirled around her. She did not care.

She began to sob from utter despair — from exhaustion — hopelessness.

Little Olaqroaq was fearful when she saw her mother collapse. She ran to her and tried to pull her up. Not being able to do it, she knelt by her mother's side and tried to console her. The sweep of the breakers swirled around the mother and child. The wind whipped against them as if mocking them. It was full daylight now.

A Man is Coming!

"Mother! Mother! There is someone coming!" Olaqroaq shouted shrilly. "It's a man and he's running, mother!"

Siqvoana responded only in louder sobs. It was her realization that help was coming at last — the help she needed ever since the desperate journey began. She was now sobbing in relief. Her sorrow was welling up in her at last in its full intensity.

"The man is running fast, mother. He is coming close now."

"It's Aniqsoaq, mother. It's Aniqsoaq!"

Siqvoana still could not move. The only movements were her convulsions of emotion she could not suppress. Her sobs voiced the tragedy that laid waste to the once happy family — the deprivation that descended in a short and terrible period of time.

"Alakaa (Alas), I had been afraid that this was happening upriver!" said Aniqsoaq with aggravation.

The man rushed toward Siqvoana.

"Aniqsoaq, take mother out of this water," the little girl pleaded. "She is very tired."

Aniqsoaq took hold of the woman around her armpits and picked her up bodily and walked up the beach. He did this seemingly with little effort. He was an average sized man but he was stockily built. He laid the sobbing woman on the gravel away from

the wash of the waves. Siqvoana weakly rolled to her side, pulled up her knees and continued to sob.

Loss of Words

Aniqsoaq was at a loss of what to say. The carnage the disease had brought the Attungana family was there in front of him — plain and stark! He knew what had happened. No further word was needed to describe the tragedy.

Aniqsoaq knew it all too well. He, too, knew the sting of tragedy. His wife Achoyak — his two children, had also died of the strange disease. He had buried the last of his loved ones only a few days before. He had been shocked dumb with grief. He had been utterly lost without his immediate family.

He looked down at the umiak. He could see Attungana and the children floating in the water within the boat. The skinboat jerked with the pounding of the waves.

"Attungana — my friend. He is gone," thought Aniqsoaq. "He was a strong man — stronger than myself. How strangely this disease has claimed its victims — from the mightiest to the weak."

The Morning Walk

Aniqsoaq had awakened very early that morning. Unable to go back to sleep, he had dressed and walked out of his sod igloo. It was still very dark. A breeze from the south was blowing. He decided to walk to the north beach of Tikiaq.

He wanted to get away from the village of grief where so many of the people he knew had died — so many and in such a short time! The dead were his relatives — friends. Tikiaq, a happy settlement was plunged into sadness and grief in a matter of days. It was incredible — unbelievable!

The Pack of Dogs

Aniqsoaq walked rather slowly through the closely bunched igloos. There were occasional growls from the dogs on the outside of the dwellings.

"I'm sorry for the dogs," thought Aniqsoaq. "Many of them have had no care for days."

As the man neared the beach, he suddenly became aware that something was following him. He looked back. He could make out faintly that there were about six or seven dogs following him.

"A pack!" he thought. "What do you want, you dogs?" Aniqsoaq said in a moderate voice as if talking to some person.

The answer was a growl. He kept walking in the same casual pace. He knew that if he showed alarm, the dogs might attack. They kept following. He was now on the beach. He could hear his footsteps making gritty crunch sounds on the gravel. He became accustomed to the darkness and he could now see the dogs more clearly.

"Go back, you dogs! Go back!" Aniqsoaq said in a commanding voice.

The dogs stopped for a moment. A couple of them growled. The man picked up some good sized pebbles. He walked on. He kept glancing back. The dogs had begun to follow once again. They seemed to get more daring. One of them snarled. It looked as if they were getting ready to attack.

When the attack seemed imminent, Aniqsoaq threw a rock with as much force as he could command. He missed. The animals scattered for a moment and regrouped. He threw another. He could hear the thud of the hit, simultaneously followed by a sharp snap.

(Continued on Page 11)

ALASKA BUSINESS DIRECTORY

Fairbanks Hotel

517 3rd Avenue
456-6440

Catering to People from
the Bush
Clean, Comfortable

Automatic Sprinkler System Installed
for your safety

FAIRBANKS PLUMBING & HEATING

SAMSON HARDWARE

Box 1270

Fairbanks, Alaska 99701

When you can buy chicken like this, why cook?



COLONEL SANDERS' RECIPE
Kentucky Fried Chicken.

Colonel Sanders' secret recipe of 11 herbs and spices makes his chicken "finger lickin' good." Get it by the box, bucket, or barrel. Bring home his special fixin's, too. Slow, baked beans, potatoes, and rolls.

Visit the Colonel &
His Friend Next Door

H. SALT ESQ.

1454 Cushman
CALL: 452-1010

ALASKA TENT & TARP

529 Front Street

P. O. Box 451

Fairbanks, Alaska 99707

Phone (907) 456-6328

- Industrial Covers, Airplane Wing & Engine Covers
- Tents, Tarps
- Industrial Fabrics
- Carvies, Nylon, Webbing, Zippers
- Hardware

America's Farthest North
Headquarters for Manufacturing
and Repair of Canvas Products

JOIN THE PEOPLE
AND ADVERTISE IN
THE
BUSINESS DIRECTORY
\$2.00 per col. in.