

# LETTERS FROM HERE AND THERE

Ouzinkie, Alaska, 99644  
October 14, 1970

## AN OPEN LETTER TO THE KODIAK ISLAND BOROUGH:

Advance publicity for the recent Borough Assembly meeting to discuss proposals for a new high school complex failed to mention the inclusion of the new school for Ouzinkie. Apparently, inclusion of Ouzinkie school in the bond issue brought forth many questions, and some adverse comments. Since we had no one present to present our case, the Ouzinkie Advisory School Board wishes to confront the entire Borough with the urgency of a new Ouzinkie school—NOW.

Reasons? First and foremost, the SAFETY of our children, and our teachers. Ouzinkie's school building, the oldest in the entire Island school system, has two classrooms, plus one combination library-recreation-classroom, each heated by an oil space heater located directly in FRONT of the EXIT. Since school opened this fall, there have been four soot fires in the stovepipes of these three heaters, any one of which could have been disastrous.

During the night of September 28, teachers John and Chris Bailey and their five-year-old son woke gasping and coughing,

to find a serious soot fire in the classroom adjoining their tiny three-room apartment. Aside from the danger to the life and health of this family, had this night fire occurred in a more distant classroom the entire building might have been ablaze before the fire was discovered. On October 8, a sootfire in the middle classroom made it necessary to evacuate the children and leave the room unheated. Repeatedly, downdrafts fill the classrooms with dangerous fumes, sometimes so irritating that school must be dismissed.

The windows are in such condition that most have been nailed shut, cutting off the only possible escape route. A health authority recently advised the teachers to purchase axes to keep beside the windows in each classroom, to chop a wall out in case of fire. The school structure does not have a stable foundation because it was built on a swamp. Wind, and even tremors, make the building shake, causing danger from overhead lighting fixtures. On one occasion, a fixture fell to the floor; another time an electrical fire was started. The bathrooms, built as an after-thought, are unventilated; the plumbing freezes up in cold weather.

The swamp is the children's playground; it is also their access to school. After the Borough Assembly refused to provide funds for an access walk, a Kodiak businessman LOANED the Ouzinkie school planks for a boardwalk, the planks to be returned in two years; by which time we were promised a new school in a new location. Nearly three years have passed; the businessman would like his planks returned...

More than four years ago, the City of Ouzinkie set aside ten acres of land in a higher, more desirable area for a new school. Repeatedly, Borough Assembly and School Board members have assured us that Ouzinkie school is a first priority. On February 20, 1970, Ouzinkie's City Council, School Board and residents were called to the school to view plans for a new school, with construction to begin in May or June, 1970. A school administrator assured us at that time that the construction of Ouzinkie School was not dependent on sale of the bonds; that funds from sale of the downtown school in Kodiak were earmarked for Ouzinkie School construction.

We face the reality that none of these promises could be kept. We know that our school is dependent upon the November 3<sup>rd</sup> passage of the school bonding issue. Our children DESERVE the education which would be possible in a modern school facility. They have a RIGHT to attend school without endangering their lives. And the Ouzinkie School Board and parents have the OBLIGATION to insist on a safe school for our children NOW, or we may find it necessary to remove our children from school.

In deep concern,  
Ouzinkie Advisory  
School Board