



Olinka Gilila becomes the center of attention at the Akiak REAA school as Nancy Krebs gets her makeup ready for Gilila's role in "Hooking a Man." PHOTO BY BILL HESS

A dramatic day in Akiak

By BILL HESS

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Inside the gymnasium in Akiak, despair grips the face of a young Yupic boy. Hard feelings between two families have pulled him and the girl he hopes to marry apart. He jerks the long blade from his belt, lifts it high into the air, and points it at his own belly. He thrusts hard. Before he can die, the young lass of his dreams runs onto the scene.

There is a blushing smile on her face. She doesn't look the least bit distressed. Yet she pulls the instrument of death from her forbidden lover, and with it takes her own life. A mulberry bush standing nearby is so sad, it groans, and its leaves turn red.

"That's a good death, Wassilie!" Dana Hart praises as the two corpses resurrect and rise from the floor. "I've seen

people in Shakespearean plays not do a sword death as well." The praise is genuine.

"Lena, try to look a little sad," Nancy Krebs instructs the young girl, gently. "You look like you are having fun! But you have just lost the boy you want to marry!"

If Lena Williams appeared to be having fun, it was probably because she was. Both she, Wassilie Gilila, and Tommy Ivan, who played the bush, were participants in a special dramatic workshop.

Akiak was one of eight rural Alaskan communities which participated in the special workshop, sponsored by the Alaska Repertory Theatre. Others included Kipnuk, Kwethluk, Quinhagak, Naknek, Kodiak, Galena and Bethel.

Hart and Krebs, both professionals from the East Coast who have been involved in theatre, television and dramatic instruction for many years,

stayed at each school on the circuit for ten days, teaching drama techniques.

Both expressed pleasure with the performance of the students, and with their own reception. "We felt so welcome, there was such a warm feeling," Krebs said shortly after leaving Akiak. "The outpouring of affection was so great!" Great enough that when they climbed on the plane to leave, there were tears in the eyes of students who stayed behind.

"For me, the high point came when that something special clicked with the students," Hart added. "When the work we were doing no longer became just another school assignment, but something they were doing because they really wanted to, because it was important to them!"

Although "Pyramus and Thisbe," the play containing

(Continued on Page Three)



When Bucko Kawagley sits down in front of the mirror, he is just an ordinary boy. A transformation begins to take place as Krebs adds makeup, and finally, with a beaver hat for mane, the boy becomes a lion.

Traditional stories told dramatically



Thisbe (Lena Williams) draws the sword from Pyramus (Wassilie Gilila) and prepares for her own death as the mulberry bush (Tommy Ivan) looks on.

(Continued from Page One)

the suicides, is a very old classic, one which inspired Shakespeare to write "Romeo and Juliet," the other three plays performed by the high school students were all centered around Native themes.

Two were based on Yupic stories, and one on a poem "Imagine," composed by Sarah Kawagley and expanded upon by her classmates. It probed the thoughts, fears, and anger of the students as they watch the advent of modern life-style intrude upon the village lifestyle.

Jerry Ivan, Jr., narrated the tale of the teakettle ghost. "I like to be a narrator," he said. "I like to tell stories about Eskimo culture. It's very good, acting." Ivan claimed there was much a young actor has to learn if he is going to be successful onstage. "You have to talk loud, and no mumbling!" he stressed.

Carlton Kulms, the principal of the school, noted that not only did the drama workshop forestall a decline in student interest which sometimes hits schools in the springtime, but



Practice sessions were videotaped. Sarah Kawagley, John Nicolai, Deke Ivan and Alvin Phillip (left to right) top to bottom, found their performance rather amusing.



Jerry Ivan, Jr. Narrator of Teakettle Ghost.



After the performance, the actors from "Teakettle Ghost" take a bow.

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Small school benefits from program

(Continued from Page Three)

it helped fill a greater need. Small, village schools often have trouble meeting the extra-curricular activities of students the way large schools do. Through the drama program, participating students were able to have an experience similar to those shared by students in larger schools where there are drama clubs, bands and other groups. "It was def-

initely a benefit to the students," Kuhns said. "Speaking as a school, it could be one of the best things that ever happened to them!"

Virtually all of the students expressed a feeling the play-acting was one of the top experiences of the year. Olimka Gilila, sophomore, who played the role of a fishing sister in "Hooking a Man," felt so. She would like to act more

regularly. "It makes me feel good," she said, "when I can do something for someone, and make them smile."

When the plays were finally performed for the younger students of the school, there were plenty of smiles. Lena Williams hardly smiled, though, when she found her dying lover. She had learned well. Even if she did smile just a bit, it didn't matter. The audience got the message.