

Arctic Survival—

IGLOO CITY SURVIVES BUT PLAGUE BRINGS BREAKDOWN OF TRADITIONS

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Times Editor
(Editor's Note: Little Olaqroaq had found an old friend as she, her mother and Aniqsoaq walked toward the village of Tikiaq after the burial of her brothers, sister and her father. He was Pooktouruk, the dog that belonged to Utourna, the little girl's cousin who, along with her mother and father, had died of the plague. Olaqroaq took the dog with her saying, "You're going to be my dog from now on.")

The little group resumed walking toward Tikiaq. Pooktouruk followed closely and alongside the little girl. He wriggled and sidled against his tiny new master. He whined happily as Olaqroaq held on to his hair on his shoulders.

Pooktouruk had grown into a large dog, only now he was lean from lack of food. His legs seemed too long for his size.

Sorrowful Activity

As they walked, Siqvoana couldn't seem to take her eyes from the activity on the tundra where Tikiaqmiuts (Point Hope people) were burying their dead.

"This is indeed a tragic period in our lives, Aniqsoaq," the woman remarked. "Like you said, the future might be a dark one for Tikiaq. The people are burying their loved ones — and our fine hunters."

"Whoever is left alive will do well this coming winter," Aniqsoaq answered. "The village is well stocked in food. What I'm worrying about is next year and the succeeding years to come. The death of our hunters will be felt then."

The Pack

Even as they walked, four dogs appeared over the bank of the north beach.

They were directly in the path of the wind from the three people. They apparently caught the scent and came up the bank to investigate.

Pooktouruk noticed them at once. He bristled and snarled. Aniqsoaq picked up a whale rib he saw nearby in case he needed it.

The dogs came at a steady trot. They neither looked mean nor unfriendly but Aniqsoaq and Pooktouruk were not taking any

chances. Pooktouruk voiced his defiance with bared fangs. He had now taken over as the protector of the three people with him. He broke away from the little girl and rushed toward the dogs.

"Don't get hurt, Pooktouruk!" Olaqroaq shouted.

The dog stopped after a short distance and snarled his defiance. The four dogs also stopped. The pack and the lone dog eyed each other for several moments and then the four dogs turned toward the north beach, their tails between their legs.

"The poor dogs — they have no one to take care of them and they are suffering," Siqvoana said, her voice breaking.

Unspoken Messages

The little group finally reached the big village. There was an atmosphere of uneasiness that was uncomfortable in the huge settlement. They saw several people among the igloos who were moving about in silence.

The men greeted Siqvoana and the little girl with kindly, sad smiles. The women were unsmiling. They looked squarely into Siqvoana's eyes. They then rushed into one another's arms and broke into tragic sobs. Not a word was uttered. That would be later when grief was bearable.

Pooktouruk broke away from Olaqroaq once again. He trotted swiftly to the Kayouktuk igloo that had been his home. He stopped near the entrance and settled on his haunches. He looked questioningly at the little girl.

"We're not stopping there, Pooktouruk. We're going to our igloo. Come on, Pooktouruk!" the child urged.

The dog hesitated, tilting his head to his right. He rose and began to nose around the entrance. His tail curled between and under his hind legs. He settled on his haunches at the entrance once more.

The Howl of the Dog

As the group watched, Pooktouruk raised his great head skyward. A sad and mournful howl came out of his mouth. It was piercing — tragic. The dog was voicing his sorrow for his masters he will never see again.

The howl of the dog was intensified by the setting — the

igloo that was empty. The plague had taken his people away.

Emotions welled in the three people. The weight of Pooktouruk's anguish found expression through the tiny child. Olaqroaq broke into uncontrollable sobs. She ran to the dog and wrapped her arms around his neck.

"You shouldn't do that, Pooktouruk," the child said, bitterly, "you're making me cry. I know you miss Utourna, Uncle Kayoutuk — Achoyak — but you can't stay here. You have to come with me. Come on, Pooktouruk!"

She tugged at the dog. He rose and began to follow the little girl. He walked with her knowing he was going home.

Eat With Us

The little group walked a short distance further and then they were at Attungana's igloo. Siqvoana didn't know what to do or say. She was home now without her husband and four children. She dreaded going into the house.

She leaned over to her daughter and said very quietly, "My little one, you must be very tired. I am. I am very tired."

"Yes, mother. I am very tired and I want to sleep, too. Can I take Pooktouruk in with me?"

"You may. He is your dog now."

"Pooktouruk, you're going into the house with me!"

The permission brightened the little girl and she hugged her dog around the neck.

Siqvoana turned to Aniqsoaq who had been standing by quietly.

"Aniqsoaq, after I rest up a little, I want to go to the sigloaq and get some oogruk meat. After I cook it, I want you to eat with us," the woman said.

"I have some good meat in my sigloaq," the man answered. "I'll get some and bring it here. You can rest in the meantime."

"As you wish, Aniqsoaq," Siqvoana replied just above a whisper.

The Epilogue

Siqvoana and the little girl began life in their igloo alone at first. Aniqsoaq lived alone as well in his igloo, although he ate his meals with the woman and

the child. Siqvoana had insisted that he did because he had no one to prepare his meals.

Pooktouruk thrived and fattened under good care little Olaqroaq gave him. He developed great affection for the child.

Many children had been orphaned by the plague. Shortly after her return to Tikiaq, Siqvoana took in two boys and a little girl. They were second cousins of little Olaqroaq. Other surviving adults took in others and in a surprisingly short time, everyone was placed in a home.

In something over a year, Siqvoana and Aniqsoaq became man and wife. It was a rather casual marriage, no doubt hindered somewhat by the memories of both persons.

Olaqroaq accepted the man and became attached to him and this helped the marriage. The man and wife, much to their surprise, became parents of a little boy. This further cemented the relationship and the new family became quite happy.

The first year after the terrible plague hit the Tikiaq area, the village did well for almost two years. Ample food had been stored away. The reduced population ate well but after that, the loss of the hunters began to be felt.

Heroic Hunters

Aniqsoaq was a fine hunter and other men like him pursued their calling exhaustively through the years in a heroic effort to feed and clothe the wounded village.

Even though the men, expended their great efforts, skills and endurance, food supplies in the village dwindled each succeeding year. This was worsened by the inevitable unfavorable hunting conditions. Starvation began to be a common visitation.

Untenable Traditions

Many lives were lost through this and dire suffering became the order of the day. And down through the years, new diseases came to Tikiaq and exacted their toll in multiple deaths. The constant loss of loved ones began to tell on the survivors.

Some established traditions became untenable, and one especially, that of tradition of cleanliness, almost toppled completely. Under constant suffering,

many people began to neglect the cleanness of their dwellings. Dirt and filth resulted.

Through the tragic years, Siqvoana and a few other women doggedly clung to the tradition of cleanliness. They tried to pass it on to their offspring. Some of them were successful and the traces of this effort can still be seen in the village of Tikiaq.

Unshaken Tradition

One tradition that remained undaunted was the dance. No matter how discouraging the outlook might have been, dances were held. They gave the survivors a spiritual outlet and encouragement for the future, both sorely needed under the terrible strains of suffering.

The aesthetic value of the dance was unmistakable and it, no doubt, served as an important bridge to survival of the present day inhabitants of Tikiaq.

Siqvoana lived to be an old, old woman. She outlived her second husband Aniqsoaq by eight years. Although she suffered along with her people through her long life, she lived in comparative comfort, especially during her aging years.

Her daughter Olaqroaq was true to her word she made when she was very young that she would take care of her mother.

Strong Personality

Although small in stature, Siqvoana was a strong personality. She was stern at times. Her wisdom was sought after, even by men. She was a traditionalist and she urged her people accordingly.

Olaqroaq grew up into a fine, intelligent woman. One of her finest qualities was her great kindness. She was rather reserved and she frequently fell into quiet moments. This seemed to reflect her difficult years during which she made great sacrifices on behalf of the villagers. Her readiness to help anyone endeared her to the people of Tikiaq.

She had grown into a dignified young woman. Her hand was sought after by the ablest young hunters. She married one of them ultimately. They had seven children only two of which survived.

Such were the men and women of the old village of Tikiaq. They were the people who struggled against almost insurmountable odds and won. Today, their blood flows in the veins of Point Hope, survivors of 2,000 people deemed to have inhabited the ancient igloo city up to early years of 1800 and what is thought to be the oldest continuously inhabited settlement in Alaska.

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