

# **The Ikkaumajammik Project**

## **Adult Drama Group Productions in Nunatsiavut**

**Tradition and Transition Among the Labrador Inuit  
Nunatsiavut Government and Memorial University  
2017- 2019**



*Tim Borlase and Martha MacDonald*

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### **IkKaumajammik Project**

IkKaumajammik means “memories,” and the plays in this collection were created from memories of Labrador life. We hope that the creation and performance of the plays will have crafted new memories for the people who were brave and gracious enough to join the adult drama groups in the communities of Nunatsiavut in 2017-2019. We would like to thank the *Tradition and Transition among the Labrador Inuit* partnership for the funding for the project, student coordinators Caroline Nochasak (Nain), Carrie Lou McNeill

(Makkovik), Robert Jacque (Rigolet and Hopedale) and Kathryn Worthman (Postville) and our co-op student Jill Jablonski for their assistance, the five communities for their hospitality and enthusiasm, and above all, the actors for coming together to tell their stories.

As people with a long-time involvement in the Labrador Creative Arts Festival, (Tim was the founder and continues to be an organizer of the festival; Martha was a long-term chair

and committee member) we have witnessed the value of original playwriting and acting for students, who bring forth their communities’ concerns and celebrate their collective

identities through the medium of theatre. The ability to express their opinions and feelings and communicate with their young voices is a powerful tool that many have used

when performing on larger stages far from Labrador. Equally, this opportunity has increased their self-confidence in the work they do at home.

In 2016 Johannes Lampe, president of Nunatsiavut, reflected on his own experience working on the film dramatization of the life of Abraham Ulrikab, and suggested that making the opportunity for acting available to adults in the communities might be a way to increase social interaction and mental well-being. Accordingly, we applied for and received funding to develop adult drama groups in Nain (2017), Makkovik (2017), Hopedale (2018), Rigolet (2018) and Postville (2019). Tim spent several weeks in each community, recruiting actors and working with them in developing and rehearsing scripts. In this he was assisted by student coordinators hired through Inuit Pathways funding.

Martha participated in the last few days of each play (weather permitting) and recorded interviews with participants to gain an understanding of motivations for participating and

the rewards and challenges involved in acting as adults.

The actors ranged in age from 17 to 70, and were recruited through social media and personal approaches. Many had participated in the Labrador Creative Arts Festival as children, and their fond memories of those experiences were sufficient to motivate them to take up acting again. For others, this was their first time on stage.

The Nain cast in play creation and rehearsal. Kristeen McTavish photo.

## **The Plays**

The play scripts are reproduced in the link below, but we would like to set the stage by talking about the artistic choices made by the actors in each community. Perhaps the most remarkable discovery throughout the process was the very distinct way in which each group approached the use of memory and culture to deliver a message important to their

community. In Nain, where the first project took place, the group consisted entirely of women, and the creation of the play became a way to put forth the experiences of women

in Nain by portraying the life of one woman at its various stages. The tragedies and hardships she overcame through her memories of the power of her grandmother were

portrayed in a series of individual performances, with each woman developing and presenting a stage of the character's life. Using poetry written by deceased community members and incorporating dance to express strong emotion, the Nain players experimented with various art forms to assist in delivering their message. In partnership with the OKâlaKatiget Society, the play was further developed into a two-part film.

In Makkovik, the community drew upon some treasured parts of its identity to present a musical theatre performance. The musical interest and ability for which the town is well known was highlighted by the incorporation of several songs performed live by a group of local musicians. The show was enhanced by an opening performance of "O Canada" in

Inuktitut by schoolchildren. The theme of the play was the organization of a festival in the town, and it served as a gentle reminder of the amount of work such events require.

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Makkovik volunteering is essential for maintaining the many activities that reinforce wellbeing, and the play helped to underline this need. The function of the play in Makkovik

was entertainment and distraction; several people in town were terminally ill, and people who normally might have participated were preoccupied. In spite of this, sufficient actors

and musicians were recruited, including the local RCMP member. Performing is a traditional part of celebrations in Makkovik, and even under circumstances that were difficult at that time, people saw the value in participating in an activity that contributed to community wellbeing.

In Rigolet the actors took on a theme that had great significance for them; the change in climate that affects the ice used for travel. The student plays of the LCAF from that community in recent years also reflected environmental preoccupations, addressing the Muskrat Falls hydro project and its potential impact on their food safety. This adult play arose from the group's discussions of community concerns and was carefully researched so that within the adventure and poetic speeches of the script, audience members would

receive accurate and valuable information about changes in the sea ice. People in Rigolet were enthusiastic and committed to the process of creating a play, and their piece

demonstrated a vital aspect of the community's character: the importance to both men and women of going off and spending time out on the land.

In Hopedale the play was entertaining, but also brought forward a message of concern about the preoccupation in the town with bingo and with the necessity to fundraise large amounts of money for the Cain's Quest race. The Hopedale play also drew on local history and interests through the introduction of artifacts discovered and preserved during archaeological projects near the community. Hopedale's play was collectively written using a system where participants added onto each other's sentences, allowing for a free flow of thought. The play was a satire, and it provided the chance to entertain people while examining the concern the actors had about bingo, which confines people to their homes listening to the radio instead of participating more actively in the community.

Postville's was the final play, in 2019, and the main focus of that production was on the history of the community, and a revived interest in that history because of the need to find material for the drama. Tim brought copies of *Them Days Magazine*, and the actors found great interest in rediscovering the anecdotes about their ancestors and in singing songs written about their community. The stories that show the tenacity and resilience of the ancestors were celebrated and the generations came together to give the rest of the community the opportunity to share in the celebrations. Postville's actors stressed the importance of the arts in Nunatsiavut and their desire to see music and drama receive the same attention as the visual arts. Several members of the Nunatsiavut Government were also members of the cast.

The use of playwriting and performing to address community concerns, to celebrate and reinforce identity, and to pass on knowledge is very much evident in the student plays of the Labrador Creative Arts Festival. In many ways the adult plays served the same functions, but the adults brought additional insight and life experience to the creation of community voices. They also provided entertainment and interest to many people; in some communities half the population attended the show. In subsequent interviews, actors expressed their interest in continuing to get together to create and perform. Digital strategies including film, recorded interviews and on-line presence of scripts will enable local direction and inter-community communication, particularly with increased access to social media.

We hope that this collection will provide the opportunity for these plays to be recreated, or will inspire the next wave of theatrical productions in a region that features many talented and committed actors, whether veterans of the Labrador Creative Arts Festival or new to the stage. Perhaps the new Illusuak Centre in Nain will become the home of a new festival of Nunatsiavut productions, celebrating the talent and vision of generations of Inuit actors to come.

For further information and to read the scripts go to [www.labradorcreativeartsfestival.ca](http://www.labradorcreativeartsfestival.ca)