

# Alaska Village Missions

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Dear Friends,

After a long journey on the mailboat down the notoriously treacherous Shelikof Straits, Olga Erickson arrived in the small village of Chignik during the winter of 1949. She was one of about a dozen single missionary ladies who pioneered churches up and down the Alaska Peninsula and on Kodiak Island. On arrival in Chignik she learned that the only place available to stay was an old, abandoned, "haunted" house about a mile outside the village. Here is what she says about her first winter in that haunted house.

*On many nights I was so cold that I couldn't get to sleep. I put several boards on top of the quilts to keep warm. My produce would freeze during those cold nights. To solve that problem I would wrap them up in some old sweaters and put them at the foot of my bed, sometimes under the covers.*



**A lake baptismal in Chignik: VBS leaders Duane and Dan**



**Armed guards at the Chignik baptism: Learn why...**

*One cold evening some Chignik natives knocked on my door to check up on me. Earlier that evening I had washed a few clothes by hand and hung them over a clothesline above the cook stove to dry. My visitors reached up and touched them. To their surprise, my clothing was stiff, partially frozen.*

Olga toughed it out that first winter and began visiting house to house to get to know the people. Her first Vacation Bible School was attended by 50 children.



At her Easter Service she had 62 people meeting in one of the available rooms in the village.

After the first few years, she began talking with some of the new converts about building a Chapel. In her book, These My People, she explains how the Lord helped with that project.

*One major obstacle was where to find the lumber to build the Chignik Bible Chapel. I noticed that there was an abandoned cannery within walking distance from the village.*

*One day I walked over to examine the remains of the cannery. Many of the local people took lumber from it to build their houses. There was an abundance of good lumber still in place high on the ceiling. As I stood there looking up I prayed: "Lord, blow it down to the ground so we can get at that good lumber."*

*The very next night a one-hundred-mile-per-hour gale tore through Chignik and flattened that old cannery. One of the villagers came rushing over to see me, all excited. "Olga!" He*

*called, "the cannery was blown right down to the ground last night!" "Praise the Lord!" I replied. "Get a hammer and a nail puller. Let's go!"*

*And so they built the Chignik Bay Chapel. At the time of Olga's writing, they averaged about 80 people on Sunday morning.*



**After holding a service in Chignik Bay, Duane, Beth and Dan held what they were told was the first church service in 12 years in neighboring Chignik Lagoon.**





Now, about 70 years later, it's our turn. A lot has changed in these villages, with most of them shrinking in population. Chignik has gone from about 200 in Olga's time, to less than 100. During our brief visits there over the last 2 or 3 winters, the chapel has been sitting empty and unused. But that's not because of a lack of interest. When our VBS team, headed by Duane and Beth, showed up there this summer, they were warmly welcomed. After a couple of days of the kids program, they were asked if they could hold a Sunday service in the Chapel, which they gladly agreed to. About 20 adults joined in that service.



*The first VBS program in many years in the village of Perryville.*

After that they were asked if they could conduct a memorial service in the Chapel for one of the former villagers, which they also agreed to. For that service, the Chapel was packed.

After the service, one of the ladies, who was already a believer, approached our team to request baptism. So plans were made for a baptism service the next day in a lake near the village. When word of that got out, one of the kids in the VBS program asked if she could also be baptized. Because of the many bears in the area the group was accompanied to the lake by three rifle-toting men, which you can see in the picture on the front page. How's that for a memorable baptism!



So far this summer our teams have held VBS programs in six villages, with one more coming up. One common observation has been that the young people have almost no knowledge about God or Jesus or the Bible. One young girl on hearing that Jesus had died for her said, "Oh, I didn't know that. That makes me so sad."

*Travel to Port Heiden for the VBS program: Jenny, Mark and Annie*





In another village the young children listened to every word about the story of Jesus. When they got to the part about Jesus rising from the dead they all spontaneously jumped to their feet, clapping and cheering to hear the good news.

In every village the teams had great interaction with the adults also, receiving many requests to please come back and even to stay permanently in the village. We need the Lord's direction on how best to serve the men, women and children in these villages this coming fall and winter. We would greatly appreciate your prayers to that end.



***A great need for ministry to women in most of the villages: Beth Klas (r)***

Now, to the real point of this letter. Olga was one of about a dozen single women missionaries who pioneered much of the work up and down the Alaska Peninsula and on Kodiak. They served so faithfully, at great personal cost, and accomplished so much. Now we need for the Lord to raise up more Olgas, and hopefully a few Oscars also, to continue representing the Lord in these villages. Please contact us if you feel that might be you.



***Be ready for uninvited guests to the baptism***

A note on our Bible School dormitory renovation project. We have been focused on the men's side of the dorm. I wish you could see the work that has been accomplished this summer. The sixth volunteer work team will arrive mid-August to finish up the project before school starts. If you are interested in putting together a team to help us finish the rest of the dorm next summer, please contact us.

Thanks, Randy

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