



# **In a Far Country: The True Story of a Mission, a Marriage, a Murder, and the Remarkable Reindeer Rescue of 1898**

*John Taliaferro*

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In the fall of 1897, eight whaling ships became trapped in the ice on Alaska's northern coast. Without relief, two hundred whalers would starve to death by winter's end. Mercifully, an extraordinary missionary, Tom Lopp, and seven Eskimo herders embarked on a harrowing journey to save the whalers, driving four hundred reindeer more than seven hundred untracked miles. At the heart of the rescue expedition lies another, in some ways more compelling, journey. *In a Far Country* is the personal odyssey of Tom and his wife Ellen Lopp—their commitment to the natives and the rugged but happy life they built for themselves amid a treeless tundra at the top of the world. The Lopps pulled through on grit and wits, on humility and humor, on trust and love, and by the grace of God. Their accomplishment would surely have received broader acclaim had it not been eclipsed by two simultaneous events: the Spanish- American War and the Alaska gold rush. The United States and its territories were transformed abruptly and irrevocably by these fits of expansionist fever, and despite the thoughtful, determined guidance of the Lopps, the natives of the North were soon overwhelmed by a force mightier than the fiercest Arctic winter: the twentieth century.

## **In a Far Country: The True Story of a Mission, a Marriage, a Murder, and the Remarkable Reindeer Rescue of 1898 Details**

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# **From Reader Review In a Far Country: The True Story of a Mission, a Marriage, a Murder, and the Remarkable Reindeer Rescue of 1898 for online ebook**

## **Katie says**

This book is well written and is a true story that really helped me to gain some understanding about Alaskan history. It is amazing what the people in this book were able to accomplish in their time. Parts of the book read like a novel, and parts read like a history book, but overall it was quite interesting and enjoyable.

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## **Unwisely says**

This book started out so interesting that I missed my stop. The background of the missionaries dividing up Alaska, how the reindeer idea came into being, all of that was fascinating. Life in the missions was also pretty interesting.

The actual trek and ending was less interesting to me than the beginning, since I have read a few arctic travel books in my day. The whalers camp stuff was almost distracting, since it seemed less detailed than the rest of it.

A very strong first half, which somewhat peters out, but overall a good read. (I have been waffling between 3 & 4 stars and changed it several times already.) The small details (e.g., the roofs dripped when the thaws came) about daily life were pretty neat, though

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## **Sharon says**

Survival in a harsh climate always makes interesting reading for me, partly because I love wild places so much. It's my vicarious pleasure, in this case, to visit Alaska's northern coasts, and most especially, to get to know the remarkable Lopp family, Ellen and Tom. The Lopps were missionaries in the mid 1800's, genuinely respectful of the people they hoped to serve, without a hair of condescension.

The book covers their years living above the Bearing Straits, focusing on the importation of reindeer to the region. Originally intended to provide the native people a more dependable food/materials source than caribou, the plans became muddled by various egos, motives, greed and ignorance.

This well researched and equally well written story describes the perhaps unnecessary overland rescue operation to provide reindeer meat to whalers stranded above the Bearing Sea. It's a complicated tale with a fine cast of characters. The most compelling portions focus on Ellen's letters to relatives back in the states; I would love to read more of these. She was an honest, chatty and positive voice throughout their tenure. Because the book covers so much territory (whalers and whaling, indigenous cultures and white impact upon them, mining and the gold rush) sometimes its focus feels unclear. Still, it was an enjoyable glimpse into a wilderness past, thoroughly recognizable today.

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**Susan Smith says**

Excellent story of education and missionaries in NW AK. Herding reindeer over 700 miles to save whaling ship crews from starvation.

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**Shincrackerfarm says**

Talliaferro has done an excellent job of weaving excitement, emotions, terror, anger, frustration and romance into a carefully told documentary. Photographs are very complimentary to the story, and the background information the author has included is more than enhancing of the excitement and wonder of this epic story.

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**Jenny says**

This is a great story about amazing people that have been forgotten by history. I love reading books like this. I think the book is well written. As far as striking a balance between exciting adventure story and history text, the book tends towards historical scholarship, but I didn't mind that.

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**Kathy says**

The "mission", "marriage" and "murder" were all quite interesting and I really enjoyed reading about Tom & Ella Lopp and their family living in one of the most frigid and remote places on earth at the end of the nineteenth century. But the reindeer rescue which--filled in the final half of the book--just went on too long and I didn't find it all that fascinating.

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**Mark Valentine says**

I did not think that I would be interested in this history, but I read it over three days and was consumed by it. Even though the murder happened 100 pages or so into the history and I asked myself, What will sustain my interest now? But Taliaferro writes in such an engaging, intelligent way that I could not let the story drop.

If you want to read an unusual book that has a great many variables, impossible situations, superhuman courage as an everyday event, I recommend it wholeheartedly.

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**Bookwyrmgryl says**

Great book - true story, about a missionary couple in northeast Alaska and their experiences. The main story is of herding reindeer to whalers whose ships were frozen in the ice above the arctic circle, but there is so

much more to this book. The author has researched documents such as letters, journals, and newspaper articles from the time, as well as government reports.

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### **Artemis Nitzband says**

This man and his wife live in 1890's Alaska and experience see through the eyes of non-natives. The book is fascinating... whaling and mining industries and its impact on the natives in Alaska at that time. The Lopps, stationed in a town along the Bering Strait, are missionaries who set out to bring Christianity to the natives of Alaska but end up learning more from the natives over their 12 or so years while stationed there. In spite of the COLD conditions, lack of even the basics, lack of communication with their lower 48 relatives, the Lopps love living their life in Alaska. This book reveals the details of the Overland Relief Expedition (which I knew nothing about) to bring supplies to whalers who got themselves iced in for the winter during 1898. Great history of reindeer/caribou populations. I learned a great deal about the geography of Alaska as I flipped back and forth between the map and the story. So now I know where the Chuckchi Sea is! The author brought these characters alive. I cared about their lives and the others around them.

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### **Mom says**

The story of the Lopp family and their experiences in northern Alaska has much to teach us about how we handle the people we come across in our lives and the respect that we should have for other cultures.

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### **Melinda says**

This would have been a 4-star read for me had it been 65 pages shorter. Really. The writing here is very good, the author a former editor at Newsweek, and there is much to learn about Alaska at the turn of the last century. I enjoyed the story of the Lopp family, how reindeer were imported to the Yukon, and the reason why the whaling trade lasted so long (corsets, believe it or not). However, at times it seemed like I was TRAPPED in this narrative. I had the feeling that the author had become so obsessed with this subject that he felt compelled to tell me every single detail from his research. Less is more, as they say. This text could have used some judicious editing to make it stronger and allow the details of the Overland Rescue Expedition shine. Good read that could have been better.

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### **Chris says**

A wonderful narrative of adventure, commerce, faith, and devotion in Alaska at the close of the nineteenth century. I used this book for reading analysis in a graduate-level education course at Christopher Newport University.

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### **Susan says**

Interesting subject (missionaries/school teachers in remote Alaskan village, late 19th century) but could have used a good editor; this book would be more interesting (to me anyway) at half its length. Still, I learned about the attempt to introduce reindeer ("imported" from Siberia) to Alaska. The focus of the book, Tom and Ellen Lopp, were an extraordinary couple, with great respect for the locals with whom they lived for many years. They had a strong belief that education and job opportunities were what was needed, even more than the gospel.

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## **Debbie says**

a fascinating read. Tom, and then his wife Ellen, move to Alaska as missionaries and although they teach the bible they feel that basic education and respect for the natives is far more important. If left to the Loppes it would have been unlikely that much of this story would have been known due to their modesty but without them the introduction of reindeer from Siberia and certainly the reindeer rescue would not have had the success it did. At no time did the Lopp family really make anything of the lack of amenities and hardship of living in Alaska, making friends and working alongside natives earning mutual respect.

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