



Winds of Skilak

Bonnie Rose Ward

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WINNER of the 2014 Next Generation Indie Book Award (memoir) other category!

AWARD-WINNING FINALIST in the Autobiography/Memoir category of the 2014 USA Best Book Awards!

Leaving behind friends, family, and life as they know it, Sam and Bonnie Ward embark on a journey into the Alaskan wilderness that will change them forever.

Winds of Skilak traces a young couple's adventurous move from the suburbs of Ohio to a remote island on ill-tempered Skilak Lake. As Sam and Bonnie adapt to a life without running water, electricity and telephones, the unforgiving, desolate environment tests their courage early on. Facing sub-freezing temperatures, unfriendly bears, and cabin fever, the Wards find strength in new friends, each other, and the awe-inspiring beauty of "the last frontier." Just when they finally settle in, a freak accident proves to be the ultimate test of their resolve. Will they be able to survive in this isolated wilderness filled with unseen dangers?

Author Bonnie Ward chronicles an exciting and thought-provoking tale of one couple's faith in God and dedication to each other through all of Alaska's curveballs. Winds of Skilak is a true tale of absorbing force, sure to bring out your own sense of adventure.

Winds of Skilak Details

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Author : Bonnie Rose Ward

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From Reader Review Winds of Skilak for online ebook

Verena says

Not what I expected. This book received high ratings but it should be shelved under 'romance', not homesteading. After reading Proenneke I was expecting a similar wilderness account, but from a female perspective. The story feels heavily scripted, the author is awfully weepy for a "wilderness woman", and the fact that the couple received so much outside help, relied on a car, motorized boats, and well-paying seasonal jobs on the Slope is reflective of the lifestyle of many Alaskans, then and today.

Lynn Bonelli says

I read this while traveling in Alaska this summer and had, in fact, just finished Pilgrim's Wilderness (a wonderful read) the day before. This title, Winds of Shilak, popped up with such high ratings that I felt needed to read it before I visited the area. After all, I too love the idea of homesteading, living sustainably, building my own cabin and communing with nature. As much as I respect what this couple has done, and I applaud their skills (and mostly luck) I just couldn't take the book seriously. Let me assure you I have not written my own book so I can only imagine how hard an undertaking that is but this read like a young adult/juvenile level book.

And while I garnered from a few five star reviews I read prior to purchasing this book, these are some very religious folks...which is wonderful...except that Bonnie defers to her husband as if he is Abraham or Noah. Even when his life (and sometimes hers) is in what she (and doctors) describe as mortal danger she kinda just throws her hands up in prayer and says she'll obey her husband's wishes and be the submissive wife as he defies (or dismisses) HER wishes, as well as advice from others. This occurs over and over and over again.

Between the blind faith of "obeying" her husband, the outright dismissal of thanks to friends who provided things for their survival (Bonnie opts to say that even though the friends may have brought the items it was actually God who provided), and the very basic...almost grade-school style of writing, it was painful to get through this book.

Again, while I admire what they went through and what they accomplished and parts of it provide a tiny peek inside the life of an off-the-grid family it's a far cry from what I'd expected from a 4.24 rated book. I mean, I think that beats out most of Steinbeck's book ratings!

Don Alesi says

A lot of people have wanted to pack up and leave their chaotic lives and run away to Alaska. This couple did just that and to everyone's surprise, they succeeded. It's a well written and entertaining book that doesn't sugarcoat the harsh realities of living on a windswept island with little contact from the mainland. After several years of and making it in Alaska, the couple returns home. I wish they would have explained why. I highly recommend this book to those wishing to lead a life in the wilderness.

Kristin says

Winds of Skilak is an incredible, moving true story of a man and a woman, deeply in love, who decide to live out their dream of living in the Alaskan wilderness. Sam and Bonnie pack up and leave their lives, as they know them, behind. They set their minds on conquering their dream, and they don't let anything stop them. Their bravery, determination, and desire to adapt and overcome anything Caribou Island and Skilak Lake have to throw at them is as encouraging as it is remarkable. Together and with God, Sam and Bonnie learn and grow as husband and wife and as wilderness people.

This is a book I will read again and again. I recommend it to everyone I come in contact with. There is so much to learn in this book, not only about wilderness survival, but about relying on each other and the power of prayer to overcome any obstacle life throws at you. This book serves as a reminder that you CAN accomplish your dreams, as long as you believe it, believe God, and never give up.

While reading Winds of Skilak, I laughed and cried with Bonnie. Sometimes, it may have been a mixture of both. Most of the time, I found myself smiling, eager to tell someone what I'd just read about Sam and Bonnie's life in Alaska. For a moment, when I had about 40 pages to go, I decided that I was going to put the book down for a few days, because I simply did not want it to end. Then, I picked the book back up, thirsty for more of Bonnie's recounts. Winds of Skilak is truly an amazing book.

Sue says

**** Author provided "Winds of Skilak" for review ****

I was totally captivated from the moment that I started reading "Winds of Skilak." It was such a surprise to me that I became so engrossed in the book so quickly as I usually don't really enjoy the books with families moving to lands that are unexplored or unsettled.

This is the book that changed my mind! I felt as if I was right there with Bonnie and Sam Ward as they came together and then followed Sam's dream. Bonnie didn't seem to even have a second thought about leaving her family and the convenient and comfortable life she was leaving behind her in Ohio.

I loaned my copy to several ladies in my church and they were ALL talking about "Winds of Skilak" anytime we were in a group together. I thought I would NEVER get it back so I could read it too! I actually read for 14 hours straight because I just could NOT put it down! I haven't done that since I was a teenager reading books with a flashlight under my blankets so Mom wouldn't catch me and fuss about staying up all night.

I felt the cold, cold waters of Skilak Lake and I felt the sore muscles as the two of them worked so hard to make a home in this barren and unsettled land. The writing is so descriptive that it just swept me away and into the wilderness with them. Bonnie seemed to always be stirring up wildlife like a grizzly bear or moose any time she went outside their little primitive cabin. Life in any wilderness is not for the faint of heart.

Nothing really seemed to test their love quite like the the dismal times when accidents plagued them. From the time that Sam injured his back until the early morning hours where they heard shots echo from their neighbors farm. Their first thought went to their goat herd of four little goats. I cried right along with Bonnie as she said goodbye to her dear sweet Esther Bester. The loss of any food source can be dangerous for any

human that lived in the area. From the garden plots of berries to the meat from the animals that seemed like a member of their family, life can be very hard not only on the muscles and body but to the heart as well.

I would gladly recommend this book to anyone who likes a really good book that will captivate you from the beginning until the very last page. The ladies of my church group just all LOVED this book. It's always refreshing to read a book that doesn't contain vulgar or profane language. This book is one that I can see my daughter and my grandchildren enjoying reading "Winds of Skilak" as well. I plan to share it next with my sixteen year old grandson when I see him in a couple of months.

If you want a really good and easy book to read,
then this is the one for your reading pleasure.
sue

Lisa Kearns says

Alaska is my favorite subject, and I've read just about everything that's been written about it since the early 1900s. Once in a while a new book comes along that renews my love of Alaska and my determination to visit there some day. This is one of those books - I was totally immersed in Bonnie Rose Ward's "Winds of Skilak" until I turned the last page. This is a true story of Bonnie and her husband Sam, who carved out a homestead on Caribou Island in Skilak Lake in the 1980s.

The story begins with Sam and Bonnie living a suburban life in Ohio. They decide to follow their dreams before they get too old, so they sell their home and most of their belongings and move to Alaska. After searching for weeks for land to buy, they hear about a plot being sold on an island miles from the nearest town. It's only accessible by boat or plane, but they quickly decide it's perfect for them.

Over the next few years, they build a cabin, learn to haul water and cook on a wood stove, grow a garden and add livestock, hunt, trap and fish, and survive the long cold winters. Sam has experience with the wilderness from his childhood, but Bonnie is a newcomer to their lifestyle. She showed her strength of character by bravely meeting each challenge that came along, and trying her best to be a good partner to Sam. She also leans on her faith in God during times of fear and loneliness.

I found this book to be honest, realistic, and totally inspiring. Bonnie's descriptions of the majestic mountains in the background, the smell of the spruce trees and the many moods of the lake were so realistic that I felt like I was there. I'm hoping she will write a follow-up book that continues their story past the first few years on the island.

If you're someone who loves reading about Alaska, or homesteading, or outdoorsy memoirs, this is a book you'll also love. Five stars!

Cheryl says

Review copy provided by author

"Winds of Skilak" is the true story of Bonnie and Sam Ward, adventurers who leave their home, family, indoor plumbing, electricity, stores--in short, civilization--to pursue a dream of living in the Alaskan wilderness. When they arrive in Alaska, they have no idea where they will live, until lots come up for sale on Caribou Island, located in giant, temperamental Skilak Lake, located on Alaska's Kenai Peninsula.

At Skilak Lake, they are greeted by a sign warning them that cold water kills--Skilak is a glacier fed lake--and then has a running total of the number of people who've died--32 is the latest number on the sign. Not exactly a warm welcome. But the couple, with the help of their friend Bill, who has made the trip with them, and Nels, the lone inhabitant of the island, the two begin to carve out a home in the wilderness. The book tells of their adventures--the accidents, injuries, unpredictable weather, trapping, hunting, wildlife, joy at completing their cabin and the beauty that surrounds them, new friends, and sorrow.

Alaska is a hard land. I've been there several times, and plan on returning. I'm familiar with the area they lived in, and can appreciate--on a small level--how difficult it was, and how great their accomplishment; successfully living their dream. Rare are the people who can do what they did, and more rare still, do it as well as they did. A good read of the difficulties and joys of living on the last frontier.

Emmy Gregory says

OK so I probably got off on the wrong foot with this one. On the very first page, where the author's husband springs it on her that he's put the house on the market without asking her first, and decided that they're both going to quit their jobs and move to Alaska, and she's OK with this, I should have noped out of there. I mean I guess they had talked about it a year before and stuff, but... no. Whatever your marriage dynamics are, you DON'T spring this crap on your spouse.

This is really a book by someone who has a fascinating story to tell but actually isn't all that great a writer. The OTT conservative Christian submissiveness towards her husband which sees her simpering in adoration towards him while he talks to her like she's a child, also grates. But really it's the fact that she's just not that great at putting an engaging paragraph together. Also her husband, frankly, seems like an overly-macho idiot. Multiple Alaskans say "don't try to live on Caribou Island all year round because it's a miserable place outside of summer and you'll probably die crossing the lake because of an unexpected storm or falling through the ice -?" "My great swinging gonads say I'll be fine!" Yeah.

Book Preview Review says

Book Description:

"Leaving behind friends, family, and life as they know it, Sam and Bonnie Ward embark on a journey into the Alaskan wilderness that will change them forever.

Winds of Skilak traces a young couple's adventurous move from the suburbs of Ohio to a remote island on ill-tempered Skilak Lake. As Sam and Bonnie adapt to a life without running water, electricity and

telephones, the unforgiving, desolate environment tests their courage early on. Facing sub-freezing temperatures, unfriendly bears, and cabin fever, the Wards find strength in new friends, each other, and the awe-inspiring beauty of “the last frontier.” Just when they finally settle in, a freak accident proves to be the ultimate test of their resolve. Will they be able to survive in this isolated wilderness filled with unseen dangers?

Author Bonnie Ward chronicles an exciting and thought-provoking tale of one couple’s faith in God and dedication to each other through all of Alaska’s curveballs. *Winds of Skilak* is a true tale of absorbing force, sure to bring out your own sense of adventure.”

Fan’s of TLC’s *Alaska: The Last Frontier* or any of the many new reality television shows about living in Alaska will enjoy this raw and honest account of the day to day life of living so isolated in the wilderness. The rugged terrain mixed with untamed and pristine beauty of Alaska and the unpredictable icy waters of Skilak separated the Ward’s from civilization. Forever at the mercy of the lake, they needed no clocks. Skilak time was measured by the seasons, the water and winds.

Coming from high gear mode, they eventually learned to slow their pace to nature’s speed. Sam is a man who fears nothing and has the strong will and ability to survive in the wilderness. Their deep love and understanding in each other and their faith in God comforted them in lessons of trust, friendship and patience. Ward chronicles her emotions honestly; they are as real as if you are there with her.

With personal photos interspersed throughout the chapters, one can truly appreciate and get a better understanding and feel of just how remote and sparse they truly lived... and lived happily.

Dave Allen says

So, this book was recommended by a friend and has numerous 5 star ratings, but I really had to force myself to keep plugging away. The homesteading and making your way in the wilderness was interesting for a while, but the writing is on the simple side and could have used some editing in my opinion. Also, the author's subservience to her husband, and what seemed like her constant "crying or on the verge of tears," got really tiresome. Maybe its just that I've read some truly great, very well written, Alaskan books recently, like *Raven's Gift*, *Dead Reckoning*, and *Jimmy Bluefeather*... or that my expectations for this one were just too high.

Rebekah says

This book filled a niche for me, I love a good live-off-the-land, survivalist story and I have a special place in my heart for memoirs about this, especially when set in Alaska!

That being said, the husband in this book is an ass. A sexist ass. I found myself rooting for the Alaskan wilderness against his stupid, egotistical antics. I wished for him to be eaten by a bear, or crashed through thin ice on the mighty Skilak River.

Sam puts down his awesome wife regularly. Telling her such gems as "put down that axe before you gash open your leg and bleed to death". Or, "we are going to town, NOW". Or, "shut up, Bonnie". He's a keeper alright!

My view of him kind of ruined sweet Bonnie for me. I can't imagine being isolated in a tiny off-grid cabin in the middle of nowhere with a man who thinks he can order women around and is such an egotistical and self-absorbed idiot that he refuses to treat a BROKEN BACK. "I am MAN!!! No one will tell ME what to do!! Not my wife, the wild Alaskan frontier, and certainly not a dozen or more broken bones! I shall heal myself!!! "

I wonder what became of this couple. I hope she left him for someone who has a little respect for women, especially women who have hewn out logs for their own dwellings! You don't need him, Bonnie! Gnaw your foot outta that bear trap!

Lone Alaskan says

At eighteen I sold all of my belongings and bought a one way ticket to rural Alaska. Since then I've fallen in love with this state and its remarkable people and their remarkable stories. Bonnie, happens to be one of those people. But contrary to others who've lived amazing lives, she documented hers- in beautiful wording and vivid description.

The story starts at the beginning. Bonnie and her husband, Sam leave their midwest home and venture into the unknown of Alaska. The story follows Bonnie and her husband Sam's trials and triumphs as they attempt to make a life for themselves in a place so far from their original 'home'. Of course, for the few of us lucky enough to fall in love with this place, Ohio soon seems distant and foreign (although the people left behind are deeply missed). Bonnie and Sam quickly make peace with the oddities of Alaska and find unique contentment in its surroundings. If you've ever dreamed of running away from the city life and delving headfirst into a homestead lifestyle, then you will absolutely love Bonnie's story- because essentially, that is the path Bonnie and Sam chose.

As the story progresses you find yourself living life beside Bonnie. You get to experience it all. The building of a rural cabin. The gathering, hunting, and raising of foods. The simple events of an everyday wilderness lifestyle. But, alas, the wilderness is not always kind. And although you get to experience the utter joy entailed in Bonnie's life, you are also thrust into the many unfortunate events that Alaska bestows upon her. You'll find yourself cringing at the painful injuries Bonnie and Sam face. You'll struggle with the emotions tied to rural living and the sadness and heartbreak that the lifestyle sometimes brings.

The place where Bonnie and Sam make home is amidst the infamous Skilak lake. The waters tell a story of their own, and Bonnie does an exquisite job of bringing their power and peacefulness into her tale. As with many Alaskans- Bonnie and Sam's lives are largely effected by the waters near them. Bonnie's story is no different. In her book you can find both her admiration and respect of Skilak. I find this to be such an intimate detail that can be found not-so-subtly plotted throughout the story. For individuals in Alaska this one small trait of the book will ring relatable and true. Nature is powerful here, and Bonnie chooses not to

hide Alaska's harshness. But she also brings fourth Alaska's light- by showing the beauty that can be found amidst Skilak's tough waters.

I found myself experiencing so many emotions throughout this tale. Bonnie's honest humour in many of her upbeat chapters made me feel as though I was chatting with an old friend. I found myself smiling and laughing at many of her uniquely Alaskan experiences. I continually rooted for Sam and her to have a wonderful life, and was always hoping for their success. And when misfortune struck, I was so deeply involved in the story that it actually often moved me to tears.

This book is a beautiful tribute to Alaska. As an Alaskan myself I can truly say this is one of the few brilliant northern-based novels out there. It captures your imagination and fills your heart with the contentment of the wild. I envy Bonnie's life so dearly and will forever treasure her story. I was blessed enough to get a copy of her book signed- and I will hold this specific copy near and dear to me for years to come. It's earned its place on my bookshelf and I will reread it again and again. The Winds of Skilak is an inspiration for those with their heart yearning for this lovely state, and a memorium to those who are blessed enough to already lived here.

Jess says

Ugh.

Giving this book two stars would've been a stretch so one, it is. I'm mad I spent actual money on the Kindle version. I only did so because the reviews were so good.

Sorry Bonnie, but your husband was (is?) an ass. And no, the rest of us women would not consider ourselves lucky to have him. (For the record, Nels was an ass, too, and didn't deserve forgiveness for the goat murders.)

This story would've made slightly more sense if Bonnie and Sam were daughter and father. I get no picture of a mature, adult relationship going on here beginning with the very first sentence in the book... Sam has already put the house on the market without a discussion?! For real?? (And don't even get me started on the day Sam berated Bonnie for using an axe while he was gone or all the times Bonnie just sat around patiently waiting for Sam to say if and when they could go to town, or get hamburgers, or go see the giant glacier, or if she could come trapping or not or if she could wipe her own ass. Jesus Christ, Bonnie. Make a freaking decision of your own for once!!!)

Save yourselves from the monotony of this story:

Sam knows everything. Bonnie knows nothing.

Sam scolds Bonnie that she knows nothing. Bonnie is a mischievous child who tries anyway and eventually learns her lessons the hard way.

Sam teaches Bonnie. Bonnie swoons and praises Sam as her lord and savior.

And after all that we get a lame epilogue with ZERO explanation as to why Sam and Bonnie left after 15 years now live in WV?!?? (But you can bet your bottom dollar it was Sam's idea.)

I also would've liked a warning that this memoir was fairly heavy on the religious side.

Also, COFFEE. Coffee, coffee, coffee. We get it. Everyone drank coffee every possible moment.

Okay. Rant over.

Rex Fuller says

Bonnie Ward knew nothing of living in the bush. She accompanied her husband to an island in Skilak Lake, Alaska, as an act of keeping faith with his dream. The book describes building a cabin and their life in it for the first two years. She collected berries for canning--more than once coming face-to-face with a grizzly--fished for salmon, helped run trap lines, and slowly became a wilderness woman. Everything you would expect. What you don't expect and what you find in this book are charming humility and honesty. Her writing is straight from the heart, making a very enjoyable read.

Janet says

Excellent non-fiction of a young married couple who choose to live in the Alaskan wilderness relying on the land for all of their needs. Even though at times I wanted to reach inside the book and grab Bonnie's frying pan and konk Sam over the head with it, I admire their strength, fortitude, skills and talents. As I read some of the dangerous situations they faced, I realized they got through it, and Skilak Lake didn't swallow them up alive after all because Bonnie lived through it to write this book I'm reading. Bonnie will invite you into their cozy cabin for some hot coffee she always seemed to have on hand.
