Togo, the Sled Dog

and Other Great Animal Stories of the North

Compiled and edited by
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Dedication

Once upon a dog-time—well, actually, in 1913—there was born in Nome, Alaska, a Siberian puppy, offspring of Dolly (one of the fifteen Siberians purchased from Siberia as a proposed gift from Jafet Lindeberg to famed Arctic explorer, Roald Amundsen) and Suggen (Leonhard Seppala's famed lead dog during their three consecutive wins in the All Alaska Sweepstakes in 1915, 1916, and 1917).

Though colicky as an infant, and a constantly-in-trouble juvenile delinquent later on, this unlikely candidate for stardom quickly became Seppala's lead dog, the true hero of the Great Serum Run of 1925.

After all his well-earned honors, he was cruelly sabotaged by the Stateside press that mistakenly credited all his stellar achievements to another of Seppala's dogs, Balto. Even worse, for more than eighty-five years, the press/media refuses to correct that mistake. Only in Alaska is the true hero of the Great Serum Run acknowledged.

Thus we feel it is long past time to begin a correctional groundswell by dedicating this book of stories of the North to the greatest dog of them all:

TOGO

Other books in the series
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Wildfire, the Red Stallion
and Other Great Horse Stories

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Alaska's Iditarod

Joseph Leininger Wheeler

Its origins

They call it "The Last Great Race on Earth"—and it lives up to its name.

The story of the Iditarod Sled Dog Race is as improbable as the story of the Great Serum Run to Nome that inspired it. (It is told movingly in Lew Freedman's book, *Father of the Iditarod: The Joe Redington Story*).

It began when Joe Redington and his wife, Vi, found the call of the North to be impossible to resist, and moved from Pennsylvania to Alaska in 1948; here they homesteaded at Flat Horn Lake and settled down on Knik Arm just a few miles from Wasilla.

They say an institution is but the shadow of one person: one person with a dream. Redington's dream started with his discovery that the sled dog way of life was disappearing from Alaska. There were fewer and fewer dogs every day that passed. In their places were bright yellow snow machines. Soon the era of the sled dog would be but a memory.

Enter Dorothy Page, chair of the Alaska Centennial Purchase Committee. She chanced to ask Redington a question: "Do you think it would be possible to conduct a sled dog race on the old Iditarod Trail? Is enough of it still open or usable?" Joe said he thought so; after all, he and Vi mushed dogs on that trail almost every

day. Page pounced, anointing him chairman of the Iditarod Trail Committee.

Joe just happened to be the one man in Alaska with the vision to take those two questions and transubstantiate them into the greatest race in the world. For her role in all this, and remaining on board for the rest of her life, Page is called "Mother of the Iditarod"; and he, "Father of the Iditarod."

According to Freedman, what Joe did was to take the All Alaska Sweepstakes sled dog race that during the years 1910–1917 transformed Nome into the "Dog Capital of the World," tie it to the epic Great Serum Race to Nome of 1925, then, when it appeared the dream would die stillborn, had the audacity to organize a thousand-mile sled race from Anchorage to Nome—no sled dog race of that length had ever taken place!—and offer a purse of $50,000! People everywhere not only thought he was crazy, they told him so. Howard Farley quipped that there wasn't $50,000 in prize money for all the dog races in the world combined! So where was all that money coming from?

Joe didn't have the faintest idea. He just had a sixth sense that only a dramatic thousand-mile race commemorating the Great Serum Race and the Old Iditarod Trail, beginning in Anchorage and ending in Nome, with a $50,000 purse, was big enough—perhaps staggering enough—to catch the imagination of Alaskans everywhere.

On March 2, 1973, thirty-four sled dog teams rushed away from the Anchorage Tudor Road starting point. Redington wasn't in it—he was still trying to raise the money for the purse at the other end. Finally, the $50,000 became a reality, but he had to take out a $30,000 loan on his house to pull it off.

The big question on everyone's mind was, *Would anyone actually finish the thing?* After all, it had never been done before. As to how long it would take, no one knew the answer to that either. Joe was so strapped for cash, they had to prepare a double-duty banner: one side for the starting point and the other for the ending of the race. Twenty-two teams made it to Nome. Dick Wilmarth won it in 20 days, 49 minutes, 41 seconds; John Schultz came in last (in 32 days), receiving the now legendary Red Lantern, the symbolic reward for the last musher in, meaning, "We're leaving the light on for you."

All Alaska celebrated. The impossible had happened—but would it ever happen again? When it did, people began marking it on their calendars.

In 1975, the Humane Society of the United States declared the race inhumane and did its best to kill it. Redington was outraged: it was common knowledge that not only did the dogs love it, they were in far better shape in Nome at the end than were the mushers.

Each year that followed was a struggle. Had it not been for Redington, it

would long since have folded. He was always coming up with new ideas to publicize it and keep it alive.

In 1976, he came up with a two hundred dog-long sled team to celebrate America's bicentennial.

In 1978, Redington finally got a bill through Congress that added the 2,200-mile-long Iditarod Trail to the list of America's National Historic Trails.

In 1979, Redington, Susan Butcher, and Rob Stapleton mushed a sled dog team to the top of North America's highest mountain, 20,320-foot Mount McKinley. They experienced a terrific storm that almost blew them off the mountain; Susan Butcher's team almost ran away from her, saved only by their indefatigable guide, Ray Genet. Finally, on May 28, they and three of their dogs reached the very summit, from which they could see far-off Anchorage. The dogs, not tired at all, just looked around curiously for the rest of the trail. Stapleton quipped, "Joe had trained the dogs to go—they just hadn't been trained to stop." But they certainly had proved that dog teams had unbelievable stamina. It had taken them forty-four days to pull off what even most Alaskans considered an impossibility.

In 1982, Joe and Vi rode in a sled with small wheels in Reagan's Inaugural parade in Washington, D.C.

In 1983, they put on the seventy-fifth anniversary celebration of the first All Alaska Sweepstakes that made Iron Man Johnson, Scotty Allan, and Leonhard Seppala folk heroes.

But it was 1985 that meant the most for the race's future. Redington had long been nurturing women, encouraging them to compete in the Iditarod. Susan Butcher was well on her way to winning the race that year when her team was attacked by an angry moose, leaving her team and sled in shambles and several dogs killed. But Libby Riddles saved the day and won. With that, the press went crazy—finally an Iditarod cover girl!

Susan Butcher *did* make it, however, in 1986—also 1987, 1988, and 1990. All this predicably resulted in the best-selling Iditarod T-shirt ever, with these words in large letters: ALASKA, WHERE MEN ARE MEN AND WOMEN WIN THE IDITAROD.

Each year, the controversy for first place is fierce, making the winners household names in the sporting world. Names such as:

Rich Swenson	(5 times)	Jeff King	(4 times)
Susan Butcher	(4 times)	Lance Mackey	(4 times)
Martin Buser	(4 times)	Doug Swingley	(4 times)

By the 1990s, the Iditarod had become the best-known mushing event, not only in America, but around the world.

Another great dogsled race today is the Yukon Quest (it is run from Fairbanks to Whitehorse in Canada's Yukon).

But a lot of things have changed: it can now be run in just under ten days; mushers have food and supplies flown in to towns along the way; mushers are no longer permitted to bunk with villagers, but must rest in common facilities; everything is much faster paced than ever before; and the purse continues to grow.

Yet some things are unchanged. It is still the world's most unpredictable race, with blinding blizzards, plunging temperatures, overhanging branches, buffalo, moose, and wild cards of every kind guaranteeing it will never become formulaic. Mushers can still attend and participate from all over the world; mushers may move as slowly or as rapidly as they choose; they may still reminisce with each other around evening campfires; and best of all, they know that each race is a once-in-a-lifetime event that the whole world is watching. Oh not quite best of all—best of all, old-time mushers say—is *mushing a dog team under the stars, the only sound the padding of huskies' feet on the trail and the hiss of the sled runners.*

And yet how close a call it was! How grateful we must ever be that one man—Joe Redington—believed enough in his dream to build foundations under it that are standing the test of time. More significantly, by so doing, he rescued for you, me, America, and the world, one of the greatest legacies of the past—the sled-dog world.

Its dogs

I had always thought a musher was a musher, a dogsled was a dogsled, a sled dog was a sled dog, and the Iditarod was the Iditarod—until God gave me an epiphany in the middle of the night of May 26/27, 2010, and suddenly, the light came on: they all add up to one word—*dog*.

Up till then, the story of Seppala, Togo, and the Great Serum Run was just a story; now, with the epiphany, I realized for the very first time what I'd been missing: the canine ingredient. Without dogs, there would be no story at all. With dogs, a new item was added to my bucket list—*experience the Iditarod personally* with Connie *before we die*.

For the incredible yearly thousand-mile soap opera that is the Iditarod is neither more nor less than the lengthened shadow of one man and one dog: Leonhard Seppala and Togo, quite possibly the greatest dog who ever lived. I use the pronoun *who* deliberately, for Togo was far more than "just a dog," just as Seppala was far more than "just a man."

Connie and Joe Wheeler, Juneau, Alaska, at a sled-dog summer training camp.

More and more, over this past year, the epic story of the Great Serum Run of 1925 has obsessed me. I used to laugh at our cherished friend Bob Mendenhall, who every year vicariously *lives* the annual running of the greatest race on earth—the Iditarod, eagerly following the moment-by-moment news reports as to where each of his favorite dog teams is on the Iditarod Trail between Anchorage and Nome. Not anymore! Now I've got the bug too.

Just two weeks ago yesterday, I stood at the edge of the Broadway Melodies Theater, center stage for Royal Caribbean's wondrously beautiful *Rhapsody of the Seas,* during our third Alaskan cruise, and shared the story of Seppala, Togo, and the Great Serum Run with them. The audience was fascinated by the story. One young couple—possibly honeymooners, since they were ensconced in each other's arms—in the second row, were so captivated by the story I could tell they were *living* it. In retrospect, I wish I could retell it to them, now that this epiphany has cast its otherworldly glow on it. Permit me to explain what I mean: some years ago, when we were living on the banks of Maryland's beautiful Severn River, I happened to notice something unprecedented in my life happening. In that late afternoon sun a wooden planter filled with flowers was slowly accumulating an otherworldly radiance. I rushed inside to grab my camera; just in time, I captured

some of it on film. Then, as suddenly as it came, the radiance disappeared; it was just another afternoon. Just so, in my mind at least, this glowing story (tied to the ever-changing phenomenon that is Alaska) has Velcrolike fastened itself so tightly in my subconscious that a bomb couldn't dislodge it.

Another contributing factor to the epiphany was a visit Connie and I made (during that same cruise) to a summer dog kennel for huskies in the hills above Juneau. I don't know what I expected to see and experience, but it most certainly didn't mesh with the reality. As our minibus approached its destination, it seemed like all the dogs in the world were barking at once! Well, one hundred fifty huskies barking full-torque at once—suffice it to say, it's an unforgettable experience. Until that moment, the dog-factor of sled-dog racing was just an abstraction in my mind. Suddenly, this collective howlerama blew years of misperceptions of what sled dogs were out of my mind, leaving me with a *tabula rasa* on which I might construct a new template.

For it didn't take long before I realized what all the howling was about. Just outside the circle of howling dogs (each one tied to a blue wooden hutch) was the beginning of a sled-dog team. And each of the unchosen one hundred fifty dogs was belting out a canine plea, *Hey there! Don't you dare leave me out! Don't you even* think *of not taking me along!* Every last one of them harbored an all-consuming dream: to pull a sled at full speed somewhere. Had any of the one hundred fifty ever raced in the Iditarod, undoubtedly they were now dreaming of doing it again.

We were permitted to look at, and pet, those huskies (most with Seppala Siberian ancestry in them) as we walked down the line. All the while, other huskies were being untethered from their hutches and brought over to the growing team. Believe me, each of those dogs was more than a handful! For the excitement over being chosen was so great they could hardly keep all four feet on the ground for the very rapture of what might lie ahead.

Who knows what goes through the mind of a wannabe sled dog? For starters, we must realize that since their life expectancy is only one-sixth of ours (that they're old by twelve), it means they have to cram into their moment-by-moment living six times as much intensity as we do.

At any rate, it took several dog handlers to keep them from tackling each other. Continually, they were messing up the lines attaching them to the tugline. And they'd leap high in the air in exuberant ecstasy at being among the elect. Just imagine trying to keep two dozen roughhousing little boys from tearing up a house—multiply that energy by at least six, and you have some idea of what it would be like to be a musher. Keep in mind that all this time the continual howls of outrage at being left behind from all the other dogs added up to an inimitable

sound track. One that will remain in the archives of our minds forever.

At the end of this tugline was a cart large enough to carry up to a dozen people (total weight: a ton and a half). A wheeled cart because, though there was still snow on the slopes above, it had already melted down below. Someday I hope to be able to ride on a sled in snow. But mushers, in order to keep their sled dogs in year-round condition, yoke them to wheeled carts during the off-season months. And we tourists represent a serendipity: plenty of weight to pull (even more than normal, after getting off a cruise ship)!

Finally—after what must have seemed an eternity to the fourteen dogs, it was time to move out. As we did, so excited were the long-tied-up dogs that the musher had to keep the brake on to keep them from running away with us. We became acquainted with the commands: "Gee" for right, and "Haw" for left; "Mush! Hike! All right! Let's go!" all used to start the team; "Come Gee! Come Haw!" 180-degree turns; "Line out" command to lead team straight out from sled. I'd always thought that dog-sled speed was orchestrated by the musher; now I discovered that the lead dog would determine that, by maintaining steady pull, for if he or she slackens up, that demoralizes the dogs behind. And each dog behind the lead dog pulls equally hard. The end result, for a musher with a well-trained team, is to let the dogs do all the work; all the while trying to keep the team from exhausting their energy too soon.

All too soon, we heard the command to "Come Gee!" then "Come Haw!" as we made a 180-degree turn. Then the dogs were permitted to stop and rest in a long pool of water (refreshing to the dogs since they don't have sweat glands, but compensate through the pads of their feet and their lolling tongues). Since they overheat so easily (because of their two heavy coats), they relish stopping in cool water they may lap up. Then it was back in motion again, and all too soon our ride was at an end. Clearly, to the dogs, it was not nearly long enough.

I learned a lot more about sled dogs from Jeff Schultz's *Dogs of the Iditarod*. For starters, that the mushing life is all-consuming—anything but just a "day job." According to four-time Iditarod champion and professional dog musher Susan Butcher, "While most everyone has pets, these dogs are my workmates, friends, and family. I'm there when they're born and there when they die. If I succeed, it is because of them, and yet they are completely dependent on me. Until my marriage and having children, I'd never had a relationship with the intensity of bonding I've had with dogs during the Iditarod. There wasn't a year when I wasn't blown away by their capabilities and desire to go, even after a thousand miles" (Schultz, 8).

Iditarod veteran Judy Currier concurs: "These dogs are really our best friends.

We spend more time with them than we do with family, friends, or even each other" (Schultz, 10, 11).

Schultz notes that, in his many interviews with mushers, he has discovered that only dog lovers can understand the special bonding between mushers and their dogs; indeed, mushers love their dogs as intensely as parents love their children. "[Mushers] typically call out to their dogs in baby talk [it is said that the minds of adult dogs equate with two-year-old children, but that is not true of exceptional dogs] as a parent would talk to a newborn. Mushers will take their special dogs off their leads or out of their harnesses and let them run free, even in the mushers' homes" (Schultz, 11).

So what is it that mushers look for in their top dogs? First and foremost: a good head, a good coat, and a good constitution. Translated: "A *good head* means the dog has a happy attitude, a desire to travel, willingness to pull, and a love of running and running some more." One reason the Siberian bloodline is so central to mushers is that they are so honest; they don't play tricks on you, nor are they disloyal (Schultz, 23).

A *good coat* is also essential. During extreme cold and blizzards, when resting, dogs curl up with their backs to the wind, placing their tails over their noses to conserve heat and keep the nose from freezing.

As for a *good constitution,* four-time Iditarod mushing champion Martin Buser declares, "I look for athleticism in a dog. . . . Typically a good, fast dog has a narrow body and runs in a single, narrow track. It also has a deep chest to accommodate the requisite large lung capacity. It also means they must have good feet and be an eager eater and drinker." Five-time Iditarod champion Rick Swenson notes that "good feet don't snowball easily and the pads don't get cut easily." Some dogs are so tough you can look at their feet at the finish line, and after 1,200 miles they look as good as the day they started (Schultz, 25).

Training starts early. After pups are born, the mushers don't wait but are playing with them from the very first or second day to get them used to human contact. During weeks five to twelve, the pups are weaned and usually put into a large pen with litter mates and other pups—this socializes the dogs and cuts down on fighting. Mushers cannot tolerate unruly dogs. Mushers also early on take pups out for "puppy walks," usually accompanied by an adult dog or two. The pups remain in a large pen until they are four to six months old, when they each get their own doghouse. At six to nine months, they are "harness broken," usually by hooking them up with older, slower, retired lead dogs. According to four-time Iditarod mushing champion Doug Swingley, "Within the first hundred yards, they realize they are sled dogs and love it from then on."

As for Iditarod dogs, they normally run as rookies on slower noncompetitive

teams when they are eighteen months to two years old. From these rookies, the musher looks for dogs (such as Togo) who early on evidence a fierce desire to be a lead sled dog. Those who prove themselves will race from the time they're two or three until they are old (twelve to as old as fourteen) (Schultz, 30–38).

Summing up the breed, Iditarod champion Joe Runyan says, "The sled dog, of which the Alaskan [h]usky is king, is not a breed of dog but, rather, a concept. The concept is 'pull hard and run fast!' . . . The sled dog is an ever-changing breed, always has been, always will be, and, hands down, the Alaskan [h]usky is the fastest and hardest-working dog alive." Doug Swingley agrees: "The Alaskan husky is the ultimate dog athlete. It is the decathlete of the dog world. The Alaskan husky can run faster, jump higher, and, if it could skip, skip better than any other dog alive. No dog in the world can do what the Alaskan husky can do" (Schultz, 41).

About this collection

This is our first ever collection of stories about the Far North (Norway, Alaska, British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Quebec, Newfoundland, Labrador, Arctic Circle). The animals featured include sled dogs, wolves, weasels, martens, rabbits, porcupines, lynxes, wolverines, bears (black, brown, polar), reindeer, eagles, and birds of many kinds—a veritable Who's Who of the North.

Other than Samuel Scoville Jr. and William Gerald Chapman, all the other writers will be new to readers of this animal series.

If you have not previously been acquainted with animals of the North, we think you will find them fascinating; if you already are, welcome to old friends.

CODA

I look forward to hearing from you! I always welcome the stories, responses, and suggestions that are sent to us from our readers. I am putting together collections centered on other genres as well. You may reach me by writing to:

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* * * * *

Strange Encounter on Coho Creek

Morris Homer Irwin

The great Alaskan timber wolf was caught in a trap. But the trapper was dead—so the wolf would die there. And with her, her pups waiting in a nearby den.

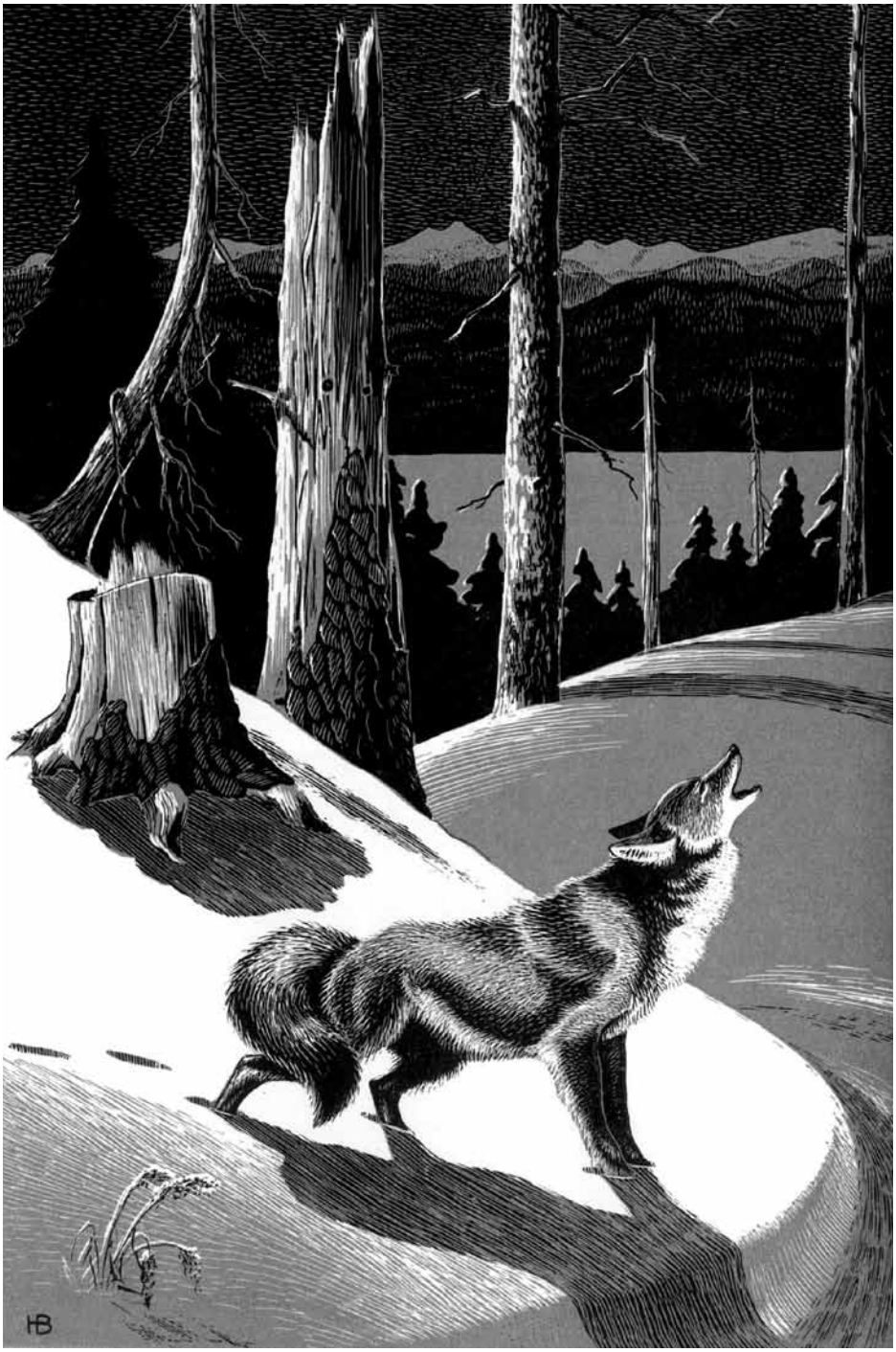
Could anything on earth save them?

* * * * *

One spring morning many years ago, I had been prospecting for gold along Coho Creek on southeastern Alaska's Kupreanof Island, and as I emerged from a forest of spruce and hemlock, I froze in my tracks. No more than twenty paces away in the flat muskeg was a huge, black Alaskan timber wolf—caught in one of Trapper George's traps.

Old George had died the previous week of a heart attack, so the wolf was lucky I had happened along. Yet now, confused and frightened at my approach, the wolf backed away, straining at the trap chain. Then I noticed something else: it was a female, and her teats were full of milk. Somewhere, there was a den of hungry pups waiting for their mother.

From her appearance, I guessed that she had been trapped only a few days. That meant her pups were probably still alive, surely no more than a few miles away. But I suspected that if I tried to release the wolf, she would turn aggressive and try to tear me to pieces.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So I decided to search for her pups instead and began to look for incoming tracks that might lead me to her den. Fortunately, there were still a few remaining patches of snow. After several moments, I spotted paw marks on a trail skirting the muskeg.

The tracks led a half-mile through the forest, then up a rock-strewn slope. I finally spotted the den at the base of an enormous spruce. There wasn't a sound inside. Wolf pups are shy and cautious, and I didn't have much hope of luring them outside. But I had to try. So I began imitating the high-pitched squeak of a mother wolf calling her young. No response.

A few moments later, after I tried another call, four tiny pups appeared. They couldn't have been more than a few weeks old. I extended my hands, and they tentatively suckled at my fingers. Perhaps hunger had helped overcome their natural fear. Then, one by one, I placed them in a burlap bag and headed back down the slope.

When the mother wolf spotted me, she stood erect. Possibly picking up the scent of her young, she let out a high-pitched, plaintive whine. I released the pups, and they raced to her. Within seconds, they were slurping at her belly.

What next? I wondered. The mother wolf was clearly suffering. Yet each time I moved in her direction, a menacing growl rumbled in her throat. With her young to protect, she was becoming belligerent. *She needs nourishment,* I thought. *I have to find her something to eat.*

I hiked toward Coho Creek and spotted the leg of a winter-killed deer sticking out of a snowbank. I cut off a hind quarter, then returned the remains to nature's icebox. Toting the venison haunch back to the wolf, I whispered in a soothing tone, "OK, mother, your dinner is served. But only if you stop growling at me. C'mon now. Easy." I tossed chunks of venison in her direction. She sniffed them, then gobbled them up.

Cutting hemlock boughs, I fashioned a rough shelter for myself and was soon asleep. At dawn I was awakened by four fluffy bundles of fur sniffing at my face and hands. I glanced toward the agitated mother wolf. *If I could only win her confidence,* I thought. It was her only hope.

Over the next few days, I divided my time between prospecting and trying to win the wolf's trust. I talked gently with her, threw her more venison, and played with the pups. Little by little, I kept edging closer—though I was careful to remain beyond the length of her chain. The big animal never took her dark eyes off me. "Come on, mother," I pleaded. "You want to go back to your friends on the mountain. Relax."

At dusk on the fifth day, I delivered her daily fare of venison. "Here's dinner," I said softly as I approached. "C'mon, girl. Nothing to be afraid of." Suddenly, the pups came bounding to me. At least I had *their* trust. But I was beginning to lose hope of ever winning over the mother. Then I thought I saw a slight wagging of her tail. I moved within the length of her chain.

She remained motionless. My heart in my mouth, I sat down eight feet from her. One snap of her huge jaws and she could break my arm . . . or my neck. I wrapped my blanket around me and slowly settled onto the cold ground. It was a long time before I fell asleep.

I awoke at dawn, stirred by the sound of the pups nursing. Gently, I leaned over and petted them. The mother wolf stiffened. "Good morning, friends," I said tentatively. Then I slowly placed my hand on the wolf's injured leg. She flinched, but made no threatening move. *This can't be happening,* I thought, *yet it is.*

I could see that the trap's steel jaws had imprisoned only two toes. They were swollen and lacerated, but she wouldn't lose the paw—if I could free her.

"OK," I said. "Just a little longer and we'll have you out of there."

I applied pressure; the trap sprang open, and the wolf pulled free. Whimpering, she loped about, favoring the injured paw. My experiences in the wild suggest the wolf would now gather her pups and vanish into the woods. But cautiously, she crept toward me.

The pups nipped playfully at their mother as she stopped at my elbow. Slowly, she sniffed my hands and arms. The wolf began licking my fingers. I was astonished. This went against everything I'd ever heard about timber wolves. Yet, strangely, it all seemed so natural.

After a while, with her pups scurrying around her, the mother wolf was ready to leave and began to limp off toward the forest. Then she turned back to me. "You want me to come with you, girl?" I asked. Curious, I packed my gear and set off.

Following Coho Creek for a few miles, we ascended Kupreanof Mountain until we reached an alpine meadow. There, lurking in a forested perimeter, was a wolf pack—I counted nine adults and, judging by their playful antics, four nearly full-grown pups. After a few minutes of greeting, the pack broke into howling. It was an eerie sound, ranging from low wails to high-pitched yodeling.

At dark, I set up camp. By the light of my fire and a glistening moon, I could see furtive wolf shapes dodging in and out of the shadows, eyes shining. I had no fear. They were merely curious. So was I.

I awoke at first light. It was time to leave the wolf to her pack. She watched as I assembled my gear and started walking across the meadow. Reaching the far

side, I looked back. The mother and her pups were sitting where I had left them, watching me. I don't know why, but I waved. At the same time, the mother wolf sent a long, mournful howl into the crisp air.

* * * * *

Four years later, after serving in World War II, I returned to Coho Creek in the fall of 1945. After the horrors of the war, it was good to be back among the soaring spruce and breathing the familiar, bracing air of the Alaskan bush. Then I saw, hanging in a red cedar where I had placed it four years before, the now-rusted steel trap that had ensnared the mother wolf. The sight of it gave me a strange feeling, and something made me climb Kupreanof Mountain to the meadow where I had last seen her. There, standing on a lofty ledge, I gave out a long, low wolf call—something I had done many times before.

An echo came back across the distance. Again I called. And again the echo reverberated, this time followed by a wolf call from a ridge about a half-mile away.

Then, far off, I saw a dark shape moving slowly in my direction. As it crossed the meadow, I could see it was a black timber wolf. A chill spread through my whole body. I knew at once that familiar shape, even after four years. "Hello, old girl," I called gently. The wolf edged closer, ears erect, body tense, and stopped a few yards off, her bushy tail wagged slightly.

Moments later, the wolf was gone. I left Kupreanof Island a short time after that, and I never saw the animal again. But the memory she left with me—vividly, haunting, a little eerie—will always be there, a reminder that there are things in nature that exist outside the laws and understanding of man.

During that brief instant in time, this injured animal and I had somehow penetrated each other's worlds, bridging barriers that were never meant to be bridged. There is no explaining experiences like this. We can only accept them and—because they're tinged with an air of mystery and strangeness—perhaps treasure them all the more.

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"Strange Encounter on Coho Creek," by Morris Homer Irwin. If anyone can provide knowledge of the earliest publication of this old story, the author, or the author's next of kin, please send to Joe Wheeler (P.O. Box 1246, Conifer, CO 80433). Morris Homer Irwin wrote around the mid-twentieth century.