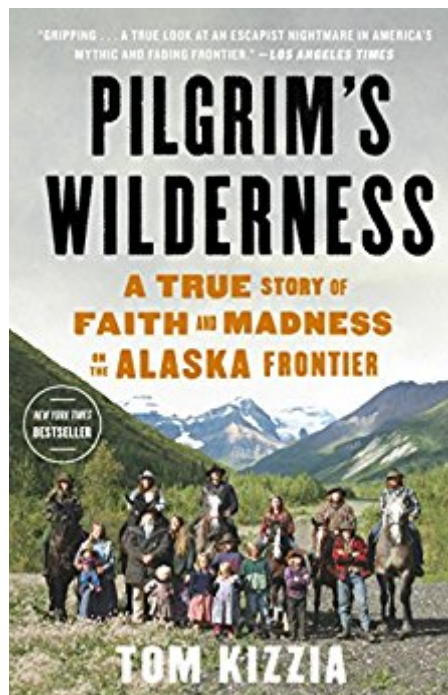




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Pilgrim's Wilderness: A True Story Of Faith And Madness On The Alaska Frontier



Synopsis

Into the Wild meets Helter Skelter in this riveting true story of a modern-day homesteading family in the deepest reaches of the Alaskan wilderness and of the chilling secrets of its maniacal, spellbinding patriarch. When Papa Pilgrim, his wife, and their fifteen children appeared in the Alaska frontier outpost of McCarthy, their new neighbors saw them as a shining example of the homespun Christian ideal. But behind the family's proud piety and beautiful old-timey music lay Pilgrim's dark past: his strange connection to the Kennedy assassination and a trail of chaos and anguish that followed him from Dallas and New Mexico. Pilgrim soon sparked a tense confrontation with the National Park Service fiercely dividing the community over where a citizen's rights end and the government's power begins. As the battle grew more intense, the turmoil in his brood made it increasingly difficult to tell whether his children were messianic followers or hostages in desperate need of rescue. In this powerful piece of Americana, written with uncommon grace and high drama, veteran Alaska journalist, Tom Kizzia uses his unparalleled access to capture an era-defining clash between environmentalists and pioneers ignited by a mesmerizing sociopath who held a town and a family captive.

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Customer Reviews

I was not expecting this book to be a page-turner, but it is. Superb writing and organization by Mr. Kizzia serve the story of creepy fanatic religious hypocrite "Papa Pilgrim" Hale and his family well. This is a disturbing and honest look at a dangerous man marinating in self-righteousness, and the sadistic wounds and pain he inflicted on his family. Hale counted on McCarthy, Alaska to shield his brutality and line his pockets, and it did, for a while. There's not exactly a happy ending but a hopeful one. The fact that Kizzia is familiar with some of the participants and that part of Alaska gives his book added credibility and heft (and, at times, poignance). A sad story, well told..

After I watched the television series "The Edge of Alaska" I just had to find out WHO were the Pilgrim family, mentioned quite a lot on the episode I happened to be watching. Well, this book, and "He Heard His Brother call His Name", I was amazed at how this man cowed and brutalized his family members, including his own twin brother. I have a fascination of family dynamics, but this guy takes the cake. I only continue to wonder how these remaining family members are, and if any of them have ever gone on to write their experiences in book form. I sincerely hope they are well today.

Wow. I've read a lot of books of this sort, including tales from FLDS escapees, and there seems to be a recurring theme concerning a manipulative alpha-male's cult-like interpretation of religion to justify his need to control other people. In this case, the manipulative alpha-male controls and abuses his very large family while presenting a benign facade to the neighbors. It was quite interesting, maybe more than 4 stars but not quite 5.

Pilgrim is a charismatic fringe dweller. He was a hippie, did all sorts of drugs and then he discovered Jesus, of course. Or did he discover a medium for his own ego. In his version of Christianity, he is Lord and he presides over his wife and 16 children depriving them of schooling, friends, education and interaction of other human beings. He is a thief, a cheat & a hypocrite. Welfare dependant himself, he strives to inspire anti government sentiments in his neighbours, notwithstanding his own unneighbourly behaviour. And what of his wife, Country Rose, destined to provide him with 21 children. While he dominates her, it is difficult to understand how did she let him abuse her children. And how can anyone raise and guide 21 children. And how did he provide for his four

children from previous relationships. This book is both fascinating and sad. Alaska sounds amazingly beautiful and yet cold, and dark and menacing. I struggle to understand how his children kept their faith!

This was a riveting story. Mr. Kizzia follows Bob Hale from his early years, through his hippie period, and then on to his religious conversion and move to Alaska. He is fair and balanced in his coverage of those who were for and against the government in the Parks Department, giving both sides of the issue. He brought the town of McCarthy to life for me and his descriptions of the rigors of life in this northern clime were fascinating. He describes, in detail, how Hale was able to indoctrinate and control his wife and children and the descriptions of how the older children finally broke away reflected the conflict they felt between obedience to parent and to God, a God they were slowly realizing was not the vindictive, angry, abusive man they called Papa Pilgrim. A takeaway from this book is that any religion has its zealots who cause harm, create terror, and wreck havoc on those around them - something we should all bear in mind during this time of Muslim terrorists. In other words, any religion can have its extremists, something that is borne out by history, as in the Crusades. Granted, Hale wasn't using bombs but he did use some violence, and I do feel that if he hadn't been stopped, worse could have occurred, as he became more desperate to hold together his family.

Watching the Edge of Alaska on Discovery Channel, and they mentioned that McCarthy, Alaska was where this beyond dysfunctional family ended up. Reading the book and watching the show about that particular town was an interesting experience. From his roots in Texas, involvement with familiar names in recent history, and subsequent descent into delusional behavior, Bob Hale, aka Papa Pilgrim is a fascinating character. Unfortunately for his family and anyone involved with him he was a brutal, destructive, manipulative person. Amazing what horrors he performed in the name of his religious beliefs, the stories from his children are mind boggling, the mind control he exercised over them almost beyond belief. The thought that he could prevail over the Park Service and do whatever he wanted to do with the property in McCarthy finally was the beginning of the end of his terrible story. The resolution of his Daughters having the courage to finally break away and eventually tell the story of the atrocities Papa performed on his family, both physically and mentally led to his ending his days in prison. A fitting place for that monster to end his days.

A fascinating story highlighting how often we see what we expect and/or prefer to see. Too often we

see only that which furthers our own ends while ignoring the darkest corners of life which make us feel uncomfortable and powerless. People want to see a quirky, independent family representing the past we romanticize. What if someone had challenged Pilgrim sooner and saved Rose and all those children so many years of abuse and hopelessness. It is better to probe judiciously and be mistaken than to turn our backs allowing suffering to grow unfettered. It is important not just to report to CPS and return to our own hopefully cleaner lives. The pace of the book dragged frequently, but is overall it was well written. Certainly it is written with conscience, with care not to exploit the story.

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