



Shadows on the Koyukuk: An Alaskan Native's Life Along the River

By Jim Rearden, Sidney Huntington

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“I owe Alaska. It gave me everything I have.” Says Sidney Huntington, son of an Athapaskan mother and white trader/trapper father. Growing up on the Koyukuk River in Alaska’s harsh Interior, that “everything” spans 78 years of tragedies and adventures. When his mother died suddenly, 5-year-old Huntington protected and cared for his younger brother and sister during two weeks of isolation. Later, as a teenager, he plied the wilderness traplines with his father, nearly freezing to death several times. One spring, he watched an ice-filled breakup flood sweep his family’s cabin and belongings away. These and many other episodes are the compelling background for the story of a man who learned the lessons of a land and culture, lessons that enabled him to prosper as trapper, boat builder, and fisherman.

This is more than one man’s incredible tale of hardship and success in Alaska. It is also a tribute to the Athapaskan traditions and spiritual beliefs that enabled him and his ancestors to survive. His story, simply told, is a testament to the durability of Alaska’s wild lands and to the strength of the people who inhabit them.

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About the Author

Rearden was outdoor editor for Alaska magazine for 20 years.

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