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# North Of Reliance



## Synopsis

This is home. It is easy enough to locate on paper, or in one's imagination, but on the inconvenient sprawling earth it is difficult to reach. The commute to the nearest town, Yellowknife, is 210 miles of wilderness lakes and trails, home to wolverine and caribou. Here's the story of why Dave and his wife, Kristen, came to choose this life, how they built a homestead and found ways to make a living, and what that choice has meant to the people they have become. Whether dogsledding across Great Slave Lake at 60 below, musing philosophically on the values of a northern life, visiting the nearest neighbors 10 miles away, or piloting a bush plane over millions of acres that rarely feel a human footstep, Dave shares both ordinary and life-changing moments with humor, insight, and really good writing.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Dave Olesen has done a rare thing here. He has captured a sweet spot in place-based writing where mystery, beauty, paradox, contradiction, intimacy all seem to gel together into an elegant truth. Here it feels like we have it all, though Dave would probably shrug his shoulders and say, it is a start and the best I could do at the time. We have the trials of travellers and trappers, the mystery of the caribou, the tireless gait of the wolverine and the elusive hunt, the elegance of the twin otter engine, the intimacies of George back and his crew, the old timer lurking the spruce, the joy of the sauna. I could go on. Thanks goodness Dave Olesen does. --Bob Henderson [author of Every Trail Has a Story: Heritage Travel in Canada](#) I'm delighted that Dave Olesen's gritty and tender account of the first years of his life at the edge of the Barrenlands in the Northwest Territories a life he has shared with his wife Kristen, and which they have now been living for three decades is

returned to print. And I am grateful that it gave me occasion to re-read *North of Reliance*. Olesen confronts the contradictions in using the tools of the modern world (Twin Otter Bush planes, chain saws, radio contact, canned foods, antibiotics) to touch the purity, serenity, and magnificence of wild nature in the far North. We taste the deep solitude of seven months of winter, we feel the joys and frustrations of working with sled dogs and the elation or disappointment of a hunt, we smell spruce sap and flight fuel on work gloves. This is a beautifully written, often moving, account of a couple's quest to live a life together that touches what matters as Thoreau says of his experiment at Walden Pond, to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life. --Erik F. Storlie Author *Go Deep and Take Plenty of Root: A Prairie-Norwegian Father, Rebellion in Minneapolis, Basement Zen*; and *Nothing on my Mind: Berkeley, LSD, Two Zen Masters* Dave Olesen is a writer/poet/observer of nature's relationship with humanity like no other. He writes in the tradition (and standard) of Thoreau, Muir, Leopold, Eisley, Abbey, Dillard, Stegner, Berry and Snyder, but his perspective of the subject is as different from any of theirs as, say, his lifestyle is different from yours or mine. After all, Olesen and his wife, Kristen, their two daughters and three dozen husky dogs live north of Reliance on an isolated homestead he built himself by Great Slave Lake next to the Hoarfrost River in Canada's Northwest Territories. Average winter nighttime temperatures are below -20F and there are five hours of daylight in December. He makes a living as a bush pilot and guide, provides most of his family's food by hunting, and for recreation is a dog musher with eight Iditarod finishes and solo trips into the northwest of up to 500 miles, just Olesen and his dogs and whatever is encountered in that vast, sparsely populated (by humans) landscape. But his passion is the written word and using literature to illustrate the culture and tradition of man's relationship with nature, in the case of *North of Reliance*, that of a self-sufficient family life in a landscape as rich as it is sparse, as nourishing as it is unforgiving, all of it entwined with the web of life on earth. As mentioned, no one writes about these things like Olesen. My favorite section of the book is about Esker, the wolf Olesen kidnapped from its den as a puppy and raised as a cultivated member of his pack of huskies. He learned a great deal from Esker about the wild and the domesticated, nature and civilization, and how even the most gentle, well-intentioned touch of man disturbs the fragile balance of Earth's ecology. This is a book about adventure, a lovely family, the environment and poetic introspection about what matters. Do not miss it. --Dick Dorworth Skier, mountain climber, adventurer, columnist, and author of *Climbing to Freedom* and *Night Driving*

Dave Olesen was born in 1957 in Illinois. From there his life moved steadily northwest through his teens and twenties. He was educated at the University of Montana and Northland College. Before

immigrating to Canada, Olesen lived in northern Minnesota and worked as a guide, Outward Bound instructor, dog musher, and pilot. In July 1987 he was on board a local freighter eastbound from Yellowknife. On board were his nineteen huskies, his father Jim, and a seven-ton cargo of building material, fuel, food, and tools. 210 miles out along the coast of Great Slave Lake the fifth largest lake in North America the boat dropped anchor and offloaded Dave, his father, and his gear and dogs. There, ten miles from the tundra and ten miles north of a tiny outpost called Reliance, Dave took up his life. That autumn he was joined by Kristen Gilbertson; they married in 1989. They have two daughters. Dave and Kristen still live at the mouth of the Hoarfrost River, where they operate a small air charter and outfitting business. In 2014 their home was destroyed by wildfire. They are re-building. Dave is the author of three other books: *A Wonderful Country: The Quetico-Superior Stories of Bill Magie*; *Cold Nights, Fast Trails: Reflections of a Modern Dog Musher*; and most recently (2014) *Kinds of Winter: Four Solo Journeys by Dogteam in Canada's Northwest Territories*

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