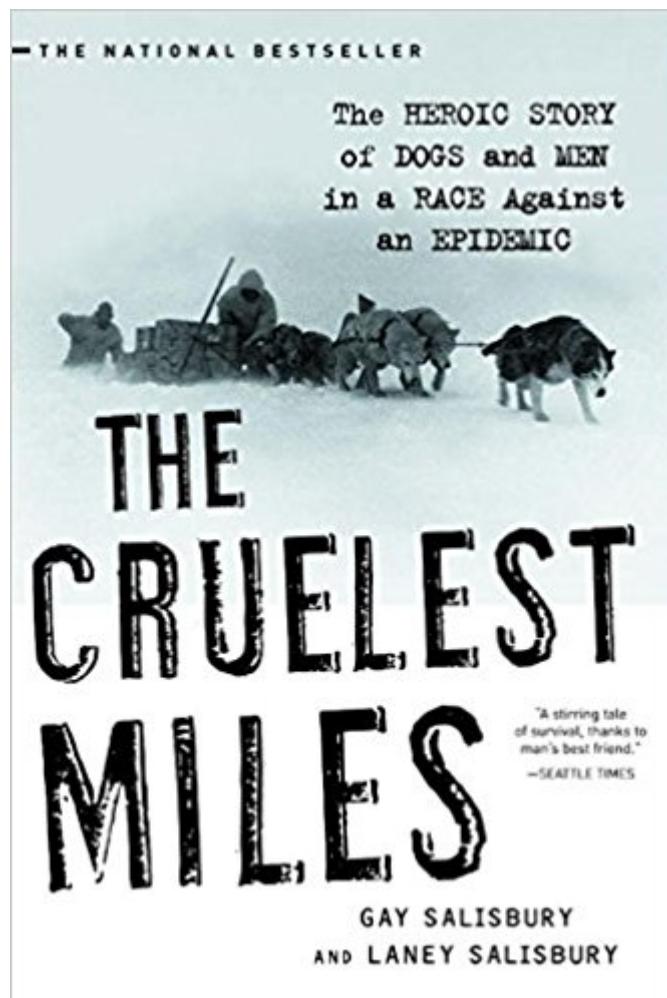


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# The Cruelest Miles: The Heroic Story Of Dogs And Men In A Race Against An Epidemic



## Synopsis

"A stirring tale of survival, thanks to man's best friend . . . reflects a transcendent understanding and impeccable research." •Seattle Times When a deadly diphtheria epidemic swept through Nome, Alaska, in 1925, the local doctor knew that without a fresh batch of antitoxin, his patients would die. The lifesaving serum was a thousand miles away, the port was icebound, and planes couldn't fly in blizzard conditions •only the dogs could make it. The heroic dash of dog teams across the Alaskan wilderness to Nome inspired the annual Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race and immortalized Balto, the lead dog of the last team whose bronze statue still stands in New York City's Central Park. This is the greatest dog story, never fully told until now. 2 maps; 48 illustrations

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Wow! What a breathtaking read. The Salisburys have beautifully captured an exciting bit of American history. Except for one slim book years ago, nothing has been written -until now- about the race against time and weather to deliver medicine for a diphtheria epidemic to Nome, Alaska in 1925. The writers take the reader on a wonderful adventure that later fostered the annual Iditerod race. They have expertly woven together the history of a nation, its people and the dogs that became such an integral part of Alaska's very existence. "The Cruelest Miles" captures the intimacy between man and animal in the same way "Seabiscuit" so successfully did. In early 1999, I read the New York Times' obituary of the last surviving musher of that miraculous dog sled team. I noted it with interest. Gay Salisbury and Laney Salisbury went more than one step further. They created a

fascinating, well written book. From the very first page, I could not put it down!

Gay and Laney Salisbury have done a wonderful job of researching and writing a riveting saga of one of the most incredible journeys in history. I knew one of the primary mushers... Leonhard Seppala, and the story they have told is the story I heard direct from Seppala. In the early 1960s Seppala lived in the Ballard district in Seattle. I got to know the man several years before his death and would stop to visit him after school and listen to his tales over cookies and milk. At the time there was no way a 10 year old could appreciate the incredible conditions Seppala faced in this epic race to save Nome. The Salisbury's have filled in those details. They have set the scene and helped me appreciate just what it was like in Nome in 1925 setting out by dog sled in 50 below temperatures to travel so many miles. I received the book for Christmas and it was the most delightful book I have ever read. What's more it was wonderful to see that Leonhard's lead dog Togo got the recognition he so deserved. I remember how saddened Leonhard was even late in life that Balto got the glory and Togo got virtually no credit. The stories he told me about Togo showed he was an exceptional dog and Leonhard loved him to the end. Thank you for writing such a well researched account of this event and presenting it in such a fascinating fashion. Robert Lane Ashland, OR

The graphic, vivid descriptions of such freezing temperatures made me feel a chill in the 100\* California heat. I felt as if the authors themselves had experienced and survived the very perils of the Alaskan wilderness they describe. They described the scenes, strength, fellowship and symbiosis between dogs and humans, interdependency that every faction of the Alaskan wilderness shared as if they had lived it themselves. I am a teacher and have read Balto to my children many a time... this will give me a much greater insight and lesson plans around the literature. If you like dogs—even just a little bit—you'll love this book AND love your dog more. If you like adventure, you'll like this book. If you like history, you'll like this book. If you're interested in the lesser explored slices of 'Americana' you'll like this book.

More thrilling than fiction are the stories of real-life events, especially those as gripping as this one. One of the problems of writing about an event of which everyone knows the ending is keeping the suspense going, as well as giving sufficient background for the reader to understand the depth of the crisis. The Salisbury cousins have been painstaking in their research, and have interspersed the narrative with information about weather, natives, history, and personalities so that we are caught

up in the tension, pain, and struggle of the efforts of so many to bring serum to the isolated community under the worst possible conditions. For readers concerned with heroism, as well as delineation of a time and place, this is a page-turner.

I believe this is a well written book that really satisfied my interest in Alaska, its natives, and the amazing relationship between dog and man. I had picked up "Cruelest Miles" just on the heels of reading "Seabiscuit," which I enjoyed thoroughly. So, I was riding on some high standards when I read the Salisbury cousins' book. And, as it is their first book together, there's room for improvement, but I enjoyed their work enough to pass it on to friends. The absorbing portions of the book focus on the amazing feats of the Sled drivers and their teams of dogs. One gets a chill even in this summer heat when reading about mushing the dogs through a blinding snow with wind chill temperatures at 70 below. And that is the main tribute the book rides on: without these courageous men working in tandem with arguably the most loyal of animals, scores of Nome residents would have perished to the horrible disease of Diphteria. The authors, unfortunately, do tend to get the reader sidetracked when taking a detour chapter into the background of a specific element of Alaska history. Some of these pieces added little value, and instead slowed the momentum of the great race to get the serum to Nome. I also made the mistake of reading each footnote; some contain interesting facts, but many were quite long, and only distracted me from the adventure that the authors otherwise do a great job in relaying. Avoid the long footnotes, stick to the trail of the dogs, and you will enjoy reading a fascinating piece of history from the Last Frontier.

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