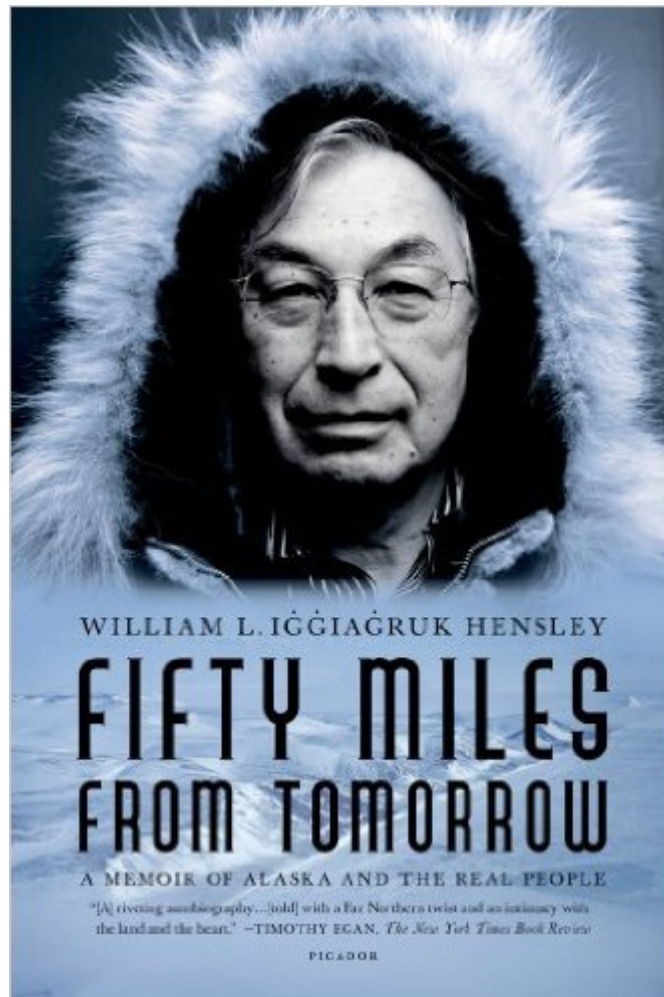


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Fifty Miles From Tomorrow: A Memoir Of Alaska And The Real People



Synopsis

A NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW EDITORS' CHOICE Born twenty-nine miles north of the arctic circle, William L. Iggiagruk Hensley was raised to live the seminomadic life that his Iñupiaq ancestors had lived for thousands of years. In this stirring memoir, he offers us a rare firsthand account of growing up Native Alaskan, and later, in the lower forty-eight, as a fearless advocate for Native land rights. In 1971, after years of tirelessly lobbying the United States government, he played a key role in a landmark victory that enabled the Inupiaq to take charge of their economic and political destiny. *Fifty Miles from Tomorrow* is "a joyous celebration of Hensley's life among the Iñupiaq people and of fighting for their rights" (Library Journal).

Book Information

Paperback: 288 pages

Publisher: Picador (March 2, 2010)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0312429363

ISBN-13: 978-0312429362

Product Dimensions: 5.6 x 0.8 x 8.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 9.1 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.8 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (67 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #161,586 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #73 in [Books > Biographies &](#)

[Memoirs > Ethnic & National > Native American](#) #88 in [Books > Biographies & Memoirs >](#)

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Customer Reviews

Willie Hensley's life story is one of extraordinary range and comprehension, both literally and figuratively. From a childhood lived above the arctic circle, in the "twilight of the stone age" among his Inupiat extended family, through an abrupt transplantation for schooling in eastern Tennessee and then Washington DC, the arc of his life is nearly without parallel in modern America. With powerful imagery and elegant, flowing prose, Willie conveys the essence of life as an Alaska Native in the 20th century as no one has done before. He paints vivid pictures of the magnificent land of northwestern Alaska, the incomparable wisdom, dignity, grace and humor of his Inupiat (Inuit) culture---and then the equally harsh challenges facing his people since Alaska became America: forced assimilation by missionaries and teachers who were both "church and state" in one; and the

challenge of sustaining life and culture in harmony with the land and sea and natural resources while also surviving in a "modern" world driven by a cash economy. Willie's life's work -- of seeing that Alaska's Native people retain ownership of ancestral lands while they fight to hold onto a fraying sense of cultural identity and still prosper -- is really a tale of universal human challenges. That is what makes this such an important book, for the lessons we can all learn about adaptability and continuity from these First People in our nation of immigrants. Willie's is the only such clear and powerful Native voice to have come from Alaska and find such a wide and receptive audience. For all of our sakes, may there be countless more.

Here is a really excellent book about the recent history of Alaska and unique life. It's about the right person in the right place at the right time with the right idea having the courage to take the right actions. Willie shares personal details of a very different and impactful life from the relatively humdrum of the rest of us. On a personal level it's a very private sharing of a full and challenging life from a sod hut on the shores of the Bering Strait to the proverbial halls of power in Washington DC. On a political level it tells some of the details of how Alaska came to have a very different, respectful, and sharing relationship between native people and culture and that of the recently-arrived western civilization. On an even broader level it gives us a glimpse of the processes and realities of bringing together widely differing needs and approaches to knowing, loving, sharing, and exploiting the land. Willie's story gives non-natives and even natives, an opportunity to understand how others may look at Alaska. Willie shares with us a deep well of personal courage, commitment to family and culture, and dedication to see things through to the end envisioned, and in the process reminds us all that if you want to get it done, you just have to go out and do it.

The minus one star is mainly for formatting issues in the Kindle edition. This mostly-biography was a great introduction to the struggle for cultural survival that's been going on in Alaska -- not just among the Inupiat, but in all the Alaska Native tribes. I came away from this with a much better understanding of how the land settlement worked. The book also gives a great account of Native subsistence living -- The author spent part of his childhood living a very traditional lifestyle for much of the year with his family. If you have any interest in Alaska native cultures, or the Inuit in particular, I highly recommend this book.

If you've ever wanted to know what it is like to be a native Alaskan and to live the subsistence lifestyle in Alaska, this book is for you. 'Fifty Miles from Tomorrow' is an outstanding account of this,

as written by William Hensely. The book covers the author's life, but isn't a typical autobiography, because it goes into so much detail about the inner workings of the Alaskan people. It covers (particularly well) the battle by the natives to recapture some of their land upon discovery that Alaska was rich in oil. It also describes in vivid detail intimate details about the subsistence lifestyle, including how the natives track and capture animals, and how they use every part of the animal for food or other use. This is a relatively short book but it is packed with interesting action. It is a great start to those who want to learn about native Alaskan life and I would highly recommend it. It's a great read which draws you in and doesn't let go. Excellent book!

William Hensley provides a rare, personal accounting of the awakening of Alaskan natives to their rights. Along the way, he gives the reader an understanding of the richness, as well as the hardships, of the Inuit people before passage of the Native Claims Act. His description of government school's role in denigrating these people was particularly gripping. An important book from an important man in the evolution of Alaska and its native people. Such a book was long overdue. The fact it was easy to read was a marvelous bonus. Bill Duke.

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