



By Kim Heacox

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Old Keb Wisting is somewhere around ninety-five years old (he lost count awhile ago) and in constant pain and thinks he wants to die. He also thinks he thinks too much. Part Norwegian and part Tlingit Native ("with some Filipino and Portuguese thrown in"), he's the last living canoe carver in the village of Jinkaata, in Southeast Alaska.

When his grandson, James, a promising basketball player, ruins his leg in a logging accident and tells his grandpa that he has nothing left to live for, Old Keb comes alive and finishes his last canoe, with help from his grandson. Together (with a few friends and a crazy but likeable dog named Steve) they embark on a great canoe journey. Suddenly all of Old Keb's senses come into play, so clever and wise in how he reads the currents, tides and storms. Nobody can find him. He and the others paddle deep into wild Alaska, but mostly into the human heart, in a story of adventure, love, and reconciliation. With its rogue's gallery of colorful, endearing, small-town characters, this book stands as a wonderful blend of Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and John Nichols's *The Milagro Beanfield War*, with dashes of John Steinbeck thrown in.

Jimmy Bluefeather By Kim Heacox Bibliography

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Editorial Review

Review

"Heacox, an exquisite writer, presents us with an Alaska true to its self, beautifully drawn. . . *Jimmy Bluefeather* is a superb addition to Alaska -- indeed, American -- literature. With enough readership, Old Keb Wisting could become as beloved a character as *To Kill a Mockingbird*'s Atticus Finch. Not heroic but human, with qualities of toughness, resilience, acceptance and humor, learned as an Alaskan from a life of living close to the Earth and its waters, in a place of stories." –Nancy Lord, *Alaska Dispatch News*

"Kim Heacox's love for the land and people of Southeast Alaska shines forth in this character-driven saga, brimming with craft, humor, and deft turn of phrase. *Jimmy Bluefeather* easily makes the short list for the great Alaska novel." –Nick Jans, author of *A Wolf Called Romeo*

BOOKLIST - "Alaskan Heacox's (*Rhythm of the Wild*) first novel is richly steeped in the landscape he knows so well and populated by a stellar group of diverse and unforgettable characters. Keb Wisting, part Tlingit and part Norwegian, is nearing 100 and worried about his family. His daughters are on opposing sides of a land-use battle near their island home, and his grandson, James, has just lost his shot at an NBA career due to a logging accident. The last canoe-builder in the village of Jinkaat, Keb embarks on a community-wide boat-building exercise that turns into a chance to recreate an ancestral journey across nearby Crystal Bay. The trip draws in not only troubled James but also an eclectic group, including a determined whale biologist, a cop trying to do the right thing, a fisherwoman who has seen too much hardship, and everyone who has an angle on the land-deal conflict. Heacox does a superb job of transcending his characters' unique geography to create a heartwarming, all-American story. Jinkaat, Alaska, can stand beside Twain's Missouri and Anderson's Winesburg, Ohio."

Jimmy Bluefeather contains echoes of John Irving and Kurt Vonnegut, but only if they had spent time among the canoe carvers, whale biologists, loggers and basketball players of Alaska. Heacox, a writer and explorer of renown, offers a genuine, funny and tender portrait that is rare in the literature of the 49th state." –Andromeda Romano-Lax, author of *The Spanish Bow*, *The Detour*, and *Behave*

"With humor, passion, and respect, Kim Heacox brings us a voyage of discovery like no other. Told through the eyes of Keb Wisting, a beloved Tlingit-Norwegian elder, this fast-paced and finely crafted novel draws us deeply into his life and landscape of continuity and change. Old Keb's gentle wisdom unfolds gracefully in the midst of an entertaining swirl of family, community, government scientists, and hucksters--all seeking something different in a magical, glacier-carved world. When you reach the end of *Jimmy Bluefeather*, you'll

be torn between packing your bags for Crystal Bay and living more fully in your own storied place." –Maria Mudd Ruth, author of *Rare Bird*

LIBRARY JOURNAL (Starred Review) – "At first glance, Heacox's (*Caribou Crossing*) new novel appears to be a predictable coming-of-age tale in which the title character overcomes his millennial ennui through the mystical ways of his wise Tlingit grandfather. That happens, but the depth and breadth of the story become perceptible only as the reader joins Jimmy in honoring his grandfather Keb's wish to face death on his own terms. The author immediately disposes of the simple generational clash in favor of a inspiring journey through nature and memory as Keb embraces life at its end. The landscape imagery in this splendid, unique gem of a novel transports the reader to Keb's Alaska, where nature's magnitude still has the romantic power to humble those who would let it, and then know themselves more completely in return. VERDICT: Fans of Jon Krakauer's *Into the Wild* or Cheryl Strayed's *Wild* are bound to enjoy this book, as will readers interested in Native Americans or small-town, character-driven, family stories." –Nicole R. Steeves, Chicago P.L.

"The force that drives *Jimmy Bluefeather* is the figure of Old Keb Wisting, the last canoe carver in his Alaskan Indian village. Keb is a powerfully drawn portrait of an indomitable spirit facing down his own death--with fierce determination, blasting a Tlingit song into the cold wind blowing off the glaciers. This is not just a well-crafted picture of an elder; it is unforgettable, in the direct lineage of *The Old Man and the Sea*." –Doug Peacock, author of *In the Shadow of the Sabertooth*; *Global Warming*, *The Origins of the First Americans*, and *The Terrible Beasts of the Pleistocene*

"A masterful portrait of the real Alaska, Kim Heacox's novel centers around a 95-year old Tlingit native named Old Keb, the last living canoe carver in a small village in Southeast Alaska. His grandson, a promising athlete, sinks into a depression after a disabling accident ends his sports career. In response, Old Keb begins work on what will become his last great canoe and entices the grandson to help. When the canoe is finished, they embark on a voyage to the Tlingit ancestral homeland. It's a voyage fraught with the hazards of sea as well as an eager government bent on saving them. What makes this story so appealing is the character Old Keb. He is as finely wrought and memorable as any character in contemporary literature and energizes the tale with a humor and warmth that will keep you reading well into the night." –National Outdoor Book Awards

"This is the best of Alaska – its wilderness and its people, de-glamorized and yet brimful of beauty – a convergence of ocean, land, and spirit as only Kim Heacox can tell it, with wisdom, humor, and grace. A welcome new novel of relationships, forgiveness, and re-inventing oneself." –Deb Vanasse, author of *Cold Spell* and *Under Alaska's Midnight Sun*

KIRKUS REVIEWS (Starred Review) – "Part quest, part rebirth, Heacox's debut novel spins a story of Alaska's Tlingit people and the land, an old man dying, and a young man learning to live. In the town of Jinkaata, off Icy Strait near Crystal Bay, Old Keb Wisting, 95, all "big ears, small bladder, bad teeth" but

diamond-clear in soul, wants to bring meaning to the life of his grandson James, "prisoner of anger" a deeply felt grief. Basketball wizard James ruined his knee in a logging accident, and Old Keb decides that the two of them will carve a cedar canoe. Canoe completed? christened Óoxjaa Yadéi, or Against the Wind? Keb, with James and two friends, begins a spirit journey to Crystal Bay, heartland of the Tlingit people. Heacox's characters resonate, each immersed in the Pacific Northwest's great watery woods. Old Keb, part Norwegian, part Tlingit, is the last of the Tlingit cedar carvers. There's also James' mother, Gracie, who "could bend [Keb] with a smile." Keb's "kittiwake daughter," Ruby, is a professor, all pride and passion. Little Mac, James' Chinese-Tlingit-Scots girlfriend, has a tiny body, towering intellect, and tremendous empathy. Large Marge, "a wide-hipped buxomed fisherwoman," captains the Silverbow with two deaf sons. Keb's dead uncle Austin speaks in dreams as Raven, the trickster. Add politicians, bureaucrats, media types, all circling, making demands, as Keb and the others set out for Crystal Bay, now a federal reserve and a place mired in conflict with the development interests of PacAlaska, a Native American corporation. It's Heacox's language, however, and his deep appreciation of the land, the sea, and the Tlingit, "a liquid people," that illuminate the story, one with an ending logical and unsentimental yet emotionally satisfying. Old Keb understands it "used to be hard to live and easy to die. Not anymore."

"This brilliant first novel contains hundreds of sentences that read like sheer poetry. The writing is incredibly beautiful. Almost every paragraph gifts us some stunning turn of phrase that made me stop and savor not only the words but also the wisdom. The characters seem like people we've known; they ring true, and feel vivid. The biggest illusion of the book is its seeming effortlessness, like something that had merely waited to be born whole. It's a tremendous achievement."

?Carl Safina, from "58 BOOKS RECOMMENDED BY TED SPEAKERS"

"*Jimmy Bluefeather*, a new novel by Kim Heacox, is a masterful work of fiction. It fits snugly in the spaces between Kim's previous books, much as the bones of his main character, Old Keb, fit the wood of his cane, "the wilderness between his fingers." That line comes from the third paragraph of this engaging book. I stopped and read the first five paragraphs several times before turning the page. I wanted to savor the craft of Kim's writing like swirling a fine wine in the glass before sipping. I was hooked. I liked Keb from page one, and cared about what might happen to him. This is very important, because at his core Kim Heacox is an activist, a disruptive radical on a mission to save the world. "Imagine ... it isn't hard to do." Except that it is, but Kim makes it less hard through the gracefulness of his writing and the quirky likability of his characters. With the wry portraits in *Jimmy Bluefeather*, Kim captures the essence of a small town in Southeast Alaska with the gentle fondness and keen accuracy of Garrison Keillor's *Lake Wobegon*. Keb's inner monologue says at one point: "To tell a story was no small thing; you had to have both permission and authority." Kim has clearly acquired both through long years of close and loving observation. Activism is present on every page. "Words are tools too," in this case well used in the service of Kim's passion for nature. Almost before we know it, we are rooting for Keb and the others to get back to the inner place where they once belonged. It is a wild and wonderful magical mystery tour, with just a hint of mysticism and a healthy dose of morality. Like its opening paragraphs, *Jimmy Bluefeather* is a book to be savored." –Bob Osborne, *Northern Passages*

About the Author

Kim Heacox is the award-winning author of several books including the acclaimed *John Muir and the Ice that Started a Fire* and the novel *Caribou Crossing*. His feature articles have appeared in *Audubon*, *Travel & Leisure*, *Wilderness*, *Islands*, *Orion*, and *National Geographic Traveler*. His editorials, written for the *Los Angeles Times*, have appeared in many major newspapers across the United States. When not playing the

guitar, doing simple carpentry, or writing another novel, he's sea kayaking with his wife, Melanie or watching a winter wren on the woodpile.

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The weight of air

USED TO BE it was hard to live and easy to die. Not anymore.

Nowadays it was the other way around. Old Keb shook his head as he shuffled down the forest trail, thinking that he thought too much.

"Oyye . . ." he muttered, his voice a moan from afar.

He prodded the rain-soaked earth with his alder walking cane. For a moment his own weathered hand caught his attention?the way his bones fitted to the wood, the wilderness between his fingers, the space where Bessie's hand used to be.

Wet ferns brushed his pants in a familiar way. He turned his head to get his bearings, as only his one eye worked. The other was about as useful as a marble and not so pretty to look at. It had quit working long ago and sat there hitching a ride in his wrinkled face. The doctors had offered to patch it or plug it or toss it out the last time Old Keb was in Seattle, but he said no.

Someday it might start working again and he didn't want to do all his seeing out of one side of his head. He was a man, for God's sake, not a halibut.

A wind corkscrewed through the tall hemlocks. Old Keb stopped to listen but had problems here too. He could stand next to a hot chain saw and think it was an eggbeater. All his ears did now was collect dirt and wax and grow crooked hairs of such girth and length as to make people think they were the only vigorous parts of his anatomy. He always fell asleep with his glasses on, halfway down his nose. He said he could see his dreams better that way, the dreams of bears when he remembered?when his bones remembered?waking up in the winter of his life. Nobody knew how old he was. Not even Old Keb. He might have known once but couldn't remember. Somewhere around ninety-five was his guess, a guess he didn't share with any of his children, grandchildren, great grand-children, great-great grandchildren, or the legions of cousins, nephews, nieces, friends, and doctors, who figured he was close to one hundred and were on a holy crusade to keep him alive.

All his old friends were dead, the ones he'd grown up with and made stories with. He'd outlived them all. He'd outlived himself.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Daniel Evans:

As people who live in typically the modest era should be update about what going on or info even knowledge to make them keep up with the era which is always change and progress. Some of you maybe may update themselves by examining books. It is a good choice in your case but the problems coming to anyone is you don't know what one you should start with. This Jimmy Bluefeather is our recommendation to cause you to

keep up with the world. Why, since this book serves what you want and need in this era.

Norman Brown:

Now a day those who Living in the era where everything reachable by match the internet and the resources within it can be true or not involve people to be aware of each info they get. How many people to be smart in acquiring any information nowadays? Of course the answer is reading a book. Looking at a book can help individuals out of this uncertainty Information specifically this Jimmy Bluefeather book since this book offers you rich details and knowledge. Of course the knowledge in this book hundred pct guarantees there is no doubt in it you may already know.

Laura Dumas:

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