



# The Final Frontiersman: Heimo Korth and His Family, Alone in Alaska's Arctic Wilderness

By James Campbell



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In the bestselling tradition of *Into the Wild* and *The Last American Man*, an intimate portrait of how one man and his family thrive in the most remote of American landscapes: Alaska's Arctic wilderness.

Hundreds of hardy people have tried to carve a living in the Alaskan bush, but few have succeeded as consistently as Heimo Korth. Originally from Wisconsin, Korth came to Alaska in his twenties, and he never left. Across the years, he's carved out a subsistence life like no other--a life bounded by the migrating caribou herds, by the dangers of suddenly swollen rivers, and by the very exigencies of daily survival.

Journalist James Campbell has spent two years documenting the lives of Heimo, his wife, Edna, and their teenage daughters, Rhonda and Krin, and he paints their portraits in vivid detail: evenings listening to the distant voices from the radio's Trapline Chatter show; months spent waiting for the odd small plane to bring supplies; years relying on hard-learned hunting and survival skills that are all that stand between the family and a terrible fate. But it's a complicated existence, too, of encroaching environmental pressures and the fear that this life might be disappearing forever--and how will his two teenage daughters react when one of them goes back to "civilization" for her high school years?

But always at the center there's Heimo Korth, a man who escaped a tough father and a circumscribed life, then reinvented himself in the Alaskan wilderness, only to witness the most unbearable of tragedies, a tragedy that keeps him and his family tied to this inhospitable and beautiful land forever.

By turns inspiring and downright jolting, James Campbell's extraordinary book reads like a rustic version of the American Dream--and reveals for the very first time a life undreamed of by most of us, outside of the mainstream, alone in a stunning wilderness that for now, at least, remains the final frontier.



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### Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Heimo Korth was one of the many young men who set out for Alaska in the 1960s and '70s to recreate the life of early fur traders in the American West, a movement first observed in John McPhee's classic *Coming into the Country*. Journalist Campbell has written a worthy sequel to McPhee's book that is a powerful tale in its own right, focusing solely on Korth, who now "lives more remotely than any other person in Alaska" as one of only seven hunter-trappers with a permit to live in the 19.5-million-acre Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR). Korth lives with his wife and two daughters 130 miles above the Arctic Circle, the only settlers for more than 500 miles (250 miles from the nearest road and another 300 miles to the nearest hospital in Fairbanks). Campbell artfully details a number of visits he makes to the Korth family in 2002, as he accompanies Korth on hunting and trapping expeditions that make him "and the reader" feel "transported straight back into the 19th century." He also sympathetically recounts Korth's flight from his abusive Wisconsin father and his reinvention of himself as an Alaskan "legend," a "gun-toting, park-hating anti-animal rights trapper with a soft side" but one who is well respected by managers of the ANWR. What makes this more than just a profile of a fascinating personality is Campbell's deft weaving of Alaskan history into Korth's tale, showing how the recent influx of developers and ecotourists is making the trapping life "more of an anachronism with each passing year."

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From [Booklist](#)

By the mid-1970s, countercultural attitudes had propelled so many wilderness seekers to Alaska that writer John McPhee gave an account of them in *Coming into the Country* (1976). Over several visits in 2002, Campbell absorbed the life story of one such emigrant from the lower 48, Heimo Korth, who happens to be his cousin. Korth traps fur-bearing animals to generate what little cash he makes, and hunts caribou, moose, and fowl for his food. Campbell's observation of the shooting and skinning this necessitates is objective, leaving nothing to imagination. Retrospectively, Campbell relates why Korth moved to Alaska (partly due to antagonism with his father), followed by incidents in his marriage to a native woman and their raising of three daughters (one of whom died in an awful canoeing accident) along a remote tributary of the Yukon River. Because the author perceptively describes how teenagers Rhonda and Krin feel about growing up in such isolation, the circle of interest for Campbell's well-organized work will encompass fans of coming-of-age stories in addition to those intrigued by unconventional lifestyles. *Gilbert Taylor*

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About the Author

**James Campbell** has written for *National Geographic Adventure*, *Outside*, and *Men's Journal*, as well as many other publications. He lives in Wisconsin. This is his first book.

### Users Review

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