



## Winter: Notes from Montana

*Rick Bass, Elizabeth Hughes (Illustrator)*

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This book is a classic celebration of winter in a remote Montana valley.

## Winter: Notes from Montana Details

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Author : Rick Bass , Elizabeth Hughes (Illustrator)

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## From Reader Review Winter: Notes from Montana for online ebook

### Ariel says

Lovely, short read. Probably would give this a 3.5 if I could... A few of the lines are really gems. It left me wanting a little more though. More winter, more people, deeper, just... More. I felt as if it scratched the surface of something wonderful, but never delivered the real "meat." For something similar, I much preferred Diary of a Wilderness Dweller by Chris C...

It does make me anxious for the winter, snow, and cold to arrive, though!

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### Dave says

This is the memoir Rick Bass wrote about the first winter in Montana with his wife. They moved there to write and paint, and actually found some time to do that when they were not cutting wood or shivering. I loved this book. I would read it and bed and listen for snow flakes hitting the window, then remember that it was May, and we would not be getting any snow in Portland for another seven months. I'm looking forward to reading his fiction. Also, good interview with him in recent Tin House.

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### Suzanne says

In the late 1980's, a young Rick Bass and his wife were searching for the ideal rural location where a writer and his artist wife could let their creative juices flow. Southerners themselves, they traveled to New Mexico and other southern locales hoping to find that perfect place to rent. Unfortunately, their budget pretty much ruled out a comfortable climate. A friend told them about Montana, and they headed north, ending up in a remote border town called Yaak.

The book is Rick Bass's memoir of that first winter in the forested valley that is northern Montana. It is truly wonderful, and as I was reading this each night, a calm would come over me, and I could see myself in this little lodge, with a crackling fire and a couple of dogs at the hearth. And when I'd wake up in the morning, I'd laugh at myself, because I live right next door to Montana and actually know what the winters are like, and know full well that I would not do well miles from the nearest grocery store or snowed in for weeks.

But really, this was a gem of a book. It took you to this magical place without any real-life discomforts to distract you from the beauty of Montana's natural paradise. 4 1/2 stars.

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### Charles Boogaard says

This is one of the rare books I will read again. It captures something in me.

These lines from the book say it all "learn to love the cold, the winter. If you love the country, the landscape --if you really love the country-- then you may find yourself able to love it in the winter most of all."

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## Matt says

I really loved this, the writings of the young and idealistic Rick Bass. It's inspiring in that it makes me want to love the real winters I get to experience, to find passion in bone-chilling cold, or difficulties like cars that won't start or furnaces that have issues. I love his writing discipline, and the way he buckles down and becomes a "real man," out of true necessity. The fact that he still lives in the Yaak Valley and has made his life there really shows the love he developed for such a remote area.

I read this during winter (albeit a pathetic one, 2012's), and I could truly read it again--during any season--to rekindle the lovely truths that are brought about by snowfall, freezing temperatures, forests, and the places in our nearby world that rely upon these things, these cycles.

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"Anything I'm guilty of is forgiven when the snow falls." (90)

"Learn to love the cold, the winter. If you love the country, the landscape--if you *\*really\** love the country--then you may find yourself able to love it in winter most of all." (131)

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## Erik says

The second book I read, and one of my favorites, by Rick Bass, a writer I feel does not get the attention he deserves. Writing in the tradition of a modern day Walden, Bass recounts his journey from the city to the Yaak Valley in Montana, the most remote place he can find. Moving to a small cabin he finds out quickly just how little he knows about living in this harsh, new environment. As he adjusts he discovers a new life where only the bare essentials are needed to survive. Except for a handful of neighbors and the regulars at the Dirty Shame tavern, Bass shares his valley with various wild animals, lots of snow and silence. Like Walden, he suggests that tremendous value exists in the wilderness away from the roaring crowds. Anyone who has ever thought about getting away from it all will find themselves envious of a man who actually did.

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## Rebecca Foster says

I had never heard of Rick Bass before I picked up this terrific little book for a quarter in a library book sale. It's a memoir of his first winter spent in Yaak Valley, Montana, aged 30 – a less mystical *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, if you will. "This valley shakes with mystery, with beauty, with secrets — and yet it gives up no answers...**I'm falling away from the human race. I don't mean to sound churlish — but I'm liking it.**" (He wasn't alone, though; he had with him his partner, artist Elizabeth Hughes, whose lovely line drawings illuminate this book. So although this is a book about solitude, it's a modified solitude – they are alone together, with their dogs, facing the world alongside other isolated neighbors.)

This is probably best read while a blizzard is raging outside, tucked up next to a log fire, rather than during the mild, blossom-filled days of early March, but I still enjoyed it very much. Four stars instead of five because there are a LOT of wood chopping scenes. Sometimes it seems that's all he does: find wood, chop it,

burn it. It's very much an elemental existence, back to the basics of survival. Still, there are some beautiful, nearly spiritual passages about the sanctity of a simple life:

**“There are days when I promise, when I swear, that as long as I can walk up the trail behind the house, or as long as I can go out into the yard and look up at the stars, I’ll never be unhappy, never. Not just count my blessings, but shout them.”**

I'd be interested in reading any of Bass's other nature books (another about the Yaak, one about wolves, and one about grizzly bears in the Colorado mountains), and trying his fiction. I would highly recommend this one for fans of *Fire Season* by Philip Connors.

**(This is my 200th review posted to Goodreads — huzzah!)**

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### **Katherine says**

So much brilliance in this book. Rick Bass, a Texan, moves with his girlfriend to caretake a ranch in the Northwest corner of Montana, where he finds his dream country and is ready to learn new things (like what's the deal with winter). 29, curious, thoughtful, he writes of wood, woods, trucks, fire, snow, neighbors, but mainly the joy of discovering wildness and loneliness that is Montana and especially Montana in winter. The book is a dated chronology like a journal, and a pleasure to read.

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### **Amy Beatty says**

Just in love.... What can I say? I also feel I would do better in his world.

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### **P.J. Lazos says**

“It was early September and I was driving, literally, to the last road in the United States, a gravel-and-dirt road that paralleled the Canadian border, up in Montana’s Purcell Mountains. It was like going into battle, or falling in love, or walking from a wonderful dream, or falling into one: wading into cold water on a fall day.”  
- Rick Bass, Winter

Can Rick Bass help it if his Soul's been on a nature walkabout for all of his life? In Winter [notes from montana], Bass's wandering spirit is alive and well and living in the Yaak Valley in Montana without electricity, without heat, other than the wood-fired variety, and without much contact with civilization given that only 30 people lived in this remote valley at the time. To read his writing, you get the sense that Bass has explored every canyon and fissure from a hundred points of view so he could bring us city folk back all the details. Both as a geologist, formerly employed by the Oil and Gas industry (Oil Notes is a great read about Bass's days in the field, looking for new veins of petrol), and now as a writer, advocating on behalf of nature and her wild places, it's evident that Bass craves a tactile connection with the earth and is keyed in to her secret language, a language he then translates for us in everything he writes. Winter is a memoir of Bass's first year spent in the Yaak Valley, living with his then artist girlfriend (now wife), Elizabeth, and their two dogs, living close to the earth -- he writes about it while she sketches -- about the daily living, and the serendipity of the path, and the sublime and exquisite stillness of the world when you can actually find

such an unlikely place, and how it contributes to the growth and grounding of us all whether we know it or not.

It's cold in the Yaak Valley. Winter, as in the season, starts about September and goes clear through to March. When Bass and Elizabeth moved in, the locals told him they needed to cut firewood. A LOT of firewood. Bass cut cords and cords of wood throughout much of the book, as a fitness routine, as a commune with nature, as a spiritual experience, as an exercise in survival, all of which are or may be the same, and when he thought he was done, the neighbors laughed so he cut more. Cords later, he called it and it was just enough to squeak past the interminable winter's finish line. He was sweating it a little toward the end. A couple more weeks of winter and they would have been toast. That's the thing about ditching our modern conveniences. There's a raw, feral power in the earth that we humans aren't so used to anymore. While daily life in a crowded environment puts us off our game, time spent in nature forces us to be present, open our eyes, pay attention. Not only will you miss nature's little delights if you don't, but you could end up in a whole heap of trouble. There's a thousand ways to die in nature, simply because you aren't paying attention. Yet there's a thousand more ways to live more fully, simply because you are. Winter is a profound journey into the heart of the earth's best kept secrets. Don't be surprised if, after reading it, you want to close up the house and head for the wild.

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### **Mary says**

Former southerner and oil man, Bass and his girlfriend get a caretaking job in the Yaak valley of Montana. He describes their first winter, a learning period for mountain survival. Beautiful, beautiful prose.

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### **Robyn says**

Read this in 2001 or 2002. I enjoyed it so much, I don't think I put it down, even though I was in the midst of nursing school, writing papers and work. I enjoyed their fearlessness in taking on an unknown and quite isolated place amid a MT winter. It's as close as you can get to being a modern pioneer; I think.

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### **Kerri Anne says**

Second only to *Oil Notes* (published in 1990), this is Bass' second book, and is really an edited journal of his first-ever winter in his beloved and still-wilder-than-most-wild-places Yaak Valley.

It's lovely and honest and endearing, a collection of notes on daily life in rugged, rural Montana creating a solid and formidably stunning sense of place: A window from which to view his wintry world, as it were.

All of Bass' books feel like such a gift to me, and this book in particular feels like a gift for those of us who long for winter, who crave wilderness like it's an aching in our bones - people who would rather live and exist and just be high in the mountains\* or in their preferred places of solitude than anywhere else. People who understand what it is to feel a deep and irrevocable sense of connection, of belonging, and even ownership (though really it's more like being owned by the land itself) to where and how you live.

I find his musings on daily mountain life incredibly interesting, but then so much of it resembles my favorite parts of my own daily mountain life. I find I'm hermitting myself into smaller and smaller mountain valleys with each passing season of my life. Or returning, perhaps, to the mountain valleys that raised me, that taught me how to swim, and how to fish, and how to get lost while hiking and then how to get found again, and what bear scat looks like, and what a moose sounds like, and the smell of wet huckleberries on my nose, my fingers, and my grin filled with so much happiness, with so much home.

That's what reading this book (and so many of Bass' books) feels like: A homecoming.

*\*In the mountains and away from as much "civilization" as possible; an important distinction if you're thinking about many mountain towns bursting at their seams more than showcasing any true sanctuary or game-changing, life-threatening (as much as life-bolstering) wilderness.*

[Four-point-five stars for being a book all about Bass finding his voice and his true forever home - his preferred sense of place - all those years ago, when I, too, was busy finding mine.]

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### **Jamie says**

In praise of, as Bass puts it, the lower, slower state: "where you're sure to live twice as long, and see twice as many things, and be two times as happy at the end." Where snow is more wonderful than rain, than anything.

God, I loved this book. I love anything Bass writes but here you can see the line between his fiction and not-fiction is so slim and pliable it's sometimes barely there at all. Even Kirby and Tricia of the short stories make their real-life appearance. But really, the reason for that pliable line is that each of his stories is in its way a love story and all of Bass's love is in that wild Yaak valley.

*"I used to think it was bad, a failing, that I had to be in the wilderness to be happy—away from most things. Now I'm starting to discover that's irrelevant—whether it's good or bad, a failing or a strength: totally irrelevant. It's just the way I am."*

If there's a feeling I know, it's that. Not the craving for wilderness and solitude, but the absolute requirement of it, the non-negotiable choices you make in order to draw all your breaths in that place. When I finished the book yesterday, I had hiked out to a favorite spot, was lying on my back by a creek deep in the woods. Pure solitude, pure treasure, and I'm not a spiritual person but that's the vocabulary I'd use to describe it. Unless, maybe, that's all 'spiritual' really means: when things are like some kind of prayer, a kind of salvation, the invitation to sit and sift and contemplate, and relish, being rich.

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### **Julie Stout says**

montana is a dreamland and what literary ambrosia to read someone waxing on about its beauty. I was in heaven as I read and experienced the passion that the author has for the wilderness, trees, and people who love them. Here are 2 great quotes on logging and Mormon missionaries: p.66: There's nothing that gets you as dirty as woodcutting. I thought roughnecking was bad. Roughnecking is a tea party, ginger cakes and lemonade. Roughnecking is washing your hands and blowing your nose with a lace hankie, compared to cutting wood." p. 100: I've been waiting for the Mormon missionaries to surface: strong, mellow, easygoing,

confident, a perfectly matched duo - training! training! - riding those bikes all over the place fleshes out their arms, gives shine to their cheeks. They can take on the world, they know about the world and are not on the run from it, as were two revolutionaries who came by yesterday. The missionaries simply believe they've seen something better, that they have something better, and are merely burdened by guilt, having it that good, while the rest of us know nothing about it. I think that's how the Mormons must feel, how they go about their business.

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