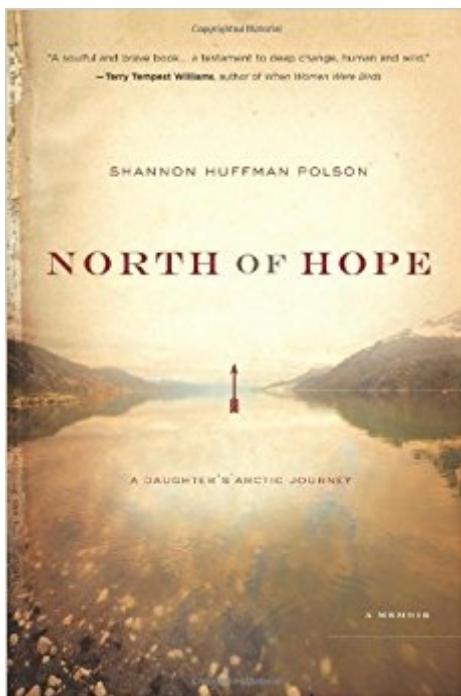


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# North Of Hope: A Daughter's Arctic Journey



## Synopsis

After her parents are killed in a rare grizzly attack, the author is forced into a wilderness of grief. Turning to loves she learned from her father, Polson explores the perilous terrain of grief through music, the natural world, and her faith. Her travels take her from the suburbs of Seattle to the concert hall where she sings Mozart's Requiem, and ultimately into the wilderness of Alaska's remote Arctic and of her heart. This deeply moving narrative is shot through with the human search for meaning in the face of tragedy. Polson's deep appreciation for the untamed and remote wilderness of the Alaskan Arctic moves her story effortlessly between adventure, natural history, and sacred pilgrimage, as much an internal journey as a literal one. Readers who appreciate music or adventure narratives and the natural world or who are looking for new ways to understand loss will find guidance, solace, and a companionable voice in this extraordinary debut.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Shannon Huffman Polson has written a soulful and brave book about death, life, and the complexities surrounding both. There is nothing sentimental in these pages. *North of Hope* shows us how personal loss and loss of our planet come from the same place: Love. This is a testament to deep change, human and wild." -Terry Tempest Williams, author, *When Women Were Birds*"Daring, perceptive, and eloquent--Polson's writing is clear and forceful. Like all true pilgrimages, this one is challenging, and well worth taking." - Scott Russell Sanders, author, *Earth Works and A Conservationist Manifesto* "Polson's extraordinary journey draws you into the depths of anguish and brings you back out realizing that while not all things fractured can be healed, the

soul will gravitate toward beauty, art, and meaning if guided in the right direction."- Alison Levine, mountaineer, polar explorer, and team captain of the first American Women's Everest Expedition"North of Hope is an enthralling story of loss, courage, and redemption told by a gifted, original, and brave new voice, Shannon Huffman Polson."- Robert Clark, award-winning author of ten books, including *Dark Water: Flood and Redemption in the City of Masterpieces* and *Mr. White's Confession*

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As Shannon Polson poignantly recounts the loss of family members to a grizzly attack in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, framing her memoir around her own trek into the wilderness where they perished, she comes to believe that there is grace and wonder in the most unlikely places, that the landscape's wildness can teach you about letting go of control, and that Easter doesn't arrive until you've experienced Good Friday. Anyone who has endured the grief of losing someone or something they loved will identify with the advice Polson was given: "When tragedy comes into your life, the most beautiful thing you can do is keep moving forward." -- Cindy Crosby, former National Park Ranger and author of *By Willow Brook* ([www.cindycrosby.com](http://www.cindycrosby.com))  
Shannon Polson brilliantly tells the story of venturing into the Alaskan wilderness to find the place where her parents were killed. Interwoven with that journey is the story of how she auditioned for and sang the Mozart Requiem. This is no ordinary memoir. To read it is to be changed. -- Jeanne Walker, author, *New Tracks, Night Falling*  
Shannon Huffman Polson has written a book about loss that is both unique to her personal experience and universal to the human

experience. She writes with clarity, honesty, and poise. The end of her story has the surreal feel of fiction---a moment so unbelievable and fitting that it must have happened. Readers will find themselves caught up in that poetic end, and in the breadth of story that comes before it. -- Andrea Palpant Dilley, author, *Faith and Other Flat Tires: Searching for God on the Rough Road of Doubt*  
North of Hope, Shannon Polson's gripping account of the shattering, traumatic loss of her father, is a must read. In the end, Shannon is faced with a choice---does she choose the beauty and majesty of life or succumb to the pain and trauma of the loss of her beloved father? It is only after her father's death that she truly listens to, and embraces, his message---to believe in her own strength and to live a life of meaning and purpose. Shannon's book is a gift to everyone who reads this powerful, inspiring story. -- Janet Hanson, CEO and founder, 85 Broads  
North of Hope is a remarkable story about the power of the wilderness both to harm and to heal, and to provide strength and sustenance to the human spirit, no matter what the challenges. -- Nicholas O'Connell, author, *The Storms of Denali*; instructor, [www.thewritersworkshop.net](http://www.thewritersworkshop.net)

"North of Hope" is Shannon Huffman's Polson's journey through grief. A year after the brutal death of her father and stepmother from a bear mauling in the Arctic Circle , Polson, her brother Ned, and an acquaintance of Ned start the same river journey her father and stepmother were on when they were killed. It's a difficult journey--physically, spiritually, and emotionally. Polson intersperses her chapters on about the journey with short chapters on music--another bond she shared with her father. Singing with the Seattle Symphony is another way she tries to ease her grief, to remain close to those she's lost, but this too is difficult. Journeying through grief is not easy, but it's a journey she must make. This isn't a book about a grizzly bear mauling or a self-help book on how to deal with grief. It is an eloquently written book about one woman's journey working her way through grief in a way that isn't centered on Polson. Instead, she brings in the beauty she finds in the midst of her struggles--the beauty of the music she sings and the beauty of the Arctic wilderness. I started this book while on vacation. My husband, who is not a reader, picked it up before I got back to it and started to read. I didn't see it again until he was done, a little over a week later. In the thirty years we've been married, that was a first, and I'm glad.

Shannon Huffman Polson's North of Hope is at least three books in one, and each of them is a great read. The first two are in the genre of nature and adventure travel writing. One paints a portrait of arctic Alaska, including off the path destinations such as the Waldo Arms "hotel" in Kaktovik, which is a coastal island town that serves as a northern gateway to the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

Based on my own visits to the Waldo Arms, I have described it as a cross between Rick's Cafe in Casablanca and the alien cantina in Star Wars. Polson's description brought back a lot of amusing, and largely pleasant, memories - including of the ancient velvet couch she describes. The second is outdoors adventure writing, describing a trip that Polson made down one of the Refuge's iconic rivers with all the internal drama and informative digressions of a John McPhee narrative, including his description of a river trip in *The Survival of the Bark Canoe*. The third internal book is just that - internal. It is by far the most eloquent, moving and important of the three. In it, Polson explores deeply personal experiences, including but certainly not limited to her exploration of the death of her father and stepmother on the same river. This is honest and searching writing, elegantly crafted. Polson is masterful at interweaving her personal exploration with its narrative context. There are other books peeking out from between the covers of this volume as well: the author's complex relationship with her brother and the structure provided by Mozart's *Requiem Mass*. Each is a nuanced and moving story in its own right. *North of Hope* is a must read for those who enjoy adventure travel, especially in arctic Alaska, but it is equally so for anyone who searches for meaning and renewal of hope in the shadow of tragedy.

I've never read a memoir before, and I'm glad I started with *North of Hope*. Polson does an incredible job of not only telling her story, but also becoming a tangible and real person with real hurt through her story. By taking the reader along with her on her journey to find an end to her grief, she maps her own personal struggle with loss and how she was able to find meaningful peace amid the storm of confusion left after the deaths of her father and stepmother. As she recounts her trip down the same river her father and stepmother traveled in their final days, Polson weaves in precious memories and even regrets she has from growing up. By recounting these memories and of the process of handling the loss in the year after their deaths, Polson brings to life her father and stepmother for the reader. Polson truly brings this part of her life into focus. I couldn't help but cry with her as she described some of the hardest parts of her journey through grief. Being allowed the incredibly personal and intimate look into another person's suffering through loss has been eye-opening and inspiring for me.

My wife admits I have a serious commitment problem ... with books! I read too many concurrently and seldom finish them (unless I'm required to). I started *North of Hope* a day or so ago, and I was inspired early. This memoir is a lovely "ode" to life, love, nature, and faith. It's a beautiful and authentic journey of self-discovery and healing, and I'm a better person for reading it. I met Shannon

10+ years ago when we attended Tuck. (She was a year ahead of me.) I regret not getting to know her well due to demands and stress of the first year experience at Tuck; however, in reading her memoir, I was quickly reminded of her beauty as a human being and person of deep faith. I'm in awe and inspired by this book, and I hope you are too. Thank you.--Tony Llano

North of Hope combines the honesty of raw grief and pain with the journey to healing and the beauty beyond. While Polson acknowledges that some things will never be ok, she goes forward and shares a story that shows the rightful place of grief in times of loss. Paired with a gorgeous Alaskan landscape, the reader feels as if he or she is on the journey with Polson, who gives us eyes to see beauty in a place that few of us will ever dare to venture. Readers are passengers on Polson's journey to find the truth that lies in loving others while living in a broken world.

I'm the Officer Holschen mentioned by Shannon in the book. Sadly, I never get to know so many people in life that I later meet in tragedies such as this. Thank you Shannon for letting me finally meet your dad and Kathy. I had no idea Shannon was such a talented author until I read this very well written book.

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