

Adventures in Alaska with My Angel Joe

Les Bingman

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Bingman's narrative is an exciting glimpse into Alaska and its people, written with travel-book detail, knowledge, and flair.

Les Bingman's spiritually affirming memoir *Adventures in Alaska with My Angel Joe* explores life in the rugged Alaskan wilds from a believer's perspective.

Some would read this memoir and call Bingman lucky, but he argues that all credit goes to his guardian angel, Joe. His adventure-filled life is spent flying old, sometimes unreliable planes, hunting in the Alaskan wilderness, and fishing its dangerous waters. Each such adventure is presented in a roughly chronological fashion, beginning in the 1960s.

Bingman's world involves frequent danger to his life and limb, with almost airplane crashes, near drownings, fights, and other perils. Miraculous survivals are attributed to God—and Joe.

Joe serves almost as a good-luck charm who makes everything miraculous possible. Joe is silent in Bingman's adventures; his presence is evident through Bingman's awareness of God's providence during events that might have ended tragically. His presence also lends humor to the story, as when Bingman writes that Joe probably hoped that flying a bigger airplane would make things easier, but instead, "the bigger the airplane, the harder his job."

Near calamities abound from chapter to chapter, but while the audience might find Bingman's adventures terrifying—proof that maybe it doesn't make sense to fly old planes in the Alaskan bush—Bingman does not. He narrates with good humor and liveliness, transforming harrowing accounts into life-affirming, exhilarating explorations of what's possible, even in the midst of near tragedies. Each blown-out engine, slip into frigid waters, and landing mishap becomes a chance for a prayer and a reminder that God is in control.

Writing is evocative and punchy, with enough details and personalities to really sell Bingman's incredible stories, about events like when "angels flew" his airplane, and Bingman found his body "postured in an aerodynamic racing stance" just before he "smashed" the throttle and narrowly avoided hitting a plow truck. Each of the planes that he flies are lovingly recalled with specifics regarding types, engines, and curious mechanical quirks.

The characters who populate this memoir are archetypes of experiences, such as a crew bodybuilder who once ripped off his shirt to scare away a rival fishing boat, or Bingman's father, who provides well-timed wisdom about handling situations. The nameless bush pilots whom Bingman comes to idolize as he learns to fly, navigate, and make his way in the world add additional color.

Bingman's narrative is an exciting glimpse into Alaska and its people, written with travel-book detail, knowledge, and flair. And as much as it is a record of experiences, the book remains most about finding God's fingerprints in the world.

Adventures explores the Alaskan wilderness and spiritual possibilities with equal panache and gusto.

JEREMIAH ROOD (April 10, 2018)

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