



## Bong Trees in Bellingham

**Christopher Malone**

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*As I approached, I saw no sign of life. I had a feeling of dread. I was searching for a lost twelve year-old girl, and hoped that I would be the one to find her, to take her home alive,*

Hamlin Cross' life changes forever when he finds the missing twelve-year-old girl, Sarah "Missy" Noll, in the mountains of Washington. This story is based on the abuses created by the Child Hearsay Laws, which prevent the accused from confronting his accuser. While giving the reader a taste of this injustice, *Bong Trees in Bellingham* also offers a love story.

Cross and Missy spend several days in a hut when snow prevents them from getting off the mountain. Missy's skis are lost and Cross must carry her: "I looked at an expanse of snow a mile long in front of us, broken only by an occasional stand of firs ... When I got really tired, I would ask Missy to walk for a bit. We couldn't stop, I knew. "

After he rescues and safely brings her back home, Cross is convicted of child molestation and kidnapping, and sentenced to sixty months in prison without seeing or talking to Missy. His love of literature and poetry and his belief in angels help him survive in prison, but Cross loses both his family and his business. Six long years pass before Missy enters his life again.

Told in first person from Cross' perspective, the story flows smoothly, and there is a clear sense of time, place, and action. From the skiing conditions during the rescue to the trials and the days in prison, Cross' point of view brings the story to life through his observations and emotional involvement. However, at times his seemingly random thoughts may momentarily confuse the reader.

Author Christopher Malone successfully brings his well-developed characters to life as the plot unfolds. Through his research into the Child Protection Laws of Washington state, Malone creates a believable plot about the devastating consequences that can occur when the archaic law is applied. Though injustice and abuse do form the basis of the story, love blooms and, ultimately, survives.

PATY AVERY (February 9, 2012)

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