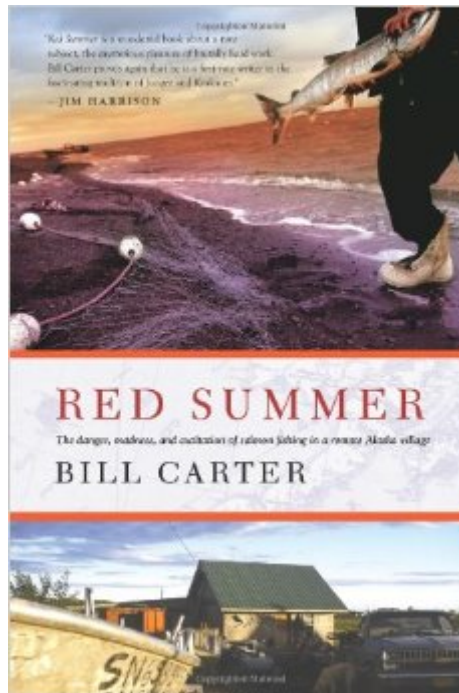


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# Red Summer: The Danger, Madness, And Exaltation Of Salmon Fishing In A Remote Alaskan Village



## Synopsis

A vivid, unforgettable account of the danger, pain, and joy of working on a salmon fishing boat and living in a small village on the farthest edge of Alaska. Set in the tiny Native village of Egegik on the shores of Alaska's Bristol Bay, Bill Carter's *Red Summer* is the thrilling story of one man's journey from novice to seasoned fisherman over the course of four beautiful, brutal summers in one of the earth's few remaining wild places. As millions of salmon race toward their annual spawning grounds, Carter learns the ancient, backbreaking trade of the set net fisherman, one of the most exhilarating and dangerous jobs in the world. Housed in a dilapidated shack with no hot water and boarded-up windows that keep the bears at bay, Carter spends his days battling the elements on the river and his nights drinking whiskey with a memorable group of hardworking, hard-living characters. There's Sharon, the tough, charismatic woman who runs Carter's fishing crew; Carl, her stoic but warmhearted colleague; and a half-dozen local fishermen, many born and raised in this unforgiving place. Their stories -- harrowing, touching, full of humor -- all underscore the credo of the village's fishermen: Do the work or leave. Carter's crew is imperiled a number of times as tides rise, nets are snagged, and the weight of too many fish threatens to sink their boat. Written with gusto and honesty, *Red Summer* brims with astonishing human experience and joins the grand tradition of books written by great American outdoorsmen-writers such as Ernest Hemingway, Edward Abbey, Peter Matthiessen, and Sebastian Junger. *Red Summer* will appeal not only to fishermen, naturalists, adventurers, and armchair anthropologists alike but also to anyone who has ever yearned, however privately, to escape the bonds of modern civilization. --This text refers to an alternate Hardcover edition.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Exhilarating, is a word that comes to mind. Did you ever wonder what it would be like to go up to Alaska and work on a boat and fish for salmon? Well, I did for years-and for one reason or another never did get there, and after having read Bill's fine book I never want to attempt it, either. It's a tough and rough existence, that's why-but I sure am grateful to Mr. Carter for having the brass to do it himself and write this terrific book about it. I'd say this is almost as good (although not many memoirs can be) as *Fools Rush In*, having to do with the war in the former Yugoslavia that moved me to tears on several occasions. Bill Carter is the real deal.

A man who is drawn to adventures as easily as many of us are drawn to our remote controls, Bill Carter offers us the gift of roaming vicariously into his world as he sets sail for another wild journey in *Red Summer*. This second memoir from the author of the sentimental and heartbreaking *Fools Rush In*, takes us to the waters of Alaska for the core fishing season where he toiled on a boat for four years doing harder work than most of us will ever encounter. The landscape is depressing, the townspeople are harsh and the money isn't nearly as good as you'd think it would be for life-threatening labor, yet Bill keeps going back for more. When you're not marveling at his physical and emotional stamina, you're wondering why the heck he hasn't packed up camp and returned to the sunny desert of Arizona that he calls home. By the end of the story, after you've met the "characters" who are now like family to him, and you appreciate the greater good of what fishing in that part of the world can provide, you'll understand. And you'll search your mind wondering where Bill's life will take him next...and hope he invites you along.

For the beginning Bristol Bay net fisherman, this is a good book and it doesn't matter if you are going to be a boat based (drifter) or shore based (set netter). It gives a good flavor of the commitment, friendships and hardships faced by the set netters and adds a lot of personal characters traits to the plot. I drifted for a number of years and it provided me an insight into their side of the fishery and brought back a lot of good (and bad) memories. A good don't want to set it down kind of read that made it through our whole family. (Dave Neault)

*Red Summer* is a fascinating narrative of Bill Carter's experience as a commercial salmon

fisherman in Egegik, Alaska. His description of the people and this strange but interesting place and his observations about life make this book far too short. Outstanding in every way.

Bill Carter is a fisher of men. There. I've spent two hours trying not to say it in the opening paragraph of my review of his new memoir *Red Summer: The Danger, Madness and Exaltation of Salmon Fishing in a Remote Alaskan Village*. But he is. In the memoir, he also happens to work as a salmon fisherman off the shores of Egegik, Alaska. The slim book put out by Scribner tells a solid story on several levels. First, it's an adrenalin-pumping armchair adventure. Commercial fishing is among the world's most dangerous occupations, with a higher death rate by far than any other. Carter gives a skin-tingling account of what it's like to dance with death on a daily basis under the guise of trying to earn a few bucks. The work is brutal. In the span of about four weeks, Carter spends hundreds of hours dislodging millions of salmon by hand from the nets strewn across the Egegik River. The skin on his fingers cracks so bad it takes Super Glue to keep it together. Several times, he nearly drowns in the rush of fish swarming down the river in their frantic effort to spawn. The tendons in his arm swell to tennis-ball size. He lives in a shack with no running water and boards on the windows to keep out bears. He regularly wakes in a cold sweat from the nightmares the place provokes in him. His fear never leaves. "Everything up here experiences a harsh death, humans included," Carter says in the book. "No one who stays here ever ends up in a hospice. No one drinks green tea and reads self-help books.... This is a land of extremes and those who keep returning follow the silent restriction that acts as the only social law: Do the work or leave." Egegik's not a postcard-pretty community. It's remote. Violent. Unfriendly to outsiders. Almost a shantytown. The place attracts extreme personalities, so any description like zany or stupid or tough falls exponentially short. It's through the stories Carter tells, with both objectivity and heart, that you get a real sense of the people and place. And while they're not likely to be people you'd bond with in the real world, they're fascinating to read about. There's nothing romantic about the place, but Carter views it with a poet's eye. He finds connections between humanity's struggle for conquest and the salmon's desperate attempts to reach fresh water long enough to survive, spawn, then die. The other fishermen don't struggle with the morality of what they're doing - it's a business and they're entitled to seek their profits. Carter does. "I fish commercially and slaughter thousands.... each day, I find one moment, no matter how tired I am or how much slime of their guts I have in my hair or on my body, to stare into their oval black eyes. Their mouths gasp for their last breath, and I feel the weight of guilt." In addition to a Hemingway-esque man-against-fish story, *Red Summer* is compelling from an environmental standpoint, especially in light of the headlines coming out of California about the

cancellation of its commercial fishing season due to the collapse of the chinook population. In layman's terms, you get a clear explanation of the industry and the challenges it faces. The greed of the fishermen continually bumps up against the stewardship policies of U.S. Fish and Game, which through careful management ensures that enough salmon make it upriver each year to spawn and keep the species alive. It answers any questions you might have about how the industry works. Why does he keep going back? That question is trickier to figure out, but it was foremost in mind throughout my read. It's astoundingly difficult work, supremely dangerous, the concept of kindness to strangers doesn't exist, and the pay isn't even very good. Still, Carter fishes for four summers in Egegik. Why, why, why? He says in the book, "I return to Egegik because I need a place where nature still has the upper hand, reminding me that my existence is fragile and fleeting." I think it's something more. I think Carter returned for the same reason he went to Sarajevo in the middle of a war, which he chronicles in his first book, *Fools Rush In: A True Story of War and Redemption*, the movie version of which is currently in pre-production. Probably for the same reason he hiked across Utah with nothing more than a backpack and a tin cup. It's because he's a fisher of men, and only when living on the edge does Carter find the sort of honesty and integrity in people that he craves. It's then that he feels Alive, with a capital A. He wants to know who a person is - what humanity is -- when stripped of the comfortable yet mind-numbing world of force-fed news and cable television and corporate brainwashing. In *Red Summer*, we all benefit from Carter's curiosity without having to undertake the grueling journey ourselves.

Buy this book immediately for your father. Much of America is based not in cities but in small rural communities where a man or woman's value is not measured in dollars and cents but in how hard that individual works. These are the backbone of America that split their own firewood to heat their home. Yes...the people that rototill, fertilize, and plant their own gardens for food. Young and old the people that conduct hard, brutal, day in day out physical labor. This book is the bible of those of us who work that hard. If you are a fan of the "Deadliest Catch" you will love this book. However unlike the "Deadliest Catch" this book is written by the individual that actually does the hard work...While this mind numbing labor takes place in just a few months it feeds families for an entire year. Add to this diary of back breaking fishing extremely insightful passages on the working man's view of the Green movement and global warming and you have a winner. When I purchased this book it was a classic case of don't judge a book by it's cover...This book is a keeper!!! Every book that I buy is passed on to others at some point...this book will be handed down to my daughters to be handed down to their daughters. It is that good !!!

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