

# **Pilgrim's Wilderness: A True Story of Faith and Madness on the Alaska Frontier Study Guide**

**Pilgrim's Wilderness: A True Story of Faith and Madness on the Alaska Frontier by Tom Kizzia**

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## Summary

Note: The primary individual depicted in this book goes by a number of different names throughout his life. The name Papa Pilgrim is being used in most instances in this study guide because that is the name he used during the time period during which most of the incidents take place. However, when discussing chapters that describe previous times in his life, the guide follows the author's lead and uses the name most closely associated with that chapter and time period.

Pilgrim's Wilderness is a work of non-fiction by Alaskan journalist Tom Kizzia. The book recounts the bizarre saga of a man who calls himself Papa Pilgrim and the impact he and his large family had on a small community in the Alaskan wilderness. Although he is initially hailed as a hero by staunch advocates of property rights when he boldly stands up to the regulations imposed by the National Parks Service, things unravel when his checkered history and the cruel abuse he imposes on his wife and children come to light.

The year is 2002 when a man who calls himself Papa Pilgrim arrives in the small outpost town of McCarthy, Alaska. With him are his wife Rose and their fifteen children. The family attracts immediate attention because of their frontier-style clothing and old fashioned ways. The family is looking for a place that is free and wild. They purchase a large piece of property that includes an abandoned copper mine and a number of small cabins. Part of the property lies within the sprawling Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve, making it necessary to obey certain rules and regulations with regard to the use of the land. This is a situation that is controversial among Alaskans who value individual rights.

The family uses its fleet of old, rusty vehicles to begin hauling supplies up the mountain to the homestead they are establishing. They also occupy a piece of land on the public right of way in McCarthy. At first, the residents of McCarthy accept them, partly because Papa has a great deal of personal charisma and the ability to talk his way out of any controversy with his Bible references and charm. When the family refuses to cooperate with park rangers and obey the regulations regarding the use of park land, it rises to hero status and begins to gain fame beyond the borders of McCarthy.

Alaskans would have been less welcoming if they had known more about Papa and his background. Raised by an affluent family in Texas under his real name, Robert Hale, Papa has a checkered history that includes the suspicious death of his 16-year-old wife, several years spent in a haze of drugs during the late 1960s, and a long string of thefts and other issues while the family lived in New Mexico. As the years have passed, he has become increasingly cruel, severely beating his wife and children for minor infractions of his rules. Most of the rules pertain to his delusional ideas about the right ways to repent from sin and ensure entrance to heaven. He has also been raping his oldest daughter, Elishaba, since she turned 18. Rose and the children have always obeyed him, but as they become exposed to outside influences, they begin to see how

normal families live and by the story's end, Papa's world unravels and he dies in prison without repentance.



# Chapters 1 - 5

## Summary

### Prologue

Third Month opens with 29-year-old Elishaba, whose real name is Butterfly Sunstar, and her sister Jerusalem hastily packing and using snow machines to travel from their family home high on an Alaskan mountain and the tiny, almost abandoned town of McCarthy below. They are among 15 children of the Pilgrim family and they are running away, certain to incur their father's wrath if they are caught. After some mechanical difficulties, they proceed down the mountain, then hide their Tundra and themselves under snow and white sheets as they hear a snowmachine coming up the valley.

### Chapter 1, The Road to McCarthy

Papa Pilgrim and several of his 15 children arrive in the tiny wilderness town of McCarthy, Alaska in a couple of old trucks. The year is 2002. The children are quiet and well behaved but the entire family is dressed in tattered vintage clothing. They meet Neil Darish, who is fixing up the town's old inn and saloon, the McCarthy Lodge. Papa explains that God has brought the family to this place from New Mexico, which has become too civilized, in search of land that is free and wild. After three years of searching throughout Alaska, they hope to buy property here in McCarthy, which is populated only by a few dozen families and individuals and is surrounded by the 100-million acre Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve. The park is only loosely managed by federal authorities and the people of the area value that freedom. Darish is careful about talking to Papa about the availability of property for sale because he wonders how such a large family would be fare in this community. The family leaves and returns a few weeks later, using old snow machines to explore the area, eventually arranging to buy the abandoned Mother Lode mine. The family celebrates the purchase, which they plan to rename Hillbilly Heaven, with singing and dancing at the McCarthy Lodge, as all the children sing and play musical instruments with great skill. Taking Papa aside, Neil tells him that he and his partner, Doug Miller, are gay, fearing that the family's religious beliefs would object to that, but Papa says they do not judge people and he appreciates the fact that Neil has not judged them.

### Chapter 2, History's Shadow

This chapter reveals that despite his outward appearance and proclivities, Papa Pilgrim grew up in a well-to-do, privileged family in Ft. Worth, Texas. His real name is Bobby Hale and his father was a college football star, then an FBI agent and esteemed member of society, but an inattentive husband and father who died at age 55. Bobby, who has an identical twin brother named Billy, was often in trouble. In high school, he began dating Kathleen Connally, daughter of later-Texas Governor John Connally, who objected to the relationship. Kathleen got pregnant, then she and Bobby ran away, got



married and settled in Florida, where Kathleen was killed by a shotgun under somewhat mysterious circumstances. Bobby claimed the gun went off accidentally when she was threatening suicide but although there was some evidence to the contrary, no charges were filed and he returned to Texas with his father.

Chapter 3, The Bollard Wars, finds assistant park superintendent Hunter Sharp and park ranger Marshall Neeck trying to get in touch with the Pilgrims to discuss what is and is not allowed regarding the use of public lands, including how to travel between their properties, which are not contiguous. The Pilgrims ignore those efforts and Parks Service officials research the deeds, learning Papa's real name, and a fly-over reveals disturbing changes being made to the land. The Pilgrims publicly post a letter saying the Parks Service officials are harassing them and that they intend to claim all the existing rights-of-way connected to their properties and deny access to the rangers. Neeck tracks down Papa to talk about the fact that the Parks Service soon will shut off the Mother Lode entrance and survey the Pilgrims' property lines, but Papa refuses to talk to him. When the snow melts in the spring, getting to and from the property is nearly impossible so Papa secretly bulldozes a new road, stopping just short of the town so no one will see it. Everyone in McCarthy is surprised when Papa Pilgrim writes an angry letter to the local paper about an on-going controversy regarding the erection of bollards – steel and concrete posts placed at either end of the footbridge across the Kennicott River designed to keep motorized vehicles from crossing the bridge into town. The town has long been divided on the issue, with some in favor of the bollards to keep the town remote and primitive and others wanting to improve access. The Pilgrims come down firmly against progress, thus pleasing preacher and newspaper publisher Rick Kenyon, but soon Papa upsets Ben Shaine, a retired teacher who brought groups of students to the area each summer, by refusing to let them backpack in his area. Meanwhile, Pilgrim continues to block the Parks Service's attempts to close the final entrance to the old mine that is on their property and in the summer of 2002, hikers find and report back on the torn landscape, and subsequent air surveillance reveals that the Pilgrims have bulldozed their own access road from the mine to McCarthy, 13 miles through the national park.

#### Chapter 4, Sunlight and Firefly

This chapter delves further into the complex background of Papa Pilgrim and his family. Following his teenage bride's death, Bobby Hale became a wanderer, becoming involved in the hippie and drug culture of the late 1960s and often living in abandoned mines and cabins. There is also some evidence that he and his brother, probably at the direction of their father, broke into and bugged the home of Judith Campbell, a woman who was romantically linked to both President John F. Kennedy and Chicago mob boss Sam Giancana. Over the next few years, he married twice and fathered four children, and came into contact with such figures of the time as Charles Manson and the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. In a fog of drugs, he met Kurina Rose Bresler, a 16-year-old girl who had run away from her Beverly Hills Home to find a simpler life living off the land. He changed his name to Firefly and she changed hers to Sunlight, and both took the legal surname Sunstar, but he was often volatile and angry. On a visit to Texas, they



began attending Baptist church services and Firefly suddenly became a devotee of Jesus, giving up drugs and renouncing the name Sunstar.

In Chapter 5, Motorheads

During the tenth month of Papa Pilgrim's first year in the Wrangells, he writes a lengthy, dramatic letter to the residents of McCarthy announcing the birth of the couple's latest child, a boy named Jonathan. The letter describes his wife going into labor while he was away, then a long and arduous journey to get there in time for the birth. While the people of McCarthy assume that the Pilgrims were looking for privacy and freedom to practice their religious views, Papa begins to talk with Neil Darish about his plans to open a lodge on his property and bring tourists to the Mother Lode mine. Darish thinks it is a workable plan, particularly since the Parks Service would not allow tourists to tour the portion of the mine on their side of the mountain because of liability concerns. Darish is a little surprised by Papa's naivety in some areas, such as how credit cards work, but is generally supportive. During the winter, a group of Alaskan men who call themselves Motorheads decide to come to McCarthy for their annual wilderness trip and they end up paying \$50 per person for a snow machine trip into the mountains led by the Pilgrims. They are amazed by the family, who lost one of its cabins to fire a little earlier, and they give the boys a big tip and talk about starting a clothing drive for the family when they return to Anchorage. On their last night in McCarthy, attorney Carl Bauman asks Papa why he says he has 16 children but he can only count 15, and Papa tells him one died four months after conception. He says they buried her by a river in Texas, but the author says Rose remembers leaving the fetus in the freezer of a couple who took them in after their truck broke down. Bauman gives Papa his card and thinks that they have similar values, but later would wonder if Papa sought him out because he knew he would need a lawyer.

## Analysis

The prologue of Pilgrim's Wilderness draws the reader in by beginning the book as if it were a work of fiction, introducing Elishaba and a few of the other characters as they make their escape from a dangerous situation as yet unknown. It also ends in suspense by implying that whatever or whomever they are running from is approaching, thus increasing the reader's interest in moving into the main text.

Papa Pilgrim and the rest of the family are introduced in Chapter 1 as odd but harmless figures who appear to be from a bygone era. Although he is clearly deeply religious, Papa presents himself as an open-minded, live-and-let-live man through his reaction to the news that Neil Darish and Doug Miller are gay, and Neil's reaction to Papa's attitude is one of several incidents that prompt members of the community to take his side and continue to overlook or ignore obvious signals that all was not right with the Pilgrim family. In addition, the first chapter introduces the tiny outpost town of McCarthy, which has a population of only a few dozen families. For that reason alone, the Pilgrim family and its activities can hardly go unnoticed and the town itself becomes something of a character in the book as its inhabitants invariably take sides as the family's saga as it



becomes increasingly bizarre. The tiny size of the community also makes it seem increasingly difficult to believe that its residents fail to see through Papa at an earlier stage, but the author makes it clear that the community is comprised of people who, for the most part, mind their own business and that atmosphere is what draws some people to move there.

The first section also introduces one of the book's major themes concerning the philosophical differences between Alaskans and the National Parks Service and the extreme reluctance of many Alaskans to give up their traditional ways. The author draws a clear distinction between Alaska and the "lower 48" in that, partially because it is so remote from the contiguous states, things have always been done more loosely there, particularly in wilderness areas like McCarthy. This area was originally settled by copper miners who gained land – sometimes huge chunks of it – by showing up and staking claims. Towns like McCarthy were built around mines and when the copper ran out, the towns died or greatly diminished. The author goes into detail about the history of McCarthy and the Kennecott Copper Company, thus providing a backdrop for the story of the Pilgrim family and also establishing the kind of community McCarthy became and the history of the attitudes of its residents and many other Alaskans toward property rights.

Another important aspect of this section is the extensive discussion of the creation of the Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve, established by Congress in 1980 and protecting more than 100 million acres and doubling the size of the country's national park system in one fell swoop. The park surrounds McCarthy and other communities, and although Alaska's homesteading days were over, local residents who now lived inside the park were allowed to continue to live off the land, conduct mining activities, hunt, fish and conduct other activities as they always had. However – and this is crucial to understanding the dilemma caused by the Pilgrim family's activities – while activities within the park were set up to be less restrictive than those in other national parks, there were rules and expectations about use of the land even for "inholders," or people who owned property and lived within the park's boundaries. The fact that those rules were not explicitly spelled out in the legislation that created the park, along with the vehement opposition of many Alaskans to the very creation of the park, considering it a federal land grab, set up the controversy that resulted from the Pilgrims' later activities.

As he continues to do throughout the book, the author moves back and forth between the Pilgrim family's activities from the time they arrived in McCarthy and their backgrounds as individuals and as a family. This gives the reader knowledge that the residents of McCarthy did not have, enabling us to foresee problems with the family, and with Papa Pilgrim in particular. For example, early in the book the author reveals Papa's true identity as Bobby Hale, a privileged young man from Texas whose 16-year-old pregnant bride died under mysterious circumstances. The author then traces his journey through the 1960s drug culture, his early life with his wife Rose, his religious conversion and finally the initial problems that begin to crop up when it is revealed that the Pilgrims have illegally bulldozed a new road through 13 miles of the national park.





## Vocabulary

homestead, remote, pioneer, pagan, wary, renunciation, defiance, pious, guise, anachronistic, dominion, credulous, shun, summit, exegesis, portent, presumptuous, appraise, melancholy, liability, rueful, subsistence, remnant, acerbic, edict, oedipal, halcyon, fulminate, terminus, torrent, defiant, rigor, perpetuity, consign, agrarian, hewn, paradoxically, authentic, provocation, retaliation, protocol, obtuse, furtive, penultimate, epiphany, echelons, emissaries, overture, vexing, arduous, rebuke, evoke, inertia, affable



# Chapters 6 - 10

## Summary

### Chapter 6, The Rainbow Cross

This chapter traces the Pilgrim family's earlier life in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains in the desert of northern New Mexico, where Papa was known as Preacher Bob. Like other hippies, the Pilgrims and their young children arrived in the area and answered an ad for someone to be the caretaker of a large piece of land. They learned later that they were dealing with log rustlers and that the land actually belonged to actor Jack Nicholson, who had bought it after filming *Easy Rider* in the area. They got rid of the rustlers and led others to believe Nicholson had hired them to care for his property, where Pilgrim erected a large cross near their cabin. During an intense storm, lightning struck the cross and sent a fireball into the cabin, injuring Rose but not seriously, and Papa decided that the cross had been struck because they had invited an unbeliever into their home. He erected several more crosses farther from the house, but all but the last one was destroyed. The couple's oldest daughter Elizabeth has written about the family's life at that time, describing days of being whipped with willow branches for small infractions as her father retreated increasingly into the Bible and thought himself a prophet. They dug out a cave beneath an overhanging rock and prepared it as a place they could wait for the annihilation of the world, but they avoided strangers and Elizabeth soon found that her father put on a front when anyone other than the family was around.

### In Chapter 7, Hostile Territory, Hunter Sharp

In this chapter, the chief park ranger and two other rangers travel on snow machines up the McCarthy Creek valley, heading for the Marvelous Millsite property owned by the Pilgrims, whom the officials now refer to only by the names on their deeds, the Hale-Sunstar family. As they progress, several of Pilgrim's sons appear behind them and begin to follow, refusing to speak or engage with the rangers. After a while, Papa Pilgrim appears with some of the younger children but again they refuse to engage although they are not openly hostile. Eventually the rangers come upon hand painted signs attached to trees within the park's jurisdiction saying the property is private and advising the NPS not to trespass. At that point, some of the family members block the rangers' path and they are forced to turn back. The situation is sticky because in recent years, there have been several incidents in which government officials and law enforcement officers have been attacked or killed by "resisters." Soon afterward, Pilgrim posts another public notice accusing the rangers of harassment and assault, and the local paper, which is run by a strong supporter of the Pilgrims, publishes a story under the pseudonym McCarthy Annie giving a very slanted view of the incident and saying that the authorities have been tapping the Pilgrims' phone. Papa goes to the FBI office in Anchorage to address the wiretapping issue, but the agent assures him that no one is



spying on his family. When he calls two weeks later to follow up, Pilgrim has changed his tone and again refuses to cooperate with any authorities.

#### Chapter 8, Holy Bob and the Wild West

This chapter goes back to the family's life in New Mexico, where they became controversial among their neighbors. While some accepted them and found them somewhat charming, others widely suspected them of stealing food, horses, tools and other items, but Bob Hale answered any complaint with Bible quotes and assurances that he followed the Lord's word. Eventually some residents wrote to Jack Nicholson to ask that the family be asked to leave, but after Hale attended a meeting to discuss the situation and charmed most of those in attendance, the request was recanted.

#### In Chapter 9, God vs. the Park Service

In this chapter, young Stephens Harper is chosen to be the first park ranger to be stationed inside McCarthy. This poses a potential problem for him because he lives next door to the Pilgrims' makeshift home in the town, which is located on a public right of way. In time, the family begins storing piles of lumber and junk around their wanigan, blocking the legal access to Harper's cabin and they accuse the Parks Service of planting a spy next door. Most locals still consider Pilgrim a local hero who stands up to the authorities so everyone is shocked when the Parks Service bans motor vehicle traffic from the illegal roads the Pilgrims have bulldozed between the town and their mountaintop home, and the local paper continues to print misinformation and inflammatory stories. One local resident who is invited to the Pilgrim's home later remarks that Elishaba seems to hate her father and as the family spends more time in town since it is now difficult to reach their home, a few others begin to sour on them. The rangers are able to cite two of the Pilgrim boys for infractions and they hire Carl Bauman to represent them, then federal surveyors fly over Hillbilly Heaven and find that the Pilgrims have indeed been clearing park land. The Pilgrims continue to harass ranger Harper in various ways, although Elishaba quietly tries to make amends, and to threaten the authorities who are trying to survey the land, then Harper's wife looks out the window to see that Moses Pilgrim is watching her as one of the Pilgrims' goats hangs butchered and skinned on a tree limb.

#### Chapter 10, The Pilgrim's Progress

This chapter reveals that Papa gives his children access to only two books – the Bible and John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, a religious allegory about a man named Christian's quest to overcome his burden of sin and reach the Celestial City. In his desire to ensure that his family makes it to heaven, Papa exacts severe punishments for both small and large infractions of his own interpretation of the Bible, including beating Rose and all of the children, sometimes savagely. Rose had been happy with her marriage at first and used her family's Beverly Hills connections to get Jack Nicholson to let them live on his property, but now endures both physical and mental abuse. He changed Elizabeth's name to Elishaba, and although she tried hard to please him, as a teenager she resented the fact that they could not have more normal lives. When she



turned eighteen, he began raping her regularly. He assured her that sex was something that was right only between a father and daughter and making up signs that God approved. Papa cut ties with all relatives except his brother Billy, who left his family and became an itinerant preacher, eventually dying in Nicaragua. In time, things began to close in on Bob Hale and the family left New Mexico for Alaska in the August of 1998.

## Analysis

Chapter 6 provides another flashback to shed additional light on the Pilgrim family's history prior to arriving in McCarthy. The author's description of their time in New Mexico strongly implies that Papa had become more dishonest and did not mind deceiving others in order to get what he wanted and take care of his family by doing as little work as possible. His deceptions also begin to include his very identity, as we now know that his various identities have included his original name of Robert Hale, his legal name change to Firefly Sunstar, and his adoption of the name Preacher Bob and later Papa Pilgrim.

During the family's time in New Mexico, it also became clear that Papa/Bob has begun abusing his children as he has gone deeper into his religious fervor. As he becomes increasingly convinced that he is a prophet and the only one who can appropriately interpret the Bible and discern the way to heaven, he finds it necessary to "correct" members of his family, including his youngest children, by whipping them with willow branches and inflicting other forms of punishment that will become increasingly violent as time goes on. Chapter 8 also reveals the ironic fact that although Papa resents the government and will eventually go to battle with the Parks Service in Alaska, earlier in New Mexico he had to obtain notarized statements for family birth certificates in order to obtain government services such as food stamps.

Despite his treatment of his family, Papa Pilgrim proves to be a surprisingly charismatic character. This is particularly evident in Chapter 8, which traces more of the family's time in New Mexico, and describes his ability to charm his neighbors who are incensed over evidence that the family has stolen items and committed other acts against them. As time goes on, Papa increasingly takes whatever he likes from others, including farm animals, tools and even vehicles, simply appropriating them for his own use and then abandoning them if he is challenged. He also begins to teach his children to steal and uses them to sneak into the homes of their neighbors to take food and other items of value.

The most disturbing information, however, comes in Chapter 10 when the author reveals that Papa not only raped his oldest daughter Elizabeth, now called Elishaba, routinely from the time she was 18, but he also essentially brainwashed her by ensuring her that these acts were only acceptable between a father and his daughter. His influence over every member of his family is absolute and just as he interprets the Bible to suit himself, he also invents signs from God to justify even his most abhorrent actions. Despite the fact that he has begun to savagely abuse his wife Rose, he is able to convince her to use her parents' Hollywood connections to get actor Jack Nicholson



to allow the family to live on his New Mexico property, then forces her to cut ties with her family in order to give him the complete control he needs.

Other chapters in this section concern the family's continued struggle with the Parks Service in Alaska. As the government agents become increasingly proactive in their efforts to bring the Pilgrims in line, Papa becomes more and more aggressive in his relationship with the Parks Service, posting increasingly threatening signs and letters warning the rangers to stay off his property. As this is occurring, the family's neighbors in McCarthy escalate the battle through, among other means, a series of extremely inflammatory newspaper stories that are almost humorous in the slanted nature of their content and include large numbers of invented "facts". The newspaper editor and other pro-Pilgrim residents do not side with the family out of a sense of genuine friendship, but rather as a convenient excuse to perpetuate their own dislike of the government in general and the Parks Service in particular as a result of the on-going property rights debate taking place throughout Alaska.

Also of note in Chapter 10 is the discussion of Papa's obsession with the book *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Not only does this allegory give him an opportunity to further his ideas about how his family should best overcome sin and reach heaven, but it also serves as the inspiration for his name and will become symbolic in other ways as the book progresses.

## Vocabulary

martyr, renegade, opacity, migration, adobe, intimidated, eloquent, vouchsafe, gnash, doctrine, tribulation, annihilation, athwart, rapacious, reconnaissance, escalating, degenerate, derision, pseudonym, trepidation, covet, antagonistic, decorum, aloof, exhortation, demeanor, aghast, pungent, confiscate, cohesion, audacious, fallacy, ethereal, annotated, allegory, distillation, commensurate, diligent, exalted, quell, itinerant, forage



# Chapters 11 - 13

## Summary

In Chapter 11, Hillbilly Heaven

The author Tom Kizzia, a reporter for the Anchorage Daily News, begins hearing stories about the Pilgrims a few months after they arrive in McCarthy and calls Papa to begin researching a story for the paper. Papa is reluctant at first but relents when Kizzia says he will be writing more stories about conflicts between the national park and the community, and he invites the author to visit. During the horseback ride up the mountain, Kizzia gets to know the older children, who are now in their 20s. Kizzia asks Elishaba if she would consider leaving the family and doing something else, but she defends her family's lifestyle and says she likes it. At Hillbilly Heaven, Kizzia notes that the walls of the house are very thin and the family lives in squalor. Papa gives him an edited version of his background and Kizzia decides to verify some information that seems unlikely. The older boys tell him that they do not want to apply for a permit to make changes to the land because they are standing up for the rights of everyone in Alaska. When he gets home, Kizzia's research turns up more information about Papa's past in Texas and New Mexico, but when he phones several times to ask more questions, Papa refuses to talk about his background and after the story appears in the paper, the family refuses to speak to him further.

In Chapter 12, Flight of the Angels

Increased publicity causes sympathy and support for the Pilgrims to spread, leading to donations of food and supplies that are delivered to them in a number of "angel flights" since they have been denied access to the road they illegally cleared. Much of the support comes from people who want to return to fundamental American virtues and see Alaska as the last holdout against government intervention in people's lives. Meanwhile, the publicity also brings forth a number of people who call the Anchorage Daily News to tell of their own brushes with the family, most of them very negative, but Kizzia is unable to report most of it because it is repetitive and he is unable to get any response from the Pilgrims to provide their side of the story, and much of the information is potentially slanderous and difficult to confirm. Eventually Papa takes Kizzia's call but denies all the allegations and blames him for bringing more problems for the family by reporting false information.

In Chapter 13, The Pilgrim Family Minstrels

The Pilgrims are now involved in several court cases and some of them seem to be going their way. Elishaba has begun standing up to Papa and he punishes her by taking Jerusalem on a trip to Anchorage instead of her. Nine-year-old Abraham severs the tip of a finger in a machinery accident and is flown to Anchorage, where doctors are more concerned about the welts on his back than his finger, but during interviews all the



family members claim that he fell down some stairs. A property-rights advocate and musician named Chuck Cushman visits the family while they are in Portland, Oregon for medical treatment and arranges for them to do a series of musical performances, which leads to more performances, a CD and some degree of fame throughout Alaska, but their Christian music is not well received when they perform at the state's Republican Convention. Gradually people begin to notice that the children cannot read and other things that seem not right and the Pilgrims fail to get the political support they want for their court battle against the Parks Service. Arriving back in McCarthy, they find that most of the town has turned against them, largely because of their large camp in the public right-of-way that includes horse manure, burning garbage and diesel exhaust. The town threatens to sue the family and Walt Wigger, the man from whom the Pilgrims bought their property, is engaged in a battle with them over the wanigan and other items they are claiming but he says were not part of their deal. An increasing number of incidents, including thefts of property, continue to pit the Pilgrims against the other residents of McCarthy and they gradually alienate even their staunchest supporters. One Saturday morning, a group of about seventy people march on the wanigan to support Stephens Harper and demand that the Pilgrims clean up their mess. However, Papa informs them that they have bought another piece of land just across the footbridge and will move their belongings there. By this time, some of the older children – Elishaba and Joseph in particular – are becoming embarrassed by their father's behavior.

## Analysis

Chapter 11 begins to bring Papa Pilgrim's past in line with his present as the book's author, an Anchorage newspaper reporter, learns of the family and begins to pursue a possible story. Up until that point, Papa had been able to use his charm and folksy demeanor to sway the opinions of others and get them to believe things that were simply not true, but he had not yet encountered someone inquisitive and resourceful enough to investigate his tales and seek the truth. Ironically, when Papa tells author Kizzia about his background, the things that seem most preposterous are the ones that turn out to be true, including the fact that his father was a well-known athlete and an FBI agent. However, in pursuing further information about this intriguing figure, he turned up things that were, not surprisingly, left out of Papa's edited version of his history, including incidents from his youth in Texas, the death of his young bride, and the complaints lodged against him by his neighbors in New Mexico. When his own family questions him, Papa is able to keep them in line with brutal physical punishment, but he does not have that option with people like Kizzia and the Parks Service rangers, so he uses the only weapon he has – issuing threats and simply turning his back on them and refusing further contact or cooperation. This is a pattern that will continue throughout his life.

The publicity Kizzia provides for Papa turns out to be unwelcome because it brings up unsavory facts about his past, but it turns out to be a two-edged sword. On one hand, many Alaskans are intrigued by the family's story and sympathetic of their plight, as the Parks Service has cut them off from using the road they cleared so they are unable to





travel in winter between McCarthy and Hillbilly Heaven. This prompts an outlandish outpouring of donations, resulting in dozens of flights to ferry supplies to the family's home. However, Kizzia's story also attracts the attention of people who have encountered the Pilgrims in the past and results in numerous reports of Papa's unsavory activities. Although Kizzia is unable to write about most of them, they serve to further raise his suspicions and lead to further investigation.

Things begin to fall apart in other ways when the people of McCarthy sour on the increasingly large, offensive mess the Pilgrims have created on the property in town on which they are essentially squatting. Perhaps, even more important than the community's growing rage is the fact that Elishaba and Joseph are now bothered by their family's behavior, signaling for the first time the possibility that his children will turn against their domineering father despite the potentially grave consequences.

## Vocabulary

brandish, recount, countenance, ingratiating, dubious, encroachment, rebuke, epitome, farrier, entice, antediluvian, pensive, cadence, exude, demerit, ascetic, provender, squalor, dour, abashed, impertinence, indigenous, vernacular, excoriate, analogy, cursory, rhetorically, incensed, ambivalent, disdainful, strewn, discredit, laudatory, enumerate, prevalent, exemplify, galvanize, onerous, substantiate, extenuating, fatuous, recluse, imposition, ambiguity, stringent, charisma, fulminate, derision





# Chapters 14 - 16

## Summary

In Chapter 14, A Quiet Year

It is now 2005 and the author has taken some time off following his wife's death from cancer. The Pilgrims have moved their belongings to their new property across the river and become very quiet, so they have essentially disappeared from people's conversation when Kizzia learns that state troopers are looking for Robert Allen Hale. He has been indicted by a secret grand jury on 30 felony counts of kidnapping, assault, coercion, incest and sexual assault, but when the troopers arrive to apprehend him, he has vanished.

Chapter 15, The Wanigan

This chapter retraces the months prior to Papa's indictment. Joseph and Joshua, age twenty-seven and twenty-five respectively, were sent to a hunting camp and being alone together for the first time, began to talk openly about their father. They also privately expressed interest in the daughters of the Buckingham, a Christian family who had befriended the Pilgrims and even invited them to live with them during the winter, opening the children's eyes to things they had never experienced before. However, the situation soured when Papa essentially took over the Buckingham's home and angered the family. Although he was no longer drinking, Papa still beat Rose and all the children savagely. After some time, the Buckingham invited the Pilgrims back but Jim asked Papa if he had a sexual relationship with Elishaba, resulting in even harsher treatment for her, but conversations with the Buckingham daughters had begun to make her think perhaps her father was wrong. Alone with her father in the wanigan, Elishaba began to argue with him, causing him to nail the door shut, rape her repeatedly and beat her savagely for several days. Back at home, all the children banded together and confronted their father, resulting in the older boys leaving home and harsh punishments for the rest, and Elishaba hatched a plan to run away.

In Chapter 16, Exodus,

Elishaba finds an opportunity to escape during the Third Month and with the help of her mother, she leaves along with Jerusalem, where they eventually locate their brothers. Rose stays in touch with her children through a broken phone she secretly repaired and when Joseph learns that Papa is taking baths with 15-year-old Hosanna, he returns to the homestead and takes her away. The girls go to stay with the Buckingham, who eventually invite the boys to stay as well, while Papa tries to win over his remaining children as he considers returning to New Mexico. When he beats two-year-old Jonathan brutally, Rose sends him away and when he returns to McCarthy a few weeks later, an altercation occurs between Papa and some of his sons in town. Troopers are



called, but Papa lies and charms his way out of the situation. However, when Elishaba hears about it, she knows what she has to do.

## Analysis

In keeping with the author's established pattern and pacing, Kizzia teases the reader with Chapter 14, a brief description of the Pilgrim family's retreat from public life following its confrontation with its McCarthy neighbors. While Papa Pilgrim previously has been aggressive and combative when confronted with problems, he has uncharacteristically faded to the background after moving his belongings from the public right of way in McCarthy and establishing a new homestead at the foot of the mountain but on the opposite side of the river from the town, so he is rarely seen or heard from for about a year. The author does not stipulate specifically the reason for this, but it can be assumed that he was aware of the fact that his actions and attitudes toward those around him were finally coming back to haunt him and he chose to isolate himself and his family as a means of protection.

Chapter 14 ends with the surprising revelation that an arrest warrant has been issued for Papa and Chapters 15 and 16 backtrack to explain the events that led up to that occurrence. Since Papa had always been careful to keep his family close to him and away from outside influence, controlling their reading material, their activities and even their thoughts, he was blindsided when his children were the ones to turn on him and cause his world to unravel in spectacular fashion. Looking back, it is apparent that the move to McCarthy was the initial precipitating factor, as the events that followed – their travels as a musical act, their interactions with others in the small community, etc. – began to expose the children to other people and give outsiders a glimpse into their lives and personalities. In Chapter 15, the author reveals that they were further exposed to the outside world – and more important, to how other families lived and interacted with each other – when the Buckingham family befriended them, even taking them into their home when they realized how unprepared they were to face a harsh Alaskan winter. While the friendship at first seemed to be a positive influence in Papa's eyes – after all, the Buckinghams shared his Christian beliefs and values – he did not count on having his children realize how dysfunctional their family was, and in particular, their relationship with their father and his influence over them. As they were exposed to different and better ways to live and interact with family members, the older children especially began to see what a normal existence looked like and want one for themselves. The relationship with the Buckingham daughters was particularly important for Elishaba because while she was a bright young woman, she had believed – or at least wanted to believe – the things her father told her because she genuinely wanted to be a good person and earn her way to heaven. However, the Buckingham daughters exposed her to the normal interpretations of the Bible rather than the slanted version her father had provided and she soon realized that her growing instincts about her father and his teachings were correct.

In addition, other members of the family became enlightened, including his oldest sons, who finally began to discuss their father when they had a few weeks away from him. In



the end, the older children found safety in numbers when they finally confronted Papa and although he punished them physically for their defiance of him, the older ones gain enough courage to leave the homestead and strike out on their own and even Rose, emboldened by his abuse of their two-year-old, finds the strength to stand up to him and send him away. As the section ends, more than thirty years of dominance and bullying come to an end as the family unravels; but, its members finally learn to stand up for themselves and each other.

## Vocabulary

erratic, extravagant, futile, reflective, consort, centurian, improbably, scenario, deployment, unkempt, explicit, portent, florid, contentious, inexplicable, repentance, allegiance, squander, illegible, defer, untethered



# Chapter 17 - Epilogue

## Summary

### Chapter 17, Pilgrim's Last Stand

This chapter finds Assistant District Attorney Richard Payne helicoptering to the Pilgrim family's mountaintop home to speak at length with Rose, who apparently tells him everything. Papa himself is captured after nearly two weeks on the run but Payne worries that there is little physical evidence so his case will depend heavily on the testimony of Elishaba and the other family members, but he worries about whether they will be able to stand up against such a strong father figure. He decides not to file charges against Rose because she is a textbook abuse victim and going after her would confirm Papa's warnings about evil government officials and upset the children too much to testify. Property-rights advocates are forced to distance themselves publicly from Pilgrim and Joseph writes a letter of apology to the people of McCarthy, asking forgiveness for all the problems the family caused. Rose moves into a small cabin near the Buckingham's where she can reflect on her husband's obvious mental issues. Kizzia is invited to visit the family, who are staying with the Buckingham's in a newly-enlarged house and the children seem to be much improved but still are tempted to lie and hide things to stay out of trouble. Elishaba is continuing to struggle and has left the house on several occasions to stay in the woods for a few days, but all of them seem to be finding strength in their new concept of God's grace. Shortly before his trial is to begin, Robert Hale agrees to plead no contest and after calculating how much longer he might live given his many medical issues, Payne offers fourteen years, certain that he will not leave jail alive. Hale changes his mind. However, he eventually agrees to the deal and a two-day sentencing hearing is set at which the children and their father will all have an opportunity to speak.

### In Chapter 18, The Man in the Iron Cage

All of the family members plus Kizzia and a few others gather in the small courtroom for Robert Hale's sentencing. Rose speaks first, addressing the judge, and describes her husband and their life together, and she thanks those who finally helped her and her children in the end. She reads a short excerpt from *The Pilgrim's Progress* about a man in an iron cage who is unable to repent for his sins. The youngest children speak next, addressing their father directly and again describing his treatment of them and their feelings about it. The older brothers tell about the severe beatings and express remorse over their own ignorance and fear, particularly their failure to help Elishaba during the beating and rape at the wanigan. Elishaba speaks last, eloquently describing her fervent desire to be good and righteous and the way her father twisted the truth to suit his own purposes. The following day, Hale spoke, denying everything the family had accused him of and placing blame on Rose for allowing the children to commit so many sins, failing to educate them and much more. After more religious and pious ramblings, the hearing ends with the judge calling him a liar and praising the courage and eloquence of



the children, leaving the family relieved and elated. Afterward, Rose shows Kizzia the copy of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. The illustration of the Man in the Iron Cage looks exactly like Papa Pilgrim.

In the book's Epilogue, *Peaceful Harbor*, the author reports that the government has dropped its case against the Pilgrims, who have sold all their Mother Lode holdings to land-rights activist Ray Kreig. The family's original supporters in McCarthy, such as preacher and newspaper editor Rick Kenyon, are more mellow now in light of the revelations about Papa. Both Joseph and Joshua Hale have married the oldest Buckingham daughters and are running businesses and living near the Buckinghams, who still care for and home school the youngest Pilgrim children. Elishaba has also married and had a child, but a minor accident revealed numerous undiagnosed and untreated concussions from her many beatings. So, she must be very careful. Kurina Rose lives alone in her own cabin near the Buckinghams. Robert Hale died a few months after entering prison, still refusing his children's pleas to repent. At his private burial, each of the children spoke freely about the meaning of their father's life and consigned him to hell.

## Analysis

One of the most interesting aspects of Chapter 17 is the fairly short mention of Joseph's letter to the people of McCarthy because it demonstrates how much the Pilgrim children have distanced themselves from their father as their view of the world has widened. Previous chapters have noted the fact that the older children have become embarrassed by their father's behavior and Elishaba, in particular, has quietly tried to make amends by replanting plants he destroyed and other small acts of subtle atonement. It is clear that Papa, despite his ability to charm his way out of the trouble he makes, would not approve of such behavior when he berates and beats Joseph for apologizing after an earlier incident with town residents. The fact that the children recognize the harm their father has caused despite his efforts to bend them to his way of thinking, and that Joseph goes so far as to publicly apologize to their neighbors, is as much of a fall for Papa as his arrest because it demonstrates that he has failed at what he considered his most important job.

The author also points out several times in this section that the Pilgrim children do not abandon their religious beliefs in the face of their father's lies about the Bible and God's will. Their faith remains strong – even to the point of begging their father to repent in order to save his soul – but they gradually come to a new understanding of the meaning of sin, forgiveness and grace. Their father succeeded at giving his children a deep and abiding faith in God, but failed in his attempt to be seen as a prophet and the only proper interpreter of God's word.

At his trial, Rose is unable or unwilling to address her husband directly but directs her remarks to the judge instead. However, the children – from the youngest to the oldest – have no problem looking their father in the eye and confront him about his treatment of them. Again, Elishaba emerges as the central figure. After years of having her father



give her “special” treatment for better and worse, from being given a preferred seat when they travelled and taken on trips that the others did not get to “correcting” her more severely and using her to fulfill his sexual desires, she is the final speaker and the one to most eloquently sum up the life the family has led. She also uses the opportunity to explain her genuine desire to do the right thing in the eyes of God, but make it clear that she now realizes that her father’s ideas about redemption are not correct.

The final chapter gives readers a happy ending for the Pilgrim family. Three have married, including Elishaba, and while scars remain, they appear to be leading simple but normal and successful lives, as is Rose.

## Vocabulary

veer, grandeur, quarry, consensual, guise, grandiose, pathological, narcissist, purported, pacifism, emerge, perpetrate, vector, redemption, megalomania, conjure, reciprocate, exceptionalism, erratic, designation, entangled, charlatan, deplore, enigmatic, apostate, heinous, consolidated, doctrine, discern, odyssey, perjury, elated, emaciated, chastened, strident, schism, cataclysm, attuned, deride, ignominiously, felicitously, exorcism, cumulative



# Important People

## Papa Pilgrim/Robert Hale

The man who calls himself Papa Pilgrim is the lead figure in Pilgrim's Wilderness. He was born Robert Hale and grew up with his upscale family in Ft. Worth, Texas. He often got into trouble as a teenager and eventually became a wandering hippie, deeply immersed in the 1960s drug culture. After marrying Kurina Rose, he underwent a religious conversion and began a nomadic life that took him, Rose, and their growing brood of children to New Mexico and eventually Alaska.

As time passed, despite his outward piety, Papa increasingly turned to theft and deception as a means of supporting his family. He taught his children to do the same. He expressed a keen desire to enter heaven and have his wife and children do the same, but he twisted the words of the Bible and his favorite book, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, to suit his own purposes. He often fabricated signs from God to justify his actions. Increasingly cruel and sadistic, he beat his family mercilessly, all in the name of "correcting" behavior that stood in the way of their entrance to heaven.

After moving to a tiny outpost town in Alaska, Papa became notorious for his flagrant disobedience of property-rights regulations, bringing him strong support from other Alaskans who resented government intrusion into their frontier lifestyle. In time, his actions come to light and he is imprisoned for a number of crimes, including the rape of his oldest daughter. He dies in prison.

Papa Pilgrim is a complex man. With his long, wild gray hair, pioneer-style clothing, and a penchant for quoting scripture, his outer appearance and manner are contradictory to the charm and charisma that enable him to talk his way out of almost any situation.

## Elizabeth/Elishaba

Elizabeth, later renamed Elishaba, is the oldest child of Robert Hale/Papa Pilgrim and his wife Kurina. She fulfilled her father's wish that she love God. Striving to lead the kind of life that would lead her to heaven, she became the victim of his abuse when she did not meet his bizarre expectations.

As her beatings increased in severity, she also became the victim of sexual abuse when her father began raping her regularly after she turned eighteen. He assured her that their activities were pleasing to God. However, as she gradually became exposed to the world outside her own household, she began to see things more clearly. Eventually, she reported her father to the authorities and testified against him in court.



## **Kurina Rose**

Kurina Rose Bresler grew up in a privileged family in Beverly Hills, but she left home to pursue a simple existence living off the land. She married Robert Hale. As they lived as hippies in the 1960s drug culture, she changed her name to Sunlight Sunstar. She was known later as Mama Country Rose Pilgrim. She was the mother of Robert's fifteen children and also the subject of his physical and mental abuse until his eventual imprisonment.

Rose was an obedient woman who tried to follow the path set for her by her husband. She was not strong enough to protect either herself or her children from his increasingly abusive behavior. In the end, her children must take the lead and help her escape along with them.

## **Pilgrim Children**

The Pilgrim family includes fifteen children, most of whose names reflect their father's strong religious convictions. In addition to Elishaba, they are: Jerusalem, Hosana, Psalms, Lamb, Abraham, Joseph, Joshua, Moses, David, Israel, Job, Noah, Bethlehem and Jonathan.

## **The Buckingham Family**

The Buckinghams are a family who take the Pilgrims into their home to help them avoid the severe Alaskan winter in their ramshackle cabin. Like the Pilgrims, they are deeply religious, but they take a more normal view of the Bible. Their influence eventually helps the Pilgrim children see what regular families are like, enabling them to confront their father and break away from him. Following Papa's imprisonment, the Buckinghams continue to shelter and home school the younger children. Their daughters marry the older Pilgrim boys.

## **Neil Darish**

Neil Darish is the owner of the McCarthy Lodge and an early acquaintance of the Pilgrims when they move to McCarthy.

## **Rick Kenyon**

Rick Kenyon is a preacher and newspaper owner in McCarthy, Alaska. He holds strong views about property rights and uses his paper to provide strong but slanted support for the Pilgrims in their battle against the National Parks Service.





## **Hunter Sharp and Marshall Neeck**

Hunter Sharp is the assistant superintendent of the Wrangell-St Elias National Park and Preserve. Marshall Neeck is a park ranger. They are the primary figures who are charged with getting the Pilgrims to comply with the regulations that govern the use of public land.

## **Stephens Harper**

Stephens Harper is the park ranger assigned to live in McCarthy. He lives next to the Pilgrim family's makeshift home in town and tangles with them personally and professionally.

## **Walt Wigger**

Walt Wigger is the owner of the Mother Lode mine and surrounding property, which he sells to the Pilgrim family.



# Objects/Places

## McCarthy, Alaska

McCarthy is a tiny outpost town in the Alaskan wilderness. It began as a copper mining town; but, as the copper dwindled, so did McCarthy's population. McCarthy has now essentially been abandoned except for a few families. It is located in the midst of Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve and becomes home to the Pilgrim Family, who bitterly divide the town's residents over property-rights disputes and other matters.

## Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve

Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve is a 100-million-acre park created in Alaska in 1980. The town of McCarthy and the property bought by the Pilgrim family is in the middle of the park, prompting disputes over what residents can and cannot do without harming the natural landscape.

## Mother Lode Mine

Mother Lode is an abandoned copper mine purchased by the Pilgrim Family and later renamed Hillbilly Heaven.

## Bollard

A bollard is a steel and concrete post designed to keep vehicular traffic from crossing a footbridge. The bollards erected at the McCarthy footbridge become a source of controversy involving both the Pilgrims and the other town residents.

## The Wrangells

The Wrangells is a mountain range in the area of McCarthy, Alaska.

## Rainbow Cross Ranch

Rainbow Cross Ranch is the former home of the Pilgrim family. It is located in New Mexico. It became the source of tension between the family and its neighbors.



## **Wrangell-St. Elias News**

The Wrangell-St. Elias News is a bi-monthly newspaper printed in McCarthy, Alaska. The paper's owner is a strong advocate of property rights, so he uses the paper as a means of distributing misleading information about the dispute between the Pilgrims and the National Parks Service.

## **Pilgrim's Progress**

Pilgrim's Progress is a book by John Bunyan. It is a religious allegory that follows the quest of a man named Christian to overcome sin and reach heaven, called the Celestial City. Papa Pilgrim draws his name from the book's title and uses it to teach his family about his ideas regarding sin and redemption.

## **Inholder**

An inholder is someone who owns land and resides inside a national park.

## **Snowmachine**

A snowmachine, also known as a snow mobile, is a vehicle designed to travel over snow.



# Themes

## Authenticity

The word “authenticity” appears frequently in *Pilgrim’s Wilderness*. Authenticity is a theme that runs throughout the book. When Papa Pilgrim and his large family appear in McCarthy, Alaska for the first time, all indications are that they are exactly what they appear to be – an authentic, old fashioned family complete with their Amish-like physical appearance, hillbilly music, family values, and deep religious beliefs. Papa Pilgrim has often remarked that he was born a century too late and that does appear to be the case as he and his family establish a homestead and proceed to live off the land in the most rustic ways.

Appearances are deceiving. In time, it is revealed that Papa and his lifestyle are anything but authentic. He has reinvented himself many times, including going by various identities. He has left behind a long trail of secrets and lies, and the loving patriarch he presents to the public is in reality a cruel maniac who exacts the most severe forms of physical and mental abuse on his cowed family, all in the name of helping them get into God’s grace. Rather than living authentically as he pretends to do, scratching out a simple but honest living on the country’s last frontier, Papa Pilgrim is the worst kind of monster and the opposite of the image he presents to the world.

## False Piety

Hand in hand with the book’s theme of authenticity goes the corollary theme of false piety. The guiding force in Papa Pilgrim’s life is the word of God, but he interprets it as he sees fit. He quotes the Bible routinely, but he often makes up stories that do not exist, misrepresents actual stories, and provides his own unique interpretation of stories and spiritual events. In all cases, he does this with the goal of furthering his own interests, justifying otherwise unjustifiable behavior, explaining his reasoning for committing questionable acts, or charming people into accepting things they would otherwise question.

For many years, no one realizes that hiding behind his pious demeanor is a cruel madman. Papa uses his Biblical misinterpretations to justify abusing his wife and children by saying he is “correcting” behaviors that will keep them in sin and therefore out of heaven. He even convinces his daughter Elishaba that raping her is acceptable and even pleasing to God. This causes her to question her own innate sense of what is right and wrong. Putting on a front of false piety enables him to essentially lead a double life as both a respected man of God and the very face of evil.



## Government vs. Individual Rights

The conflict between the government and the rights of individuals is one of the overarching themes of Pilgrim's Wilderness. The author provides a great deal of background information about the development of Alaska's Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve, a sprawling 100-million-acre piece of property created by Congress in 1980. Although the purpose of the park was to protect and preserve a large piece of the state's wilderness, it was controversial from the beginning because it was contrary to the frontier mentality that set Alaska apart from the other states. Alaskans were suspicious of the rangers who maintained the park and enforced regulations, and from time to time tensions escalated into violence. Even though the regulations for Wrangell were purposely designed to be less stringent than those for other parks, problems persisted.

When the Pilgrim family moved to McCarthy and bought property, they stepped into the middle of the ongoing controversy by ignoring existing regulations and the officials charged with enforcing them. They engaged in activities that destroyed portions of the park and became local heroes to those who opposed any government intervention and believed that individual rights should always take precedence.

The Pilgrims' boldness in standing up to the government stirred long-simmering anger that had begun to recede with time. The family's emergence as property-rights heroes caused their supporters to overlook obvious signs that something was amiss with Papa in particular.

# Styles

## Structure

Pilgrim's Wilderness is divided into three parts and eighteen chapters of varying length, plus a prologue and epilogue.

Part One: Pilgrim's Trail includes the first 10 chapters and sets up the backdrop and traces the Pilgrim family's arrival in McCarthy and the situations that pitted the Pilgrims against the Parks Service.

Part Two: The Farthest-Out Place consists of Chapters 11 through 14, covers the middle of the Pilgrims' time in McCarthy

Part Three: Out of the Wilderness traces the events that led to Papa's downfall.

Throughout the book, author Tom Kizzia weaves chapters describing the background and history of Papa Pilgrim and his family between chapters covering the recent events beginning with the family's arrival in McCarthy. He includes a great deal of history to help the reader understand the events that shaped McCarthy and the state of Alaska as well as the attitudes of Alaskans. The book also includes a map of the Kennicott Valley and Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and a list of sources.

## Perspective

## Tone



## Quotes

Darish felt vague misgivings as the strangers peered in the windows of the closed-up hotel across the street. He caught himself: He'd been in McCarthy only a short time, and already he'd picked up the local mistrust of visitors hunting souvenirs from the past.  
-- Narrator/Author (Chapter 1 paragraph Page 4, Paragraph 2)

**Importance:** This quote reveals that Neil Darish had an instinct upon first meeting the Pilgrim family. In the end, his misgivings proved right.

Doug Miller returned to hammering. The partner in charge of authenticity had seen enough.  
-- Author/Narrator (Chapter 1 paragraph Page 14, Paragraph 4)

**Importance:** This passage foreshadows the fact that the Pilgrims would prove to be anything but the authentic traditional family they claimed to be.

The three Pilgrim properties were, moreover, non-contiguous. In the old days, miners had never worried how they got from one place to another. But now arrangements would be necessary. Even in Alaska, a person could get in real trouble driving cross-country through a national park.  
-- Narrator/Author (Chapter 3 paragraph Page 34, Paragraph 2)

**Importance:** This quote begins to explain the logistical issues that started the problems between the Pilgrims and the Parks Service as well as Papa's refusal to adhere to the rules imposed on those living within a national park.

In Oregon and California and New Mexico, as later in Alaska, he drifted into abandoned mining claims and shepherd cabins, finding comfort as well as convenience in recycling the work of earlier pioneers. He rode horses and drove old trucks that were hard to find parts for. He told more than one person he'd been born one hundred years too late.  
-- Narrator/Author (Chapter 4 paragraph Page 59, Paragraph 2)

**Importance:** This describes the pioneering life to which Papa Pilgrim aspired before his descent into madness.

This process continued until one day we heard a car or a four-wheeler coming up the mountain. In a hurry not knowing whom it might be they told me to come down from the attic, fast. I learned two things, first was that my parents didn't want others to know about my discipline, and second that my father would put on a front with others that wasn't his real self when it was just the family at home.  
-- Elizabeth/Elishaba (Chapter 6 paragraph Page 92, Paragraph 2)

**Importance:** This marks the first time Elizabeth/Elishaba begins to see through her father.



Parham's home became a regular town stop for the Hale family, providing the kids' first tastes of pizza and strawberry shortcake -- "They were ravenous" -- and notarized statements for birth certificates that were essential to obtain the food stamps that helped sustain the pioneer dream.

-- Author/Narrator (Chapter 8 paragraph Page 110, Paragraph 3)

**Importance:** This quote is important for two reasons. It confirms the fact that the children apparently did not get enough to eat and it shows the irony of Papa's willingness to take part in government programs and handouts despite his rants about its evils.

But from now on, Alaskans were going to need permits just like other Americans to do certain things on federal land. he arrived in McCarthy that April day in 2003 ready to argue the point.

-- Narrator/Author (Chapter 9 paragraph Page 122, Paragraph 3)

**Importance:** This passage helps point out the fact that much of the problem between Alaskans and the government, including the Parks Service, comes from the fact that things have always been handled more casually in that state so there is resentment when change comes.

The Pilgrim's Progress is considered one of the great books of the Western canon, never out of print since it was published in 1678. To modern scholars, it is a landmark in the development of English fiction and allegory, an imaginative historical and religious novelty, a window into the literal-minded piety and harsh Calvinist theology of another age. For many modern evangelicals, it remains a relevant testament to faith and a warning against errancy. In the Immanent landscape of the Sangre de Cristos, however, it was much more. The centuries-old story was encyclopedia and atlas, the textbook describing how the world worked, the treatise explaining why few ever make it all the way down the perilous path to salvation and a father's love.

-- Narrator/Author (Chapter 10 paragraph Page 137, Paragraph 1)

**Importance:** This quote explains the importance of the book to Pilgrim's religious education of his children and why he was able to bully them into obedience through the use of this allegory.

It would be many years before they learned the real reason their bloody whippings came and went was that Papa had been teaching Elishaba about God's mercy.

-- Narrator/Author (Chapter 10 paragraph Page 143, Paragraph 3)

**Importance:** This foreshadows the revelation that Pilgrim had been raping Elishaba and telling her that only by giving in to him could she provide mercy for her brothers.

Joseph tried to respond lightly: "Maybe we are brainwashed. How would we know?" "Papa exploded. It was nothing to make light of, he said. He forced Joseph to apologize. The oldest Pilgrim son never forgot that moment, surprised at such an overreaction -- he thought it was a pretty good joke. How, indeed, would anyone know?"





-- Joseph and Author (Chapter 12 paragraph Page 181, Paragraph 2-3)

**Importance:** This passage demonstrates that despite their lack of education, the Pilgrim children were bright, perceptive and clever. Even though he continues to obey his father, Joseph is smart enough to know that it was a real possibility that he and his family were being brainwashed by their father.

There was a moment, though, during their stay at Cushman's house, when the property-rights activist caught himself wondering about his pure-as-a-mountain-brook poster family. He shared some sheet music with the children, no really expecting they would be able to read the music. But it was worse than that -- they couldn't read the lyrics.

-- Narrator/Author (Chapter 13 paragraph Page 203, Paragraph 2)

**Importance:** This is one of the first times when an outsider begins to have an inkling that all is not right with the family.

It was not just the wanigan camp. It was that the Pilgrims had defied the unwritten rules by which the community always got along. They had scrapped their little three-wheeled roadster and gone full-scale into the Kennicott shuttle business, undercutting the established local taxi using unpaid family drivers and an uninsured van donated by an out-of-town sympathizer. They build a tourist booth by the footbridge, sold photographs of themselves, and steered tourists toward their own businesses. The down-home neighbors were suddenly apostles of cutthroat frontier competition. They tore up chain speed bumps that a family had anchored across the Kennicott Road to slow shuttle vans passing their cabin. It was a public right-of-way, the Pilgrims argued, without apparent irony. And the Pilgrims, of all people, were invoking state laws and calling the cops.

-- Author/Narrator (Chapter 13 paragraph Page 207, Paragraph 5)

**Importance:** This provides an excellent description of how the family essentially took over the town, making their own rules and using the law only when it suited their own purposes, making enemies of their neighbors all along the way.

Any inkling could be brought only to Papa, who could explain it away. Papa would keep talking about an event they had seen, describing it in his own way, until they had a hard time remembering anything other than Papa's description.

-- Narrator/Author (Chapter 15 paragraph Page 233, Paragraph 2)

**Importance:** This passage refers specifically to the sex going on between Papa and Elishaba, but it also explains how Papa imposed his own version of any event upon his family, forcing them to believe his stories over what they had seen with their own eyes.

At the bang of the gavel, the children rose and filed out, never looking over their shoulders. Hale watched from his wheelchair, his face collapsing in a look of anguish, and cried out, "Family, don't turn your backs on God!"

-- Papa Pilgrim (Chapter 17 paragraph Page 270, Paragraph 1)



**Importance:** This hints that despite his piousness, perhaps Papa Pilgrim really did consider himself God, especially to his family.

They still believe Jesus is coming. But there are lives to be led in the meantime.  
-- Narrator/Author (Epilogue paragraph Page 290, Paragraph 1)

**Importance:** This sums up how the Pilgrim children have reconciled their own deep faith with the type of faith their father imposed on them, and with their history, their present and their future.



# Topics for Discussion

## Pilgrim's Progress

Discuss the importance of the book *The Pilgrim's Progress* in the life of Papa Pilgrim. Why does he place such significance on it? How does he use it to influence his family?

## Mail Day Murders

What were the Mail Day Murders? What impact did they have on the town of McCarthy and its residents?

## Papa's Bible Instruction

Papa Pilgrim spends a great deal of time and energy instructing his family on the Bible. Discuss how he uses the Bible to keep his family in line. Describe the contradictions inherent in his religious teachings and interpretation of the Bible.

## Elishaba's Religious Beliefs

What are Elishaba's religious beliefs? How are they impacted by her father? How do they influence her life? How do they evolve over time?

## Wrangell-St. Elias National Park

Discuss the creation of Wrangell-St. Elias National Park. Why did Congress create it? Why was this controversial for Alaskans? How has it affected McCarthy and other towns in the area?

## Government vs. Individual Rights

The issue of the government vs. individual rights is at the core of this book. Give the pros and cons for each argument. With which side do you agree? Why?

## The Pilgrims' Relationship with McCarthy

Discuss the evolution of the Pilgrim family's relationship with its neighbors in McCarthy. Initially, how did the town's residents feel about the family? Even before Papa's abuse of his family was revealed, how and why did people's views of the family change over time? Cite specific incidents that influenced the townspeople's opinion of the family.



## **Rose**

Discuss Papa Pilgrim's wife, Rose. What is her background? Why does she become involved with Papa? How does she handle their relationship as time progresses? How does she feel about him by the end of the book?

## **Repentance**

The author describes the efforts of Papa's children to get him to repent for his sins before he dies. Why is this important to them? Why do you think he refuses to do so?

## **Author's Relationship with the Family**

Discuss the relationship between author Tom Kizzia and the family, Pap in particular. How does their relationship change over time? How do Papa and his family feel about Kizzia? What role does Kizzia play in how the family's story evolves?