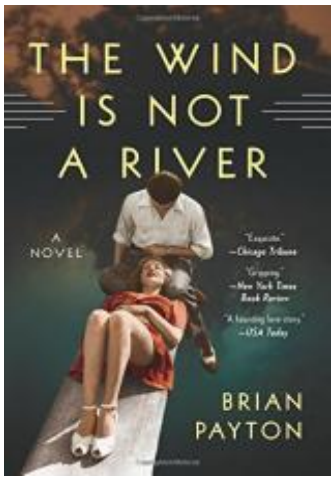
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# The Wind Is Not a River

by Brian Payton




## About the Book

THE WIND IS NOT A RIVER is Brian Payton's gripping tale of survival and an epic love story in which a husband and wife --- separated by the only battle of World War II to take place on American soil?fight to reunite in Alaska's starkly beautiful Aleutian Islands.

Following the death of his younger brother in Europe, journalist John Easley is determined to find meaning in his loss. Leaving behind his beloved wife, Helen, he heads north to investigate the Japanese invasion of Alaska's Aleutian Islands, a story censored by the U.S. government.

While John is accompanying a crew on a bombing run, his plane is shot down over the island of Attu. He survives only to find himself exposed to a harsh and unforgiving wilderness, known as ?the birthplace of winds.? There, John must battle the elements, starvation, and his own remorse while evading discovery by the Japanese.

Alone at home, Helen struggles with the burden of her husband's disappearance. Caught in extraordinary circumstances, in this new world of the missing, she is forced to reimagine who she is --- and what she is capable of doing. Somehow, she must find John and bring him home, a quest that takes her into the farthest reaches of the war, beyond the safety of everything she knows.

## Discussion Guide

**1.** THE WIND IS NOT A RIVER is a novel set against the backdrop of an actual WWII battle most people are unfamiliar with. Had you heard of the battle for the Aleutians before reading this book? What surprised you the most about the war in Alaska?

**2.** THE WIND IS NOT A RIVER, the Aleutian landscape plays a critical role in the novel, almost becoming a character

unto itself. At the beginning of the story, John Easley is hurled into this little-known wilderness. How does the Aleutian landscape affect the lives and destinies of the novel?s main characters, John and Helen? How does it affect the U.S. and Japanese forces? How is it reflected in the style and themes of the book?

**3.** John Easley believes that North Americans have a right to know about the war on their own west coast. He goes to great lengths to get and bring home the story of the war in the Aleutians. He also says, ?the sacrifices made on our behalf must be known before they can be remembered? (pg. 34). Was he justified in the actions he took to witness and report these events?

**4.** THE WIND IS NOT A RIVER is a story of survival as well as a story about the power of love. Helen Easley is driven to find her beloved husband and bring him home. Helen also loves her father, but is forced to leave him behind. John loves Helen, but feels duty-bound to return to the Aleutians. John loves his deceased brother Warren; he loves Karl and Tatiana. Which relationship affected you the most? Which surprised you the most?

**5.** The displacement and mistreatment of the Aleut people is explored in this novel. The evacuation of the Aleut people was done for expedience, as well as their own protection. Discuss this protective/paternalistic impulse. Was it justified? Would this kind of treatment have happened to nonnative Americans?

**6.** The photograph and possessions of a young Aleut woman, Tatiana, is discovered by John Easley in his most dire time of need. For him, these found objects take on almost mystical proportions. The urge to idealize others through their images, words or possessions seems almost innate. Can you think of other examples from our culture or personal experience? Discuss.

**7.** Helen finds strength in her religious beliefs and traditions. When things seem hopeless, her faith sees her through. John finds himself facing some of the darkest parts of human nature and the nature of existence itself. He comes away with a conviction that this life is all we have. Which character?s beliefs come closest to your own? Did you find insight into the mind (soul?) of the character of the opposing point of view? Discuss the role of ?faith? in the story.

**8.** THE WIND IS NOT A RIVER explores the role of censorship and our understanding of history. Was censorship understandable in the context of this battle and war? What about more recent wars and conflicts?

**9.** The novel ends with Helen and Tatiana coming together in the same place at the end of the WWII. Helen feels protective of this young woman and her fiancé. She leaves without speaking to her. Was it the right decision? Are we sometimes justified in protecting others from knowledge we possess?

## Author Bio

Brian Payton has written for the *New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Chicago Tribune* and the *Boston Globe*. He is the author of SHADOW OF THE BEAR: Travels in Vanishing Wilderness, which was chosen as a Barnes & Noble Book Club pick, a Pearl's Pick on NPR and a National Outdoor Book Awards Book of the Year. THE ICE PASSAGE: A True Story of Ambition, Disaster, and Endurance in the Arctic Wilderness and his novel HAIL MARY CORNER were published to acclaim in Canada. He lives with his family in Vancouver.

## Critical Praise

?In this gripping, meditative second novel, Brian Payton explores this nearly forgotten chapter of American history.?

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