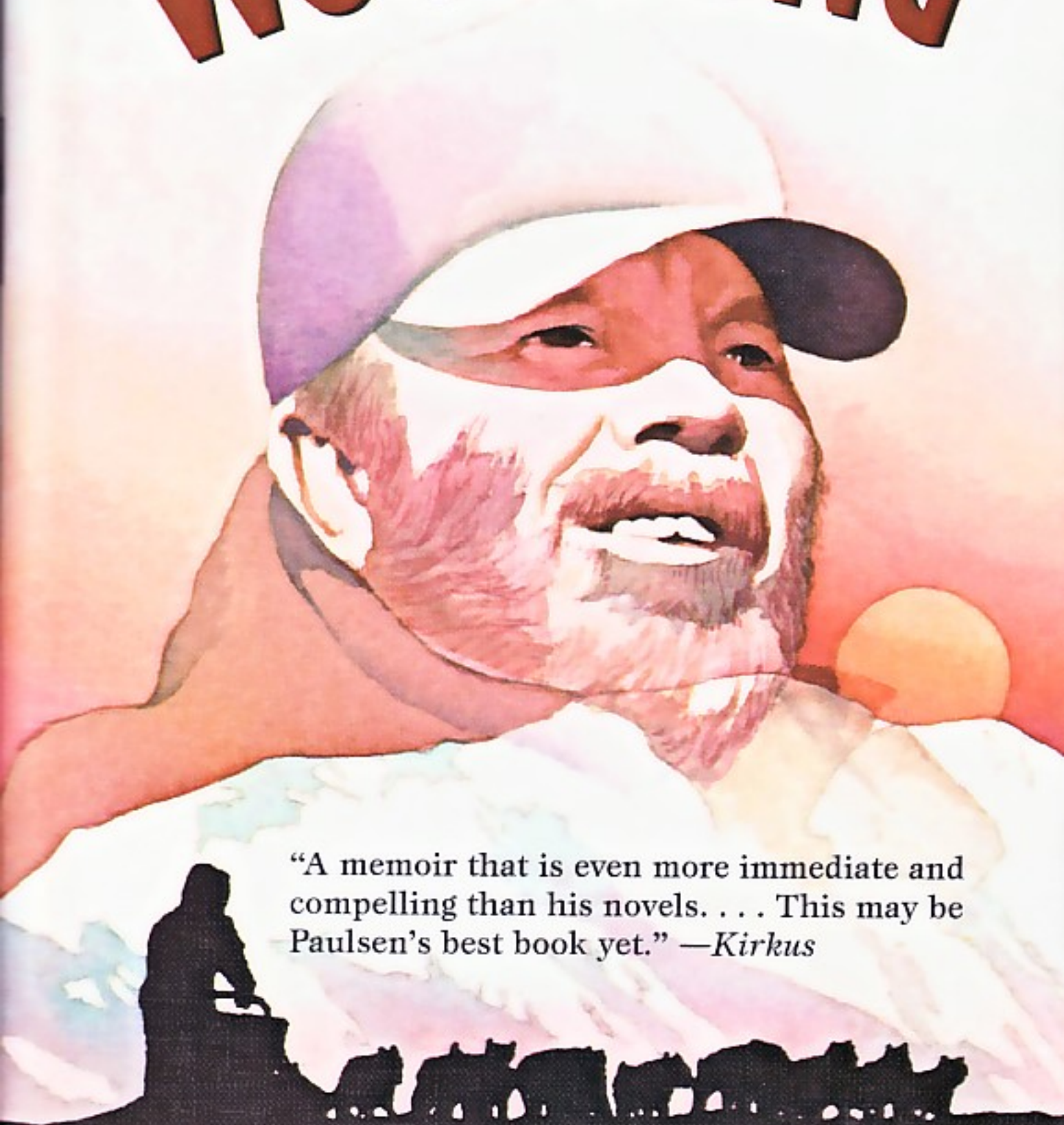
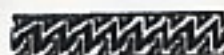


GARY PAULSEN

# WOODSONG



"A memoir that is even more immediate and compelling than his novels. . . . This may be Paulsen's best book yet." —*Kirkus*



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**I** UNDERSTOOD almost nothing about the woods until it was nearly too late. And that is strange because my ignorance was based on knowledge.

Most of my life it seems I've been in the forest or on the sea. Most of my time, sleeping and waking, has been spent outside, in close contact with what we now call the environment, what my uncles used to call, simply, "the woods."

We hunted. Small and large game. We hunted and killed and though I think now that it is wrong to hunt and kill, at the time I did not think this and I spent virtually all my time hunting.

And learned nothing.

Perhaps the greatest paradox about understanding "the woods" is that so many who enjoy it, or seem to enjoy it, spend most of their time trying to kill parts of it.

Yet, it was a hunter, a wild one, and an act of almost

unbelievable violence that led me to try to understand all of it, and to try to learn from it without destroying it.



I lived in innocence for a long time. I believed in the fairy-tale version of the forest until I was close to forty years old.

Gulled by Disney and others, I believed Bambi always got out of the fire. Nothing ever really got hurt. Though I hunted and killed it was always somehow clean and removed from reality. I killed yet thought that every story had a happy ending.

Until a December morning . . . .

I was running a dog team around the side of a large lake, just starting out on my trapline. It was early winter and the ice on the lake wasn't thick enough to support the sled and team or I would have gone across the middle. There was a rough trail around the edge of the lake and I was running a fresh eight-dog team so the small loop, which added five or so miles, presented no great difficulty.

It was a grandly beautiful winter morning. The temperature was perhaps ten below, with a bright sun that shone through ice crystals in the air so that everything seemed to sparkle. The dogs were working evenly, the gangline up through the middle of them thrumming with the rhythm it has when they are working in perfect tandem. We skirted the lake, which lay below and to the right. To the left and

rising higher were willows and brush, which made something like a wall next to the trail.

The dogs were still running at a lope, though we had come over seven miles, and I was full of them; my life was full of them. We were, as it happens sometimes, dancing with winter. I could not help smiling, just smiling idiotically at the grandness of it. Part of the chant of an ancient Navajo prayer rolled through my mind:

*Beauty above me*  
*Beauty below me*  
*Beauty before me . . .*

That is how I felt then and frequently still feel when I am running dogs. I was in and of beauty and at that precise moment a doe, a white-tailed deer, exploded out of some willows on the left side of the team, heading down the bank toward the lake.

The snow alongside the trail was about two feet deep and powdery and it followed her in a white shower that covered everything. She literally flew over the lead dog who was a big, white, wolfy-looking male named Dollar. He was so surprised that he dropped, ducked, for part of an instant, then rose—almost like a rock skipping on the trail—and continued running. We were moving so fast and the deer was moving so fast that within a second or two we were several yards past where it had happened and yet everything seemed suspended in slow motion.

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**Gary Paulsen**, Newbery Honor author of *Hatchet* and *Dogsong*, is no stranger to adventure. He has flown off the



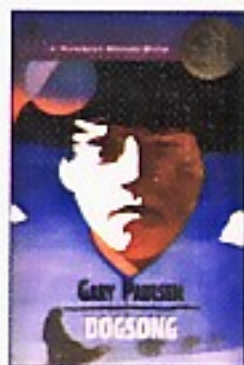
back of a dogsled and down a frozen waterfall to near disaster, and waited for a giant bear to seal his fate with one slap of a claw. He has led a team of sled dogs toward the Alaskan Mountain Range in

an Iditarod—a 1,180-mile dogsled race—hallucinating from lack of sleep, but determined to finish.

Here, in vivid detail, Paulsen recounts several of the remarkable experiences that shaped his life and inspired his writing.

**“Paulsen evokes the ‘wilderness’s’ mysteries as well as anyone has since Jack London.” —*Horn Book***

Read these other award-winning novels by Gary Paulsen



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