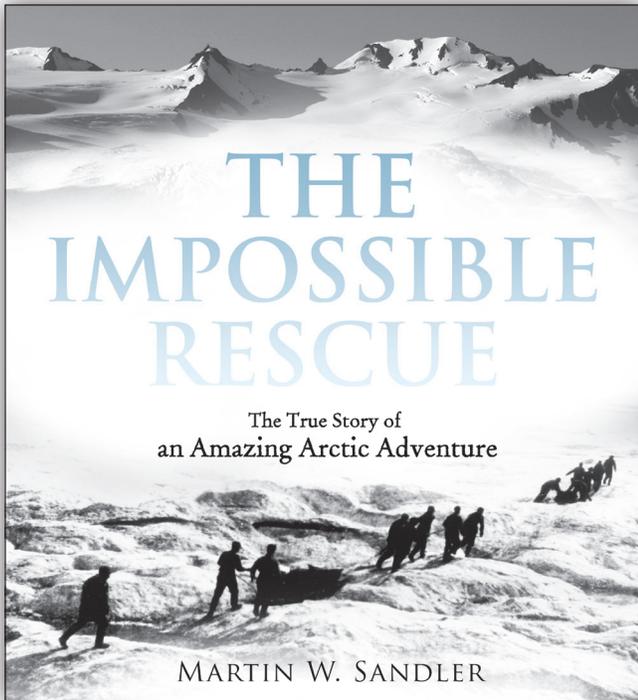


# The Impossible Rescue

The True Story of an  
Amazing Arctic Adventure

an interview with author MARTIN W. SANDLER



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*The Impossible Rescue is about a group of courageous men who embark on a perilous journey to save three hundred sailors after the Arctic ice traps their ships. What drew you to this event and made you realize that this is the story you wanted to tell?*

What I like doing best is finding an important, fascinating true story that has been mostly lost to history and telling it in the most exciting way I can. I first encountered hints about the events of the extraordinary rescue of 1897/1898 while conducting research for another book I was writing. The more I uncovered about this remarkable adventure, the more I realized that it was a story that cried out to be told, and the more determined I became to be the one to tell it.

*You quote from many sources to provide the reader with firsthand accounts from both rescuers and survivors. What was your research process like?*

My goal has always been to make history come alive. And, for me, the most powerful way of doing that is to let the people in the story tell the story. From the moment I decided to write *The Impossible Rescue*, I began exploring every avenue I could to find the participants' own accounts. Doing so reaffirmed what I discovered a long time ago: conducting research that really pays off involves determination, perseverance, and no small amount of luck. And I was very lucky as far as my research for *The Impossible Rescue* was concerned. The fact that I was able to find diaries, journals, and other reminiscences from all the major players in the drama gave me the opportunity to tell the story in as compelling a manner as possible.

*What was the most surprising thing you learned while writing The Impossible Rescue?*

Uncovering the details of so improbable a story provided me with surprises from the beginning of the saga to the very end. Several ships were hopelessly trapped in the ice months before the Arctic winter usually set in. A desperate rescue was undertaken by three men who were asked to walk more than 1,700 miles in temperatures as low as sixty degrees below zero, over the most challenging terrain in the world. The rescue was also dependent on some five hundred reindeer for its success. Perhaps the greatest surprise came when I discovered scores of actual photographs of the adventure taken by one of the key participants.

*One of the biggest themes in the story was the severely limited means of communication back in 1897, as the rescuers were continually forced to separate and hope that they would find one another again after having succeeded in their missions. How much luck do you believe played into the events of the Overland Relief Expedition?*

As a sports enthusiast, I have long believed in the maxim that luck is a combination of preparation and opportunity. Yes, there are many instances in the story in which pure luck plays a role. For example, the fact that Jarvis survived what could have been a disastrous deer-sled accident without serious injury was indeed lucky. But for the most part, the achievements of the expedition were the result of men who were prepared to meet the extraordinary challenges they encountered and viewed them as opportunities to demonstrate their courage and the willingness to sacrifice all on behalf of others in peril.

*You describe the harsh, frigid Alaskan climate in such a way that it feels like the reader is really there. Have you ever been to Alaska? Do you have any plans to go after writing this book?*

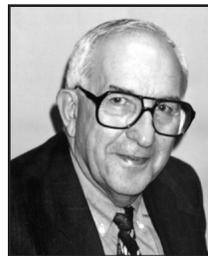
I would love to have the opportunity to visit Alaska. I know that, in many ways, it is a majestic, intriguing place. But I would have no desire to do so under the conditions experienced by those in *The Impossible Rescue*. That requires a very different breed of person, with heroic qualities that I am willing to admit I lack. That they possessed those qualities is, of course, what makes this story so remarkable.

*What do you hope your readers will get out of this story?*

I hope that readers come away from this story with two things in particular: First of all, an appreciation for the courage and indomitable spirit of people willing to risk everything to help others in dire need. And I hope that I have been able to convey the invaluable contributions and positive attributes of the indigenous people of the Far North, people who far too often have been portrayed in an unflattering manner.

*You have written about historical events in your other books as well. What makes the genre so exciting for you?*

I am absolutely convinced that nonfiction, if written as it should be, is far more interesting than the best fiction has to offer. That is why I love to write about amazing, little-known events. It all, of course, depends on the research. And I love doing the research. To me, it's like a giant detective game, one that has as its reward the uncovering and telling of a story like the one in *The Impossible Rescue*. As I'm fond of saying, "You simply couldn't make up a story like this one."



Martin W. Sandler has written more than seventy books for children and adults and has written and produced seven television series. He has twice been nominated for the Pulitzer Prize and has won

multiple Emmy Awards. He says, "My goal has always been to make history come alive. Above all else, I love a good story, particularly if it is one that is largely unknown and is filled with people battling against great odds. The story of the 'impossible rescue' is one of the most remarkable and inspiring sagas I have come across, and I am delighted to have had the opportunity to tell it." Martin W. Sandler and his wife, Carol, live in Massachusetts.



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