



# FAIRBANKS

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*Fairbanks* is comprised of several vignettes from *Jampa Dorje's Worldly Dharmas: An Abcdeary*, my autobiography (written as a third-person narrative by my persona, Bouvard Pécuchet, about Jampa Dorje, my monastic name), published by D Press in 2022.

**A**fter their adventure living in a cabin near Deep Bay, Cheri, Theo, and Jampa traveled up the Alcan Highway to Fairbanks, so Jampa could attend the University of Alaska. Situated just below the Arctic Circle, the University of Alaska is located near the juncture of the Tanana and Chena rivers. It is a delicate eco environment with a thin veneer of grasses, mosses and lichens, called tundra. It is a treeless plain with a few hills—very isolated. Some of the locals call it “the armpit of the world.” According to a Wiki elf: Fairbanks’ climate is classified as subarctic with long, bitterly cold winters and short, enchantingly warm summers.

In Fairbanks, winter lasts from late September until early May. Snow arrives early and in large amounts. Average winter low temperatures range from  $-15$  to  $-25$  °F, but extremes can range from  $-60$  to  $-75$  °F. Fairbanks’ low-lying location at the bottom of the Tanana Valley causes cold air to accumulate in and around the city. Warmer air rises to the tops of the hills north of Fairbanks, while the city itself experiences one of the biggest temperature inversions on Earth. Ice fog occurs when air is too cold to absorb additional moisture, such as that released by automobile engines or human breath. Instead of dissipating, the water freezes into microscopic crystals that are suspended in the air.

In the summer, this area is known as “The Land of the Midnight Sun.” In the winter, the students stop their studies at noon to watch the sun briefly rise above the horizon. At the winter solstice, Fairbanks experiences close to four hours of sunlight; after sunset, there is enough light to do chores in the twilight. At the summer solstice, Fairbanks receives about twenty-two hours of direct sunlight. People stay up longer in the summer.

In any village along the coast, children might entertain themselves during the long days by jumping on a dried whale carcass around midnight. In the winter, Caribou snuggle against warm buildings. People wear *mukluks*, which are made from the Caribou’s hide. There is an inner liner with the hair, which is hollow, turned inwards, and there is an outer boot showing the hair. Mukluks are light, allow your feet to breathe, and allow you to move quietly in the snow. Mukluks are tanned by the natives using urine—piss cured—and teachers ask students to leave this kind of footwear in the hallway and not wear them in the warm classroom because of the odor.

Outside in the quad, there might be a moose on the loose gone berserk. The Fish &

Game Department has to sedate the beast and transport it to a wilder location. Snarling sled dogs can also pose a threat on the way to class. There are some wild and woolly critters on the University's land.

One of the research projects is the Musk Ox Farm. A musk ox is a cud-chewing animal, more sheep than ox, about five feet high at the shoulder and about eight feet long. They are native to arctic America. They are also to be found in Siberia and Greenland, and they are covered with a long hair. When Jampa was at U. of Alaska, one member of the research team, an Englishwoman, was designing knitting patterns that could be read by the Athabascan women to enable them to knit gloves, hats, and scarves for exclusive boutiques. *Qiviut* (pronounced "kiv-ee-ute"), an underbelly hair of the musk ox, is softer than silk and stronger than wool. The male half of the team was an authority on the knuckle bones of Paleolithic musk oxen.

The summer that Jampa, Cheri, and Theo arrived in Fairbanks, they camped in their bus and then moved into an apartment complex until student housing on campus became available. The apartment was necessary because Cheri got work at the Student Union Building as the Information Secretary, and it was easier to keep up appearances having running water and a bathtub.

Cheri found she had an old boyfriend on campus, a man with a Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology, who was working on a research project that summer. He and a woman colleague were working on habitual tendencies, using stop watches to determine the time between their urges to have a cigarette, while they were quitting smoking. The woman's husband and Jampa became close friends. He had a briefcase containing different varieties of marijuana—Acapulco Gold, Panama Red, even some grown in Alaska, called Matanuska Thunder Fuck. It was a good berry season that year, and the two potheads would get stoned, pick berries—high and low bush—and make deep dish pies in a cast iron skillet.

There were numerous earthquakes. You could hear them coming, the tremors increasing, and after shaking things up, they would roll on. The psychologists and Jampa's pot-smoking friend left Fairbanks at the end of the summer. Jampa and Cheri made new friends, Kelly and Susan Fisher. He was studying to be a lawyer, and she, a painter. They are now divorced, but they still live in Alaska. Kelly became a municipal attorney for the City of Anchorage, and Susan became involved with the State Art Commission. The last time Jampa saw Susan was at a Dakini Retreat at Tara Mandala, in the early 'nineties.

Old friends from Ketchikan arrived. Larry Kerschner and Kristi Lee, now a couple,

found an abandoned house on the flood plain and winterized it as best they could by putting gravel on the ground with planks for a floor and covering the walls with space blankets to reflect heat. You had to sit on the back of the couch with your feet up and the stove going full blast to stay warm. Jampa was glad his family had central heating.

Walsh Hall was a short walk to the S.U.B. where Cheri worked. The University had not yet built underground passageways. Theo attended a pre-school in the village, called College, at the bottom of the hill. Jampa would bundle up in an Air Force parka, put Theo in a snow suit inside a down sleeping bag and ride with him on a sled to school. The return trip took longer, hauling Theo and a bag or two of groceries up the hill.

Until the weather became too cold, Jampa drove the VW. He would take the battery out at night and drain the oil to keep it warm inside the apartment. But, alas, when it was 40 below, a temperature where metal is brittle, Jampa abandoned the VW in the parking lot, after snapping off a door handle. He also snapped off his mustache when he rubbed it with the back of his glove. People left their cars running if they could not find a parking meter with an electrical outlet to plug in their oil pan heaters. Jampa decided to use his vehicle as a deep freeze. He put a haunch of caribou in the back seat and sawed chunks off the carcass when he needed meat. The caribou came from Bob Allen, an English teacher, who Jampa had assisted in butchering the animal on Bob's dining room table. Bob had taught English at Ketchikan Community College, where Jampa had met him through Cheri, who had studied with him. Bob moved to Fairbanks and was now teaching English literature at the University.

Jampa took a course in Canadian literature with another professor who taught Canadian history as part of the course in tandem with Bob. The course in Canadian History and Literature alternated between lectures on books such as *The Jesuit Relations* and *Lord Durham's Report* and *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* and Leonard Cohen's *Beautiful Losers*. Bob allowed Jampa free rein to write a stream-of-consciousness term paper.

Jampa's term papers were controversial. His Chaucer professor was disturbed by Jampa's comparison of the Canterbury pilgrims to Bob Dylan's characters in the song "Desolation Row." He wrote in the margin: "Cryptic and obtuse." Jampa's linguistic professor told him that his paper, "To Plant a Seed," on the word *fuck* as mantra was not even at the level of a cocktail party conversation. Another professor, taking a more tolerant stance, felt that Jampa was daring in his handling of "devilish complicated ideas" in a paper about the metaphysical background of themes in the

works of the Romantic poets. One of Jampa's philosophy professors conceded that Jampa's comparison of Concrete Poetry to his ideas about Semiotic Phenomenology was interesting and original. His World History professor, on the other hand, wondered why Jampa would waste his time on such an insignificant person as the Latin poet of the late Roman Republic, Gaius Valerius Catullus. Some people get Jampa and some do not.

In the fall of 1973, Wood Center, the University's Student Recreation Building, opened. Given such harsh winters with such long nights, the University spared no expense in building a pleasure dome worthy of Kubla Khan. There was a large ballroom that had walls the slid along on tracks to create different size rooms. There was a bowling alley in the basement across from a full-liquor bar with a dance floor. There was a mezzanine with an espresso bar, adjacent to a staircase that rose upward to end at a small platform with just enough room for a table and a few chairs, exposed on all sides by open space in a high-ceilinged, cathedral-like room. There were many small lounges, nooks and romantic, secluded crannies. The isolated staircase became known as "the clit."

Among other luminaries who performed in the Wood Center Ballroom was poet Allen Ginsberg. Ginsberg arrived from Ayers Rock Central Australia. It had been summer there and -10° when he landed in Fairbanks. Jampa was Ginsberg's host and presented him with an Air Force parka and white rubber bunny boots. The poet wanted to explore the area, and Jampa took him ten miles north to Fox, all the while giving him his tour guide spiel—"1901 Captain Barnette sets up a trading post at the juncture of the Chena and Tanana Rivers, Felix Pedro finds gold near Fox site of Red Dog Saloon and the 'Ice Worm Saga' Wild and wide are my borders/Stern as death is my sway/From my ruthless throne I have ruled for a million years and a day/Hugging my mighty treasure/ Waiting for man to come Robert Service verse, miners call this place Fairbanks after an admired Senator from Indiana Charles W. Fairbanks later a vice-president under Teddy Roosevelt, census in 1912 is 3500 present population is 84000, Barnette became the most hated man in town when his bank failed."

In the Red Dog Saloon, Ginsberg, who was wearing a maroon Tibetan wool scarf with his glasses and balding head peeking out, met a bush pilot and made plans to fly to an arctic village called Arctic Village. On the way back to the VW, Jampa asked Ginsberg for a mantra to help with the cold and was given Padmasambhva's heart mantra. The next day, at the village, a young man recognized Ginsberg and had a copy of *Howl and Other Poems* left by a Peace Corps worker.

The Polar Star was a weekly in a tabloid format. Jampa and his friend, Larry Kerschner, worked in the backshop. They were laying out the “Art-Lit Supplement” to the paper with poems and art they collected from students, when they heard Ginsberg on the campus radio invade the airwaves with his “Caribou Blues”—a Blakean melody with harmonium—“Hum Bom! Whom Bomb! We Bomb Them. How big is the president's prick?”

The “prick” referred to was President Johnson’s. Under the Nixon administration, The Vietnam War would soon bleed over into Cambodia. As the senator for married students, Jampa (along with other senators) waged a successful battle to get the University of Alaska to condemn the Vietnam War.

That year, 1972, the University of Alaska’s Polar Star won an award for the best student paper in the country. A footnote to this story of success is that Jampa was chastised for going over budget for backshop materials by the Head of Student Activities (“Stud-Act”—Jampa had a T-shirt with that logo on the front). The wax machine was always on the blink, and Jampa had let his crew charge glue-sticks on the paper’s account at the bookstore. Howard Rigley, the editor of the Polar Star, was so proud of his staff’s work that he paid the bill out of his own pocket.

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It was not all play for Jampa in Alaska. He worked for R & M Geology, after he graduated from college, sinking test holes along the Trans-Alaskan Pipeline.

## **THE BEAST**

Old Valdez. 275 sq. miles. Second oldest white settlement in Alaska. Capt. Cook 1778, Bligh Island 1794, Spaniards 1798. In the 1800s whaling. Copper mined. Route to the goldfields. Blue fox farming in the 1920s. Iron Trail by Rex Beach set here.

New Valdez. Rebuilt after an earthquake on a new site. Voted All-American City 1965. “Valdez rhymes with ease.” South Terminus of Alyeska’s pipeline from Prudhoe Bay.

Wrathful Alyeska. Auger in one hand, marsh probe in one hand, geo-stick in one hand, polaski in another.

I take soil samples along the surveyed route from Valdez to Tonsina. I follow the

Low River through alder swamps across marsh muck to bog mire. Streams jammed with rotting salmon. I follow a bear trail to the cutline where I auger twenty feet to bedrock. Sidetrack to Kendal Cache to collect lichens and weathered telegraphy insulators. I note the conglomeration from glacier deposits.

Along glacier benches to bedrock, across rivers to bedrock, to bedrock under ridges, under boulders, under cobbles, under sill, under sand, under volcanic ash. I take a rest and get sick.

A caravan of Winnebagos pass. A woman points to a dead salmon and exclaims, "Someone should do something about that!" Cheechakos. 10% chance of rain in a rainforest means 10 inches of rain.

At Trans-Alaska Pipeline Point on Ground TAPS PG=361+68, I join my copter pilot. Mustachioed Vietvet with shades, his scarf trails in the breeze. Under the front seat is a stash of Berkeley Barbs. He drops me off on a sandbar. There's a field of devil's club and a jungle of alder hanging from granite cliffs between me and my test hole.

Kingcrab to Otterman

- Glacierized graywhacky
- Sandy sill
- Silly sand
- Gravel
- Cobbles
- Indian love stones
- Fucking rocks

Over

Otterman to Kingcrab

Reading you

- Alluvial fan
- Metamorphic composition
- Zone theory
- Montage effects
- Colluvium
- Colluvium

Clear



Dhal sheep graze below me. A bull moose into the brush as we land. Up the line, a grizzly and her cubs hiding.

From the Arctic Ocean at Prudhoe Bay, over the Brooks Range, across Koyukuk River, across the Yukon River and the Tanana, stretching across the Alaskan Range, this in temperatures below zero for more than one hundred days, below forty below for weeks, dropping to eighty below in arctic winds.

From Thompson Pass, down a glacier moraine, to the northernmost ice-free port, the pipeline slouches into Valdez.

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The data gathered from the excavation of materials along the initially planned route, the eighty miles between Tonsina and Valdez, proved the ground to be unsuitable for the pipeline. Rather than crossing the Lowe River and running the pipeline behind several spectacular waterfalls, the pipe descends, as the poem indicates, from Thompson Pass down a moraine to follow the river to its destination in the port of Valdez. This was the eve of pipeline construction. Jampa was told by his employers that there was a lot of work ahead and that he would have his share, but Jampa and Cheri had weathered five winters in Alaska and decided to go “outside.”

