

# *THE BIG RACE*



For the past six months, Ken had gotten up early every morning and left the house to exercise. He had a regular workout designed to help his endurance and his speed. He and his dog Duke were preparing for the race of a lifetime. All of the best dogsled racers in the Northwest were going to be there.

Ken's family had moved to Alaska two years before. When he first heard the news that they were moving from southern California to Alaska, Ken rebelled. He did not want to go. He loved going outside to play his favorite sports all year long. He did not want to go where there was so much snow. He especially did not want to live in the mountains. He loved the city and all of the fun things to do there.

His father had taken a new job as a manager on an oil pipeline. This meant more money for the family and a big change in their lives.

His father had grown up in Alaska. He always talked about how wonderful it was to live in clean air, pristine beauty and to have clean water. Ken had heard all about it for most of his life, but he did not want any part of it.

His parents made an agreement with him that if after one year he still wanted to return to the city, he could go back and live with his grandparents until he graduated from high school.

The first year was hard for Ken. The new school, the cold weather and the boredom all were very hard for him, but then he found something he loved, and he

decided to do the best he could.

Ken had always loved animals so one of the first things his parents did when they arrived in Alaska was to buy him a dog. They named him Duke.

When Duke came to live with Ken and his family, he was a tiny little ball of fur. He was very playful and caused a lot of damage to the house. As he grew up, he got bigger and bigger. He grew into the biggest Huskies anyone had ever seen. He was big, and he was strong.

During the first winter in Alaska, Ken and Duke were playing in the snow. Ken slipped on some ice and hit his head. Duke ran over to him and licked his face until he came to. Then Duke dragged Ken to his house, and barked so loudly that the family came to see what was wrong.

Ken parents took him to the hospital. He had a big bump on his head. The doctor said it was lucky that Duke was there, or else Ken might have died in the cold. From that day on Ken and Duke were together all the time.

Duke was so big that when he tried to sleep on Ken's bed he would push Ken onto the floor. Ken wanted a bigger bed, but his parents said they did not want Duke sleeping in his bed anymore. Now he had to sleep on the floor next to Ken.

There was an old shack behind the house. His parents told him they wanted him to clean the shack. At first, he did not want to, but when he started to find special treasures, it became fun.

He found some exciting books to read, a compass, an old sled, some old coins from before Alaska was a state and a big box with a lock on it. He asked his parents if he could keep the stuff.

They said, "Yes".

The sled had a leather harness. The harness was very complicated. It took several attempts to get the harness on Duke. Duke was very patient while Ken struggled to figure out the harness. Once the leather straps were in place, Duke was no longer patient. He had had enough of the harness. He rolled and jumped and twisted and twirled trying to

get the annoying straps off his back.

Ken just sat back in the sled and laughed as he watched Duke spin around, growling and fighting to get free.

Finally, Duke gave up. He realized he was not going to get out of the harness.

All of a sudden, Duke started running, pulling the sled behind him with Ken inside. Ken held on for dear life as he and Duke flew through the forest. The sled was leaning to one side and then the other as they sped through the snow. Duke was strong, and he was having fun. Ken was screaming for help.

After what seemed to be an eternity, Duke slowed down. Ken was now able to sit up. He looked around. He did not know where they were. Ahead of them was a small cabin. Ken told Duke to stop, but when he did not stop, Ken rolled out of the sled into the snow. It was deeper than he thought, so it was difficult to get up onto his feet. Duke kept running up to up to a cabin and stopped in front of it.

Ken walked up to the cabin, which was only a few more meters ahead. There was smoke climbing out of the chimney. Ken went to the door and knocked. If someone was there, they might know the way home.

A large lady in a red flannel shirt and overalls answered the door.

“What can I do for you Sonny?” the lady asked, looking down at Ken. “What are you doing way out here?” she asked.

“My name is Ken Murphy, and this is my dog Duke. He got a little excited and he pulled me in my sled, and we ended up here,” Ken replied. “I don’t know where we are.”

“You look pretty cold. Why don’t you unhook your dog, and come in to get warm,” the lady offered.

Ken did as she asked. He and Duke went into the warm cabin.

The cabin was beautiful. There were so many things on the walls. The curtains on the windows were bright reds and yellows. The house smelled of freshly cooked cinnamon. The house was warm and inviting.

“My name is Mildred Rollings, but you can call me Aunt Millie. Come and sit at

the table so we can talk,” the woman said, as she motioned for Ken to sit down at the table.

“What a beautiful place you have Aunt Millie, I haven’t seen anything like this before,” Ken commented, as he got comfortable at the table.

Aunt Millie put some fresh cinnamon rolls on the table along with some hot apple cider. Both of these were Ken’s favorites!

“So, where do you live Ken?” Aunt Millie asked.

“I live in Nikiski,” Ken replied.

“My, you’re a long way from home. How did you get here?” Aunt Millie asked, while she sat back in her chair with a look of surprise on her face.

“I found this old sled in our old shack. I was playing with the harness, and I decided to put the harness on Duke. All of a sudden he took off, and then I found myself here.” Ken told his story.

Leaning forward in curiosity, Aunt Millie asked another question, “Is this the first time you and your dog have used that sled?”

“Yep, and I was scared too!” Ken said, with his eyes wide open.

“From what I can see, you should have been scared. You are more than five kilometers from home. That’s a very strong dog you have there. Where’d you get him?” Aunt Millie asked.

“My parents bought him for me when we first came to Alaska. We’ve raised him since he was a puppy and now he and I are best friends. He even saved my life once,” Ken replied.

“That’s a very smart dog,” Aunt Millie said as she refilled her cup with hot cider. “Did you like having Duke pull you on your sled?” Aunt Millie asked.

“NO! He went too fast, and I was scared. When he got tired, I jumped out to save my life. Then I saw your house,” Ken answered. “Do you know how we can get back home?”

“Yes, I have a truck out back. I can take you home if you want,” Aunt Millie

answered.

She pulled her chair closer to the table and looked closely at Ken. “May I ask you a question?”

“Sure, what do you want to know?” Ken responded.

“Do you think you’d like to race that sled of yours?” Aunt Millie asked him.

“Huh, race? What do you mean?” Ken asked her a question in return.

“My husband and I’ve been racing dogs for many years. We have seven sled dogs. I must say I’ve never seen a dog like yours. He’s so big and strong. My husband had a heart attack while on a race in the Yukon, so now he has to retire from racing. He’s in the hospital in town recovering. They say he’ll get better, but he’ll never race again.

“We were thinking about selling our equipment, but if you’re interested I would like to work with you and your dog. Maybe we could have some fun. What do you think?” Aunt Millie asked with a big smile on her face.

“I don’t know anything about racing dogs,” Ken replied. “Plus I’d have to talk to my parents about this.”

“Tell you what, let’s get you home, and I’ll talk to your parents when we get there, OK?” Aunt Millie said with a big grin.

Ken finished his cinnamon roll and cider. Then, after Duke finished the piece of meat Aunt Millie had given him, they loaded the sled in the back of the pickup truck and headed down the long winding road that led to the highway.

Ken looked out of the window and admired the snow-covered trees. Duke was in the back of the truck because he was just too big.

When they arrived at Ken’s house, his parents were surprised to see the big red pickup truck as it turned into the yard. When the truck came to a stop in front of the house, Ken jumped out of the truck and ran to his parents.

“Guess what? Duke pulled me through the forest in that old sled, and we ended up at Aunt Millie’s house. She wants me to learn how to drive a dogsled,” Ken rambled speaking very fast.

“Hold on, hold on. Slow down a minute,” Ken’s dad said.

He turned toward Aunt Millie, and said, “Hi, I’m Jim Murphy, and this is my wife Ann. Would you like to come inside and get warm?” Jim offered.

“I’d love to,” Aunt Millie responded as she walked up the stairs to the house.

“What a lovely house you have,” Aunt Millie complemented the décor.

Ken spoke up, “You should see Aunt Millie’s house. It’s so beautiful!”

They went to the kitchen and sat down. Aunt Millie told how Duke and Ken had arrived at her house. She told them about her husband and his love for their dogs and how, because of his heart, he would not be able to race anymore. She asked if they would allow Ken and Duke to join their racing team and if they could teach Ken how to race.

“We’ll have to think about this,” Jim Murphy responded to the offer. “We’ll talk about it as a family, and then we’ll call you. Can I get your number?”

“I don’t have a phone, but we could meet in town tomorrow and discuss this with my husband if you want.” Aunt Millie suggested.

“That sounds fine,” Ken’s dad answered.

“How does two o’clock sound to you?” Millie asked.

“Sure. Two o’clock? That would be good. We’ll see you tomorrow at the medical center. It was really nice to meet you, Aunt Millie,” Jim said, with a big smile as Aunt Millie got into her truck to leave.

“Have a good trip home, and thank you for bringing Ken and Duke home,” Ken’s mom said, as she waved goodbye.

“I was happy to do it for them. He’s a very nice boy,” Aunt Millie said through the open window of the truck smiling.

She then as she pulled away from the house, she raised her window and headed home.

Ken and his parents talked about the idea over dinner. Ken went to his room and dreamed about how he and Duke were going to go through the snow. How could his parents say no?

The next morning his parents told him they were going to go to the hospital to discuss the idea with Aunt Millie and her husband. They told him they had not made up their minds yet. They would wait until later to do that.

Ken could not wait for the trip to town. He kept looking at his watch to see what the time was.

Finally, they loaded up into the car and drove to meet Millie's husband.

When they got to the hospital, they met Aunt Millie at the entrance. They went inside and walked down a long hallway. When they arrived at room 1002 Aunt Millie told them to wait outside until she could talk to her husband.

A few minutes later Aunt Millie came out and motioned for them to come inside.

Millie's husband sat up in his bed and smiled.

"I'm so glad to meet you folks. I'm Frank Rollings, but you all can call me Uncle Frank. Millie told me a little about what happened yesterday. I think it's an exciting idea," Uncle Frank said with a lot of energy. "Let's talk about it."

The meeting lasted for a long time. The Rollings and Ken's parents discussed many things. The Rollings had brand new equipment, seven trained dogs and they had the time to spend with Ken to help him to prepare for racing. If Ken didn't like it, he could stop at any time.

Ken was getting excited. This all seemed like so much fun. Plus, he would be with Duke every day practicing.

The two of them worked very hard. Duke learned very quickly what he was supposed to do and soon he became the leader of the pack because he pulled the hardest and he was the smartest.

Today was to be their first race. Ken and Duke knew that they were ready!

**VOCABULARY:** (*Match the word to its definition*)

- |                   |                                 |
|-------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. admire ____    | a. unspoiled, pure              |
| 2. pipeline ____  | b. soft colorful material       |
| 3. damage ____    | c. esteem, like                 |
| 4. twirled ____   | d. spin, turn                   |
| 5. flannel ____   | e. get well, improve            |
| 6. overalls ____  | f. disconnect                   |
| 7. recover ____   | g. injure, hurt                 |
| 8. endurance ____ | h. stamina, strength            |
| 9. unhook ____    | i. baggy blue jean pants        |
| 10. pristine ____ | j. tube to transport oil or gas |

**TRUE / FALSE:**

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|---|-------|
| 1. Ken lived in Hawaii.                     | T / F |
| 2. Duke was a poodle.                       | T / F |
| 3. Ken's dad's name was Jim.                | T / F |
| 4. Ken was just dreaming about racing Duke. | T / F |
| 5. Duke saved Ken's life.                   | T / F |
| 6. Aunt Millie was an old lady.             | T / F |
| 7. Uncle Frank was in prison.               | T / F |
| 8. Ken loved the snow.                      | T / F |
| 9. Aunt Millie had seven dogs.              | T / F |
| 10. Ken died in the forest.                 | T / F |



**MULTIPLE CHOICE:**

1. What was the dog's name? \_\_\_\_\_
  - a) Duke
  - b) Buddy
  - c) Fluke
  - d) Doobey
  
2. With who would Ken live if he hated Alaska? \_\_\_\_\_
  - a) parents
  - b) cousins
  - c) grandparents
  - d) foster parents
  
3. How far was Aunt Millie's house from Ken's? \_\_\_\_\_
  - a) next door
  - b) about five kilometers
  - c) about two miles
  - d) about one hundred miles
  
4. What did Ken find in the old shack? \_\_\_\_\_
  - a) Duke
  - b) coins
  - c) newspapers
  - d) car

**COMPREHENSION:** (*Write a complete sentence to answer the question.*)

1. Why did Ken's family move to Alaska?

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2. What did Ken find in the old shack?

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3. Who did Ken meet in the forest?

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4. What was the name of Aunt Millie's husband?

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5. What did Duke do for Ken when he hit his head?

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6. What was Ken angry about in the beginning of the story?

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7. What was Ken's father's name?

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8. How long had Ken lived in Alaska?

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9. Where did his family live before moving to Alaska?

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10. What was the name of the town where Ken lived?

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