

## READING GROUP GUIDE

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# HOWL

## of Woman and Wolf

BY SUSAN IMHOFF BIRD

### Introduction

Commemorating twenty years since the wolf's return to the American West, *Howl* explores passions and controversies surrounding nature's most fascinating predator. Susan Imhoff Bird travels the West, journeying from her home in Salt Lake City, Utah, through Yellowstone and Montana. Along the way, she interviews ranchers and park personnel, wolf watchers, biologists, and families, uncovering a range of emotions—from admiration and reverence to vitriol and anxiety—toward wolves and all that they have come to signify.

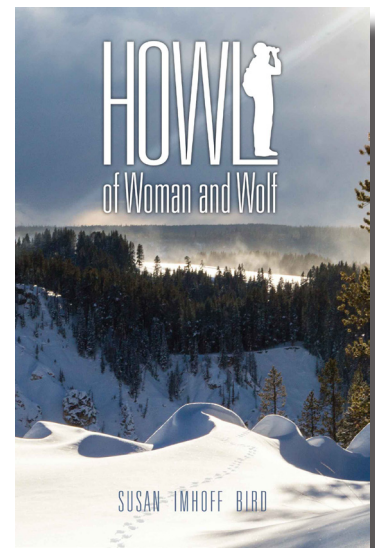
Drawn to wolves' natural independence and innate sense of place, Bird discovers important personal truths and desires as she learns more about these often-misunderstood creatures. At a crossroads in her own life, she shares her personal triumphs, her self-doubt, and difficult scenes from her past: caring for a son with cerebral palsy whose blue eyes won't meet her own, stripping wallpaper with a husband whose hidden layers have built up a barrier, a long dark night of pain while recovering from a severe bicycle accident. An emergence beyond these periods of her life and a respect for how they have shaped her drives Bird to find her voice and her self—unfettered, and wild as a wolf's howl.

"With humor, sensitivity, and probing intelligence, Bird's inquiry into the world of the wolf weaves an outer journey with inner way-finding, resulting in an inspiring book about more than being human—it's about being alive."

—**Mary Ellen Hannibal**, author of *The Spine of the Continent: The Race to Save America's Last, Best Wilderness*

"Wolves are tough. To coexist with them takes coming at the issue with everything we can muster and think of—Susan adds vitally to this conversation. With wit, emotion and passion, she thinks like many who have pondered the issue do not. This opens the eyes of the initiated and uninitiated. It's well worth the time reading this precious fresh look at an ancient conflict."

—**Doug Smith**, author of *Decade of the Wolf*, senior wildlife biologist, Yellowstone National Park



## Conversation Starters

1. Susan expresses a desire to find her tribe—do you think her vision of this tribe shifted as a result of her exploration of wolves? Do you have a tribe of your own?
2. One of *Howl*'s themes is the right to be who or what we are. What are some obstacles standing in the way of this right for wolves? For Susan? For Bob?
3. Susan tells us she “doesn’t want to be wrong” when she first participates in wolf watching at Yellowstone. Is this mentality a strength or a weakness?
4. Do you think Susan has found her voice by the end of the book?
5. Susan imagines her “soul lined with things and places and people in miniature replicas.” Does she acquire anything new on this trip to add to her collection? What would your own collection look like?
6. Although the author practices howling literally, howling might also refer to a state of being free, genuine, and wild. What does howling look like for you? Are you able to “howl” freely in your own life?
7. How is Susan’s relationship with wolves similar or dissimilar to her relationship with Jake?
8. Which character and/or group of people (or animals!) introduced in the book do you sympathize with the most?
9. Susan’s bicycle accident was a painful fall with a prolonged period of recovery. Identify other times that Susan fell and recovered. Did she handle some instances better than others?
10. Susan writes that Big Mountain is “the closest thing to wild that I’m able to access...from home.” Where is your “closest thing to wild” and how do you access and experience it?



## About Susan Imhoff Bird

Susan Imhoff Bird finds inspiration in Utah's stunning canyons, valleys and water-sculpted rock. Traveling in Asia, South America, and Europe has exposed her to varied cultures and societies, resulting in an award-winning short story and a book about humanitarian work in Nepal. A mom of three and owner of a gratitude-based business, she is fascinated by human interactions. When not writing, reading, trying to meditate, or attempting yoga asanas, she can be found on her bicycle or snowshoes, absorbing the wisdom of the natural world. And occasionally howling.

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Susan is available to discuss *Howl* with reading groups in person or via Skype. For more information, email [anne@torreyhouse.com](mailto:anne@torreyhouse.com).

## About Torrey House Press

*Love of the Land*



Torrey House is an independent book publisher of fiction and nonfiction about the environment, people, cultures, and resource management issues relating to America's wild places. Torrey House Press endeavors to increase appreciation for the importance of natural landscape through the power of pen and story. Through the *2% to the West* program, Torrey House Press donates two percent of sales to not-for-profit environmental organizations and funds a scholarship for up-and-coming writers at colleges throughout the West.

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