

A review by Professor David Waltner-Toews,  
Founder and first CEO of Veterinarians Without Borders.  
of Dr. Jerry Haigh's  
*Reindeer Reflections: Lessons from an Ancient Culture*

"Veterinarians, in popular imagination, tend to be some mashup of James Herriott and Doctor Dolittle. The human-animal bond evokes pictures of snuggling cats and loyal dogs. If wildlife make an appearance, the images that spring to mind are variations on a theme of Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom. If we can look beyond these glossy images, we discover that veterinarians, trained as animal healers, follow many, often conflicting paths through the landscapes we share with all those other millions of species.

If we take this broader, deeper, more authentically humane, view of what it means for humans to be animal healers, Jerry Haigh offers us an alternative vision to that promoted by popular media.

It is no accident that Dr. Haigh would begin his "Reindeer Reflections" with Rudolf and his red nose, reflecting as it does how Disney Corporation has warped our perceptions of nature. For animal lovers who would like to know what working with live reindeer is really like, and wish to understand the significance of that red nose --and no, it doesn't have to do with social marginalization---spending pandemic lockdown reading these real-life tales will be time well-spent.

Haigh brings anthropomorphic and romantic fantasies down to earth, and grounds them in the hardscrabble lives of people for whom treating an animal as "part of the family" means demanding that they do their fair share of the work. For the veterinarian working with these animals and their owners, the demands include a nimbleness of mind and body, close observation, and the ability to make medical decisions without the benefit of an Internet or a library, drawing on a memory where all the important information is filed and accessible.

From East Africa to the Arctic, from the parklands of Saskatchewan to the rugged hills of Mongolia, Haigh has studied *Rangifer tarandus*, the species that includes both caribou and reindeer. Equally important, he introduces us to the people who have, for centuries, lived and worked with them. Rudolf's red nose is here, as are fentanyl-loaded darts, Mongolian shamans, cold mountain bogs, scream-bled eggs, gut problems, freezing nights of restless sleep on hard ground, generous, welcoming strangers, and long days of trekking through rocky, windswept landscapes.

Haigh's "Reindeer Reflections" brings together good science, saddle-sores, adventure, politics, culture, history, and wildlife medicine. This is the life of an animal healer who has fully lived his vocation, and not merely observed his professional duties. Brew a pot of tea. Make yourself comfortable on the rug by the fireplace. Enjoy."