

# BORN TO MUSH

## *Dallas Seavey*

Youngest Iditarod® Champion



The Iditarod Journey with  
Sponsors Jim & Rosanne Keller



*Photo courtesy of Albert Lewis*

**J. J. KELLER/DALLAS SEAVEY**  
Iditarod® Racing Team



**2012 Iditarod® Champion**

**BORN TO MUSH** is the story of how Dallas Seavey becomes the youngest person ever to win the grueling Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race. Along the way, this tenacious and dedicated athlete learns to think like a dog—focusing on the moment, and finding the joy in every challenge—from blizzards to thin ice. After becoming a world-class competitive wrestler and facing a tough decline in health, Dallas returns to the sport he was born to do...sled dog racing. This book highlights his six-year partnership with Jim and Rosanne Keller representing J. J. Keller & Associates, Inc., who believed in Dallas' dream to win the Iditarod—Alaska's largest sporting event. Enjoy the adventure with the J. J. Keller/Dallas Seavey Iditarod Racing Team!



P.O. Box 368  
Neenah, WI 54957-0368

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*Dallas Seavey, Youngest Iditarod Champion*



By Dallas Seavey and James J. Keller  
As told to Hannah Moderow

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# INTRODUCTION

By James J. Keller

For our 30th anniversary, my wife Rosanne and I booked an Alaskan cruise. During our voyage, she surprised me with a shore excursion to Seward, Alaska, where we visited the Seavey sled dog kennel. We had always wanted to visit an Iditarod team and experience a dog sled ride. Little did we know that this trip in 2006 would start us on a six-year journey with Dallas Seavey—a journey to make history, and help him become the youngest Iditarod champion ever.

When I met Dallas, I immediately liked the fact that he was young, energetic, hard working, customer friendly and really into the dogs and the Iditarod. His great tour combined with his passion and his accomplishments as a wrestler sparked the thought—what would be involved in a sponsorship, and how could J. J. Keller & Associates, Inc. benefit from this exciting prospect?

When I returned home to Wisconsin, I discovered that J. J. Keller had 1,100 transportation customers in Alaska. I knew that if we could tie in one of the earliest forms of transportation—the dog sled—with our transportation market, it would make sense and our customers would embrace the concept. We have sponsored many different venues, but this one had a unique ring to it!

So, I did some informal research and marketing, talked with many folks, and created The Extreme Transportation Solutions logo. After many phone calls, Dallas and I arrived at a sponsorship agreement and our concept of “Mushing Together to Nome” became a reality.

After hundreds of hours of planning, we had designed graphics and logos, parkas, dog coats, hats and head bands; written ads and news releases, and set up a website, and we were ready to go for the 2007 Iditarod.

Before the race began, J. J. Keller sponsored a luncheon

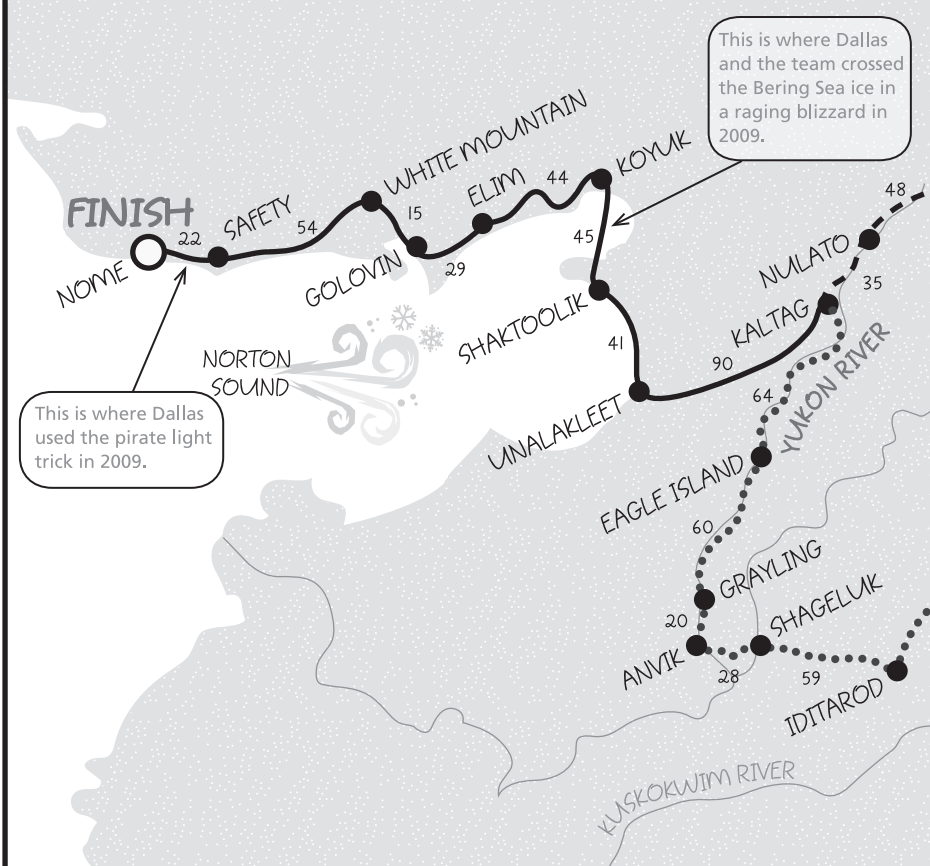
with the Alaska Trucking Association. Rosanne and I attended the Musher's Banquet and sat with the Seaveys. I bought Dallas' sled at the IdidaRider auction, and enjoyed mushing with Dallas during the ceremonial start in Anchorage.

After experiencing the 2007 Iditarod, I knew we'd be "Mushing Together to Nome" again. Between my son Brian, Rosanne, Dallas and myself we have kept this dream alive by bringing the race to the lower 48 through videos, photos and blogs on [jjkeller.com/iditarod](http://jjkeller.com/iditarod). We've created a DVD every year and offer this free to schools and groups interested in learning more about the Iditarod.

Dallas was our guest for the American Trucking Associations Management Conference and Exhibition in Orlando, Florida in October 2007—this is where we introduced Dallas, the Iditarod and J. J. Keller's sponsorship to the world. Dallas was the J. J. Keller VIP for our annual sales awards program in December 2007—this is where we introduced Dallas and the Iditarod to the J. J. Keller associates.

It's been an exciting six-year journey with Dallas, and I hope you enjoy reading this unusual story. Don't forget to follow the J. J. Keller/Dallas Seavey Iditarod Racing team in years to come.

# The Iditarod Trail



This is where Dallas used the pirate light trick in 2009.

This is where Dallas and the team crossed the Bering Sea ice in a raging blizzard in 2009.

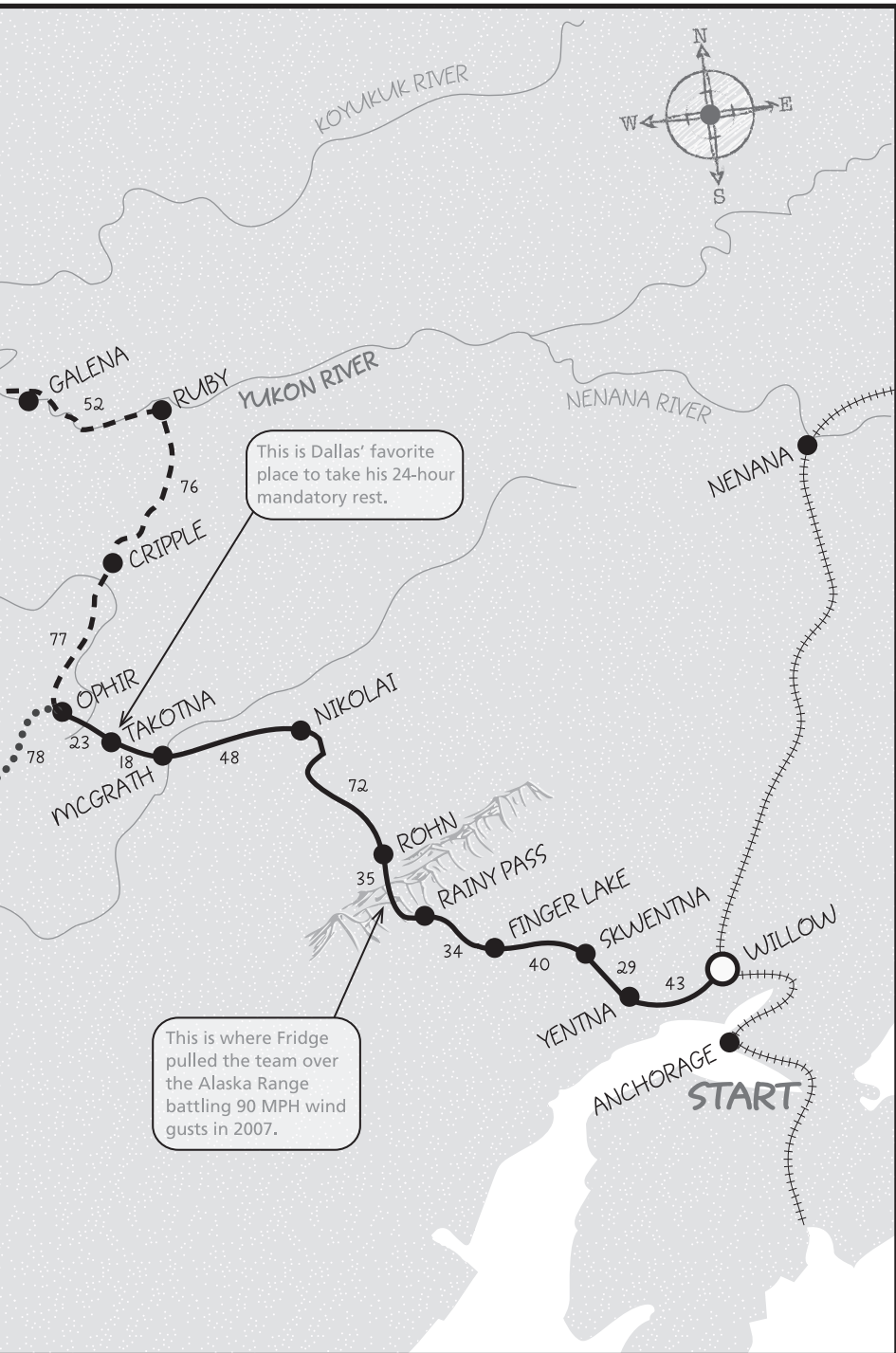
**Iditarod Trail**

-----  
Northern Route (even numbered years)

.....  
Southern Route (odd numbered years)

+++++  
Alaska Railroad



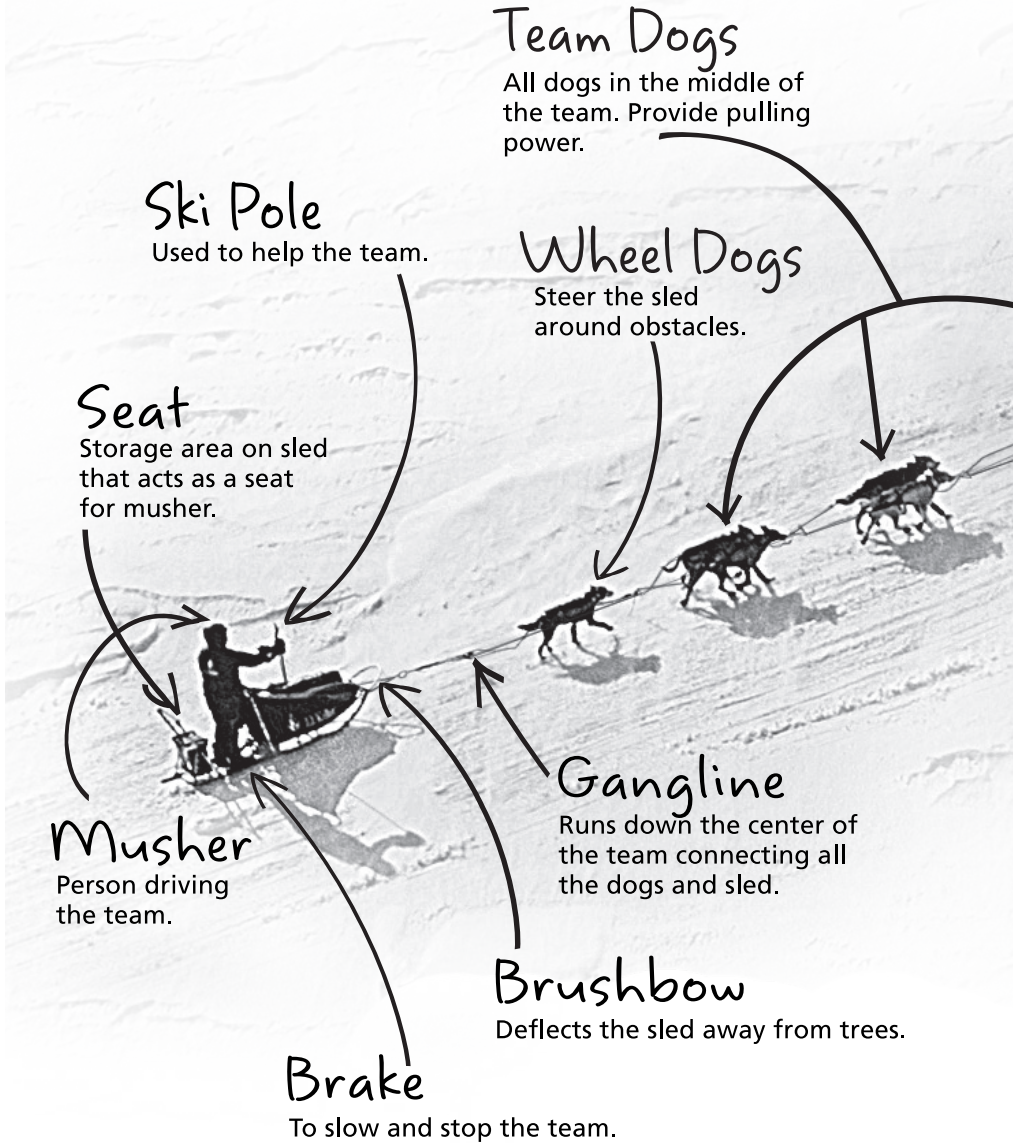


This is Dallas' favorite place to take his 24-hour mandatory rest.

This is where Fridge pulled the team over the Alaska Range battling 90 MPH wind gusts in 2007.



# Dog Team Sketch



# Trail Marker

Wooden stakes that show mushers the way.

# Swing Dogs

Help the lead dogs steer the team.

# Haw

Command to turn left.

# A'ight

What Dallas says to let the dogs know it's time to go.



Command to stop.

# Gee

Command to turn right.

# Neckline

Connects the dog's collar to the Gangline.

# Lead Dogs

Take the musher's commands and set the pace.

# Tugline

Connects the dog's harness to the Gangline.

# Sled Dog Gear

## Jacket

Sled dogs wear jackets during every rest and while running in below-zero temperatures.



## Leggings

Keep the ice from building up on the back of the dog's wrist in extreme weather conditions.

## Booties

Used to protect the dog's feet from sharp snow and rough trail conditions. Booties are removed at every rest stop.

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## Foreword



One morning a few weeks before the start of the 2012 Iditarod, Jim Keller called me up and said, “Hey Dallas, check out the J. J. Keller Iditarod website and let me know what you think.”

I logged onto the site and read the headline, “History in the making. Follow Dallas Seavey as he tries to become the youngest musher to win the Iditarod.” It was true. In a few days, we would make our first big attempt at winning the Iditarod. But it was strange and exhilarating to see my lifelong dream in print.

I knew that we were capable of winning, but to do so we’d have to strike the perfect balance between patience and speed, and work together as a team. I would need to use all the knowledge, skills, and experi-

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ence with sled dogs I had gathered over my twenty-five years of life to get us to the finish line first.

I called Jim back and said, “Great. Let’s win it. No pressure, right?”

Jim chuckled. “Race like you know how to race, and you’ll have no problem.” This was just one of many times that Jim and the folks at J. J. Keller gave me a challenge that I was excited to pursue.

Some mushers try to win the Iditarod by being the rabbit. They bolt out of the starting line with enthusiasm and speed, and hope to maintain the lead for one thousand miles to Nome. Sometimes a rabbit wins. However, more often than not, the rabbit ends up getting passed by the tortoise by the end of the long race.

We wouldn’t be the rabbit or the tortoise on the 2012 Iditarod. We’d be the fox. We could win, but we’d have to be smart to catch the rabbits.

We—the dogs and I—were ready.

We were born to mush.

This is the story of how we won the Iditarod, and how I became the youngest Iditarod champion ever.





# 1

## MUSHER IN THE MAKING



When I was five years old, life revolved around Buster, an ancient black and white husky who looked like a milk cow. Buster was a far cry from the lead dogs who would win the Iditarod with me twenty years later. He was old, with legs that gimped up from time to time, but he was the best dog in the universe because he was mine. Mushing was my world, and Buster was my man. He was a champion as far as I was concerned.

Buster came from my grandpa Dan, known to most everyone as Bappa. Buster was one of twenty dogs in the kennel in Seward, Alaska, but he was the only one I could call my own. I did everything for Buster: I fed him, scooped his poop, gave him atten-

tion, and even got to mush with him. To my mom's dismay, I raided the fridge to make him special meals of hamburger, rice, and vegetables. I was jealous of my older brothers, Danny and Tyrell, who cared for several dogs each, but their dogs were jealous of Buster when I delivered his special meals to the yard. If Buster was my only dog, then he deserved to be treated like a king.

My favorite part of owning Buster was tearing down the snowy trail with him. We chased my dad and his dog team around the woods near our home, and we even had the chance to compete in a few local one-dog races. I was a natural on my mini wooden dog sled, and I loved barreling down the trail pretending that I was winning the Iditarod. Buster was my guy, and I was his guy. The possibilities were endless.

My dad taught me to be a meticulous musher. At age five, I knew how to tie the right knots to secure my dog sled. I was vigilant about doing a pre-trip inspection of the lines and equipment, and you better believe Buster's harness fit him just right. Every little detail mattered; I was serious about precision. I believed the key to being a good musher was to be in control.

The best part of mushing was when the race announcer said, "Five, four, three, two, one, Go!" and Buster and I took off down the trail. Once on the trail, I knew exactly how to lean into sharp corners to avoid tipping my sled. I was as focused on my one-mile races with Buster as I would be on winning the Iditarod twenty years later. I loved competing with Buster, even if he was old and slow. We were comrades.

When I turned eight, I started mushing with Sparky, a fresh retiree from my dad's Iditarod team. Sparky was a little brown dog—no more than forty pounds—with pointed ears and a short round snout with touches of gray. She was a stubborn old girl, but her greatest trait was that she always brought her musher home. She was the perfect lead dog for a beginner.

So far, my dad hadn't let me go mushing by myself. He knew of too many things that could go wrong. I could get charged by a moose, get lost in the woods, get stuck in a blizzard, or worse! That's why he made me harness up my team and follow right behind him. Mushing with Dad was fun, but I lobbied hard to go out on my own. Danny and Tyrell had been mushing by themselves for what seemed like forever, and nothing bad had ever happened to them.

When my dad finally consented, he gave me a three-dog team with Sparky in single lead and Floppy and Cuda behind. He instructed us to go two miles out, take the turnaround, and mush home. It should have been no big deal. We had traveled that same trail together many times, and Sparky knew the way.

I treated the pre-mush preparations as if I was going on an expedition to the North Pole. I had to get every little piece of equipment just right. First, I made sure the snow hook line was tied with the right knot. My only hope for stopping the dog team was using my snow hook. Then I untangled the gangline—the rope used to string the dogs together.

Once the gear was ready, Dad helped me hook up the dogs. They barked and howled and pulled into their harnesses with excitement. Finally, I was ready to go. This three-dog team had more spunk and power than old Buster, but my confidence didn't waver. All my life I had watched other people in my family mush. Finally, I would follow in their sled tracks and mush on my own.

"Hike!" I yelled, and we blasted down the trail like a rocket.

We whizzed through the forest. It was exhilarating. I knew the trail well, but it felt different this time—by myself. Good thing Dad had taught me how to be in control.

However, just as soon as any musher thinks he's in control, things often go wrong. At the intersection where I was supposed to take the turnaround, I yelled "Gee!" to tell Sparky to go right.

But Sparky wanted to go straight ahead. Sparky didn't even look to the right. She didn't want to take a command from a little twerp like me.

I slammed my boot on the brake, but it just skidded along the icy trail. I couldn't stop!

"Gee!" I said again, this time in my big musher voice, but it was too late. We were past the turnaround.

"Whoa!" I hollered, "No, Sparky!" I said, jamming my foot on the brake. The dogs leaned into their harnesses and pulled even harder. We were headed on down the trail and there was nothing I could do to change it.

Sparky was taking me for a wild ride.

That's when panic set in. Dad had given me a plan, and I had promised to stick to it.

Sweat poured down my back. What would Dad say when I got home—if I got home? Sparky charged ahead, and Floppy and Cuda followed with glee. I tried to set the snow hook so that I could get off the sled, run up to Sparky, and lead her back the way we'd come. But the darn snow hook wouldn't grip the icy trail.

My brain scrolled through some of the bad things that could happen—moose, blizzards, and hypothermia—and what if I let go of my sled and lost the team?

After thinking of everything that could go wrong, something dawned on me. Nothing was actually going wrong except that I was mushing the wrong way.

My dad and I had traveled this trail before, and I was pretty sure we'd get to the forest soon. There, I could hook a tree and turn the dogs around. But what if Sparky took a different trail before we reached the forest? Then I could get really lost!

A few minutes later, I spotted trees in the distance. Phew. We were going to be just fine. When we reached the forest, I hooked to a tree, ran up to stubborn old Sparky, and turned her around. Bingo. We were on our way home.

That wasn't so hard. Why had I gotten all worked up?

Sparky took us home like she always did. On that trip, I realized that in mushing, as in life, things don't always go as planned. I learned to flow with the

unexpected, focus on the next most pressing thing to do, and not to worry about the things beyond my control. This lesson would develop and grow into one of my greatest strengths in dealing with the crucial and sometimes life-and-death situations I faced while sled dog racing.

*Notes, Thoughts, and Sketches*







Dallas seconds away from winning the Iditarod and fulfilling his dream of becoming the youngest Iditarod champion ever! The dog team from right to left: Elim, Beatle, Guinness, Crockett, Rody, Sable, Diesel, Crazy, and D-2.



After arriving first and second at the half way checkpoint of Cripple, Mitch and Dallas talk dogs while eating.



Tybo (left) and Derby (right) arrive at a checkpoint covered in frost after 11 hours of mushing in cold temperatures.



Dallas and team cruise towards the Galena checkpoint under beautiful northern lights.

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