

Where's the Boss?

By Lois Harter

Play adapted by Cassandra Wilson

Narrator #1: The greenish glow of the northern lights danced across the Alaska sky, like sheer curtains moving in the breeze at an open window. It was a cold, clear night, perfect for mushing along Alaska's famous Iditarod Trail.

Narrator #2: Toby thought about all the time that had gone into training for this particular race as he and his teammates padded along the hard trail, mile after frozen mile. All those trips into the wilderness they had made to get ready for the Iditarod Race.

Narrator #3: Toby remembered the first time he had been in a harness and how the older dogs had laughed when he got tangled in the tug lines. He smiled to himself remembering how scared he was when he was put in the lead position. Toby had been so proud when the team had followed him on the trail.

Narrator #4: It had taken three years to pick just the right team of dogs for this race. Toby puffed out his chest with pride as he thought of where they were, The Iditarod Trail. He had heard other dogs in other races boast that they had run the Iditarod and had envied them. Finally he was here!

Narrator #1: The dog's boss was professional musher Joe Haddock. Joe and his dog teams had been competing in many sled races for seven years. When Toby and his littermates were born, Joe had dreamed of traveling on the Iditarod Trail, from Anchorage to Nome. Now, it had become Toby's dream. He wanted to see the light of Nome almost as much as Joe.

Narrator #2: Joe built a three-room cabin to live in. In the backyard he built doghouses for Toby and his teammates. He also built a big dog barn for use when the weather was really cold or snowy. The dogs were Joe's life and he was always thinking of better ways to care for them. He gave his dogs constant attention.

Narrator #3: Toby was a large dog for a leader, weighing sixty-seven pounds. He had long legs that made him the ideal lead dog for working in deep snow. He was gray and white, with the typical mask and coloring of an Alaska husky. He had a black stripe down the middle of his tail. His big brown eyes missed very little of what went on around him.

Narrator #4: The team was very excited when they ran past the starting line. They were running in the famous Iditarod Sled Dog Race! As the miles flew by, the dogs felt comfortable and some dogs were able to close their eyes. They can doze off and run at the same time! The lead dog, Toby looked over to his teammate Crystal. He noticed she was dozing.

Toby: Psssst, hey Crystal you need to open your eyes! We are almost at the checkpoint where we can rest and Joe will fix something delicious to eat.

Crystal: Sorry Toby. I was just dreaming about the finish line.

Beauty: I can't wait to rest on some nice fresh smelling straw. Joe always makes a wonderful bed to rest on!

Toby: I'm drooling about the big chunks of warm beef and that tasty broth he cooks for all of us.

Socks: I'm looking forward to our 24-hour layover. We will have enough time to rest and visit with each other.

Sweetpea: I look forward to these checkpoints. I get a little bored always being in the back. I know I am a good teammate, but I miss being able to chat with the rest of you.

Digger: I'm glad Joe gives us lots of breaks. Hey, didn't you love those frozen fish snacks we had a couple of hours ago?

All Dogs: Yes siree!! Yum!

Beauty: How are everybody's feet feeling?

All Dogs: Great!

Socks: These booties are so comfortable to wear.

Crystal: I like it when Joe changes our booties. He always gives us a foot massage.

Digger: Yeah, and he puts them on so carefully. The booties are never too tight.

Sweetpea: I like the colors of the booties!

Toby: The colors are great Sweetpea, but they really help protect our feet from the hard snow and ice. We have to have healthy paws so we can trot through the race without any trouble.

Narrator #1: The team arrived to their 24-hour layover checkpoint. Joe wasn't feeling too well. He didn't say too much to his dog team.

Beauty: Boy, our boss is sure quiet.

Socks: He is usually so talkative and plays with us for a while.

Crystal: I don't think he looks too good. Maybe he is feeling ill.

Toby: Don't worry, I bet with this long layover he will get plenty of rest and he will be back to his old self.

Digger: Joe is a great boss! He wouldn't want us to miss out on the finish line in Nome.

Narrator#2: After the layover, the team was ready to go! They traveled several miles. Toby looked back over his shoulder to check on the team. He made sure each dog was in line and that no one was in trouble.

Toby: All of you look good. You are trotting just the right speed, thanks!

Sweetpea: I feel great!

Crystal: Me too!

Socks: I feel like I could run 1,000 miles!

Beauty: Now socks, we have to pace ourselves.

Narrator #3: The dogs continued to keep their steady pace. The weather was good, their paws felt great and they were all feeling proud of themselves. Toby again, looked over his shoulder. Unfortunately, this time something didn't look right. At first he couldn't quite figure out what was wrong.

Narrator #4: His entire team was trotting at a good pace. All of them were alert. The sled looked okay. Then suddenly Toby realized what was bothering him.

Toby: Where's the boss? Where's Joe? I can't see him on the sled. Hey, Sweetpea, is he running next to the sled?

Sweetpea: I don't see him. Is he in the basket sleeping? Take a look Digger.

Digger: No, he isn't in the basket!

Socks: If he isn't in any of those places, where is he?

Toby: Hey, we have to stop! The boss is gone! Joe's gone! Crystal, help me stop the team!

Crystal: Everybody! We have to stop!

Narrator #1: Both Toby and Crystal got the team to stop. Both of them looked over their shoulders, past the team, past the sled and as far behind the sled as the darkness would let them see. There was no sign of Joe anywhere.

Beauty: Oh no! What are we going to do? Where could he have gone? He just gave us snacks a couple of hours ago.

Sweetpea: Now don't you go getting yourself all upset, Beauty.

Digger: I'll bet Joe dozed off and fell off the sled.

Socks: He is probably back there on the trail yelling at himself for not paying better attention.

Toby: Crystal and I have been alone on a trail before and we know just what we need to do.

Crystal: Don't worry Beauty, Toby and I can help the team turn around and go look for our musher.

Toby: Okay, team we need to work together. We have to make a narrow turn and it will take all of you to get this done.

All Dogs: We're ready to help!

Narrator #1: Toby and Crystal guided the team in a full turn to the right, going back down beside the fourteen other dogs and cutting a path past the sled. Each pair of dogs made the turn as the duo in front of them passed alongside.

Narrator #2: When it came time to swing the sled around, there was barely enough room on the trail, but the dogs pulled together slowly and eased the sled around without spilling it.

Narrator #3: Looking down the trail, the leaders still could not see any sign of Joe. Now they would have to get down to the business of finding the boss.

Toby: Not too fast. We don't want to run over Joe when we come up on him.

Crystal: Toby and I will set the pace and everyone will need to keep a lookout for Joe.

Socks: All of us will look to the side of the trail in case you might miss something in front.

All Dogs: You bet! We need to find Joe!

Narrator #4: The team began back tracking on their trail. Everyone's eyes were searching the trail ahead and on both sides, looking for the boss. Toby would stop the team every now and then and sniff the air, trying to pick up the scent of their musher.

Crystal: Toby, look up ahead, there is something in the trail.

Toby: Yes that's him!

Digger: I see him too, but why is he lying in the snow?

Narrator #1: The team stopped beside the lump in the snow. It was their musher and beloved friend. Toby and Crystal sniffed at the cold body.

Socks: Is our boss all right?

Beauty: He isn't moving! He has to be all right, he just has to be!

Narrator #2: Toby put his nose close to the musher's face. He waited to see if he could feel Joe's breath.

Toby: He's alive!

Narrator #3: Crystal and Toby quickly licked the snow off Joe's face and nuzzled him, trying to get him to wake up. No luck.

Sweetpea: I think we are going to need some human help! Who should go for help?

Digger: Crystal is the fastest runner. I think she should go for help.

All dogs: Yeah!

Toby: Crystal, we will stay here and keep the boss warm.

All dogs: Good luck Crystal!!

Narrator #4: Before Crystal could leave she needed to be free from the tug line. Thinking quickly, she asked Beauty to help her chew through the back straps of her harness.

Beauty: Oh, the boss gets so angry with anyone who chews a line or harness. I don't want him to be mad at me and make me stay home next time.

Crystal: Now beauty, don't panic. I think in this case the boss would want you to help. Now let's get to work. We need to get help for Joe before he freezes to death!

Narrator #4: While Crystal and Beauty tended to chewing Crystal loose, Toby was trying to figure out what to do for Joe. Sled dogs have two layers of fur that keep them warm in almost any kind of weather. This same fur can help keep a musher warm too.

Socks: While Crystal and Beauty go for help why don't we snuggle close to Joe?

Digger: That's a good idea. Our warm bodies and fur will help keep the boss warm until help arrives.

Narrator #1: Soon Joe was covered with the furry bodies of his dogs. They snuggled as close as he or she could without smothering Joe. Meanwhile, Crystal was free from the tug line and ready to go get help.

Toby: Whatever you do Crystal, don't let any human or dog catch you. Stay just out of their reach, but if they stop chasing you, stop and bark like crazy until they start to follow again. Lead them back here as quickly as you can.

Sweetpea: All of us will help Toby take care of the boss as best we can until you get back.

Narrator #2: Toby and rest of the team were slightly worried about Crystal's journey. The night before they caught the scent of a wolf pack. They all hoped that Crystal would have a safe trip.

Narrator #3: The team did their best to insulate Joe from the severe arctic night.

Beauty: I don't know what I would do if something happened to the boss.

Sweetpea: I can't imagine giving up running the trails, but my heart wouldn't be in it with any other musher.

Socks: He's going to be all right, Sweetpea. I know it looks bad, but we can't give up.

Digger: We can take care of him until Crystal brings help.

Narrator #4: Toby raised his head and listened intently to the night sounds. In the distance, he could hear the howl of a wolf. Soon he heard another wolf begin his song and before long, a chorus of wolves was singing its lonely song.

Narrator #1: The hairs on the dog's backs stood almost straight up as they listened to the wolves.

Beauty: I hope the wolves are not on a hunt tonight with Crystal out there all alone.

Toby: Pipe down! We have to stay calm until Crystal's return.

Narrator #2: Crystal flew along the hard, fast trail toward the last checkpoint. It seemed like she had been running for a very long time and she had no idea how much longer it would take to reach help.

Narrator #3: She heard the wolves and knew that she would be easy game should they decide to attack her. Her thoughts turned back to her musher and she promised him silently that she would bring a human to take him to safety.

Narrator #4: Suddenly, up ahead, she saw a light bobbing in the distance. She knew it was too soon to be a checkpoint.

Crystal: Could it be a musher's headlight?

Narrator #1: It was another team! Crystal spotted the lead dog Foxy. She slowed her pace and slowly moved forward so as not to appear as a threat to the approaching team.

Crystal: My musher is in trouble up ahead and we need help. Can you bring your musher?

Narrator #2: Foxy relayed the information to his teammates. Crystal began to bark her frantic message to the approaching musher. This startled the musher, Michael O'Donald. He put his foot on his brake only to find that his team didn't want to stop. They kept pulling against the brake!

Narrator #3: Michael O'Donald recognized Crystal as being one of Joe's dogs. He called her and wanted to put her in his sled and take her to the next checkpoint. However, Crystal remembered what Toby had said, "don't let anyone catch you."

Crystal: Oh Foxy, please follow me! My musher is hurt! I need your boss to help him. Please hurry!

Narrator #4: Foxy began barking and Michael realized that Joe might be hurt, so he and his dogs followed Crystal. Meanwhile, the team was doing their best to take care of Joe. They checked to make sure he was breathing.

Socks: He is still breathing and he seems a bit warmer than when we first got here. I think he will be all right. I hope Crystal arrives with some human help, soon!

Digger: Hey look! Over there I see a headlight!

Beauty: Could it be a musher? Oh, I hope so!

Sweetpea: It sure is a musher! Look how fast Crystal is running!

Crystal: We made it! Thanks to Foxy, his teammates and his boss! Now lets make sure Joe gets some help.

Narrator #1: Michael put Joe into his sled bag. Toby and his teammates pulled Joe's sled and followed Michael's team to the next checkpoint. There, Joe was taken into a warm cabin. The dog team was taken to a nice area and fed some delicious warm stew. After they ate there were nice straw beds waiting for them to rest.

Socks: Boy that stew was great and these beds are nice, too!

Beauty: I'm sure glad that Joe is okay. I wonder if we are going to finish the Iditarod.

Toby: Joe is going to be all right!

Digger: He has to be. I wouldn't want another human for my musher.

Toby: We will be sent home. I'm sure Joe isn't going to be able to go on, but I'm sure he'll be all right.

Socks: I think we should all try to get a little rest.

Narrator #2: Several hours later, Toby heard footsteps in the snow. He called softly to the team, all of whom were only dozing fitfully waiting for some sign of their musher. There was Joe, bundled in heavy outdoor gear. He knelt slowly to pet and whisper **kind words to each dog. Joe had pneumonia and could have died in the cold.**

Narrator #3: Joe would have died if the dogs hadn't known just what to do. Joe gave love and thanks to his loyal friends. Toby felt a little sad that his team didn't get to finish the race to Nome. However, he knew there would be another time to try again. The team would continue to have many adventures with their friend Joe...but those are stories for another time.