

Forty days!

By Joel Rudinger '64

Forty days among these mountains,
crooked trails, fresh snow, steep slides of black shale
slick and glistening in the midday melt,
long shadows from the sun moving west in the morning, east after noon,
minute by minute passing over this wide land
of rivers and streams and mountains and taiga
with trees and weeds and cranberries patches,
fields of blueberries and flowers,
suddenly appearing new pockets of beauty,
new and unexpected bright spirit blazonings.

The solitary moose and bear, families of sheep, they wander free
with the goats and herds of caribou, and they, as do the wolves,
lay down and rise up day after day, year after year, in the gift of silence.

And the small animals: fox and rabbit and wolverine,
rise up and lay down day after day, year after year,
the hunter and the hunted, the stalker and the prey,
in the protection of silence.
And I am Here! Standing alone in ALL of this.

Every breeze I see is changing the direction of the grass,
and across the lake, nudging, pushing the dark ripples into waves
as fish move deep and slow as in a dream
along the shoreline beneath the water's edge;

the ptarmigans, the ravens, the eagles in flight,
the sky-filling flocks of honking geese
darkening the land in their great migrations
far above the shimmering, dancing, humming clouds of insects,
far above the quick scattering of mice and chipmunks.

Everything. Everything.
Every breeze or wind or gale or drop of rain or flake of snow
or flying leaf or falling feather that touches or brushes
against the face of these mountains alters their features forever.

And I want to throw off my pack in this ecstasy of time
and raise my eyes and arms to the sky, beaming, laughing.
And I want to holler from the core of my being:
"Yes, Yes, I am here. I am here.
Oh my God. I am here. Yes.

Forty days in this great wilderness."
Forty days and forty nights!
Was Moses ever so blessed?



Photo by Ray Whitehouse.

Arriving at UAF as a 21-year-old, Joel Rudinger
already had a sense of history —

"my own history"

he wrote to us. "I came up to Fairbanks from Ohio
because I knew I had never done anything worth
remembering, and I wanted to start living a life of
potential and adventure."

A graduate assistant in the UAF English Department from 1960-1964, he went on to become a
professor at the Firelands Campus of Bowling
Green State University in Huron, Ohio. He is now
retired with emeritus status.

Rudinger worked as a packer and assistant guide
for Hal Waugh in the Alaska Range, hunting for
Dall sheep and moose. His poem reflects upon
leaving the Post Lake area, in the upper reaches of
the Kuskokwim River's South Fork.