

Kenai Refuge's 65th Birthday—and my brother's

by Bill Kent

This December will mark the 65th anniversary of President Franklin Roosevelt's executive order which created the Kenai National Moose Range. I personally find this easy to remember because my brother was born on the same day the order took effect. I try not to dwell on the fact that my brother will be that old—because I am acutely aware of my own pre-1950 birthdate. Kenai Refuge and my brother share a few characteristics other than a birthdate; bear with me a little and I'll try to explain my reasoning.

Kenai Refuge's heart is its' wildlife habitat, which gets distressed and “clogged” when the vegetation grows without some “renewal” periodically by wildfires. Even though he ran marathons over the years, my brother's own heart was in the same condition a few years ago, and he suffered a heart attack. He got an ambulance ride to an Atlanta hospital and eventually underwent a multiple bypass operation. One could reason that his operation allowed his heart to function more normally, just as a wildfire allows natural processes to renew themselves and generate new vegetation to better provide for wildlife.

After his heart bypass, my brother's doctor discovered one of his carotid arteries was blocked; he describes the succeeding procedure as getting his neck “roto-rootered”... lovely. I can associate that with the periodic floods which sweep down the Kenai River and other rivers on the peninsula every few years. While the “procedure” is not a thing of beauty, the cleansing effect certainly provides new routes for the life blood of the Refuge and Peninsula to flow more freely.

My brother is a semi-retired Methodist pastor; “semi” because after he officially retired the church's conference asked him if he would be willing to return

and be a “supply pastor” at a rural church in north Georgia. I am constantly amazed at his ability to find the best in human beings, and help them find their own paths to some kind of spirituality that suits the particular individual. Although Kenai refuge is not “retired”, I think it does have the ability to help every person who uses its' lands and waters to find spirituality in a manner that suits them.

For some of you, that means fishing the lakes and rivers, for others it means a family camping outing at one of the Refuge campgrounds. Some may find that hunting or trapping on the Refuge provides the best avenue for experiencing a spiritual episode while alone out in the forest and fields. Others find it experience hiking trails or canoeing through the wilderness.

Where am I going with all this talk of renewal, cleansing, and spirituality? Only that while understanding that Kenai Refuge is many things to many people, its' two million acres allows each of those individuals or user groups the space and means to reach a place and time that provides an ability to connect with some type of spiritual experience. Your experience will probably not be the same as mine, or your neighbor's. The connection, like my brother and this Refuge, is that if we allow ourselves, each of us can find cleansing, renewing, and maybe even a spiritual effect while we make use of this present given to us by President Roosevelt 65 years ago.

Bill Kent is the Supervisory Park Ranger at the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge who has lived on the Kenai Peninsula for over 15 years. He and his family live in Sterling. Previous Refuge Notebook columns can be viewed on the Web at <http://www.fws.gov/refuge/kenai/>.