Though I saw that winter through, I was too thin for the task and had brought the wrong body, packing it along with the many misguided supplies a good-sized grant could buy.

Sitting in our tent, nesting on caribou over cut spruce, the elder of the family teased me in Athabascan: "Are you reading? With all we did today, you should be taking notes."

Who is studying whom?

In the small space of a sigh and the popping of sap in the stove, my calf muscles uncurled and the question eased the pain until the blood swam slowly back, pulsing, pausing, pulsing, to scream its silent anger to the bears and the stars.

When I undressed and, following the ritual orders, changed my socks, I saw that around the prow of my toes the tissue had put out its white flags, a colony of button-sized swans, aching with embarrassment, riding the current in a mute reproof to hubris.

FROSTBITE

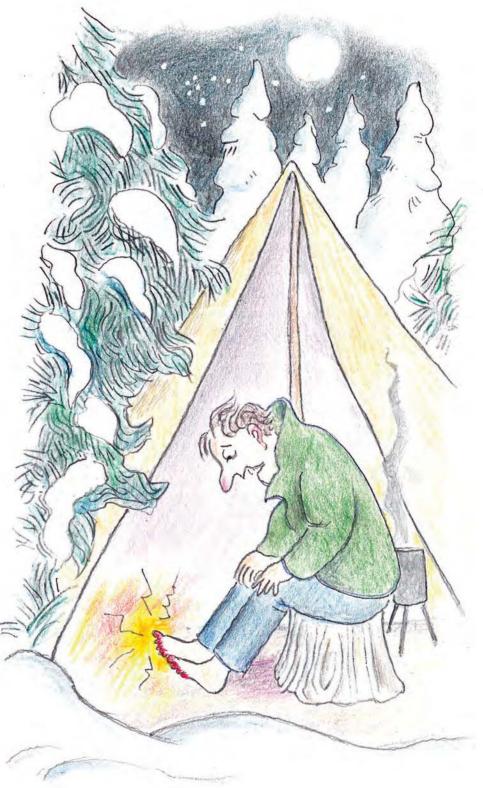


Illustration by Jim M'Guinness

Dr. Savishinsky is the Charles A. Dana Professor Emeritus in the Social Sciences, Department of Anthropology, Gerontology Institute, Ithaca College. His E-mail address is savishin@hotmail.com.