

Dear Reader,

In 1940, the tallest human being ever documented, Robert Pershing Wadlow—known as the Alton Giant--died in Michigan at the age of 22. He stood eight feet, eleven inches tall, and at his heaviest weighed 491 pounds, his great size caused by hypertrophy of the pituitary gland. As one might expect of a giant living in 1930s America, Wadlow toured with the Ringling Brothers Circus, which brought him national fame, and thereafter worked promoting the International Shoe Company, which provided custom-made shoes free of charge for his size 37 feet.

Reading about Wadlow's short, remarkable life led me to a question I could not stop thinking about: what would happen if a giant appeared in 21st century America? I wanted to write a novel about this, and I turned this question over in my mind for years, but I could not figure out what the story might be or how I would tell it.

The answer came to me early one evening while I was fly-fishing for brown trout on the Mekan River in rural, central Wisconsin. As I waded a stretch of water that ran close to the county highway, I heard the clopping of a horse's hooves and the rattle of an Amish buggy approaching, and after it passed, my thoughts turned to a slightly more focused iteration of that initial question: what if a giant were born into the Amish community in this rural Wisconsin township? This premise introduced the novel's central tension, which pits our mainstream culture's veneration of individual fame, wealth, and material excess against Amish values of community, humility, and simplicity. I wrote the opening scene, a version of the current prologue, but I soon realized the story could not only be about the giant; it also had to be about the modest place where he was born, and the community of people, both Amish and "English," who raise him and tell his story—the veterinarian who delivers him; the Amish grandmother who takes him in; the sports bar owner who first spots his extraordinary athleticism; and the high school football coach who lures him away from the serenity of Amish life into the frenzy of American fame.

The novel is animated by other things I love as well—animals, both wild and domesticated; the beauty of the natural world; high school and college football; the pleasures of reading literature, which guides us out of our certainties; and, perhaps above all, the poetry of Emily Dickinson.

Weaving all these elements into the tapestry of this novel proved to be the richest experience of my writing life.

Ron Rindo