



Ordinary Wolves

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Seth Kantner draws on his Alaskan childhood experiences for *Ordinary Wolves*. In the novel, Cutuk and his siblings Jerry and Iris live in a sod igloo with their artist father, Abe Hawcly, in such a remote part of Alaska that it is a two-day dog sled ride to Takunak, the nearest village. What the children learn is a way of life that is quickly disappearing. They can skin wolverines, tan caribou hides, make birch snowshoes, and stitch mukluks (boots). Whatever is hunted is used completely; nothing is wasted. Even the moose intestines are saved for dog food. The family is as much a part of the land as the wolves. The natives in town, on the other hand, have adopted the more mainstream American culture of snowmobiles and jeans. But even so Cutuk feels inferior to the Eskimos, often flattening his nose to make himself look more like them and hating his pale skin.

Abe has instilled in him not only the knowledge needed to survive in this relentless wilderness but also, and more importantly, the feeling of oneness for the land and the animals. But as Cutuk reaches maturity, he leaves for Anchorage, feeling the need to understand the modern ways in order to be able to choose.

In a beautiful prose, Kantner writes of what he knows and of what few will ever know. In *Ordinary Wolves* the reader is introduced to a way of life that has been replaced by a consumer culture. Kantner knows that the cost for such goods is much higher than the dollars indicated by the price tag.

Review Sources

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