



Shopping for Porcupine

A Life in
Arctic Alaska

Seth Kantner

Throughout the book Kantner catalogs foods from the tundra (examples on pages 12,30 68,199). How do these food lists change from the beginning to the end of the book? What does this mean? What are the consequences of these changes?

In what ways is this a book of philosophy rather than a series of autobiographical essays? What do you learn about living in the modern world?

The Candy Store

Kantner and his brother asked three simple questions when it came to life: “Did something work? Was it good to eat? Does it hold a knot?” (page 4). Do these questions translate into life in a non-subsistence society? What would be the equivalent questions?

Does “scarcity was how we measured value” (page 7) ring true in Alaska today? How do we measure value now?

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On page 99 Kantner states that while the distance between Alvin’s and Kantner’s homes has shrunk, they have grown further apart. Why do you think this might be? Who is holding on to the old ways?

What does Kantner mean when he asks “How did the old Eskimos live before Hefty Bags?” (page 100). How does this question reflect on our current lives? In the urge to “become sustainable” and “lead a simpler life,” where do you stop?

Sharpshooter

On pages 104 and 105 Kantner shows from personal experience how cultural change and alcohol can be linked. Is this a valid explanation? Is it true outside of rural Alaska?

Flower of the Fringe

What does Kantner mean when he says “we (are) the children of changing times on a frontier falling apart” (page 131)? Why don’t newcomers to rural Alaska recognize the importance of the details of subsistence life?

Once Upon a Frontier

Kantner boldly tackles the complicated and controversial issue of subsistence. Why does he make a distinction between the ANCSA definition of subsistence and living off the land as a profession (page 158)? Why is current subsistence practice “pretending to be in the past” (page 164)?

These Happy Spruce

How does this essay show the many sides of climate change to the Inupiaq? For food sources? For survival? For cultural change?

Silver Strangers

Discuss the various details Kantner records that add up the “reality” of climate change in Kotzebue. How do those changes affect the social and economic structures of fishing?