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## **NEWS RELEASE**

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Sept. 12, 2006

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### **AUTHOR FOLLOWS TOUGH ROAD TO, FROM UM**

#### **MISSOULA –**

To nearly anyone, best-selling author, igloo builder, hunter, trapper and Alaskan, Seth Kantner's life is anything but ordinary.

Kantner's debut novel, "Ordinary Wolves", was met with rave reviews from publications such as the New York Times Book Review and Outside magazine when it hit the shelves in 2005.

That book was chosen for the first-year reading experience this fall at The University of Montana, said Associate Provost Arlene Walker-Andrews. The program encourages all first-year students to read the same book so they have one more thing in common as they begin college.

Kantner, a 1991 graduate of UM's School of Journalism, said that while his novel about a white boy growing up in the wilds of the Alaskan tundra is fictional, the arc of the story closely mirrors his own life.

"All the characters, all the scenes, it's all made up," he said. "They're not real people regardless of some people who try to find themselves."

But Kantner writes about a life of living off the land and sleeping in a sod igloo from

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experience, having been raised north of the Arctic Circle in a harsh landscape often romanticized in the lower 48.

“I wanted to write something that didn’t have all the natives as noble and the glaciers as beautiful,” he said. “It’s a land of extremes; the country is beautiful and the wildlife is amazing, but the social problems are depressing.”

After attending the University of Alaska at Fairbanks on and off for a few years, Kantner said a creative writing professor told him about UM.

“About the only thing I learned in the first two years of college and the only thing I remembered was the word ‘Missoula,’” he said.

Kantner said he came to UM intending to pursue creative writing, but one day walked across a courtyard to use a copy machine in the Journalism Building and got hooked.

“They just made you work, and they taught you the importance of every word being useful or not being there,” he said.

Useful advice as he constantly reworked and revised his book and searched for a publisher.

Kantner, who professes to be “fiercely, loyally unemployed,” still lives in northwest Alaska where he fishes, hunts, traps and now, for a change, is being asked to write essays and columns and fly to the mainland U.S. to speak.

“It’s kind of a strange thing to be a professional bum and then be making book tours all over the Lower 48,” he said. “I’ve gone through a metamorphosis here; I’ll probably go back through it to walking along the beach looking for scraps.”

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Kantner said that the success of his debut book has made him nervous for a sophomore effort, though he is working on another novel.

“It took me 12 years to write this one, and I thought it was the biggest piece of boring junk ever compiled,” he said.

Kantner has struggled with dyslexia his whole life, and writing, no matter the length of the piece, has always been a challenge, he said.

“I can’t spell, letters just pop around on the page,” he said.

“Ordinary Wolves” had been in the works for nine years before Kantner found Milkweed, a nonprofit publishing house in Minnesota. Once accepted, Kantner said the editing process went on for three long years with Milkweed.

“About the hardest thing I know how to do is write a sentence.”

Many of Kantner’s hard-come-by sentences underwent the humbling and occasionally brutal editing process with the publisher.

“One of my characters was dead for eight years, and I brought her back to life,” he said. “I had a strong case of ‘not wanting to make characters,’ so I just kill them off.”

Kantner said his worst experience with editors was with friends who wanted to have a look at the story and give some input.

“You give it over and you’re all naked and expectant,” he said. “After a year he sent it back with a scrap of paper that said, ‘If there’s a story here, I can’t find it.’”

But plenty of people around the country, and perhaps more importantly, around Kantner’s “country” found the story and liked what they saw.

Kantner said an old Inupiaq man came up to him shortly after the book’s publication



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and paid him a short but weighty compliment in the terse, brief manner of his people, whose version of English often confuses b's and p's.

“Good pook,” he told Kantner. “Real good pook.”

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