

Ginger, I think you got a lot more out of ~~stop~~ reading the book than you would have simply watching the movie. I enjoyed observing how Chris's story affected you. I just hope it doesn't inspire you to do anything too crazy!

Virginia McBride

Into the Wild: Pages 1-50

The prospects of leaving my home to fend for and find myself are quite appealing.

I feel like I could emerge from that experience victorious and alive. But even if I didn't survive, if I died on some arctic cliff frozen and alone I don't think I would mind. Chris McCandless didn't mind too much either. "It is experiences, the memories, the great triumphant joy of living to the fullest extent in which real meaning is found." (pg. 37).

There is a certain point where one can only tolerate so much garbage from co-workers, peers, the system, and society that I can easily see the appeal in McCandless' Alaskan frontier expedition.

So far in the book we know McCandless is a smart competent kid and I can easily see how dealing with a broken system, unchangeable to someone of his age and reputation would drive him insane; I know I am often displaced by my frustration surrounding broken and seemingly unchangeable systems (people too for that fact).

Without the means to change the situation he was in he did the obvious: he changed his situation entirely. Rather than going to law school as everyone expected from his McCandless donated the remainder of his savings to charity, destroyed his social security card and invented a new life for himself under the name Alexander Supertramp. By creating this new life he was able to control almost every aspect and basically lived life as if it were a fantasy.

There is a certain point where ones faith in humanity and ignorance to the fact that things really can be as broken as they seem leaves hundreds with the only option to yield results is to change ones self. For me there is always a point where I am left feeling

yeah - I liked your point from you insisted every ~~new~~ about rather than learn how to navigate these systems. He opted out of the system entirely.

like the only resolve is to be a less conscious young person, for McCandless one can assume he needed to remove himself from society to explore what it was (literally) built on and really appreciate what was going on around him.

For Chris McCandless there was only one retreat from “the man”, nature, but what McCandless didn’t know was that it would wind up being a retreat from which he wouldn’t return. Unfortunately his brilliant mind, rich with the experiences he put himself through, tempered to the way things work, the way things flow in their most natural state was lost, frozen and destroyed by arctic winds, snow, and dependency on food. There wasn’t really a way for him to beat the system there, the system is living and with death as the only other option it is clear why the situation turned out the way it did.

Though some call McCandless arrogant to think he could beat “the natural system” he wasn’t out to beat it; he was out to master it and he almost did. “But then by fantastic chance {Alex} comes upon some Mexican duck hunters who can speak English. He tells them his story and his quest for the sea. They say there is no outlet to the sea. But among them agrees to tow Alex back to his basecamp [behind a small motor skiff], and drive him and the canoe [in the bed of a pickup truck] to the ocean. It is a miracle.” (pg. 35). Dependent on nothing yet benefiting from the kindness of others, I leave page 50 wishing for things to turn out well yet knowing that our hero is dead to begin with. Hoping for his success and knowing it can not be achieved. Convinced that he will walk out of the woods onto an Alaskan highway and begin his travel home all the while knowing that happy endings don’t always come true and in this case won’t.

Into the Wild: Pages 50-100 ✓

Of all the people Alex is hitchhiking with my favorite was defiantly Mr. Franz because of the leatherworking story. In summation Mr. Franz is a leatherworker and as Chris is traveling with him he teaches Chris a thing or two about the craft. Chris winds up making a belt depicting the story of his travels thus far. I really like this belt and think I will do something similar for my creative project. One thing that really stuck out to me about the belt was how he depicted the name change he went through. On one side of the belt the initials C.J.M. (Christopher Johnson McCandless) are above a skull and cross bones which leads to pictures of the flash flood a hitchhiker's thumb and others ending with the name Alexander Supertramp. To me, this symbolizes the journey he is taking to become Alex and that all these experiences are what makes him Alex after the death of Chris. In an odd way like he isn't really sure who Alex is but that the experiences he is having on his journey are Alex or at least making Alex real. One thing he does talk about though is about why he is working so hard to create this Alex charter. "So many people live within unhappy circumstances and yet will not take the initiative to change their situation because they are conditioned to a life of security, conformity, and conservatism, all which may appear to give one peace of mind, but in reality nothing is more damaging to the adventurous spirit within a man than a secure future" (pg 56) ✓

When I think about what it means for Chris to have changed his name so defiantly in his mind that he adopts it externally as well, I feel a connection to the way I lead my life and the names I go by. My real name is Virginia McBride but not many people know that; most people know me by Ginger. In fact for the longest time I would sign my name just Ginger (without the McBride) as an act of disconnecting myself from my family. I

also would at time deny the fact that my name was Virginia in opposition to my father as it is his aunt I am named after and he who insisted that it became the name of his first born as well.

The more I read into this book the more I feel connected to Chris and understand why he did what he did. As we go into November the prospects of college and choosing a future **now** does not appeal to me and the fact that this is what society expects from me is upsetting as I try to wrap my mind around the idea. At times I wish I could just go into central California and work as a migrant farm worker, putting in long hours of demanding labor and in the end getting paid barely enough to sustain my existence. I also want to hitchhike to Alaska and follow in McCandless' path. I was seriously considering this for a while until reading on the internet during some extra research that the bus has disappeared and is being considered stolen by the authorities.

I also feel more connected to McCandless as the book goes further into his family life. I am not a fan of my family though I don't mind being related to them but sharing a home with seven people has its way of creating conflict even if you love the people you are sharing the space with. There is also a certain amount of contention that comes from being a freethinker yet subordinate to ones parents. "Since they won't ever take me seriously, for a few months after graduation I'm going to let them think that I am "coming around to see their side of things" that our relationship is stabilizing. And then once time is right with one abrupt, swift action I'm going to knock them out of my life... I'll be through with them once and for all, forever." (pg 64) ✓

Into the Wild: Pages 100-150 ✓

Starting the chapter entitled “Chesapeake Bay” I am finding that this book is more than just what happened to McCandless on the road and in Alaska, it is also providing the history of Chris in relation to his family and his family’s reaction to the news of Chris’ death. Although at times the family’s point of view can be boring and seem irrelevant there are also some points we learn about Chris that help readers understand him as a more rounded character. On page 108, we learn that Chris is not the only odd ball in the family tree. “{Chris’ mother’s} dad didn’t quite fit into society. In many ways he and ✓ Chris were a lot alike.” It is reassuring to find out in this passage that at least his parents acknowledge and aware of his uniqueness of their son; sometimes the things Chris has to say about them makes it feel like his parents didn’t even know him.

We also learn in this section that Chris had an easy time mastering new activities, a talent his parents attribute to his over confidence which has lead me to wonder: If Chris was confident he could survive in the Alaskan frontier would he have attempted it anyway? I know I have mentioned it in my other responses but I still am finding bits and pieces of myself in Chris and Alexander McCandless. I defiantly know that I would not be detoured on making the trip to Alaska even if I thought I might not be able to complete my goal. This attitude and reaction has about a 70%/30% split for failure vs. success (respectively) when it comes to things I really doubt I can achieve. But why am I than not an example of failed attempts you may ask? One thing I have learned about my self and suspect would be true about Chris as well is that I have found “adult allies” who are around me and are able to aid me when I find myself in situations I know I can not handle.

✓

“If this adventure proves fatal and you don’t ever hear from me again I want you to know you’re a great man. I now walk into the wild.” (pg 134). It is obvious that McCandless walked into nature’s wild (if that makes any sense to any one out there besides myself), but I think his adventure also forced him to explore the wilds of the mind. I think McCandless was searching for something more than facts, more than the success and potential fame that would come from having accomplished what he set out to do, I think he needed to learn; learn about himself and the way he fits into the bigger scheme of things. As if he needed to find himself in relation to the world and ultimately leading to how he fits into society.

When it comes for the search of self, McCandless went on the wildest search he could; I can not imagine wilder search. Roaming the United States and eventually taking off to Alaska, some people call Chris crazy but at a certain point I think he was desperate. Desperate to know things he couldn’t learn in law school or anywhere else with in the cities of our society. Everything Chris learned he learned from people and from nature not a computer, not from an 8-5 job and not from droning from home to office and back again like a broken record playing three notes of a five minute song. McCandless needed to hear the whole song and he needed to understand why the composer wrote the parts the way they did. McCandless needed to know why the director had the flutes play their melody the way they were and he needed to know why he was listening to the record in the first place.

Into the Wild: Pages 150-200

The cover of the book reads “In April 1992 a young man from a well-to-do family hitchhiked to Alaska and walked alone into the wilderness north of Mt. McKinley. His name was Christopher Johnson McCandless. He had given \$25,000 in savings to charity, abandoned his car and most of his possessions, burned all the cash in his wallet, and invented a new life for himself. Four months later, his decomposed body was found by a moose hunter...” After completing this book going back and reading the cover makes the story sound so inspirational and put plainly nice. In reality, even when Alex completely supported his life wasn't easy and plagued by his own thoughts his only option was to understand them.

This book gets especially deep as it covers Chris' death. After having learned so much and preparing to emerge from the woods a clean shaven young adult with a new outlook on the world, it is painful to read about the inability of Alexander to get back across the river (formerly knee deep now a rushing river chest deep in shallow sections) and even more painful to read the author's findings about the ski lift type of vehicle less than a mile from where Alex was stranded. If Alex had headed down the river as opposed to upstream on his re-con mission he would have found that the box-suspended-by-cable set up although disabled to some extent had been made accessible from the side of the river Alex was on to prevent the type of misfortune Alex found himself in.

Although I've enjoyed the insights the author of this book has provided, I find the additions to be frustrating more than anything else. I am frustrated that this Jon Krakauer went through a similar (though less extreme) phase of risk taking and adventurousness Supertramp experienced but wound up **surviving**. From what Krakauer wrote, it feels

like he is only trying to climb Devil's Thumb because he was done contributing to society for a while. On top of that I cannot believe this guy brought a victory blunt along and after feeling like he couldn't go on, smoked it in his tent which proceeded to catch on fire after having been exposed to the flame. I am also frustrated that an entire chapter of this book was dedicated to explaining the other Alaskan mountain climbers' experiences (especially as it was right in the middle of Supertramp's story) and think it was a poor section to include on his part.

On page 168 it is recorded that in the back of the book he was using as a journal he wrote, "I am reborn. This is my dawn. Real life has just begun." Although McCandless didn't live much longer than after having written that, this book allows his memory and spirit of adventure to live on. It allows me and any other readers to learn of his tale, his life and his unique thought process. ✓

The book also speculates that after two months in the snow, perhaps McCandless was ready to go home. I know there is no way I am going to school closer than 6 hours away next year but I do know that there will be a point where despite all my dislike for this place now I will want to come back and if not to be with my family at least to be with my school (ACLC). Learning is an intimate process and no matter how you wind up learning, for me through ACLC and for McCandless through his experience in nature a bond is always formed and I think that is the ultimate lesson of the book. When we are born we all have something inside of us that compels us to learn, the part that is unique to each person are what you study and how you study it and sometimes your style might be extreme and cost you your life but there's a reason McCandless died with a smile on his face; he was satisfied with his experiences and what he had learned from them.