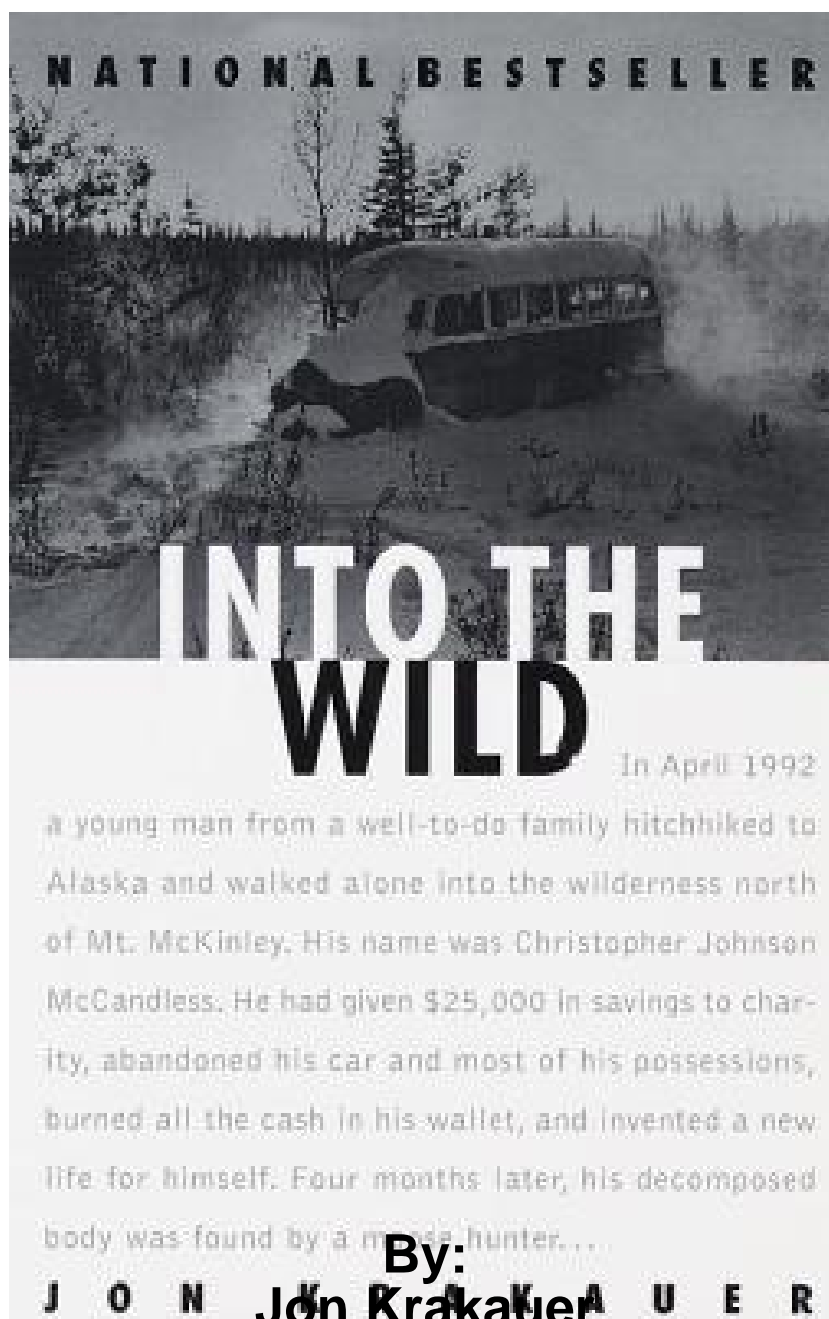


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What people Say:

Melinda

This book is a wonderful cautionary tale. I will probably read it again with my daughter when she is old enough to discuss it. Unfortunately, I'm afraid the reason most people will read the book and see the new upcoming movie, is for a different reason. Chris McCandless (in the book, and from what I understand in the movie), is a hero and courageous for flying in the face of everything he grew up with to find a better way. A young man unhappy with the materialism, hunger, and waste in the world;

This book is a wonderful cautionary tale. I will probably read it again with my daughter when she is old enough to discuss it. Unfortunately, I'm afraid the reason most people will read the book and see the new upcoming movie, is for a different reason. Chris McCandless (in the book, and from what I understand in the movie), is a hero and courageous for flying in the face of everything he grew up with to find a better way. A young man unhappy with the materialism, hunger, and waste in the world; angry with his father for not being a perfect father to him; intellectually superior, a fantastic athlete in top condition... and yet a young man who died because of his own decisions and his own actions. He cut off ties to his family, hitchhiked and worked his way to Alaska, headed "into the wild" in April 1992, and was found dead in August 1992 most probably from starvation. How wonderful to "fight against the odds" and "ask real questions". Unfortunately, Chris didn't really fight against any odds, he took the easy way out by cutting off real relationships. Chris may have asked real questions, but he denied real people the opportunity to answer them in any way, because he had already decided what was "the right way". This is not heroic. It is immaturity. It is tragic and sad, yes, but not heroic or courageous.

After reading the book, I think Chris died because he was foolish. Intellectually bright, yes. Athletically gifted, yes. But he had no wisdom. Wisdom has been defined as "skill in living", and wisdom is not always bestowed on the young and the healthy and the intellectually smart. The opposite of wisdom is foolishness. His anger and questioning drove him not to wisdom, but to self-reliance and an overweening arrogance in his own ability to "get through it". Well, we see the result of those decisions and those attitudes.... to quote Darwin, Chris is an example of how "survival of the fittest" applies. Chris was not "fit", therefore he did not "survive". But why wasn't he fit? He was smart and young and gifted in many ways, but he chose to abandon relationships and abandon those who loved him and create himself anew with no relationships and no ties. He walked away from people who loved him, made friends with people who came to love him, and walked away from all of that to find his answers "in the wild" on his own. The way away from love and relationship leads not to life, but indeed to death. And death is what Chris got.

The book quotes Chris' mother as saying, "I haven't prayed since we lost him." (pg. 202) An older man who befriended Chris, Ronald Franz, also says, "When Alex left for Alaska, I prayed. I asked God to keep his finger on the shoulder of that one; I told him that boy was special. But he let Alex

die. So on December 26, when I learned what had happened, I renounced the Lord. I withdrew my church membership and became an atheist. I decided I couldn't believe in a God who would let something that terrible happen to a boy like Alex." (pg. 60) But God didn't do anything to Chris, except let him do as he wanted? If Chris sought real answers to his hard questions, God is there, and God can help, but you have to know you need help and submit to someone wiser than you. Chris McCandless never submitted willingly to anyone, and he certainly never admitted anyone else had teaching or wisdom for him. He was smarter than everyone else, better able to see the truth than anyone else. So the heritage Chris McCandless left is one that drives his mother to stop praying, and converts an old man to atheism. Is this the heritage anyone would want?

So read this book, but read it with questions in mind. Why are we lauding a young man as a hero who was actually a foolish man? What kind of society are we in where real courage and real heroism are somehow playing 2nd fiddle to selfishness and arrogance? When are you so intellectually intelligent that you become stupid? Is there any time when foolish decisions could be called "courageous"? In a search for truth and what really matters in life, is it acceptable to think nothing of hurting those people who are most vulnerable to you? When you die, will the way you lived your life cause others to abandon their faith or grow in their faith? Is it ever courageous to be selfish and think only of yourself? Is it harder to walk away from a relationship, or to stay in a relationship and work on making it better? Would you ever teach anyone else that the way to have real relationships is to limit yourself only to those people who cannot ever hurt you?

Real courage, real heroism comes when you love others and you serve others. Real courage has nothing selfish in it. Fathers and husbands who remain with their families and provide for them, even though they would rather have a mid-life crisis and leave it all, they are courageous and heroic. They remain, they work, they don't father or husband perfectly, but they remain in difficult relationships. It is courageous to stay in the hard parts of life, and try. Mothers and wives who sacrifice and serve again and again and again without books being written about them, without thanks, but who continue to love and give of themselves to others. That is courageous. It is hard to stay in messy relationships. It is easy to leave. It is courageous to stay and do hard things. It is easy to leave and do what you want.

So, let's read this book, but read it as a cautionary tale. This is what happens when you seemingly 'have it all', but have not love. When you die, will people be driven to become atheists? Will people stop praying when you are dead? Or will you live a life of wisdom and love? Will you leave behind you a heritage of godly love and service? Will people pray more because of the example you left them? Will they be more loving, better mothers or fathers or sisters or brothers? Or will they become angry and arrogant and foolishness? Yes, this is a good book to read. But let's read it for the right reasons and with the right questions.

[NOTE: In the book, and in the movie, the author proposes that Chris ate some poison berries which caused his death. But tests have been made around the area, and plants that would have been available to Chris were tested, and no toxic berries or plants have been found. The truth is probably that he starved. Too few calories coming in, high expenditure of calories for hunting and keeping warm resulted eventually in such a calorie deficit that he died.]

Some good articles I found on Chris McCandless include:

Alaskan Park Ranger Peter Christian wrote: "I am exposed continually to what I will call the "McCandless Phenomenon." People, nearly always young men, come to Alaska to challenge themselves against an unforgiving wilderness landscape where convenience of access and possibility of rescue are practically nonexistent. When you consider McCandless from my perspective, you quickly see that what he did wasn't even particularly daring, just stupid, tragic, and inconsiderate. First off, he spent very little time learning how to actually live in the wild. He arrived at the Stampede Trail without even a map of the area. If he had had a good map he could have walked out of his predicament. Essentially, Chris McCandless committed suicide. Some may argue that this is what he wanted all along, given his troubled past

Dixie Diamond

My grandfather--not an Alaskan but an experienced outdoorsman--would have tied this kid to a tree and let the bears play tetherball with him.

A small part of me appreciates the effort Krakauer put into researching this book. A much bigger part of me is completely disgusted both with McCandless himself and with Krakauer's mindless adoration of him. Krakauer pulls out all the stops to make McCandless look like a phenomenon, and seems to agree with McCandless that the world should have handed itself

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Krakauer tries half-heartedly to disguise his fascination but his admissions that McCandless was a clueless young hothead sound insincere; he has to say it to sound credible to his readers, who are less smitten. Krakauer makes an apt comparison between himself as an idealistic and foolhardy young man, and McCandless, and then dismisses himself because "he didn't have [McCandless']

intellect". This sounds utterly bogus after all we have been told about McCandless' foolish mistakes, and the obvious fact that Krakauer is not stupid. Two chapters that could have provided some insight into his hero are wasted because Krakauer sounds like a religious fanatic, with McCandless as his unknowable God and Krakauer as the I'm-not-worthy follower.

McCandless' (and Everett Ruess') overconfidence speaks to a fascination with nature but not a respect for it. Courage is not the same as not knowing when we ought to have a healthy degree of fear. Instead, McCandless arrogantly drives his car into the habitat of an endangered species of poppy. He butchers a moose, wasting the life of a beautiful and well-adapted animal because he could not be bothered to learn ahead of time how to preserve it.

This was not a tragedy; this was inevitable. I don't believe he was schizophrenic or suicidal. Bipolar or ADD, maybe. His own friends readily admitted that he had a lot of enthusiasm but little common sense and didn't know much outside of academia. There are so many glaring outdoorsmanship errors made in the first two chapter that even I was cringing.

I write this with full admission that I am not much of an outdoorsperson. However, I don't believe for a minute that he lasted longer than most of us would have, or that "at least he tried it", as so many of his fans insist. I wouldn't try it, not because I'm scared, but because I can tell from here that ten pounds of rice and no preparation is a recipe for failure. I don't need to try it, and if I did, I'd want to live to get something out of it. Lots of other people have gone into the wilderness and come out just fine because they knew the magnitude of their own insignificance and planned ahead.

I'm not jealous of his alleged brilliance, either. I was accepted to Emory. And the University of Chicago. And a couple of other amply respected schools. Lots of people are. Big deal.

He had money to pay his college tuition; the rest of us graduated and went to work to pay off our loans. He also had the gall to complain about his parents' offers to help him out, which smacks of a kid given so much that he doesn't know how fortunate he is.

Matt

I live a life, I suspect, that is much like yours. Wake up, go to work, come home, eat dinner, go to bed. At the end of this weekly desert, there might be a drink or ten to celebrate the victory over another five days of soul-crushing drudgery.

I am a desk jockey. A paper pusher. I mean that literally; I sit in my office, and when people peer inside, they will see me moving a sheet of paper from one side to the other. It looks, to the untrained eye, like valuable labor.

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When I get the chance, though, I head to the mountains, to the wild. I love the away-ness of these trips. At the risk of sounding absurdly curmudgeonly, I like getting away from the crush of humanity (and I'm sure the crush of humanity appreciates my temporary absence).

There was at time when my friends and I would head out west every summer. We picked a destination (isolated, challenging), packed the car, and plunged into the wilderness. We undertook silly risks, because we were younger and we laughed at consequences, or at the possibility that there were consequences. Once, a little later on, we gathered around a campfire, four of us, and swore - like characters from a young adult novel - that we'd always do this: that we'd always head out to the mountains together.

Then we got older. My friends married, they started having kids, and the mountains became a memory, a slideshow of pictures that showed up on the screen savers of our computers. Friends with whom I'd jumped off cliffs, slid down glaciers, and climbed rocks matured overnight into sober professionals, husbands, and fathers. It was remarkable how age engendered caution, and squelched the desire for adventure.

That was my mindset when I picked up

.

Nadine

Overall, I was pretty disappointed with this book. The genesis of the book was an in-depth magazine article, and I suspect that the article was superb. But I just don't think there's enough here to warrant an entire book. As evidence, I point to several lengthy chapters that have nothing to do with the underlying story--they discuss other people who have gone "into the wild" and, surprisingly, Krakauer includes a whole chapter about himself.

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My other problem is that I found myself unable to identify or empathize with the central character here. I think that Chris McCandless was not much more than a privileged, entitled, selfish, and undeniably intelligent person who threw everything away and nearly destroyed his family for reasons that weren't any clearer by the end of the book than they were at the beginning. I worried far more about his parents and his sister, who he called his "best friend," than I did about him.

I ended up "finishing" the book by skimming the last 1/3, or maybe even the last 1/2. I almost gave this only 1 star but decided to go with 2 because I want to give Krakauer the benefit of the doubt--it's a well-written book, I just don't think it needed to be written at all.

Traci

I love Jon Krakauer. I didn't find one single thing about the Alex McCandless even remotely interesting. He came across as a spoiled brat with no concept of reality - basically because of his priveleged upbringing. But somehow, he blamed his parents for that void of myopic self absorption.

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I live in Alaska and I've lived in Idaho and Colorado and Oregon . . . basically AROUND people who

love the great outdoors. I am more comfortable in a heated coffee shop **READING** about the great outdoors. Still, I know that heading into any forest - particularly one at that latitude and altitude in pursuit of adventure with (a) no food, (b) no gear, (c) no plan and (d) no backup plan is nothing short of delusional or maybe just stupid.

I absolutely adore Jon Krakauer's attempts to explain Alex's possible motives and angst. I get that Krakauer identifies with some of what gnawed at Alex . . . that discontent . . . that feeling that life can't possibly be this pointless . . . etc. I wonder about those things with fairly consistent frequency. I suppose I have my own means of stamping those feelings out (alternating burst of extreme carbohydrate consumption and running or spinning; work and volunteerism). Still, the fact that Alex died of exposure in an abandoned bus in Denali National Park is less poignant than poetic - justice, that is. Darwinism, if you want to be cruel.

(Cringe) That sounded really awful, didn't it? But Krakauer carefully paints a picture of a young man completely disillusioned with the life that his parents provided for him, the future they groomed him for. A life easier, better than theirs. He points to his parents' mistakes and flaws as lightning rods for Alex's rejection of them and his pursuit of deeper understanding.

What a luxury. One that we all pursue at some point in our lives and if we have any sense, grow out of. I was constantly irritated with Alex for hitching, homelessness, biting every hand that tried to feed him. His lonely, desperate death not at all surprising and not terribly sad, either . . . except for what it put his family through.

I had no interest in seeing the movie. I saw trailer images of a young man looking off into the wilderness with depth and intensity and that is **NOT** the Alex McCandless I got to know in the book. If Sean Penn managed to paint a more enlightened image of Alex, then he deviated from the book quite a bit.