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Posted on 05 February 2017 By Jon Krakauer

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 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

Into the Wild Jon Krakauer's classic is, to put it mildly, a polarizing book. Based on the people I've surveyed, I've found that you either love it or you hate it, and whether you love it or hate it will be determined by what you think about Christopher McCandless, the young man at the center of *Into the Wild*. You will be taken in by Chris's literate, philosophical, iconoclastic, boundary pushing vagabondism. Or you will be sickened by his selfishness, his self pity, and the way he left a shattered family in his wake. Either way, you will have a vivid response.

Upon graduating from Emory University, and instead of going on to law school which was my choice, McCandless gave away 25,000 to charity and began his life as a tramp or hobo, as they sometimes like to be called. I was in sixth grade when McCandless walked into the Alaskan wilderness and never returned. He was 24.

The power of *Into the Wild* is directly attributable to Krakauer's empathy for his subject. Krakauer is a solid adventure writer, but he's not a prose stylist. Rather, he uses his own life experiences to connect with Chris on a very intimate, personal level. He does not attempt any faux objectivity that is often the hallmark of serious serious journalism. Instead, Krakauer admits, straight up, that he saw his younger self in Chris, with the exception that Krakauer survived his youth, while Chris did not. For instance, there is an autobiographical section in *Into the Wild* where Krakauer tells his story about climbing the Devil's Thumb. This could easily have been a self serving digression, but Krakauer uses that experience, and the vividness of his memory, to explore the the compulsions that drove Chris McCandless to follow his unique path to his destiny. I think Chris, in his own way, was a towering figure. He was the person I would like to be, if I had guts and less excuses. He was a smart kid, a college grad, who came from money. His parents were messed up, but really, whose parents aren't? After college, instead of going to law school don't go to law school, by the way, he gave away 25,000, burned his credit cards, and set out to see the west. Whatever else you call him, you can't call him a poser. Like everyone, he had his share of dreams and demons, and he set out to follow his dreams and fight his demons. There's something to be said for what he put his parent through. Still, the world forces us to be our own person. He went forward the best way he knew how, defining himself along the way. The tragedy, of course, is that

the lessons he learned about the value of friends and family he learned too late I don't really need to defend Chris Krakauer does that He is unabashedly in his corner, defending his choices, his skills, his desire to go alone to the far places, like John Muir before him Chris McCandless was himself, fully and completely, which is saying a lot, in this day and age Or any day and age He was part adventurer, part philosopher, and part monk the monk part fascinates Krakauer, who spends a lot of time wondering whether Chris died a virgin I suppose a brief note on the movie, directed by Sean Penn, is in order While I found it poetic and inspiring, the movie focuses too much on Chris's effect on the various people he meets on his journeys In a way, Chris becomes some kind of wandering apostle, healing and helping those he meets along his path, before he dies a martyr's death in Alaska, a vision from a Don Maclean song the world was never meant for one as beautiful as you The book, on the other hand, keeps Chris firmly grounded as a human being Krakauer admires Chris, to be sure, but he does not neglect the warts However, Krakauer sharply dismisses those armchair psychiatrists who want to diagnose Chris with a mental disorder I'm glad he does I think it's saying something about the conformity of our society that anyone who bucks the trend he gave up law school is called mad In the end, Chris was one of those rare people who wanted to know the world intimately, and in the process of discovering those secrets, was killed by that same world Maybe there was something quixotic or foolish in his quest maybe he should have taken a job, taken a wife, found a safe desk behind which to grow old Or maybe there is something foolish in us, to believe that we can outlive the world with our caution. Librarian's Note An Alternate Cover Edition Can Be Found Here In April, , 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 , 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, A Party Of Moose Hunters Found His Decomposed Body How McCandless Came To Die Is The Unforgettable Story Of Into The Wild Immediately After Graduating From College In , McCandless Had Roamed Through The West And Southwest On A Vision Quest Like

Those Made By His Heroes Jack London And John Muir In The Mojave Desert He Abandoned His Car, Stripped It Of Its License Plates, And Burned All Of His Cash He Would Give Himself A New Name, Alexander Supertramp, And, Unencumbered By Money And Belongings, He Would Be Free To Wallow In The Raw, Unfiltered Experiences That Nature Presented Craving A Blank Spot On The Map, McCandless Simply Threw Away The Maps Leaving Behind His Desperate Parents And Sister, He Vanished Into The Wild 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 to him on a silver platter because he was just so darned special We're told he was brilliant, independent, funny, kind, musical, athletic, visionary, talented Can you see the halo Unfortunately, the impression that comes across is of a snotty adolescent who has never seriously thought of anyone but himself and is used to getting by on charm and flippancy rather than making good use of his considerable gifts and I do not doubt that he was gifted The conflicting aspects of his personality don't sound quirky they sound devious and self-serving. Krakauer tries halfheartedly 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 chapters 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.¹ His bourgeois status made his adventure possible in the first place. 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. Further, living with nothing by choice is very different from living with nothing because you have no alternative. Though I'm sure he would have denied it, McCandless had the option of going back to his affluent life if he had wanted to, or if he had had to in an emergency. Maybe it would have knocked his self-image for a loop, but he would have been sheltered, fed, and nursed back to health. A lot of people live in poverty without that safety net.² Now is not the time to be squeamish about killing animals. Hint: There are no vegetarian Aleuts. This guy was a history and anthropology major. I learned in anthro that you can eat plants and lean protein until you burst and still starve to death if you aren't getting enough calories. It's very difficult to feed yourself if you

re alone and don't have a lot of practice at it.³ If he got this idea from Thoreau and London, he wasn't reading very carefully. McCandless should have read less Thoreau and Donner Party London's Alaskan experience was during the Klondike Gold Rush when he had plenty of help from others. Thoreau lived in a cabin on the edge of town, a mile and a half from the family home. He was not in the wilderness. Further, Thoreau's civil disobedience was a protest against the Mexican War and slavery, not a petty defiance of matters of public safety such as mandatory car insurance. McCandless was a rebel without a cause.⁴ Book smart can't save you now. Success only learning does not work. Krakauer goes into raptures about McCandless' education and intelligence to demonstrate the supposed tragedy of his loss. Nice brain gymnastics, but apples to oranges when what you need is practical knowledge. This guy was idolized by some of my college classmates, most of whom were sheltered, relatively wealthy urbanites. They had the same vague and pathetic need for real experiences and arrogant expectation of success that comes from never having failed at anything in their lives.⁵ For most of his trip, McCandless was neither independent or self-reliant. He got lost in Mexico; it would have been self-reliant to get a map and take charge of his own navigation. He didn't eat for days until somebody felt sorry for him and fed him. Once he was in a situation where there was nobody to step in for him, he died. In this respect, I disagree with Krakauer that McCandless was any different from Carl McCunn. Even at that point, he left a note on the door of the bus begging for rescue. The best and most independent outdoorsmen spend years learning. Just because you were a superstar student and athlete doesn't mean you get to skip all the hard work. I've no doubt that McCandless was smart, but he was mind-bogglingly ignorant and inexperienced.⁶ Why are these self-discovery escapades always so self-centered? How about joining the Peace Corps. Teaching in inner-city schools. Working in healthcare in a remote South Asian village. If you're so disgusted with society, why don't you do something to improve it rather than keeping all the enlightenment for yourself?⁷ Nature is not your babysitter. Nature doesn't care if you live or die. It's survival of the fittest, and humans, compared to most animals, are slow, weak, poorly armed, poorly insulated, have no stamina, have

poor senses of smell, eyesight, and hearing and are ill adapted to go without clean water and food for any length of time We are clearly meant to live in groups and use tools This guy didn't even bring an ax.⁸ He was already controlled and tainted by society or else he would not have worked so hard to avoid it His anti society and anti materialism were as controlling of him as is the materialism of those who think they can find themselves by buying the right clothes or drug habit or SUV.⁹ Unprepared people who set out on ill planned adventures and need to be rescued are jackasses A lot of other people better prepared, better trained, and sensible people such as park service, volunteers, and EMT's end up spending a lot of time and money, and risking their own necks, to save them McCandless spared everyone that trouble, but I'm sure there's a whole line of wannabes lined up to try it I hope they have to pay back every penny spent on their rescues. And Truth The bad news is that Truth is relative It doesn't exist in a vacuum What a waste. okay lets address the elephant on goodreads, which is the common theme of essentially bashing Chris McCandless in reviews i have seen so many ranting about how irresponsible and selfish and arrogant and unprepared he was and i mean, they're not wrong, but that honestly has nothing to do with the book what i love most about this is how objective Krakauer is he neither praises nor critiques McCandless, but presents the facts regarding an unfortunate event in a very interesting and fascinating way which leads me to believe that many people did not understand the nature of this book. yes, McCandless thought so highly of himself that he literally went out into the Alaskan wilderness, equipped with only a plant guide, and felt confident that he could survive yes, he ignored the number one rule of Boy Scouts to be prepared yes, he only thought about how his actions affected himself but man, the manner in which Krakauer tells Chris' story is so gripping that i couldn't help but get invested in everything that happened this book reads like a true crime story, but where the only crime committed was a serious lack of judgement by a very misguided individual so it seems massively unfair to penalise the book itself because of disagreeing with what a young man did but hey, to each their own 4 stars 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. 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 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. 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 privileged upbringing. But somehow, he blamed his parents for that void of myopic self-absorption. I live in Alaska and I've lived in Idaho and Colorado and Oregon basically AROUND people who love the great outdoors. I am 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 bursts 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 hitchhiking, 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 an enlightened image of Alex, then he deviated from the book quite a bit. In 1992, roughly around the same time Chris McCandless was living out his final days in the Alaskan wilderness, I would have been enjoying the summer holidays before embarking on my final year at school, contemplating the big wide world and what I was going to do with the rest of my life. It wasn't until watching Sean Penn's film in 2008 I would learn of Chris's story, a story that moved me, immensely. I always presumed Jon Krakauer's book would be some huge epic, but was surprised on finding out it's a little over 200 pages. I simply had to read it, just don't know why it took me so long. It's going to be difficult to review this without making my own thoughts on Chris known first. Although it isn't as straightforward as this, taking everything into consideration, if there is to be a camp criticism and a camp McCandless, then I firmly sit with McCandless. He was an awe-inspiring bright young man, who simply broke free from the establishment to follow his own path, a path, going by both book and film that was simply stunning. I know there are people that criticized his adventure as reckless, stupid, dangerous and well unequipped for the treacherous landscape of wild Alaska, and were even angry with him, that he deserved what was coming to him, disrespecting nature. Let's not forget something, he probably died a slow agonizing death that you wouldn't wish on anybody, why the anger from people who didn't even know him? It was nobody else's business what Chris chose to undertake. As the old saying goes, it's a free country. And he was just that, free. I do feel for his family of course, I can't begin to imagine the pain and anguish they would have had to endure, and the

fact he didn't try to contact his sister Karine, who he was dearly close to, was strange. I just hope his family came to eventually realize that the two years Chris spent on the road he would have been immensely happy. That's got to count for something. Had he gone on to work, no doubt well paid work, you get the impression he just wouldn't want to be there. Had Chris been some wacko or mentally incapacitated person I would have taken sympathy over his story, but he wasn't, he was highly intelligent and knew exactly what he was doing. That's why, although he came to a sad end, I am still on the whole, happy for the guy. The strongest parts of the book for me are actually not the last months in Alaska which had to be recreated based on Chris' diary and the evidence found at the site of his death, but the memories of people whom Chris had met on his travels, with whom he had caught rides, worked and stayed, struck up friendships. I was especially moved by the generosity of strangers and by Chris's run-in with 81-year-old Ron Franz, whom he managed to convince to give up the monotonous life and take up adventure. These two years of traveling had no boundaries, no obligations, no limitations, no expectations. Just exploring the land, exploring life, and himself. Jon Krakauer also included memories from his own youth, trying to draw comparisons with Chris, along with some other historical journeys similar to what McCandless embarked on. Chris was a keen reader, and used literature as a way to inspire him on the road, there were quotes from the likes of Leo Tolstoy, Jack London, Henry David Thoreau and Wallace Stegner that he noted down in his diary, these play an important role for any outsider trying to understand just who Chris was. The book works wonders on different levels, it deals with non-fiction in a dramatic storytelling way, like an adventure novel, but also stays as close as possible to the facts and truths recovered from Chris's diary. I didn't think his epic story could be condensed down to 200 pages, but it works, only concentrating on the things that truly matter. I was moved to the core. Not many books have had the opportunity to do this to me. One shouldn't judge a life by its end or its duration, but by its content. Chris may have died young, but his life certainly was a fulfilling one. We are all heroes to ourselves. McCandless was, Krakauer is. This doesn't vary. All that varies is how we define heroism and how much, or how little, we are prepared to do to

for that stance. In order to get people, usually young men, to sacrifice their lives we tell them of those that went before and tell them they were heroes who died for their countries, died for their principles, died even for their dreams. Impractical dreams that are the province of the young. And those who would be heroes never concern themselves with the practical, that is far too mundane, it is for others to take care of those details.

McCandless' dream of heroism was to survive entirely alone and entirely off the land at the ends of the earth. It didn't include the practicality of learning about the wild foods he might forage in that area, or how he might survive in extreme weather conditions, or even exactly where his place of solitude was situated so that when he sought succour at the end, he didn't even know how close it really was. The final photograph he took of himself is of a wasted face, gaunt but beautiful with the shining eyes of one who has lived his dream and is satisfied. Then he died.

This book got me riveted in the tragic story of Chris McCandless, a young man who left his family and friends, abandoned most of his material possessions, went to the Alaska wilderness and perished there. The author does a great job of portraying McCandless' complex personality through meticulous research based on interviews, letters and journal entries. The writing is so engaging that although it is already clear from the beginning how McCandless' story would end, I was hooked till the last page. Krakauer only digresses when discussing his own high risk undertaking and those of ill-fated adventurers similar to McCandless. These parts offer comparison to McCandless' character but I found myself getting impatient and wanting them to end quickly, to return to the main story itself which is much compelling. Readers have been divided with regard to this story. Some admire McCandless' daring and idealism, some others say he was stupid, reckless and arrogant enough to have gone to Alaska without sufficient preparation. I think he was a human being with faults and merits, but I have to admit I felt something stirring in me when I read this passage, taken from a letter he wrote to a friend: make a radical change in your lifestyle and begin to boldly do things which you may previously never have thought of doing, or been too hesitant to attempt. 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 conservation The very basic core of a man's living spirit is his passion for adventure The passage resonates with me because my life has been filled with stagnation and inactivity I am the queen of conventionalism I don't consider myself unhappy, but I'm always afraid of moving outside the comfort zone, of expanding further than my own comfortable little shell I often don't exert myself to my best capabilities because halfhearted efforts seemed good enough When I read about McCandless, I noticed that one of his admirable traits is if he wanted something he went out and did it He was not afraid of challenges, the greater they are the better Jason Mraz says live high, live mighty, live righteously I think that was what McCandless did he lived up to his ideals One the other hand, the greatest tragedy of McCandless life, in my opinion, was his conflicting feelings toward human intimacy and relationship He clashed with his parents and others who didn't share his beliefs to the point that he spurned humanity and sought nature and the wilderness instead But even during his solitary journeys he met a lot of people and connected with them, touching their lives as well as his own His final odyssey in Alaska had probably made him realize, than ever, the raw need for companionship, but he didn't survive that trip causing endless grief to his family So in the end, if there is something I can take from McCandless story, it is this message Be bold Get out there Do something But don't forget those who love you. On the outside looking in, this seems like another case of arrogant human vs unassuming nature Nature usually wins that fight It did here and in a most tragic way And yet, in Into the Wild Jon Krakauer does an excellent job of muddying up the waters, so that they flow with the natural fluidity of life itself Was this kid so very unprepared Was this a foolhardy and unnecessary death easily avoided with a few, slight precautions Life is seldom black and white, cut and dry Krakauer reminds us of that, while telling a riveting story.

