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Wild: From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail

by Cheryl Strayed

About the Book

At 22, Cheryl Strayed thought she had lost everything. In the wake of her mother?s death, her family scattered and her own marriage was soon destroyed. Four years later, with nothing more to lose, she made the most impulsive decision of her life. With no experience or training, driven only by blind will, she would hike more than a thousand miles of the Pacific Crest Trail from the Mojave Desert through California and Oregon to Washington State --- and she would do it alone. Told with suspense and style, sparkling with warmth and humor, WILD powerfully captures the terrors and pleasures of one young woman forging ahead against all odds on a journey that maddened, strengthened and ultimately healed her.

Discussion Guide

1. ?The Pacific Crest Trail wasn?t a world to me then. It was an idea, vague and outlandish, full of promise and mystery. Something bloomed inside me as I traced its jagged line with my finger on a map? (p. 4). Why did the PCT capture Strayed?s imagination at that point in her life?

2. Each section of the book opens with a literary quote or two. What do they tell you about what?s to come in the pages that follow? How does Strayed?s pairing of, say, Adrienne Rich and Joni Mitchell (p. 45) provide insight into her way of thinking?

3. Strayed is quite forthright in her description of her own transgressions, and while she?s remorseful, she never seems ashamed. Is this a sign of strength or a character flaw?

4. ?I knew that if I allowed fear to overtake me, my journey was doomed. Fear, to a great extent, is born of a story we tell ourselves, and so I chose to tell myself a different story from the one women are told? (p. 51). Fear is a major theme

in the book. Do you think Strayed was too afraid, or not afraid enough? When were you most afraid for her?

5. Strayed chose her own last name: ?Nothing fit until one day when the word *strayed* came into my mind. Immediately, I looked it up in the dictionary and knew it was mine...*to wander from the proper path, to deviate from the direct course, to be lost, to become WILD, to be without a mother or father, to be without a home, to move about aimlessly in search of something, to diverge or digress*? (p. 96). Did she choose well? What did you think when you learned she had assigned this word to herself --- that it was no coincidence?

6. On the trail, Strayed encounters mostly men. How does this work in her favor? What role does gender play when removed from the usual structure of society?

7. What does the reader learn from the horrific episode in which Strayed and her brother put down their mother?s horse?

8. Strayed writes that the point of the PCT ?had only to do with how it felt to be in the wild. With what it was like to walk for miles for no reason other than to witness the accumulation of trees and meadows, mountains and deserts, streams and rocks, rivers and grasses, sunrises and sunsets? (p. 207). How does this sensation help Strayed to find her way back into the world beyond the wilderness?

9. On her journey, Strayed carries several totems. What does the black feather mean to her? And the POW bracelet? Why does she find its loss (p. 238) symbolic?

10. Does the hike help Strayed to get over Paul? If so, how? And if not, why?

11. Strayed says her mother?s death ?had obliterated me?I was trapped by her but utterly alone. She would always be the empty bowl that no one could fill? (p 267). How did being on the PCT on her mother?s fiftieth birthday help Strayed to heal this wound?

12. What was it about Strayed that inspired the generosity of so many strangers on the PCT?

13. ?There?s no way to know what makes one thing happen and not another?But I was pretty certain as I sat there that night that if it hadn?t been for Eddie, I wouldn?t have found myself on the PCT? (p. 304). How does this realization change Strayed?s attitude towards her stepfather?

14. To lighten her load, Strayed burns each book as she reads it. Why doesn?t she burn the Adrienne Rich collection?

15. What role do books and reading play in this often solitary journey?

Author Bio

Cheryl Strayed is the author of the #1 *New York Times* bestseller WILD: From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail, which was the first selection for Oprah?s Book Club 2.0 and became an Oscar-nominated film starring Reese Witherspoon; TINY BEAUTIFUL THINGS: Advice on Love and Life from Dear Sugar, a national bestseller now the basis of the WBUR podcast "Dear Sugar Radio," co-hosted with Steve Almond; and TORCH, her debut novel. Her books have been translated into 40 languages, and her essays and other writings have appeared in numerous publications.

Critical Praise

"Spectacular?A literary and human triumph."
?*The New York Times Book Review*

"Strayed?s language is so vivid, sharp and compelling that you feel the heat of the desert, the frigid ice of the High Sierra, and the breathtaking power of one remarkable woman finding her way?and herself?one brave step at a time."
?*People* (4 stars)

"An addictive, gorgeous book that not only entertains, but leaves us the better for having read it?Strayed is a formidable talent."
?*The Boston Globe*

"One of the most original, heartbreaking, and beautiful American memoirs in years?Awe-inspiring."
?NPR Books

"I was on the edge of my seat?It is just a wild ride of a read?stimulating, thought-provoking, soul-enhancing."
?Oprah Winfrey, on Wild, first selection of her Book Club 2.0

"Cinematic?A rich, riveting story?Our verdict: A."
?*Entertainment Weekly*

"Devastating and glorious. . . . By laying bare a great unspoken truth of adulthood?that many things in life don?t turn out the way you want them to, and that you can and must live through them anyway --- WILD feels real in many ways that many books about ?finding oneself??do not."
?*Slate*

"Pretty much obliterated me. I was reduced, during the book?s final third, to puddle-eyed cretinism?As loose and sexy and dark as an early Lucinda Williams song. It?s got a punk spirit and makes an earthy and American sound. . . . The cumulative welling up I experienced during WILD was partly a response to that too infrequent sight: that of a writer finding her voice, and sustaining it, right in front of your eyes."
?Dwight Garner, *The New York Times*

"Brave seems like the right word to sum up this woman and her book.,,Strayed?s journey is exceptional."
?*San Francisco Chronicle*

"One of the best books I?ve read in the last five or ten years?WILDis angry, brave, sad, self-knowing, redemptive, raw, compelling, and brilliantly written, and I think it?s destined to be loved by a lot of people, men and women, for a very long time."

?Nick Hornby

"Incisive and telling?[Strayed] has the ineffable gift every writer longs for of saying exactly what she means in lines that are both succinct and poetic?an inborn talent for articulating angst and the gratefulness that comes when we overcome it."

?*The Washington Post*

"Vivid, touching and ultimately inspiring account of a life unraveling and of the journey that put it back together."

?*The Wall Street Journal*

"Strayed?catalogs her epic hike?with a raw emotional power that makes the book difficult to put down?In walking, and finally, years later, in writing, Strayed finds her way again. And her path is as dazzlingly beautiful as it is tragic."

?*Los Angeles Times*

"A fearless story, told in honest prose that is wildly lyrical as often as it is dirtily physical."

?*Minneapolis Star Tribune*

"This isn?t Cinderella in hiking boots, it?s a woman coming out of heartbreak, darkness and bad decisions with a clear view of where she has been?There are adventures and characters aplenty, from heartwarming to dangerous, but Strayed resists the temptation to overplay or sweeten such moments. Her pacing is impeccable as she captures her impressive journey."

?*The Seattle Times*

"Strayed?s journey was at least as transcendent as it was turbulent. She faced down hunger, thirst, injury, fatigue, boredom, loss, bad weather, and wild animals. Yet she also reached new levels of joy, accomplishment, courage, peace, and found extraordinary companionship."

?*The Christian Science Monitor*

"Strayed writes a crisp scene; her sentences hum with energy. She can describe a trail-parched yearning for Snapple like no writer I know?It becomes impossible not to root for her."

?*The Plain Dealer*

"Brilliant?Cheryl Strayed emerges from her grief-stricken journey as a practitioner of a rare and vital vocation. She has become an intrepid cartographer of the human heart."

?*Houston Chronicle*

"A deeply honest memoir about mother and daughter, solitude and courage, and regaining footing one step at a time."

?*Vogue*

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