

The Long Walk Study Guide

The Long Walk by Stephen King

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Plot Summary

Raymond Davis Garraty arrives in a guarded parking lot with his mother in a blue Ford that looks like "a small tired dog after a hard run." The guard retrieves Garraty's information and permits them to enter. Garraty's mother asks why the guard doesn't return the card and - not for the first time - says she doesn't like it. Garraty is wearing a fatigue jacket against the spring chill. Garraty, watching a guard eat c-rations, thinks again that it's real, that he's really here, and that he's actually among the field of walkers, but for the first time, the thought carries weight.

He's one of a hundred boys, none older than eighteen, who are walking for the Prize - everything his heart desires. The walk is completed when only one walker remains. There is no second prize. All must walk at least four miles per hour. When a walker falls below that speed, he is warned. Thirty seconds later comes a second warning and then a third. The final warning is the ticket - death at the hands of the soldiers who guard the walkers. The Major oversees the beginning and end of the walk and puts in appearances at several points along the way.

Garraty soon connects with several of the boys, including McVries. When McVries is almost eliminated early on, it's Garraty who intervenes and McVries later returns the favor. Though he vows he won't help again, it's McVries who keeps Garraty from running into the crowd to his girlfriend, Jan, a move that would have ended in Garraty's death.

Through the heat of the days, the chill of the nights and the worst rainstorm Mother Nature can dream up, the boys walk, falling off one by one. Many fall victim to leg cramps, hurting feet or simply the inability to continue moving at the pace of four miles per hour. Others go mad with the knowledge that there's no way out and from the thought of those who have already fallen. With no mercy, the soldiers shoot to kill anyone who fails and all must fail eventually - except one.

As they enter the fourth day and the final miles of this particular walk, there are seven left, then three - Garraty, McVries and a loner, named Stebbins, who has shown no signs of weakening. It's only then that Garraty and McVries learn the horrible truth - Stebbins is the Major's illegitimate son. The Major knows of the kinship and Stebbins' heart desire is to be recognized by his father. When McVries can walk no farther, he simply sits, leaving the other two to go on alone. When Garraty realizes that he simply can't go on either, he has the need to tell Stebbins and puts all his last strength into catching up. That's when he realizes that Stebbins is failing as well and he suddenly drops over dead, the soldiers firing into his body as if to be certain. Garraty, with the road now to himself, sees the dark figure ahead and wonders who is there. He thinks back over the field of boys who began the race and knows it must be one of them, but can't be certain which. And when someone touches his shoulder for the second time, he pulls from a reserve he thought long gone and runs to catch up, after all, there are many miles yet to walk.



Chapters 1 and 2

Chapters 1 and 2 Summary

Raymond Davis Garraty arrives in a guarded parking lot with his mother in a blue Ford that looks like "a small tired dog after a hard run." The guard retrieves Garraty's information and permits them to enter. Garraty's mother asks why the guard doesn't return the card and - not for the first time - says she doesn't like it. Garraty is wearing a fatigue jacket against the spring chill. Garraty, watching a guard eat c-rations, thinks again that it's real, that he's really here, and that he's actually among the field of walkers, but for the first time, the thought carries weight. His mother, again not for the first time, asks him to change his mind but Garraty says that he knows what the consequences would be. She says that if his father were here, he'd do something about it, then answers his soft command to let go. Telling him to "be a good boy," she leaves, and he hurts with a sense of aloneness he hadn't expected.

He meets a boy named McVries and the two sit next to some other boys, including Hank Olson who says that the secret is to adjust to the conditions they'll face. There's a boy in a pine tree who'll later be introduced as Stebbins. Now he's eating jelly sandwiches and watching the others. It's Olson who says that a kid from two years before froze up on the starting line, simply couldn't take a step and was "given his ticket" at 9:02, two minutes after starting the walk.

The Major arrives and reminds them of Hint Thirteen - to conserve energy whenever possible - and urges them to sit down. He tells them that he isn't going to make a speech, that he issues his congratulations to the winner and "acknowledgment of valor" to the losers. The boys are then called alphabetically by last name and assigned a number, one through one hundred. Garraty is forty-seven, McVries is sixty-one and Olson is seventy. The Major speaks to some, even joking with others. The soldiers hand out belts with pockets, each containing energy concentrate packs like the astronauts use, and canteens. The boys are lined up, ten to each line and ten lines deep. The extras who had shown up in case any of the field of one hundred didn't, pack up and leave. Then it's time and they're walking.

Stebbins is the first to get a warning for going too slow - four miles an hour is the minimum speed. Olson says it's smart because Stebbins now knows just how fast he has to walk and in an hour the warning will be taken off so that he has a clean slate. There are soon several other boys with warnings. Garraty and walker number five talk about the reasons for having no spectators at the beginning of the race. The boy, Barkovitch, says that it spoils the walkers' concentration, but that later in the walk the crowds will no longer be a factor. In time, Garraty will realize that Barkovitch is right. Barkovitch suddenly squats on the road to take a stone from his shoe, earning himself his first warning, then his second, then his third and final warning. Some believe he might get his ticket on the spot but he rises and catches up, saying that it's all part of his



plan - that he got a rest and in three hours his slate will again be clean. Olson says it's a stupid plan because Barkovitch won't get another warning, they'll simply shoot him.

As they continue their walk, they come to a girl holding a sign that reads, "GO-GO-GARRATY NUMBER 47, We Love You Ray, Maine's Own." Garraty runs to the girl, kisses her passionately and earns one warning for it, and feels certain that he is going to win. He thanks the girl and Olson says that he would have accepted several warnings in exchange for that. Garraty's pace picks up until McVries asks why he's hurrying. Garraty slows and thanks him but McVrie says that Garraty should remember that they're all out to win. He says that while he doesn't really want to become the Three Musketeers, he does think they might as well "entertain each other" during the walk. Garraty walks on, sees a discarded sweater and knows that someone will wish for that when the night turns cold.

Walker 47, Harkness, moves among the walkers, taking names and corresponding numbers with the announcement that he's going to write a book, making himself rich from the proceeds. The walkers see a woman, screaming for her son, Percy. He looks embarrassed and continues to walk and she's restrained until they pass. Soon after, a boy named Curley falls victim to a charley horse. He screams out that it's not fair, gets three warnings and then begins to recover, saying that the pain is lessening. Olson laughingly says that everybody should "take five," earning him the laughs of those nearby. A short time later, the muscles again tense and Curley screams out until the moment four carbine rifles fire shots into his head. Stebbins, behind Curley, steps over the body and Garraty notes that he leaves bloody footprints. A woman watches from the side of the road and the walkers become quiet, focusing on themselves for the moment and trying to get past the death they witnessed. Garraty notes that he can see up the woman's dress, that she has on blue underpants and that he is inexplicably hard.

Garraty yells for a fresh canteen. The walkers can have more water whenever they want but food comes once a day. As the soldier hands him a canteen, Garraty touches the carbine gun slung over the soldier's shoulder though he can't answer McVries when he asks why. Garraty soon learns about the grapevine among the walkers. Word comes to him about a boy named Ewing who has blisters and is having trouble. He's black, from Texas and wearing sneakers, despite the information that recommended walking shoes instead of sneakers. Ewing is in a group of boys when he again falls below the four mile minimum but the soldiers push the boys away, drag Ewing to the side of the road and kill him. Garraty notes that Ewing bleeds red, just like the rest of them, and that their chances had increased a tiny bit.

Chapters 1 and 2 Analysis

Garraty immediately begins to connect with other walkers, though he'll later say that it was probably a mistake to have done so. He's sixteen, an average age among the field of walkers and many of them connect with others in one way or another. Many of them have a plan - McVries is going to walk on the shoulder to avoid the hot asphalt.



Only a short way into the walk, the boys begin talking about Maine. Most are from other states but Garraty will pass near his home town on the walk, and he expects to see his mom and girlfriend there. Garraty has, in fact, become a local hero for his position among the field of walkers, apparently the only walker from Maine. He'll encounter fans along the way, cheering for him specifically, though there will be knots of fans cheering on others as well. As they walk on, Olson predicts that there won't be more than twenty-five boys eliminated by the time they reach downstate Maine where Garraty's mom will be waiting, but they all know it isn't true.

It's interesting that none of them yet seem to realize the reality of their situation. It's not yet revealed whether each of them expects to win or if they all think the punishment won't really be death, or if somehow they all think they'll escape death. At this point in the story, it's not yet clear, but each boy who doesn't walk at least four miles per hour in a forward direction will be warned three times and killed on the fourth. It's accepted that this will happen and there's no effort to hide the murders - in fact the spectators love it.

It's during this chapter that there are the first hints of the reasons the boys would go on this "Long Walk." It's McVries who says he has no idea what he'll do with the money if he wins. He says that he doesn't have a sick mother, a father on a kidney machine or a brother fighting leukemia - indicating that these are all reasons the boys would put their lives on the line in this way. It's also the first time the reader gets a look at the finish line, which it seems will be wherever the second-to-last walker falls out of competition. It's noted that it sometimes goes past the state line but has only once gone as far as Massachusetts.



Chapters 3 and 4

Chapters 3 and 4 Summary

That afternoon, there's a huge thunderstorm that makes it briefly difficult to see but the soldiers continue to monitor progress even as Garraty wonders - without fully expressing the thought - if a person might slip away. Olson, who has been quiet for some time, says his legs feel funny. McVries tries to reassure him that it will pass but Olson seems afraid. There's another death and they discover that it's simply because the boy slowed one time too often - no cramps or blisters, just walking too slowly. The rain clears, there's a rainbow, and the boys walk on toward Caribou and into darkness. Number one hundred, a boy named Zuck, falls and begins to bleed profusely. He continues on but is losing a lot of blood and it's evident that it's only a matter of time. Zuck soon takes off running and is out of sight when the rest of the group hears the gunshot, then a second - just to be certain.

Garraty talks to Baker and they consider the others in the field of walkers. Garraty points out Stebbins and says he wonders why the boy is there, and whether he'll die. Baker says that they're all going to die and Garraty, saying lightly that he just hopes it's not to be tonight, shudders as he seems to realize the truth of the words.

They talk about what they'll do if they win and Olson says he's going to buy a fleet of cabs so that he'll never walk anywhere again. There's then a discussion of whether anyone is doing much planning and even McVries admits that he's "adjusted his horizons," to which Garraty responds that they're all too busy at the moment avoiding dying. Olson drops his food belt and Garraty gives him his cheese, earning McVries teasing comment about the Three Musketeers. With eight and a half hours behind them, four were dead, then a boy named Travin had diarrhea, earning himself a warning each time he stops, until he half-squats and falls. He's shot immediately. Olson begins to say Hail Marys. When they reach the town of Caribou, they've covered forty-four miles, saw a man trying to give them cold drinks and been reminded that Rule Eight is that no one can interfere with another walker.

In Caribou, Percy's mother shows up again and is arrested this time as she tries to cross the police lines. The boys talk of many things - including whether true love actually exists. Garraty drops below the speed two times within ten minutes and feels afraid, especially when others begin to stare at him.

Chapters 3 and 4 Analysis

McVries asks Garraty if he's getting tired now and Garraty says no, that he's been tired for a long time already. There's "something akin to animosity" in his eyes when he asks if McVries is not yet tired. McVries says that he could dance like this forever and teases Garraty about going dancing. The bond that is quickly growing between the two boys



will save both their lives, though Garraty will think on several occasions that it would have been better to have not known those who were going to die.

Olson is beginning to break under the strain, saying the soldiers are watching him closely, sensing that he's having trouble as well. Gribble begins to scream that the Major is a murderer. It's an interesting accusation because apparently none of the boys were forced to participate and even could have chosen to opt out.

It's here that there's another clue as to the Prize. Baker says that "it's not so much the Prize itself as all that money." As is typical of this author, it's left to the reader to continue piecing together clues and to decide what exactly the Prize is.

There's a minor skirmish among the boys as they argue whether a person should be allowed to die as he pleases or if he should be urged on. Though there's no consensus here, there will be several occasions during which someone urges another walker to continue on.



Chapters 5 and 6

Chapters 5 and 6 Summary

Garraty takes a "mental inventory of himself," finds his head "crazied up, but basically okay," - grainy eyes, a hungry gut that the concentrates can't satisfy, legs that are tired but essentially good, and two aching feet. He knows that his feet are carrying one hundred, sixty pounds, but that they're holding up well. He thinks of a hole in his sock and recalls Stebbin's story of the guy who won with his shoes and socks worn completely away. They pass a couple, asleep on a bench, who don't wake up for the procession. McVries produces a toothbrush from his backpack and brushes his teeth, prompting Garraty to think of all the polite things people do simply because they should. Then word comes back that a bridge is out and the walk will be temporarily halted. They look forward to the brief break, especially Olson, but arrive to find a crew had used a telephone pole for a brace and a pickup tailgate as a temporary landing, and the rest they'd hoped for doesn't happen. As they cross, a worker tells Garraty that he has a ten dollar bet on him with twelve-to-one odds.

Just prior to the bridge, an argument breaks out between Rank and Barkovitch. Both heave insults and receive warnings for slowing, with Rank rushing at Barkovitch, missing and landing on the side of the road, stunned, where he receives his ticket and is shot. Baker shouts out that Barkovitch is no longer a pest, but is now a murderer. McVries suggests that Barkovitch go back and dance on Rank's body to entertain the rest and then quietly says that he can't wait to see Barkovitch on the road. McVries later tells Garraty that he knows the walk has nothing to do with stamina, that it's those people with something driving them on who'll last longest. He cites cases of normal people picking up a car when a loved one is trapped and says that Barkovitch will last a long time because he's driven on by hatred. McVries says that he's tired now, but not overly so, and that when he is too tired to walk anymore he'll simply sit down and wait to die. While it scares Garraty to have it put into words in this way, McVries says that he will force himself to outlast Barkovitch.

They pass through another small town with a tiny group of watchers cheering them on. Then number 45, a boy none of them seem to know, wearing a green trench coat, begins to weave and eventually stumbles, prompting a warning. Garraty doesn't think he can get up but he does. Olson, also on his last bit of reserves, repeatedly asks the boy his name but he doesn't answer. Finally Olson tells Garraty to make the boy say his name but McVries says, "He's dying, don't bother him," and a few minutes later he stumbles for the final time and is killed. Garraty notes that his name probably wasn't that important anyway.

The night passes in a haze that Garraty describes as a "wakemare." With seventy-five miles behind them on the walk, twenty-four had been killed. He finds himself thinking how good it would feel to stretch out on the pavement, regardless of the outcome. Suddenly, in the darkness, he realizes that he is not walking with anyone he knows and



panics, momentarily harboring the fear that he's walked off the track and joined with some midnight-hiking scouts. Garraty thinks back to the only dead person he'd seen prior to beginning the walk. Freaky D'Allesio, a boy Garraty's age who was called "Freaky" because of the look in his eyes, was struck by a car while riding his bike. Eddie Klipstein described the accident in graphic detail and Garraty went to the funeral expecting to see Freaky's head split open but was relieved that he looked as if he was waiting for the next game of baseball to begin. Garraty comes out of his reverie to find that it's nearing daylight and that those he knows best - even Olson who seemed likely to fall out hours ago - are still among those walking. When McVries wakes from his half-sleep, he is amazed that it's daylight and Garraty says that they're "a quarter of the way home."

Garraty continues to think about Jan and admits that she has probably come to be something more than reality - a symbol to which he can continue walking.

Chapters 5 and 6 Analysis

The boys often talk among themselves during the days of the walk. These topics are usually without any connection to the walk. For example, Pearson asks if any of them have had an enema and Harkness says he did once after eating a whole sack of Halloween candy. Pearson says that his mother promised his younger brother an enema if he wouldn't cry upon Pearson's departure. They agree that it's sick and the topic then turns to something else. They begin to tell tall tales, with someone saying that a farting contest had resulted in a boy lighting fire to the expelled gas and burning the hair off his rear and back, prompting Harkness to laugh so hard he received a warning.

At one point the boys talk about the publicity of the Long Walk and the fact that it's estimated a billion dollars are bet on winners. Garraty and McVries talk about those who died during the night, neither able to put names to all of them. As the morning wears on, Garraty watches Barkovitch, walking alone, and considers that the boy could have the right idea. He's made no connections as Garraty and most of the others have. By having no friends, he was in no danger of losing someone he cared about. It seems that many of the boys need to be angry at something and they begin making up crude knock-knock jokes about the Major - that he "buggers his mother" before breakfast, or his grandmother or his dog. Suddenly, McVries seems to snap, rushes at the "wooden-faced soldiers atop the halftrack," and yells at them to come down and face him, earning himself the second and then third warnings. Disregarding his own warning, Garraty runs to McVries, urging him to come on which he eventually does, saying that he hasn't died "thanks to the Musketeer." McVries then says, sullenly, that they're "all going to buy it," to which Garraty responds that someone wins and it might be one of them. McVries says that no one wins, that they take the winner out behind a barn and kill him too.

When Harkness has a cramp, he pleads with Garraty to do something but Garraty says he can't help him and Harkness stops, massages his foot and takes two warnings before jumping up to walk again. Then he drops his shoe, gets a third warning, grabs at it and loses and eventually goes on without it. Two kids are riding their bikes with the



walkers and Baker yells at them to get lost, but they remain. The guns aim at Harkness as he nearly earns his ticket, then back up and everyone waits but Harkness does catch up and takes the lead, though without his shoe. Garraty knows that the more people who drop out, the better for those who are still walking, but admits that he fears for those he's bonded with. They are part of his "sub-clan" and - in Garraty's mind - if one member of them can be taken out, they're all susceptible.



Chapters 7 and 8

Chapters 7 and 8 Summary

Garraty connects with a guy named Scramm, number 85, who interested Garraty because he is married. He says that he had little aptitude for school and dropped out, got a job in a bed sheet factory and married Cathy. She is now pregnant. He simply seems to ignore the fact that he could lose. He says that they have seven hundred dollars in the bank to pay for the delivery and that Cathy's parents are with her, which Garraty takes to mean that they understand more of Scramm's chances than Scramm. While they are talking, a boy falls out, convulsing, is warned three times and then "shot like a dog."

Later in the morning, they encounter two girls, dressed in short shorts and middy tops. Gribble stops, grabs the breasts of one of them, hunches against her and takes the third warning before pushing himself away, falling, scrambling to his feet and walking on. He is holding his crotch, screaming that he hurts and is told he has "blue balls." A short time later, he falls to the ground, clutching his abdomen and a moment later is dead. Garraty, thinking back to Gribble humping the warm body of that girl, has trouble of his own and eventually allows himself to orgasm in order to find release. He ties his jacket around his waist so that no one will know and reminds himself that he loves Jan but has been momentarily caught up in the situation.

They reach Jefferson Plantation near the one hundred mile mark and are greeted by huge, cheering crowds. It's here that Garraty hears Collie Parker saying as he waves, "Glad to see ya, ya goddam bunch of fools," and "Howya, Mother McCree, you goddam bag. Your face and my ass, what a match." Garraty begins laughing and is soon hysterical. He is laughing so hard he can't stand and can't get his breath. McVries helps him up once, yells at him to stop, but his admonition is drowned in the cheering voices. Finally, McVries slaps Garraty hard, returning him to sanity and the fact that he must walk. As he catches up, Olson asks McVries why he did that and McVries says that he pays his debt, that he and Garraty are now even and that there's to be no more Musketeers. Olson seems angry that McVries helped Garraty. Then 64, Frank Morgan, falls by the wayside and is shot, to the screams of the spectators. Garraty later walks beside Stebbins for awhile then catches up with McVries. He wants to say thank you for saving him, but can't bring himself to say the words. McVries eventually says that "square is square" but adds that "quits is quits" and that he won't do it again. They are interrupted by a boy running toward the halftrack, screaming that he can't go on, and that he wants his mother. Then he is screaming about his feet and it's noted that the halftrack has run over his legs, obliterating his feet. The soldiers give him his three warnings anyway before killing him.

McVries seems to know that Garraty is near to falling apart and he asks about Jan, what Garraty plans to name the first kid, then offers to tell him about his scar. He says that he got in the walk like most guys get into the foreign legion - over a girl and a lost love. He



says her name was Priscilla, that they'd gone from their home town to Newark, New Jersey, to work in a pajama factory, that she'd made much more money than he at the piecework rate, and that he'd eventually quit, asking her to go home with him. She'd refused and when he tried to take her to bed, she cut his face with a letter opener. McVries says that she was still very important to him the previous day but it no longer hurts to tell the story. He says that she was, in fact, just an excuse for him to come on the walk. McVries then says that what's important for Garraty to know is that "you've been had," though he doesn't elaborate and the meaning is left to the reader.

Chapters 7 and 8 Analysis

Percy, the boy whose mother had sought him out on two separate occasions, begins walking on the shoulder of the road and it's noted that the minute he steps off the road he has given up his right to warnings. He seems to be measuring the distance to a wooded area and is carefully watching the soldiers who guard the walkers. It's Garraty who sees his plan and the boys continue talking, mostly nonsense, so as to not raise the guards' suspicions. However, Percy barely makes it to the woods when he's shot, without warning.

The reader gets another clue about the "Squad" as the boys pass a trucker, forced off the road for the walkers, anxiously feeling the side of his refrigerated truck. Garraty says that his father, Jim, was a trucker and that it's hard to make a living. He notes that his father lost his own truck and began driving for the government where it became well known that Jim was not a Long Walk supporter. Eleven years ago, Jim had been taken from his home - "squadded" - because he couldn't keep his mouth shut about his politics. Garraty's mother had struck him when he asked where Jim had gone, and he'd never seen his father again. Baker says that his brother was in trouble for stealing a car, and is dead now of a heart attack - three years older than Baker who says that he'd also done some things wrong, that he'd been a "night rider" and had burned crosses in yards until he came to realize that the time for that had passed.

The boys pass many people along the side of the road and as Garraty watches a grandmother eating what appears to be an egg salad sandwich, he says that it's obscene but McVries reminds him that others do the same and that many of the boys in the walk have watched. When Garraty says that he's starving, McVries says they're only hungry, and that it's a case of mind over matter. Garraty notes that it's less than an hour before the tubes of energy paste will be distributed. McVries notes that the people watching are not unique, that their ancestors screwed after watching the guillotines and the Romans "stuffed each other" during the gladiator games. He says that they all came to see the dead men but the difference is that the spectators are just watching while those walking are here for one purpose - they all want to die.

The attitude of the walkers begins to change after the one hundred mile mark. Garraty says that they seem to be giving him the silent treatment and bitter arguments break out among those still walking. There is also a constant group of bystanders who watch "voraciously," even when Wyman squats to make his bowels work. It's in this



atmosphere that Garraty, mindful of his three warnings, drops back to walk with Stebbins. He asks Stebbins why there are so few spectators early in the walk and so many later. Stebbins points out Garraty's earlier reaction - the hysterics that almost cost him his life. He says that there will come a point where the crowds won't matter.



Chapters 9 and 10

Chapters 9 and 10 Summary

There is a ninety-minute period with no deaths, then several at once. Olson is in bad shape, no longer talking, eating or even drinking. His tongue lolls out from between parched lips and he doesn't answer when spoken to. Scramm is obviously ill, but cheerful, saying that he can continue to walk for as long as it takes. When he speaks, it's obvious that the cold is taking its toll. At an intersection some forty-five miles from the turnpike, Percy's mom is being forcibly held back as she screams for her boy.

They encounter an Italian on the side of the road offering free watermelon to the walkers. Several run toward him, despite warnings, but troopers interfere. In the scuffle, the Italian throws slices into the walkers and almost all get a piece. Garraty notes that Stebbins doesn't, but admits that he doesn't need it. They are now near the one hundred, twenty mile mark.

The day fades into night as a steady drizzle sets in. It's cold but there are many who line the roads, though few cheer. Garraty, with his toes numb and holding his lips together to keep from trembling, gets another warning and picks up the pace. Then there's a band heralding their approach. Garraty is now on home ground and feels a bit of excitement at the thought. Stebbins walks up to him, seems to read his mind and says, "Maybe it's your edge," referring to the fact that Garraty knows this route. When they pass through Oldtown, there's a huge assembly chanting Garraty's name. He waves, noting the number of people and thinking back to the time - if there was such a time - that he'd been concerned about high school.

Garraty now seems to become fascinated with Olson's ability to go on past what he should have been able to endure. He observes the boy for some time then asks what his secret is, seeming to hope for some magical advice that will carry him on when his own strength and stamina give out. Olson, who has chanted Hail Marys along the way, tells Garraty that the garden is filled with weeds, though he can't explain what he means. He then says that Jesus will save Garraty. Olson then seems to lose what hold he has on the reality of the walk and goes calmly toward the halftrack, grabbing one of the guns and jerking it from the soldier's hands. Another shoots him in the belly but he grabs that gun as well. He is then shot two more times in the abdomen, falls, rises holding in his intestines that try to escape like links of sausage, falls again, and rises yet again before finally falling at the side of the road. Garraty stops beside Olson, trying to help him up but McVries grabs Garraty, shouting that he can't help him. Garraty and McVries earn warnings and they walk on as Olson shouts, "I did it wrong," collapses and is shot again. Stebbins says that the action is a warning so that no one else will try to rush the halftrack.

Garraty learns that Scramm is running a fever and seems to be talking out of his head and that Barkovitch has stopped expending energy on lung power and is focused on leg



power. As they walk on, McVries says that what's bothering him so much is that each death is trivial - a number in a field of one hundred. He says that if Priscilla had killed him at least he wouldn't have been a trivial death among all the others. Garraty realizes that he's soon going to have to empty his bowels along the street as he walks and that someone will rush out with napkins and pick it up for a keepsake. He dozes as he walks, thinking nonsense thoughts and listening for his number in his dozing state. He hears his name yelled from the crowd, hears another gunshot then a scream of horror and a roar of approval from the crowd.

Chapters 9 and 10 Analysis

It's here that the reader gets another hint about the prize. Pearson says that it would be hard to be the second-to-last man walking, to have beat out everyone but the one who'll win, and says that there should be a second-place prize. Garraty suggests that it should be your life. He says that might not sound like a good prize to anyone who isn't in their situation at this moment, but that he'd fight for second place if that were to be the prize. He says that losing his life looks like a high price to pay for the chance of the Prize - "having my every heart's desire."

Garraty also gives a glimpse at his own motive for walking. He recalls the night a month earlier when he and Jan had sat together on a bench and he'd announced his intention to walk. She'd said it was nothing but murder and begged him not to go. He says now that he hadn't understood like she had.

Garraty notes the dynamics of the walkers. There are two as the vanguard - the very front of the line. They wear leather jackets and it's said that they're queer though Garraty doesn't really believe it. Next is Barkovitch and McVries. Though McVries says Barkovitch is failing, Garraty doesn't see it. There are other groups, usually with changing members, and a few who walk alone either because they are nearly catatonic or - like Stebbins - seem to prefer that.

Garraty tells Stebbins that he isn't sure why he talks to him because it's like trying to talk to smoke. Stebbins then notes that it's interesting how the human mind can take over the body. He says that a housewife may walk sixteen miles in a day, "from icebox to ironing board to clothesline." He says that at the end of the day, she's tired but not exhausted. But that if someone told her she has to walk sixteen miles before she could rest, there'd be a different reaction. Garraty says that she would be exhausted but Stebbins disagrees, saying that she would get the sixteen miles in quickly so that she could put her feet up to watch her soaps. He then uses the analogy of a mule, saying that a mule doesn't like to plow but will, and if there's no carrot in front of him he'll soon be exhausted. However, if there's a carrot hanging in front of his face, he'll continue on for a long time, spending a long time being tired. The message, though Garraty doesn't yet understand, is that a person will continue trying as long as there's a reason to try. When there's no more reason, it's easy to give up. Stebbins points out Olson as someone who has no reason to keep on walking and tells Garraty that there's a lot to be learned from Olson.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

It's midnight when they pass through Oldtown and it's here that Garraty realizes that the earlier assessments of the crowds was correct. He was enamored by those who stood and waved during the early hours of the walk but now the crowd noise is just a blur and he barely notices those who support "Maine's own." He goes so far as to say that the noise cuts off his ability to think or reason. While it's obvious that the crowds gather to see the deaths of those who fall along the way, they're disappointed in Oldtown because no one dies during that part of the walk.

Garraty is dozing as he walks when McVries approaches, seeming more excited than anyone had in hours. McVries says that the Major will be waiting for them as they enter the turnpike and that they'll be given a four hundred gun salute there. Garraty says he has heard salutes fired off before and that he's not interested, but then McVries says that the walkers have a plan for a return salute of their own in the form of a forty-six man raspberry. He then says that there are several walkers beyond comprehensive thought and so it will likely be more like a forty-man raspberry, but still predicts that it will be great. Garraty rouses a bit and they gather closer together for the event - even Barkovitch who apparently thinks it's the "greatest idea since pay toilets." After the guns are fired, the forty or so walkers still capable turn and, at the signal, offer their collective raspberries. Garraty admits that it sounds pretty pitiful after the guns and no one is interested in a second round.

It's just before the raspberries that Scramm begins crying out for Cathy, saying that he hasn't given up yet and looking about with fever-glazed eyes that show no recognition. The walkers are pouring water over his head in an attempt to revive him but his canteen is nearing empty and the rules say that only Scramm can ask for another canteen for himself.

Garraty takes to the median as a relief after the hard pavement and soon discovers that there are small pine trees planted there that make the walking more difficult. He gives up the idea and moves to the left lane.

During the night, the guns center on a small, portly figure that Garraty first thinks is Barkovitch but discovers it isn't. He dozes again and thinks of Jan, realizing with a start that he'd forgotten about her. He "builds" her in his mind, from her small feet to her blond hair. He had once told her it was whore's hair - hadn't meant to say it aloud but she'd not been angry and he thought she was actually pleased.

During the night Baker says he's heard that Joe and Mike - the two boys wearing leather jackets who have led the way through the entire walk - are Hopis and are brothers. Baker says he's taken a good look and that they could be brothers. McVries says angrily that having brothers walk together is "twisted," and that it's no different than abortion.



Baker says he knows of a different tribe, that the members are proud and poor, and that the Hopis are probably the same.

The crowd changes but is always present, sometimes shooting off firecrackers, sometimes cheering specifically for one walker or another, sometimes touting causes or candidacy. Garraty dozes again, his visions alternating between love and horror, and at some point beating out a cadence, "Are you experienced?" He can't decide whether the voice droning this question is Stebbins or the Major.

Chapter 11 Analysis

Garraty talks briefly with Stebbins and says that he expects that the walkers will now start dropping off quickly. Parker disagrees. He compares the walkers to a box of crackers being pushed through a sieve. He says that the small crumbs fall through easily and are soon eliminated, but that the larger pieces have to be pushed a little harder. But the whole crackers - those who have walked this far and continue to walk - are whole crackers. The only way they'll be pushed through the holes is if they're crumbled up and that has to happen one piece at a time. Garraty is disappointed at this assessment and seems to really be wishing that the end was nearer than Parker's prediction. The next morning, when there have been only two more kills during the night, he admits that Parker was probably right.

Garraty begins to have stomach cramps and knows that he'll soon have to take a crap though he hopes he can wait. Eventually he knows he can't, chooses a less-lighted place, drops his pants, takes a warning, hears people yelling to him - including a girl yelling that she sees "his thing" - and sees the flash of cameras before pulling up his pants and racing to catch up. He knows that someone will collect it and put it on display, and imagines the conversation, that they'd got it just minutes before he was killed, perhaps. Baker and McVries congratulate him on completing the task and he thinks that they should have just sent a get well card.



Chapters 12 and 13

Chapters 12 and 13 Summary

Pearson says that if he had it to do all over, he would never start the walk. He says that he now has a plan, that if it comes to the point where he can go no farther, he's going to rush into the crowd. Garraty says it would be like hitting a trampoline, that they'll simply throw him back onto the pavement, and he points out Percy's fate. Pearson says the difference is that Percy didn't choose his position well. Pearson plans to rush into the crowd where the soldiers won't dare shoot.

The walkers gather around Scramm who is worsening but regains his consciousness. The walkers have pledged to take care of Scramm's wife, Cathy, and Scramm thanks them. His voice is raspy and it's plain that his lungs are bubbly with fluid. He says that it's not fair, that he was the favorite to win and wonders if God has done this to him. Scramm, seeming more lucid than he had in hours, says goodbye to the boys, and that the "real Walk" might be ahead for him. He then walks faster and talks to Joe and Mike. Mike is dealing with cramps and having trouble, though he hasn't slowed his pace. After a consultation, Scramm and Mike turn and walk to the crowd, drawing screams from the spectators who clear a space behind the boys. Both turn to the halftrack and give the soldiers the finger, Scramm screaming out that he'd had "your mother and she was fine." Then both seated themselves, talked quietly together though in two different languages and accept their final warnings. Garraty and the others don't turn around to look, even when it was over. McVries says quietly that whoever wins had better keep his word to Scramm's wife - "He'd just better."

Garraty is dozing and watching as Baker and Abraham play dimes. He suddenly has a leg cramp that ties him up in knots and puts him on the ground. He lays there, kneading the tight muscle as McVries calls out to him, fear evident in his voice. Garraty gets his first warning and sarcastically says that he can count, he isn't laying in the road for a suntan, and continues to knead the muscle. He tries to ignore the second warning with the pain continuing, unabated. Stebbins murmurs something that might have been "good luck" as he passes and Garraty is alone. The third warning comes and everyone else has passed as one soldier remains behind to kill Garraty if he's not moving in the next few seconds. Garraty considers remaining where he is. He wonders if dying will be painful or if he'll simply be there one minute, dead the next. He sees the soldier move the safety catch and aim the gun. He hears all the sounds around him and guesses the heightened sense is because death is literally reaching out to him, then springs to his feet with what he estimates is two seconds left and begins to walk again.

The pressure now is intense because if he falls below the four-mile-per-hour minimum walking speed, he'll be killed with no warning at all. He catches up with McVries who offers to walk ahead with him for awhile. Garraty is having trouble holding his emotions together at this point. He asks McVries for the time, then repeats the question a few minutes later. Garraty, knowing what time it is now, says that he can't make it. McVries



tells him to stop thinking, or to think about Jan or his mother, but to stop focusing on the distance remaining. Then a woman cries from the side that Garraty isn't going to make it much longer, prompting him to yell back that her tits aren't either, earning a cheer from the crowd.

McVries, seeking to distract Garraty, asks what he did when he got his letter of confirmation. Garraty says he realized that he was one in a million but didn't stop to think that the circus fat lady is also one in a million. The two talk about the pressure, after applying, of remaining in the field, how many apply but only two hundred are chosen and that you don't know if you're a walker or a backup until after the deadline to drop out. Garraty says that there was a town hall dinner for him and that the people acted as if he'd given them the Gettysburg Address. Their talk is interrupted as Joe is killed. McVries asks if anyone tried to talk him out of it and he says that Jan promised to go all the way with him if he'd just drop out, that she'd cried and begged, but that she eventually came to understand that he just couldn't - though Garraty admits that he himself couldn't really understand.

He says that his mother's "special friend," a diagnostician, pointed out that the odds of him surviving were fifty-to-one and that he was hurting his mother. Garraty says he finally interrupted with his own logic, that he'd hit the man if he didn't get out. Garraty's mother argued but Garraty says that dropping out would attract the same attention as his father speaking out against the walk. McVries then says that he wasn't among the one hundred walkers, but was the twelfth and was called just four days earlier. He says his father ranted and raved and refused to give permission, but while the argument was still going on two burly soldiers arrived at the door and McVries' father told him to get packed, then they were all on a plane headed to the starting line.

They continue to walk, hear a couple more deaths, then note that a soldier shoots someone's pet dog that pulled loose and makes a run toward Pearson. A little boy then wanders onto the road and there's a fear that he'll be shot like the dog, but a soldier pushes him back into the crowd. They eventually fall back and Abraham tells them that he "bragged" his way into a place among the walkers in the essay. He says that he happened upon the place where the tests were being given and entered on the spur of the moment, that he answered the question why he was qualified to walk by saying that he was a worthless S.O.B and the world would be better without him, unless he wins in which case he'd hire himself some high class whores and provide them with pensions. He says that everyone thought it was a big joke and he just kept going along until it was too late to back out.

Chapters 12 and 13 Analysis

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It's while everyone passes Garraty by that he suddenly seems to realize what McVries said earlier - that the death of a walk, one among a field of one hundred, is irrelevant. Garraty notes that if he had died there, no one would have stopped and probably no one would have cried for him.



Chapters 14 and 15

Chapters 14 and 15 Summary

They reach Augusta and the crowds eclipse everything they've encountered before. Here, there's confetti so deep walking is more difficult. Streamers rain down on them and there's a constant scream so loud that the walkers scream back, despite the fact that it's costing them valuable breath and that they can't be heard above the crowd. Then a walker named Milligan falls, scraping his nose on the pavement and is shot, ending the walkers' reactions.

Pearson says that he is nearing his end and that McVries still seems to want more. Garraty then realizes that Pearson, intent on his feet, doesn't have his shoes anymore. Barkovitch is losing touch with reality. When Garraty asks what he'll ask for if he wins, Barkovitch says he wants plastic feet, that he'll have his own cut off and put in a washing machine, watching them go around and around. Garraty wants to rush up to McVries to tell him about Barkovitch, but can't hurry. When they do talk a while later, McVries says that it's past the time when the impending death of someone - even someone hated like Barkovitch - could arouse his interest. McVries says that it's like practicing pole vaulting all your life, then arriving at the Olympics and wonder why you'd want to jump across that pole anyway.

Garraty himself is having trouble and there's a moment when he's talking to Barkovitch and says that he's going to take time to spit on Barkovitch's brains once he's dead. He yells at the boy that he has no friends but then seems to get a grip and feels ashamed for his outburst. As Garraty, Baker and McVries walk together, Garraty asks if the others had seen Olson's hair. He says that it had turned gray, but the other two don't believe it. Garraty then says it seems that they've been on the road forever and suggests that they're trapped in eternity. There's another gunshot and they wonder if it's Barkovitch until he yells that he's not dead yet, and they know it was Quince. Then Barkovitch grabs his throat and rips out great hunks of it, prompting Pearson to throw up and everyone to run from Barkovitch as he continued his screeching and clawing. Then he falls and they shoot him, even though he was possibly already dead. McVries wishes he could be insane, Baker retches and cries that he doesn't feel good, and Pearson is quiet though Garraty swears that he smells Louisiana honeysuckle and hears cicadas in the distance.

The next morning, there are twenty-six remaining. Pearson is among the six who died during the night. Garraty asks McVries who he believes will win and McVries predicts Stebbins, saying he looks hardly any different than when they began. Garraty makes his way through those remaining, talking to several. He finds Baker dozing and as they talk Garraty stumbles and almost falls as the heel of his shoe comes off. On Baker's advice, he kicks off the broken shoe so that he won't have the nails poking into his heel and be constantly off-balance, then tries to kick off the other but has to untie it to get it off his swollen foot. The crowd fights over the first he shed and he leaves the second in the



middle of the road, out of reach. The realization seems to make an incredible impact on him - that he's lost his shoes. Baker reflects on things that have made him happy during his life - whipping a drunk over a girl and reading a particular book - and says that he's done in. Baker asks, "Why'd we do it?" and Garraty can't answer.

As they near the meeting place Jan is to be waiting, Garraty comes close to losing his grip, screams at McVries and can't keep his pace normal, wanting to rush ahead to be certain Jan is there. She is and Garraty rushes to the crowd, drawing himself a warning and then a second until McVries, pointing out that if he remains he's going to die in her arms, pulls him away. Both his mother and Jan are telling him to go on and he does. They both get their third warnings and McVries tells Garraty that if he wants to simply die he should at least do it out of their sight, and they move on. There are hundreds there, chanting Garraty's name and waving flags and banners, one with his yearbook photo blown up to a huge size.

Chapters 14 and 15 Analysis

It's here that Garraty comes to think of the crowd as a gigantic, living thing, both "God and Mammon," no longer made of individuals but a creature without a body, that only sees and voices approval. It's in Augusta that Parker says Garraty is lucky because he's going to be passing by his mother and girlfriend, and the rules say that Garraty can make contact with them as long as he doesn't accept aid from them. McVries suggests that it might be worse for Garraty - a thought that's crossed Garraty's mind as well. He fears that once he's seen them, there'll be no more reason to go on and that he'll simply sit down and stop. Parker voices what they all seem to feel, that he's homesick and afraid. As they near where he expects to see Jan and his mother, Garraty admits to feeling some excitement, despite the fact that his feet and his whole body are on fire. He says that he's heard the chanting of "Garraty, Garraty" for the last several miles and it seems this could be having a positive effect on him.

There's a better look into the walk as the boys talk. Only one person from Maine has ever won, a boy named Coggins, and that was "a long time ago," as Garraty says. He was so honored that a road was named for him. Then Garraty says that Coggins had a blood clot and died just a few weeks after the win.

After Parker leaves Garraty and McVries, McVries says that Parker believes the two are "queer for each other." He then asks Garraty if he could "jerk you off." Garraty isn't certain whether McVries is joking or not. He says, "What the hell?" and McVries tells him to shut up, and that he's self-righteous. Garraty then says that McVries did save his life and tells him to do whatever he wants. The reason for this exchange and the significance is left to the reader.

Garraty soon finds himself walking with Stebbins who says that Garraty won't be able to see his girl in this crush of people but Garraty says she has a pass and will be out front. Stebbins then says that it's his mother Garraty wants to see anyway and that he'll bet Garraty wanted to marry her as a child. Then he predicts that Garraty, a second-rate



citizen with a second-rate mind, also has a second-rate libido and has never "slipped it to" Jan. He suggests that Garraty might be "a little bit queer," and invites him to talk about it. Garraty, angry beyond rational thought, calls him a "motherfucker" which prompts Stebbins to ask why Garraty chose that word. Then Garraty walks away and notes that he's a bit ashamed, though he doesn't say why.



Chapters 16, 17 and 18

Chapters 16, 17 and 18 Summary

The walk continues and a boy named Tubbins who had to constantly pull up his hip-hugger jeans begins to ramble, citing scripture, until Parker says that he's going to kill Tubbins himself if he doesn't shut up.

Now Abraham comes to Garraty and says that several of the walkers have agreed that no one is to offer any help to another walker. While Abraham says they can't stop someone from helping someone else, he says it's come to a point, and Garraty finishes that it's "root hog or die." Garraty agrees, thinking that he's now just an animal, and wonders if McVries heard. The little groups break up and Garraty dozes, thinking of many things - Scramm and his wife, heavy with child, Jan, his mother, his father. He's shocked to see Parker standing on the halftrack with a gun in his hand, a dead soldier on the ground. Garraty wants to know what happened and McVries says that Parker slipped up on them while they were "asleep at the switch," and that he'd wanted them all with him. McVries adds that he believes they - as a united force - could have pulled it off. Baker is counting his money, saying he wants a lead-lined casket, and that they all wanted to die or they wouldn't be here. Early the following morning, Baker falls and Garraty - unthinking - starts to him but is stopped by McVries who reminds him of the fact that they are now on their own. The third warning rings out but there's no shot and a few minutes later Baker walks past them. There are several deaths over the hours of the night and Garraty notes that McVries is suddenly failing.

At nine o'clock on the final day of the race, there are nine walkers left. Stebbins is walks with Garraty and McVries eating a peanut butter cracker and laughing at Garraty's inability to eat. In defiance, Garraty eats a whole chocolate bar, then Stebbins throws up. Garraty and McVries, who is now in serious trouble, ask why Stebbins walks and why he knows so much about the walk. He finally says that the Major is his father.

There were seven when they passed across the Massachusetts line. Three die over the next few miles and Baker continues on though something inside him is hemorrhaging and he's bleeding from his nose. He asks Garraty once if it's bad, his voice saying that he knows the truth but wants to hear a lie, and Garraty does lie. Baker says that he can't walk anymore and

Garraty first urges him on, then on Baker's next insistent plea, says that it's okay for him to quit. Then Baker asks Garraty to do him a favor, to be certain that he has a lead-lined coffin and Garraty promises. Then he asks for one more favor, that Garraty not watch as he dies and Garraty promises that as well. Garraty walks on with Stebbins on one side and McVries on the other.

Stebbins and McVries tell Garraty to tell them a story. When he begins with "Once upon a time," they object but he says he'll tell a fairy tale if he wants to. He says that there was



a knight who went on a sacred quest through a forest, fighting trolls and wolves before reaching a castle and asking to take the Lady Fair for a walk. Garraty almost faints, then realizes that McVries isn't beside him. He rushes to him though Stebbins reminds him of the promise. As Garraty tries to pull McVries back, he says simply that it's time to sit down, and he does. Stebbins asks Garraty to finish the story but he refuses, saying he's going to walk Stebbins into the ground. Then he realizes that he can't, that Stebbins simply can't be beaten. At eight that evening, Stebbins, slightly ahead, looks emaciated but Garraty knows that it's time to give up. He catches up with Stebbins with the intention of telling him so but finds the boy staring at him with blank eyes. Stebbins grabs Garraty's shirt and the crowd roars at the interference, but then Stebbins falls. Garraty turns him and looks in his face, but the boy is already dead.

Then there's a jeep on the road in front of him and he hears the gunshots into Stebbins' already dead body. The Major is waiting ahead, but so is the dark figures. Garraty wonders who it could be, Scramm or Parker or Percy or someone else? The dark figure beckons, reminding him that it's time to play the game. When someone touches him on the shoulder, he shrugs it off, intent on following the figure. There is, after all, still so far to walk. Then the hand touches his shoulder again and from somewhere, Garraty finds the strength to run.

Chapters 16, 17 and 18 Analysis

After seeing Jan and his mother, Garraty admits several things. One is that he's again indebted to McVries. Another is that he wouldn't help McVries if he had the opportunity. And he admits that he now wants to win because it's the only way he'll see Jan and his mother again.

Stebbins says that in England, a real rabbit was used in the dog races, but the dogs sometimes caught the rabbit, ending the race. He says that he is the mechanical rabbit used in the modern races. Then he says that his father is the Major, and that there are apparently many of his "little bastards" running around. Stebbins says that he'd planned to spring it on the world, once he won the race, by saying that what he wanted for his Prize was to be taken into his father's house. As it turns out, his father knew his identity before the race began. Stebbins suggests that he was put purposefully among the walkers so that the walk would go farther this year than in many years past - earning the event some positive publicity and additional coverage.



Characters

Raymond Davis Garraty

Garraty is sixteen and arrives at the starting point with his mother. He says that he applied without any real expectations of being selected. When he was among the chosen field, he says that he felt it was a one-in-a-million opportunity. What he later learns is that being the circus fat lady is also a one-in-a-million opportunity, but that he hadn't realized that being among the walkers was to be the horrible reality it turned out to be. Garraty, from Maine, began to be touted as a hero as soon as he was affirmed and says that after the town had dinner, tea and other events in his honor, he simply couldn't back out, even when his girlfriend, mother and his mother's "friend" begged him to.

Garraty has stamina and is fit, but it takes some time for him to learn that it isn't going to be enough for him to win. When they've been walking for more than two days, he predicts that the walkers will begin falling off quickly but soon learns that's not the case. As another walker puts it, those who remained for that long are made of a strong will to live and it takes more than another few hours to push them past their limits. Garraty never really says what he'll do with the prize if he wins and it seems there comes a point that simply living would be prize enough. He has the "home field advantage," and sees his mother and girlfriend when the walkers pass near his hometown, but as he nears that point he fears that he'll lose interest after seeing them. In fact, the realization that he's seen them for the last time unless he wins the walk spurs him on past human endurance.

Peter McVries

Number 61. McVries tells Garraty that he hadn't actually been among the field of one hundred, but had been among the alternates chosen to fill in for those who dropped out. McVries says that he didn't get the call to show up until hours before the walk began. He soon makes a connection with Garraty and the two walk side-by-side for a great deal of the distance. They help each other out on more than one occasion. In fact, when Garraty would have thrown himself into the arms of his girlfriend despite the fact that he'd been warned, it's McVries who pulls him away, saying that if he wants to die he must at least do it around the corner so that his mom and girlfriend can't see it happen. They talk about many things, including their reasons for being there. For McVries, entering the walk was something like joining the foreign legion - he'd taken the step after being spurned by a girl. McVries holds up better than most of the walkers and is one of the final three remaining on the road. He says all along that there will come a point where he has no more endurance, and that when that happens he'll simply sit down and wait to die. In fact, that's exactly what happens. As the boys are stumbling along, well past the point they should have still be walking, McVries angles off away from Garraty.



When Garraty rushes to pull him back, McVries says simply that it's time to sit down now. Garraty wants to argue with him, but doesn't.

Gary Barkovitch

Walker number five, from Washington, D.C., claims to have a plan. Soon after beginning, Barkovitch falls behind, stops at the side of the road and takes a pebble from his shoe, earning himself three warnings in a matter of minutes. Barkovitch then says that it's part of his plan, that he had a rest with no real repercussions. Garraty thinks he might have a good idea though he notes that Barkovitch now has to walk for three hours with no problems before the warnings are removed. Soon, no one likes Barkovitch and much later he tells Garraty that he's not a bad guy but that he's never well-liked. Barkovitch eventually goes crazy and rips out his own throat in a fit of madness as he reaches the end of his endurance.

Stebbins

Stebbins is the skinny kid wearing purple pants and sitting in a tree eating a jelly sandwich before the walk begins and who eats more jelly sandwiches along the way. It's not until almost at the end of the walk that Garraty learns that Stebbins is the illegitimate son of the Major. He says that he plans to make the Major acknowledge him as his Prize and that seems to spur him on long past the point of normal endurance. He is, in fact, expected among the field of walkers to win. It's noted that the Major knows that Stebbins is his son, meaning that he either expects the boy to win or has no compunction against killing his own son.

Curley

Number 7, Curley, gets a charley horse and nearly falls out of the race but recovers and returns to the walk. Garraty notes that many of the walkers slow to unconsciously match Curley's pace until several are issued warnings, and that there's a mild disappointment when Curley recovers since he would have been the first to fall out. Minutes later, Curley's charley horse returns in full force, he screams that it isn't fair and is shot dead with the fourth warning.

Ewing

A black boy from Texas, Ewing, ignores the suggestions that walkers wear hiking boots, and wears sneakers. The inadequate shoes soon raise blisters on his feet. When those burst, the pain slows him until he earns his fourth warning, is dragged to the edge of the road and shot with a single bullet to the head.



Harkness

A young boy makes his way through the ranks taking the name and number of each walker. Harkness plans to write a book, an insider's view of the Long Walk. When he has a cramp, he stops to massage his foot and loses his shoe, walking on without it. He is among the first half of the field to drop out.

Percy

The boy whose mother tries to run into the group on two different occasions. The first time, she calls out to him and he waves, embarrassed. The second, she runs onto the road and is forced back by police, though if she hadn't, she'd have been shot. Percy himself later makes a break for a wooded area and is shot by the soldiers.

Scramm

Scramm is the favorite to win. He is married and his wife is expecting a child. Scramm sneezes a lot along the way and says that it's only hay fever, but then faces the weather - burning hot during the day and cold at night with rain added in. Combined with his severe allergies, it simply becomes too much for Scramm and he's soon burning with fever and there comes a point where he's talking out of his head, sometimes muttering his wife's name and that he hasn't given up. There's a deep rumbling in his chest and it's obvious to everyone - including Scramm - that he's going to succumb. The remaining walkers then agree that the winner will see that Scramm's wife and child are provided for. Scramm talks to a boy who has had a severe cramp in his side and is also obviously about to be out of the walk, and the two take a seat, flip off the soldiers and die together.

Mike and Joe

The two are rumored to be "queer for each other," but it's later learned that they are members of the same tribe - Hopi Indians - and are brothers. There's a general agreement among the other walkers that having brothers together is twisted since only one can possibly live. As it turns out, neither survives, one falling victim to a cramp and dying with Scramm and the other dying a few hours later.

Pearson

This walker has ninety-nine pennies in one pocket. Each time someone is shot, he moves a penny to the other pocket. He says that he brought them for good luck, but takes some heat from Olson who says it's gruesome.

Larson

The seventh boy to be shot. He simply sits down on the road and says that he has to rest, that no one can walk without stopping, gets his third warning and says that he'll get up in a minute, then is killed.



Objects/Places

Maine

Where the walk starts.

Porterville, Maine

Where Garraty is from.

Hint Thirteen

One of a set of "hints" given to walkers. Hint 13 recommends that walkers conserve energy whenever possible.

Limestone City

The first town on the walkers' route. It's just before Limestone City that Curley is killed.

Caribou

Where a woman screaming for Percy intercepts the walkers for the second time, this time tripping a boy and almost earning herself a ticket for interference before being arrested.

Jefferson Plantation

A town near the one hundred mile mark of the walk where Garraty almost dies, hysterical with laughing.

Oldtown

Where there is a band and what appears to be an entire high school cheering for Garraty.

Interstate 95

The turnpike where the walkers go after Oldtown. It provides a more level walking place and it's noted that the walkers would have the opportunity to walk in the median, barefoot if they choose.

Woolman's Free Trade Center Market

Where Jan and Garraty's mother are to be waiting for him.

Boston

Where the race ends with Stebbins' death.

Themes

The Will to Live

There's little doubt that the will to live soon becomes the overriding theme in this book. The boys volunteer for the walk and there's little discussion about what drives them to make that decision. What is evident is that once they begin the walk and are faced with the stark reality of facing death, they all fight in their own way to survive. For some, that means ranting against the powers that will take their lives. They call the soldiers names, offer obscene gestures and even - on several occasions - rush in to try to fight the soldiers. Some, apparently nearing the end of their endurance, scream for the Major, saying that he's a murderer and apparently hoping the words will impart some sense of shame so that the killings will stop before they fall victim.

More often, the will to live manifests itself as endurance well past the point when any human should still be standing, let alone walking. When Baker has a nose bleed that soon becomes a serious issue, he looks at Garraty and asks how bad it is. Garraty can hear in his voice the need to be reassured and says that it doesn't look bad at all. Baker continues on until his shirt is soaked with blood and everyone knows that there's a major hemorrhage inside the boy, then he says that he's going to quit. Garraty himself continues long past his endurance, spurred on by the thought that if he quits, he'll never see his mother or Jan again. Just as he realizes that he can't outlast Stebbins, he finds that Stebbins has suddenly failed and the boy falls down, dead before he strikes the pavement. That Garraty himself has walked past his range of endurance is evident by his final thoughts - that there is a black figure ahead, spurring him on and that he somehow finds the strength to run toward it.

The Need for Companionship

Garraty soon connects with several of the boys including McVries, Baker, Pearson, and, to some degree, Stebbins. He notes that little bands of walkers form over the course of the walk though there are a few - like Stebbins - who remains alone for the majority of the time. With these few exceptions, the boys become something more than just boys who met a few hours - or days - earlier as they endure the trials of the Long Walk. And also with few exceptions, they look past the competition and become something more to each other, often helping each other. The connection between McVries and Garraty is stronger than some others. When McVries gets in trouble early on, Garraty comes to his aid. Later, McVries helps Garraty, saying that they're now "square," and that the helping stops at this point. Despite his vow, it's McVries who comes to Garraty, pulling him back onto the road when Garraty would have thrown himself into Jan's arms and died there. Garraty later admits that McVries did it for several reasons, not the least of which was to spare a girl who was important to Garraty and who McVries would never know. This is the depth of the bond that forms between them.



Perhaps this need to connect with fellow walkers - even though their deaths is the only thing that will result in life - is best exhibited by Garraty's reaction when Stebbins falls. Garraty has walked as far as he can, and is on the verge of saying so to Stebbins. But just as he reaches out to say so to the boy, Stebbins grabs at Garraty's shirt and slumps to the ground, dead. Garraty, despite his own condition and the fact that he is now the winner if he can remain on his feet, takes time to turn Stebbins over and to briefly cradle his head.

Bloodlust

The idea of the Long Walk being an accepted form of entertainment may seem foreign to some readers, but it's pointed out that people watching this sort of event is really nothing new. The gladiators provided exactly the same entertainment for the Romans, who gathered by the thousands to observe men die. Those who walk are watched in the same way. Garraty notes that there are entire families - in fact, school yards filled with children - who watch the walkers despite the fact that one may be killed at any minute, meaning that small children would be subjected to that sight. When it happens in front of a crowd, there's a collective cheer - likely for the opportunity to see the death. When one of the boys rushes to the side of the road to hunch on a scantily-clad girl, he's soon beset by cramps and falls where he is shot. It's noted by the walkers that the girl had wanted to see the boy die, had prompted the action and had watched.

While those gathered as spectators to the horrific event are obviously watching for the deaths, the walkers themselves are - at least at the beginning - little different. When a boy gets a charley horse and falls behind, receiving warnings as he massages his tight muscles, everyone of the walkers holds his breath and waits for the shot. When the boy manages to walk again and catches up with the body of walkers, there's almost a disappointment. The bloodlust eventually cools for most. When it becomes clear that Barkovitch is failing, Garraty expects McVries to be happy because McVries has vowed that he wants only to outlast Barkovitch in order to witness his death. Now, McVries already knows that Barkovitch is in trouble and says that he no longer can stand the thought of another death.



Style

Point of View

The book is written in third person and is limited to Ray Garraty's perspective. While it would sometimes be beneficial to the reader to see things from other walkers' points of view, the limited perspective actually works quite well in the building of suspense. For example, the reader knows that Barkovitch is having trouble, but there's no indication the level of his madness until he tears his throat out. That abrupt behavior, with no warning, is an excellent way to make the reader literally jump with understanding.

The one negative point on this topic is that the point of view is so limited that the reader is left with many questions unanswered. Some readers may find it difficult to come to any conclusion as to the reason these boys participate and what they expect their prize to be. While the mystery may be a definite enticement to some, it may be distracting to others.

Setting

The story is set in Maine, where Stephen King is from. The cities described along the way - including Limestone City and Caribou - really exist. The fact that they are real towns add a sense of reality to the setting, though the story - as is true with most Stephen King stories - is too fantastic to be real. The story progresses along the line of the highway to Boston, Massachusetts, where Garraty is the last walker on the road and is encountered by the Major.

The time frame could be the present, but the particular time is never revealed. There are some clues that put the reader in the future. For example, when there's a huge storm, Parker says to Garraty that Maine is ... but Garraty interrupts, saying that he knows what Parker is about to say, that it's the most "fucked-up state in the fifty-one." The fact that there are fifty-one states indicates a futuristic setting. However, Garraty refers to a scary movie he'd watched starring Robert Mitchum. This indicates a time in the past. It's left to the reader to decide the time of the story.

Language and Meaning

The story, in typical Stephen King fashion, is written in such a way that the reader has to dig for the truth of the story. While the story is written in an easy-to-read format, understanding the deeper meaning is much more difficult and actually only comes with finishing the book. For example, there are no real details about the reasons the boys are on the walk early in the book. It is told that there is a waiting list, that they are apparently not forced to participate since they are allowed to back out up until the day before the walk begins, and there are boys waiting to take the place of anyone who doesn't show up. Then the first is killed when he falls behind because of a charley



horse. It's known that the boys must maintain a pace of at least four miles per hour and that they've been given information - including hints - to help them along. Later, Baker and Garraty are talking and Garraty says that he wonders whether Stebbins will live or die, and Baker responds that they're all going to die. This all combines to make it seem as if the boys know the penalty for participation but volunteer anyway. Still, someone screams that he wants to talk to the Major, and that he'll call the man a murderer, which seems in conflict with the fact that the boys apparently knew the penalty for failure. In fact, there is no attempt at keeping the murders secret and those who fall behind are killed even if there are civilian witnesses along the side of the road. It's also noted that Garraty's participation is a matter of honor and that people along the route hold signs in support of him, as fellow residents of Maine.

Structure

The story progresses in chronological order with flashbacks in the form of memories or stories to fill in information necessary to the readers. For example, it's noted that Garraty's mother and his girlfriend, Jan, will be along the route near his hometown to cheer him on. The reader then learns many things about Jan from Garraty's memories. He thinks about their relationship - that she taught him that he doesn't have to read only things he studies but that some books are just meant to be enjoyed. He taught her to knit. Garraty says that it's a family tradition for fathers to teach their sons to knit and that his own father taught him "before the Squads got him." This is the second time it's mentioned that the "Squad" has taken Garraty's father but it will be some time before the reader learns the details of this Squad.

King uses capital letters for words that would not ordinarily be capitalized in order to bring attention to them. One of the most obvious is when he refers to "the Prize," though the reader is left to wonder about this Prize and is required to determine for himself whether the prize is - as has been indicated - anything the winner desires.

The book is divided into eighteen chapters of varying lengths. Each begins with a quote and these range from television game show hosts to the Reverend Jim Jones. There is a quote from The Count, a Sesame Street character and nursery rhymes. These, set against the backdrop of the story in which so many young boys are dying, seem to take on a sinister tone.

The story includes a forward by Stephen King, noting that this was among the books written as Bachman, that he never intended Bachman to be a temporary pen name, and that Richard Bachman became real.

Quotes

"The Major had made a speech to the crowd while the boys were still five miles out of town. He began with Competition, progressed to Patriotism, and finished with something called the Gross National Product - Garraty had laughed at that, because to him gross meant something nasty like boogers. He had eaten six hotdogs and when he finally saw the Walkers coming he had wet his pants." - Garraty describing seeing the Walkers when he was ten, Chapter 1, Page 29

"Garraty wondered if it was embarrassing, being shot in front of people, and guessed by the time you got to that you probably didn't give a tin whistle." Chapter 2, Page 41

"Garraty thought that memories were like a line drawn in the dirt. The further back you went the scruffier and harder to see the line got. Until finally there was nothing but smooth sand and the black hole of nothingness that you came out of. The memories were in a way like the road. Here it was real and hard and tangible. But that early road, that nine in the morning road, was far back and meaningless." Chapter 4, Page 87

"He was taking careful inventory of himself. One head, a little confused and crazied up, but basically okay. Two eyes, grainy. One neck, pretty stiff. Two arms, no problem there. One torso, okay except for a gnawing in his gut that concentrates couldn't satisfy. Two damn tired legs. Muscles aching." Chapter 5, Page 100

"There's no winner, no Prize. They take the last guy out behind a barn somewhere and shoot him too." - McVries, Chapter 6, Page 137

"Directly above them the sky had gone a sick yellow. A tornado sky, Garraty thought. Wouldn't that be the living end. What would they do if a tornado just came tearing ass down the road and carried them all off to Oz in a whirling cloud of dirt, flapping shoe leather and whirling watermelon seeds?" Chapter 9, Page 225

"A mule doesn't like to plow. But he likes carrots. So you hang a carrot in front of his eyes. A mule without a carrot gets exhausted. A mule with a carrot spends a long time being tired." - Stebbins, Chapter 10, Page 238

"'I still want to live,' Parker said roughly. 'So do you, don't shit me, Garraty. You and that guy McVries can walk down the road and bullshit the universe and each other, so what, it's all a bunch of phony crap but it passes the time. But don't shit me. The bottom line is that you still want to live. So do most of the others. They'll die slow. They'll die one piece



at a time. I may get it, but right now I feel like I could walk all the way to New Orleans before I fell down on my knees for those wet ends in their kiddy car?" Chapter 11, Page 259

"I was one in a million. I wasn't bright enough to realize the circus fat lady is too." Chapter 13, Page 290

"About fifteen minutes ago they had passed under a wet and flapping banner that proclaimed that the New Hampshire border was only forty-four miles away. Only, Garraty thought. Only, what a stupid little word that is. Who was the idiot who took it into his head that we needed a stupid little word like that?" Chapter 16, Page 334

"The crowd cheered on, unaffected and seemingly impervious. At least there had been fewer firecrackers today. The rain had put a stop to that happy bullshit." Chapter 17, Page 360

"The dark figure beckoned, beckoned in the raid, beckoned for him to come and walk, to come and play the game. and it was time to get started. There was still so far to walk." Chapter 18, Page 370

Topics for Discussion

What is the Long Walk? What is the reaction of people to this? How are walkers recruited? What do you believe the Prize is to the winner?

What does it mean to "get a ticket?" Who is the first? Give the details of at least three other deaths.

Who is picked as the favorite to win? What happens to him?

What advantage do some say Garraty has? What evidence is there of his support along the way? What honor was bestowed upon another Maine boy who won the race? What was his fate?

Why do boys volunteer? Does it seem they understand the reality of what the walk will really be like? What does Garraty say happened to keep him from backing out?

McVries and Garraty come to each other's aid several times. Give the details of at least three of those times. What happens when McVries is in trouble for the final time?

What favor does Baker ask of Garraty? What agreement do the boys come to about Scramm's wife?

What prediction is made about how long the walkers will last? Is it true? What does Garraty say about making friends on the walk? Was he correct?