

Miles to Go (Walk) Study Guide

Miles to Go (Walk) by Richard Paul Evans

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Plot Summary

Miles to Go is the second novel in the Miles Series by Richard Paul Evans. After the death of his wife and losing his house and business, Alan Christoffersen makes the choice to walk from his home in Seattle, Washington to Key West, Florida. It is this choice that saves him from committing suicide. However after only sixteen days on the road, Alan is attacked by three young men. Alan wakes with no home and no place to go. Thanks to a real life angel, ironically named Angel, Alan finds not only a place to stay, but someone besides himself to save. Miles to Go is a novel of hope.

Alan Christoffersen wakes in the hospital days after he was brutally attacked outside of Spokane, Washington. Frustrated that he never even left his home state and the fact that he cannot walk, Alan lashes out at the gentle woman who has come to his rescue. Alan stopped once to help a woman with a flat tire and it is that woman who has become his caretaker, even offering him a place to stay until he can get back the strength to continue his walk.

Alan is surprised by Angel's kindness, but he knows better than to turn it down. The first few days in Angel's home are quiet and uneventful. However, when a strange woman comes to the door looking for someone named Nicole, Alan finds himself on the edge of a mystery that will take him down a familiar road. Alan asks the neighbors if they have heard of this Nicole, but no one seems to have heard of her. Alan then speaks to the landlord. The man clearly seems to know what is going on, but Alan misses the hints.

Angel gets mad at Alan for speaking to the landlord and lashes out at him. When things do not get better in a few days, Alan decides to leave. When Alan tells Angel his plans, she tells him the truth. She is Nicole. Nicole came from a broken home and entered into an even more broken marriage in an attempt to find love. As this marriage slowly dissolved, Nicole gave birth to a son. One day, after having a fight with her husband, Nicole was in a car accident that killed her child and left her recovering alone. After the accident, Nicole came back to Spokane, her childhood home, so that she could commit suicide.

Alan convinces Nicole that suicide is not an option. Alan then talks Nicole into reaching out to people by encouraging her to invite a neighbor and the landlord to Thanksgiving dinner. That night, after a successful meal, Alan is surprised when his father unexpectedly shows up on the doorstep. Alan learns that both his father has been deeply concerned about him. Alan assures his father he is fine and they talk, learning things about one another they have never really known.

Alan stays with Nicole until spring. When the roads into Yellowstone National Park open, Alan begins his walk. One night, shortly after beginning his walk again, Alan finds himself as a witness to an attempted rape. Alan uses the gun his father gave him to scare the would-be rapists away. Alan then feeds the young victim, a seventeen year old girl named Kailamai, and offers her a clean place to sleep. The next day Kailamai asks to walk with Alan. She ends up becoming his companion for several weeks.



After Alan hears Kailamai's sad story of abuse and neglect, he realizes that Nicole and Kailamai could help each other. Alan calls Nicole, who comes to meet Kailamai. Kailamai is thrilled with the idea and quickly goes home with Nicole. Alan is left on his own again. Alan makes his way through Yellowstone and into Wyoming. Alan falls into a depression that is suddenly lifted when he sees the incomplete Crazy Horse Memorial in South Dakota. It inspires Alan, reminding him that not every journey has to have a clear and defined conclusion.



Prologue and Chapters 1-11

Summary

Prologue

Alan Christoffersen is in a great deal of pain because he was stabbed while walking outside Spokane, Washington. However, he looks to the future with hope.

Chapter 1

Alan lost his wife and his business all in the stretch of a few weeks. Desperate, Alan decided to go for a walk. He decides to keep walking until he reaches the furthest point he can go, Key West, Florida.

Chapter 2

Alan wakes in the hospital after having been attacked by three men outside of Spokane, Washington. Alan is anxious to get his catheter out, but he is told he needs to have a CT scan first.

Chapter 3

A strange woman has been visiting Alan each day in the hospital. Her name is Angel. Not long before he was attacked, Alan helped Angel change a tire on her car. She gave him her number before he left. This is the only number Alan had on him when he was attacked, so the police called her. When the doctor tells Alan he can go home in a few days, he realizes he has nowhere to go. Angel invites him to go to her home. Alan hesitates, but then accepts.

Chapter 4

Alan realizes that it is the day of his wedding anniversary. This makes Alan reflect back on his wedding day, which was a disaster because it was an outside wedding that was made soggy by a rain storm the night before. It did not, however, dampen his or McKale's enthusiasm for the future. As Alan reflects on the past, he realizes that McKale's ring is not around his neck. Angel goes to ask the nurses about it. When the nurse comes to tell him she will look for it, she also tells him the cops want to speak to him. Alan tells the cops all he remembers about the night he was attacked. Alan learns that the men who came to his rescue shot the man who stabbed Alan in self-defense. The man is not expected to survive.

Chapter 5

The nurse comes in with McKale's ring. She then asks Alan if he is ready to walk. Alan is deeply shocked by how painful it is to simply stand. He only walks a few feet before



he has to sit back down. Alan is angry because walking was his salvation and now that is gone, too. Later, the nurse brings Alan a quote that is meant to cheer him up. When he walks this time, the pain is worse. Angel comes for another visit. When Alan tries to ask her about her past, she is vague and uncommunicative.

Chapter 6

The following morning, Alan learns the boy who stabbed him has died. Alan also learns his CT scan was clear, so he can have the catheter removed. Alan walks a short distance and does much better. The nurse brings him pictures of Key West as motivation to get better. The doctor comes and tells Alan he can go home the following day.

Chapter 7

Angel is late picking Alan up the next day. She tells him she had low blood sugar. The nurse walks them out.

Chapter 8

Angel drives Alan home to her apartment which is near Gonzaga University. The apartment building is a converted house. Alan has significant pain moving into the apartment and walking around. He sits to rest while Angel makes them dinner. Over dinner Angel tells Alan that she is working her way through the American Film Institute's top one hundred greatest movies. She is on number seventy-seven. They watch it together. Then, Angel helps Alan to bed and instructs him on how to care for his wounds.

Chapter 9

When Alan wakes, Angel is gone, but she has left him an elaborate breakfast in the oven. After eating, Alan takes a shower and goes for a brief walk outside. Angel comes home upset over a call she took about a family who was in a car accident. Angel is a police dispatcher. In an attempt to cheer her, Alan tells Angel that he believes he was supposed to meet her because he had a dream in the hospital in which McKale told him he would. Angel does not really believe it.

Chapter 10

The following afternoon, a woman comes to the door and asks for Nicole Mitchell. Alan has never heard the name, so he sends her to the neighbors. However, when he tells Angel about the encounter she becomes upset. Later that night, Angel calls Alan by the name of Kevin. Then, in the middle of the night, Alan can hear Angel crying in her room.

Chapter 11



Over the next week, Alan plans his route out of Spokane and continues his exercise. He and Angel watch the next few movies on their list. Alan has his stitches out and then manages to walk around the block, which is his first major goal.

Analysis

These first few chapters introduce the main character. Alan Christoffersen is a man who lost everything and had a choice between committing suicide or doing something radical. He chose the latter. Alan has decided to walk from Seattle, Washington to Key West, Florida. Alan has only made it to Spokane, Washington, however. A group of boys attacked Alan as he was walking just outside the city limits, leaving him with three large knife wounds to his belly. Alan cannot even walk. However, an angel named Angel has come to his rescue.

In the category of one kind deed results in another, Alan finds himself watched over by a young woman he once helped with a flat tire. This girl named Angel has become something of a guardian over him, visiting him in the hospital and giving him a place to live while he recovers. If not for Angel, Alan might have ended up in a shelter or spending most of his savings on an extended stay hotel. Angel has literally saved Alan from homelessness.

As Alan settles into Angel's home, he begins to notice odd things about her. It is significant that she is working her way through a numerated list from end to beginning. It is also significant that she cries in the night and has people coming to her door looking for a woman with another name. Alan does not see it yet, but Angel is in trouble and he might be exactly what the doctor ordered. Perhaps, they can save each other.

Discussion Question 1

Why is Alan walking to Key West? What happened to him that would make him think this might be a good alternative to a warm home?

Discussion Question 2

Who is Angel? How did she and Alan meet? Why has she opened her home to him?

Discussion Question 3

What list is Angel making her way through? To what purpose? What is she going to do when she reaches the end?

Vocabulary

Different, respect, taught, difficult, course, shortest, classics, regularly, entertainment, moodiness, outpatient, listened, apartment, decreased, questions, altogether, sobbing, commercials, credits, neighbor, progress, meaning, moment.



Chapters 12-22

Summary

Chapter 12

Alan sees an old man clearing the sidewalks after the first snow. Later that same day, the man comes to the door and introduces himself as Angel's landlord, Bill Dodd. Bill takes a quick look through the apartment and then tells Alan he hopes Angel will change her mind about moving out in February. This is a surprise to Alan. When he asks Angel about it later, she says that she just had not had the chance to renew her lease yet.

Chapter 13

Alan has begun to wonder about Angel because she never talks about her past. For this reason, he introduces himself to her neighbor, Christine Wilcox, in an attempt to learn more about her. However, Christine knows less about Angel than Alan does. In complete contrast, Alan finds himself telling Christine all there is to know about himself.

Chapter 14

A few days later Alan sees Bill again. Alan asks him questions about Nicole, but Bill makes it clear he does not want to talk to him about it. That evening, Angel comes home late and angry. Angel talked to Bill and knows that Alan was speaking to him. Angel wants Alan to stay out of her business. That night, he hears her crying again.

Chapter 15

The next day Alan thinks briefly about leaving. A few days later, he checks the mail and finds a reminder from the cable company to renew Angel's account. Alan is surprised to see she wrote across the bottom that she will no longer need the service. That night, Angel is less moody, but when they watch M*A*S*H, she surprises him by crying during the suicide scene.

Chapter 16

Alan realizes that Angel is planning to commit suicide. However, when Alan confronts Angel about it, she tells him to mind his own business.

Chapter 17

Alan has decided to leave, but he waits for Angel to come home so he can tell her face to face. As he begins to leave, Angel begs him to stay. Angel then tells him that she is Nicole.

Chapter 18



Angel/Nicole tells Alan a sad story of how her parents' marriage dissolved, leaving her feeling abandoned and unloved. For this reason, Angel/Nicole sought out an older man who gave her the love she thought she needed. Angel/Nicole learned the man was engaged to someone else, but she consented to marry him when he left his former lover. Unfortunately, Angel/Nicole's new mother-in-law was not happy about the union. The mother-in-law made Angel/Nicole and her husband so unhappy with her constant criticism that it had a negative impact on their marriage. Then, when Angel/Nicole got pregnant, she thought it would bring them closer, but she learned that her husband had never wanted to have children.

One afternoon when her son was four, Angel/Nicole took him to her husband's restaurant for ice cream. Unfortunately, Angel/Nicole and her husband had a fight. As Angel/Nicole pulled out of the restaurant parking lot, her car was hit by a speeding car. The child was killed, and Angel/Nicole spent weeks in the hospital. In the hospital, her only visitors were the grieving mother of the man who hit her and her miserable mother-in-law. Angel/Nicole's husband served her with divorce papers before she had even recovered. Angel/Nicole left that life behind. She came to Spokane to relive some of the happier moments of her childhood. She thought that after reliving those moments, she would commit suicide.

Chapter 19

Angel/Nicole asks Alan if God is punishing her for something. Alan insists that God would never do something so terrible and encourages her to look to the future one day at a time.

Chapter 20

Angel/Nicole calls in sick the next day and helps Alan plan a big Thanksgiving dinner. They invite both Bill and Christine to come. They spend the rest of the day shopping, buying everything from food to music to a Christmas tree. Unfortunately, the first Christmas tree is stolen off Angel/Nicole's car.

Chapter 21

Angel/Nicole calls in sick on Thanksgiving as well. She and Alan spend the morning cooking. In the afternoon, Bill arrives, followed a few hours later by Christine. Over dinner, they share the things they are most grateful for. Later, Bill goes home, but Christine stays to watch *It's a Wonderful Life* with Alan and Angel/Nicole.

Chapter 22

Alan is shocked when his father shows up at Angel/Nicole's on Thanksgiving night. Alan learns that his assistant back in Seattle has been tracking his progress through his credit card charges, and she became upset when the charges stopped. After some impressive detective work, Alan's father has found him. Angel/Nicole makes a meal for Alan's father. Alan later convinces his father to spend the weekend so they can catch up.



Analysis

Alan tries to learn more about Angel, first from her, then her neighbors, finally from her landlord. Angel is annoyed by Alan's interference in her life, though the reader has to wonder what she has to hide. It takes some time, but Alan finally figures out what is going on with Angel. She is suicidal. Alan finally recognizes the symptoms because he was in the same place not very long before. It is a difficult situation, and Alan wants to help. However, when Angel continues to push him away, he realizes he cannot help someone who does not want help.

Angel's life has been a very difficult one. When Alan finally learns her story, it seems so much like his own that he has no trouble identifying with her. Everything about Angel has been a lie, down to the simplest thing like her name. Angel, whose real name is Nicole, has run away from her past because she cannot handle the grief and pain that existed for her. For this reason, Angel/Nicole made an elaborate plan to end her life, beginning with finishing the greatest movies according to the American Film Institute and ending with taking an overdose of the insulin that keeps her alive. It is a brilliant plan, one that would hide the truth of her despair and keep anyone left who loves her from having to deal with her despair. Even in death, Angel/Nicole wanted to protect those around her. Angel/Nicole is a natural nurturer.

In an attempt to help Angel/Nicole begin her life anew, Alan suggests that they throw a Thanksgiving Day party. This includes Bill and Christine, both of whom are clearly pleased to be invited somewhere. They are a group of lonely people who have found one another, another miracle of Alan's trip.

When Alan's father shows up in Chapter 22, Alan is shocked. Alan honestly thought there was no one left who really cared all that much about him. Alan learns that is not true and he chastises himself for his thoughtless behavior. This gives the reader some hope that when all is said and done, Alan will not be as alone as he thinks he is.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Angel/Nicole want to die? What happened in her life to make her so desperate?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Alan decide to stay after Angel/Nicole asks for help? Is Angel/Nicole just a place to stay for Alan, or is there real friendship growing between them?



Discussion Question 3

Why does Angel/Nicole invite Bill to Thanksgiving? How does he respond? What does that suggest about Bill?

Vocabulary

Appreciated, portions, defrosted, acceptable, unconscious, creased, pleasure, investigated, advertising, loyal, agency, unnatural, windbreaker, affected, disbelief, enjoyable, diabetes, forgotten, grateful, continued, thoughtfully, sadly.



Chapters 23-33

Summary

Chapter 23

Alan calls his assistant Falene and apologizes for not keeping in better contact with her. Falene updates Alan on the progress of liquidating his assets and tells him she has some papers he needs to sign. Falene offers to drive down to see him before New Year's Day.

Chapter 24

Angel/Nicole and Alan sit down to watch Citizen Kane, the first movie on her list, and they discuss the impact it had on William Randolph Hearst.

Chapter 25

Alan and his father go to the local IHOP and discuss their relationship. Alan is surprised by how supportive his father is of him, feeling that they never had that kind of relationship before.

Chapter 26

Back at Angel/Nicole's apartment, Alan's father gives him a gun that he insists he carry from now on.

Chapter 27

Over the next few weeks, Angel/Nicole seems like a different person. They have fun spending time together and with Bill.

Chapter 28

On Christmas Eve, Bill comes over. They exchange gifts after dinner. When Bill leaves, Angel/Nicole gives Alan another gift, a St. Christopher's Medal to protect him on his travels.

Chapter 29

The day after Christmas, Falene arrives. Falene and Alan go to a fast food restaurant for lunch and a long conversation. Falene tells Alan that his former partner, the one who stole his clients and destroyed his company, is beginning to fail. Alan and Falene then go to Angel/Nicole's apartment where Alan introduces Falene to Angel/Falene.

Chapter 30



Alan and Falene spend a lovely night together.

Chapter 31

Alan sees Falene off the next day.

Chapter 32

Alan spends New Year's Eve with Angel/Nicole. The following morning, Alan and Angel/Nicole go to Bill's house to take him some donuts. Unfortunately, when Angel/Nicole goes into the house, she finds Bill dead on the floor.

Chapter 33

The paramedics tell Alan that Bill has been dead for a long time. Angel/Nicole and Alan looked through Bill's house to see if they can find someone to notify. The only number they find is one for Bill's lawyer, Larry Snarr. When Bill is buried a few days later, only Alan, Angel/Nicole, Christine, and Snarr attend. A few days later, Snarr comes to the apartment to tell Angel/Nicole that Bill left his entire estate, worth over three million dollars, to her. In a letter, Bill explained that Angel/Nicole was the only person in his recent life that made him feel alive again.

Analysis

Angel/Nicole blossoms as new hope comes into her world. She no longer cries in the night or dwells on her own shortcomings. Instead, Angel/Nicole looks forward to the future. Part of that is her growing relationship with her landlord, Bill Dodd. Angel/Nicole needs someone to need her. Bill is that person in that he is a lonely man who needs someone to make him a part of life again. Angel/Nicole does this. Unfortunately, Bill dies. Angel is once again left without a purpose, but Bill has also left her with enough money and property to fill her time until she finds someone else to care for.

At the same time Angel/Nicole is trying to build a new life for herself, Alan is left taking care of loose ends in his past. Falene comes to visit Alan and they spend a great deal of time talking about the past and the people who hurt him so badly. Alan is somewhat grateful to hear about the difficulties his old partner is having, especially since it was this partner who stole Alan's clients and ruined his business while Alan was busy caring for his injured wife. Alan is not the type to get pleasure from another person's pain, but it is clear that he feels his ex-partner is getting what he deserves.

Discussion Question 1

What kind of relationship does Angel/Nicole have with her landlord? How does the landlord feel about Angel/Nicole?



Discussion Question 2

Why does Falene come for a visit with Alan? What does this visit reveal about Alan's past? Is this important to his future?

Discussion Question 3

What does Bill leave Angel/Nicole in his will? What might this mean for Angel/Nicole's future?

Vocabulary

Accept, inviting, deducting, documents, executor, motioned, divided, tenants, honorable, wreath, mortuary, paramedics, cardiac, fortunately, revenge, kneeled, traditions, supposed, celebrating, operator, vexed, curse, conversation, discovered.



Chapters 34-44

Summary

Chapter 34

Angel/Nicole does not know what to do with the money Bill has left her, so Alan suggests that she call his father. Alan's father is an accountant. Angel/Nicole quits her job and signs up for classes at the university. Several months pass. In March, Alan learns that the roads are open through Yellowstone National Park.

Chapter 35

A few days later, Alan packs his things, says his goodbye, and returns to his walk.

Chapter 36

Alan walks out of Spokane and heads toward Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. He spends the night in a motel just outside the city, exhausted by the first day's walk.

Chapter 37

As Alan walks through Coeur d'Alene, he is thinking of how much McKale would have loved the city. From there, Alan follows the interstate. That night, he decides to camp in a small picnic area off a gravel road. There are signs forbidding overnight camping, but Alan ignores them, setting up his tent where it cannot be easily seen. As Alan finishes his dinner, he hears a truck come down the gravel road. A group of young people get out and Alan can hear them laughing and talking. Things take a more sinister turn, however, when Alan hears a male voice ordering a young woman to undress. Alan takes out the gun his father gave him, slams the clip home, and joins the group of youths. Alan points the gun at one of the boys and insists they all leave. After some arguing, the boys all climb back into their truck and pull off, leaving the girl behind. The girl is hungry. Alan shares his food with her and offers to let her sleep in his tent. The girl is polite, but clearly worldly. Alan is somewhat surprised when she asks if he minds if she prays before going to sleep.

Chapter 38

The next morning, Alan rises before the girl and makes them both breakfast. The girl, whose name is Kailamai, asks Alan if he would mind if she walked with him for a while. Alan agrees.

Chapter 39



As they walk, Kailamai tells Alan jokes. Kailamai surprises Alan by sticking with him all day. When they reach Kellogg, Alan pays for both their dinner and a motel room with two beds.

Chapter 40

As they walk the next day, Kailamai and Alan run into another man who is hitchhiking. The man stays with them until he gets a ride. Alan notices that Kailamai is weary of the man. That night, they cannot find a place to stop, so they strike their tent behind a closed ski lodge. A man comes out of the lodge and allows them inside for the night.

Chapter 41

The next day, they stop in a bar for burgers. Kailamai asks Alan about why he chose to hold his gun on the one teen who had not threatened to hurt her. Alan tells her it was psychology, but then later admits it was simply because that boy was closer and he was most confident he could hit him.

Chapter 42

A little more than a week later, Alan and Kailamai find themselves near a river. A man in a camper offers to feed them dinner. As they eat, Alan learns the man was once an ad man in New York City, so obsessed with his job that he lost his wife. For this reason, the man has chosen to spend his life fishing.

Chapter 43

The next day, Alan and Kailamai camp near a golf course.

Chapter 44

The next day, Kailamai tells Alan her heart wrenching story. Kailamai's mother was a drug addict who let her various boyfriends do as they pleased with young Kailamai. Then her mother married a cruel man who liked to beat Kailamai. One day, the school nurse saw marks on Kailamai and finally got her to tell the truth about the abuse. Kailamai was removed from her mother's home for a year, but she was sent back when a judge decided her mother was better able to care for her. Kailamai's mother beat her again. Kailamai was removed again. She lived in several foster homes before she finally ran away a few weeks before meeting Alan. Kailamai is about to turn eighteen, so she figures no one is looking for her.

Analysis

Alan begins his walk again in the spring, but he is not alone for long. Alan saves a young girl from being raped by a group of young men. The young girl named Kailamai begins walking with Alan, entertaining him with her wit and her jokes. Alan and Kailamai make quite an interesting pair as they walk across Idaho and Montana together.



Kailamai is clearly a very intelligent young woman, but she also clearly has a dark past. Alan does not push her to reveal her story. When she finally does, it is just as sad as the reader expects it to be. It seems to the reader that Alan has a way of attracting sad, lost women to his side.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Alan continue his walk? Why does he not stay with Angel/Nicole? What would Angel/Nicole have done if Alan had wanted to stay?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Alan save Kailamai from being raped? How does he do this? What does this say about Alan's character?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Kailamai walk with Alan? Why does he let her? Why does he worry about the way people might view the two of them together?

Vocabulary

Uncomfortable, suicide, abuse, pressure, neglect, frightening, furious, accept, cheered, alcoholic, understood, kindest, frowned, populated, journey, experience, hopelessness, products, decent, procession, funeral, anatomically, surprisingly, establishment.



Chapters 45-53 and Epilogue

Summary

Chapter 45

One night, Alan asks Kailamai if she could have anything she wants, what it would be. Kailamai describes a secure home and a chance to go to school. The next day, Alan introduces Kailamai to Angel/Nicole. Angel/Nicole and Kailamai hit it off almost immediately. After spending the day together, Alan asks Kailamai if she would like to go to Spokane to live with Angel/Nicole and attend school. Kailamai is happy about the idea and immediately agrees.

Chapter 46

Left on his own, Alan continues his journey toward Yellowstone. Alan travels for a week through small towns, mostly camping outside.

Chapter 47

Alan arrives at Yellowstone. Walking through the park, Alan is filled with memories of a family vacation to Yellowstone the year before his mother died. Alan finds himself viewing some of the same attractions he saw on that previous visit, but things have changed considerably because of the inconsideration of visitors.

Chapter 48

It takes several days for Alan to make it through Yellowstone. On one of those nights, Alan sees a bear. This causes him to have some trouble sleeping.

Chapter 49

Alan stops at a hotel in Cody, Wyoming. He spends some time soaking in the hot tub after scaring off a cowboy with a little wit.

Chapter 50

Alan stays in the hotel an extra day before moving on. When he does continue his trip, Alan finds himself dwelling on his loneliness and his grief.

Chapter 51

When Alan crosses into Custer, South Dakota, he treats himself to a hotel and a break. While there, Alan goes to see Mount Rushmore and the Crazy Horse Memorial.

Chapter 52



Alan had never heard of Crazy Horse or the artist who began the memorial a half century ago. However, when he hears the story and sees the memorial, he is inspired.

Chapter 53

The next morning, Alan is preparing to leave the hotel when he runs into a woman who claims to have been searching for him for weeks.

Epilogue

Alan admires Korczak Ziolkowski, the artist of the Crazy Horse Monument, because the man knew his project would be impossible to finish in his lifetime, but he did it anyway.

Analysis

After hearing Kailamai's story, Alan begins to wonder about her future. When Kailamai tells him all she wants is a safe place to live and an education, he suddenly thinks of Angel/Nicole. Angel/Nicole is the kind of person who needs someone to care for. Kailamai needs someone to care for her, someone to give her the kind of family she has never known before. It is as though these two were made for one another. It is an inspirational moment that brings both Angel/Nicole and Kailamai's stories full circle.

On his own once more, Alan finds himself dwelling more and more on the past. This causes Alan to think about his mother and McKale, both of whom died much younger than they should have. This, combined with the sad landscape of Wyoming, leaves Alan in a dark funk. The reader begins to worry that Alan is slipping back to the dark depression that almost ended his life in the aftermath of McKale's death. However, when Alan sees the Crazy Horse Monument, a huge carving into the side of a mountain that still is not completed, it inspires him. Alan realizes that it is not the successful conclusion of a dream, but the dreaming itself. It gives him hope and helps him feel that there is purpose to what he is doing even if he never reaches Key West.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Alan introduce Kailamai to Angel/Nicole? What do they think of each other? How do they seem to be a perfect match?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Alan fall into a depression as he continues his walk? What preys the heaviest on his mind?



Discussion Question 3

What does Alan find inspirational about the Crazy Horse Memorial? Why?

Vocabulary

Heavier, grief, depression, loneliness, landlord, terrain, discomfort, combination, stench, culture, culturally, congruent, encountered, distinct, remnants, frontiersman, easterners, costumes, literature, convention, colon, careful, apparently, magical.



Characters

Alan Christoffersen

Alan once had it all. He had a successful advertising company, an expensive house, and a wife who loved him. In the stretch of a few weeks, Alan lost it all. After the death of his wife, the betrayal of his business partner, and foreclosure on his house, Alan considered taking his own life. Instead, Alan went for a walk and decided to walk to Key West, the furthest point on the map from his home in Seattle, Washington.

After only sixteen days on the road, Alan was attacked by a group of youths who stabbed him three times. Alan wakes in the hospital to discover that his injuries will make it impossible for him to get back on the road until spring. Like an angel from heaven, a woman named Angel offers him a home and a place to recover.

Alan struggles with grief. Alan's wife had only been dead a few weeks when he was stabbed. For this reason, Alan is still so deep in his own emotions that he does not initially see the pain that his new savior is in. However, Alan knows he was meant to be with her because his wife told him so. For this reason, Alan fights to help Angel and in doing so, he helps himself. This continues when Alan meets Kailamai and gives her the home she has always wanted and never been able to find. Alan is like a guardian angel to these women, proving that one good turn deserves another. Alan is at his best when he is helping others. However, when he is on his own, sometimes those dark emotions are too much to ignore.

Angel Arnell/Nicole Mitchell

Alan met Angel on the side of the road when her car had a flat. Alan helped her change the flat and Angel was so grateful she gave him her number with the request to call her if he ever needed anything. A short time later, Alan was attacked by three youths and hospitalized with three stab wounds. The police called Angel because hers was the only number Alan had with him. Angel comes to see Alan every day and offers him a place to stay when the doctor releases him from the hospital.

In the first few weeks staying with Angel, Alan becomes aware of something odd going on with her. When Angel refuses to talk about herself, Alan begins to wonder. After some investigating, Alan realizes that Angel is suicidal and he threatens to leave her because she will not allow him to help. Finally Angel breaks down and tells Alan about her sad history and the death of her child. Angel also tells Alan that her real name is Nicole.

Alan stays with Angel/Nicole for several more months, forcing her to socialize and find a purpose to her life. Alan also encourages Angel/Nicole not to hide her child, but to embrace his memory. This helps Angel/Nicole move on with her. In the end, Angel/Nicole seems more stable when Alan decides to continue his journey. When Alan



meets a young girl who needs someone to give her a good home and an education, Alan thinks of Angel/Nicole. Through Alan, Angel/Nicole not only finds a purpose in life, but she begins to rebuild her family as well.

Kailamai

Kailamai is a seventeen year old girl that Alan saves from being raped on the first part of his return to his journey. Kailamai joins Alan as he walks through Idaho and Montana, providing him with both a distraction and fascinating conversation. When Alan learns about Kailamai's unfortunately abusive childhood and her desire to have a safe place to live so she can pursue a college education, he introduces her to Angel/Nicole. Angel/Nicole is the type who needs to take care of someone and Kailamai needs to be taken care of. It is a match made in heaven.

Bill Dodd

Bill Dodd is Angel/Nicole's landlord. Bill is a man in his late eighties whose wife of many years has passed away. Bill has no family, his only son died in his youth. For this reason, when Bill dies after becoming good friends with Angel/Nicole, he leaves his estate to her. Angel/Nicole is surprised to find that Bill's estate is worth more than three million dollars, giving her the means to finish her education and decides leisurely what she wants to do with the rest of her life.

Christine Willcox

Christine Wilcox is Angel/Nicole's neighbor. Christine is a student who cannot afford to go home for Thanksgiving, so Alan and Angel/Nicole invite her to have Thanksgiving with them. Christine rounds out the festivities, providing a balance to the get together. After a few weeks, Alan feels confident that Christine and Angel/Nicole will be good friends.

Bob Christoffersen

Bob Christoffersen is Alan's father. Alan's father surprises him by showing up at Angel/Nicole's apartment on Thanksgiving Day. Alan's father has been searching for him since Falene informed him that Alan was missing. Alan did not think that his father cared that much about him, therefore he is exceedingly pleased to find that not only does his father care, but that they suddenly have found a way to speak to one another in order to build a better relationship.



Falene

Falene is Alan's former assistant. Falene is the only one who stood by Alan after the death of his wife while his business partner was stealing all his clients and his business. When Alan lost his house, Falene took charge of liquidating all his assets. Falene has also been keeping tabs on Alan through his credit card records. It is because of Falene that Alan's father learned something had happened to him outside of Spokane. Falene comes to visit Alan while he is staying with Angel/Nicole. Falene tells Alan that his partner is failing in his new business venture. Alan greets this information with little pleasure.

McKale Christoffersen

McKale is Alan's wife. Alan and McKale were married for seven years when McKale was thrown from her horse, breaking her neck. While McKale was in the hospital recovering from her injury, she contracted an infection from her catheter and died. Alan has been left devastated by her death and it is because of her death, and the subsequent loss of both his home and business, that Alan walks.

Hitchhiker

While walking in Idaho, Alan and Kailamai come across a man hitchhiking on the same interstate where they are walking. The man is unemployed. In fact, he spends most of his days looking for gold. The man has a wife and children, but the children are grown and the wife has been gone for years. The man does not own a car and he hitchhikes each time he wants to go to nearby towns to visit his friends. He is a contrast to Alan and Kailamai who make the conscious choice not to hitchhike.

Former Adman

While walking in Montana, Alan and Kailamai comes across a man fishing in a river. The man invites them to dinner without asking their name or why they are walking. In fact, the man seems to prefer to keep things anonymous. The man invites them into his camper where Kailamai makes herself at home. Alan eats with the man outside and learns that he was once an advertising executive at a high powered firm in New York. However, the man's wife left him because he was never around. For this reason, the man decided to quit his job and fish for the rest of his life. The man lives in a truck with a camper on the back, moving from place to place fishing. Alan understands his reasoning and admires his choices. In fact, this man and Alan have a lot in common as their stories seem to parallel one another's.



Symbols and Symbolism

Doughnuts

Alan and Christine spend New Year's Eve making homemade cake doughnuts, a tradition that Alan began with his wife McKale.

Backpack

Alan takes a backpack with him on his journey that carries his supplies, including a tent and food stuffs.

Shoes

Angel/Nicole gives Alan new tennis shoes for his trip.

Credit Card

Falene tracks Alan's journey by the charges he makes to his credit card. When the charges stop for a significant amount of time outside Spokane, Falene calls Alan's father in concern for his safety.

Cellphone

Alan's father gives Alan a cellphone to carry so that he can keep in touch with both his father and Falene while walking.

Gun

Alan's father gives Alan a gun to carry on his journey to prevent another attack like the one that left Alan with three stab wounds. Alan uses this gun to save Kailamai from some would-be rapists.

Journal

Alan chronicles his journey in a journal to help him work out his emotions.

McKale's Wedding Ring

Alan wears his wife's wedding ring on a chain around his neck.



St. Christopher's Medal

Angel/Nicole gives Alan a St. Christopher's medal to protect him when he begins his journey again in the spring.

Picture Frames

Alan encourages Angel/Nicole to set out a picture of her son so that she can remember him and deal with her grief over his death. Angel/Nicole does the same for Bill to display a picture of his wife.



Settings

Spokane, Washington

Alan wakes in a hospital in Spokane, Washington, at the beginning of the novel. Alan was attacked as he was leaving Spokane by three men. Alan finds himself forced to remain in Spokane until spring because he plans to walk mostly mountain roads so that he can see Yellowstone National Park. For this reason, Alan ends up moving in with Angel/Nicole, a woman he once helped change a flat tire, for nearly six months.

Idaho

While walking through Idaho, Alan meets a seventeen year old girl who was about to be raped by a group of men. Alan saves the girl and ends up allowing her to walk with him through all of Idaho and most of Montana.

Montana

Alan and Kailamai walk together through Montana on their way to Yellowstone National Park. When they reach Butte, Alan calls Angel/Nicole and suggests that she take in Kailamai so that the teen can have the normal life she has always had. This leaves Alan alone to walk through Yellowstone.

Yellowstone

Alan visited Yellowstone National Park the year before his mother died when he was only eight. For this reason, when Alan set out to walk to Key West, Florida, he decided to plot his journey so that he could walk through the park. Alan is disappointed to see that the inconsideration of visitors has changed some of the attractions at the park. At one part, Alan sees a bear in the park that makes him frightened to sleep in his tent.

Wyoming

Alan walks through Wyoming on his own. The dusty, desolate landscape adds to his sense of loneliness and desperation, causing him to fall into a depression.

South Dakota

Alan reaches South Dakota in the final chapters in the novel. Alan visits Mount Rushmore during a break in South Dakota and finds himself visiting a landmark he had never heard of before. When Alan sees the Crazy Horse Monument and hears the story

of the artist who began work on it more than fifty years before, he is inspired and breaks out of his depression.



Themes and Motifs

Suicide

Suicide is a theme of the novel because two of the main characters of this novel have considered taking their own lives. After the death of his wife, followed immediately by the loss of his business and his home, Alan finds himself alone with a bottle of pills. Alan considers taking the pills, of ending his life and going to wherever his beloved wife has gone. However, Alan decides to go for a walk instead.

In Spokane, Angel/Nicole is a woman who has lost everything she ever had. Angel/Nicole's parents fell apart, her father committing suicide as his wife walked out of his life. Angel/Nicole turned to a cold, self-centered man for love, only to find that the opinion of his mother was enough to make what little love he felt for Angel/Nicole die. Angel/Nicole had her child, a loving four year old who was her whole world, but a split second stole even that from her when a reckless driver plowed into her car.

Angel/Nicole has made a plan. She has decided that she will live out the lease on her apartment, watch the American Film Institute's top one hundred best films, and then take an overdose of her insulin. For this reason, Angel/Nicole keeps to herself, avoids making friends, and refuses to share with anyone her real story or even her real name. However, Alan eventually sees in Angel/Nicole the same desperation he once saw in himself.

Alan talks Angel/Nicole out of committing suicide and helps her build a new life for herself. In doing this, Alan helps himself see that there is hope in life no matter how bleak life might see. By saving Angel/Nicole, Alan has saved himself.

Grief

Alan loved his wife more than anyone in the world. Therefore, when McKay was thrown from a horse and broke her neck, he spent every second at her side. While he was watching his wife struggle with the complications of paraplegia, Alan's partner was stealing all his clients and beginning a company of his own. As his wife died of an infection, Alan's home was foreclosed on.

Angel/Nicole married a self-centered man because she was desperate to be loved. When she became pregnant, she thought a child would solve all the problems between she and her husband and mother-in-law. Instead, it made things worse. However, Angel/Nicole had that sweet, beautiful child to fill her days and provide some of the unconditional love that had been missing from her life. Therefore, when the child died and his father filed for divorce while Angel/Nicole was still in the hospital recovering from her injuries, Angel/Nicole was left with the desperate realization that there was no one who loved her.



Grief is a theme of this novel because grief can be all consuming when someone loses that one person in their life who seems to be the best, or only, source of unconditional love. Alan cannot go one minute without thinking of McKay, the woman who completed his world and shared both his triumphs and failures. Angel/Nicole felt so much guilt over the loss of her child, she could not imagine living in a world without him. For this reason, grief is a theme of the novel.

Hope

Hope is a theme of this novel because it is the one thing that keeps Alan going despite so many overwhelming losses in his life. Alan has lost his wife, his business, and his home all in the stretch of just a few weeks. Then, as Alan walks cross country to deal with his grief, he is stabbed and loses his ability to walk for a few weeks. It seems like Alan keeps losing more than he could ever gain. However, when he wakes in the hospital, Angel is sitting beside him.

Angel offers Alan a home, a place to go, and a reason to get up each day. Angel has her own problems and as Alan helps her figure them out, he begins to heal a little more inside of himself. As Alan shows Angel/Nicole that there is hope out there for her, he begins to see it for himself. This is only reinforced when Alan introduces Angel/Nicole to his new friend, Kailamai.

Despite everything he learns while living with Angel/Nicole and while traveling with Kailamai, Alan begins to lose sight of his purpose, of his hope, as he travels alone through Wyoming. Then he sees the Crazy Horse Monument in South Dakota, a monument that a single man designed and began to carve more than fifty years ago even though he knew he would never be able to finish it. This faith in an impossible dream gives Alan his hope back as he realizes that not all dreams have to be realized in order to make them worth dreaming. It is this that makes hope a theme of the novel.

Styles

Point of View

The point of view of this novel is first person. The narrator of this novel is Alan Christoffersen. Alan is walking from Seattle, Washington to Key West, Florida in order to deal with his grief over the loss of his wife. As Alan walks, he meets interesting people and learns something new from each of them.

The point of view of this novel is appropriate to the plot because it keeps the reader focused on only one character in the novel. Alan shares all his thoughts and actions with the reader, drawing the reader in like they were speaking with a good friend. Alan is struggling with his own grief over the loss of his wife, but manages to find time to help other people. By helping these others, Alan learns a few lessons that are often hard won for most people. In telling his story in the first person point of view, the author makes the reader care about Alan and about his journey.

Language and Meaning

The novel is written in simple English. The novel is written from the point of view of a well-educated man, therefore most of the language has a sophisticated edge while keeping a simple, conversational tone. This makes the language easy for all readers to understand, even younger readers.

The language of this novel works well with the plot because it is authentic to the main character and the intended audience of adult readers. The author also manages to keep from using vulgar language that might annoy some of his readers. The novel has a religious tone to it, suggesting that the author might have a more conservative audience in mind. The language fits this ideal despite some difficult situations the main character manages to get himself into.

Structure

The novel is divided into a prologue, epilogue, and fifty-three chapters. Each of the chapters are fairly short, some as short as a single page while others are half a dozen pages long. The novel is written in both narrative and dialogue with a great deal of internal dialogue as Alan begins his journey alone.

The novel contains two main plots and several subplots. One of the main plots follows Alan's journey as he walks from Seattle, Washington to Key West, Florida. The other main plot follows Alan's relationship with Angel/Nicole as he tries to help her see that suicide is not the answer to her grief. One subplot follows Alan's relationship with his father and his former assistant. Another subplot follows the story of Kailamai. All plots come to a satisfactory conclusion at the end of the novel.



Quotes

Still, there is hope--not to forget McKale, nor even to understand why I had to lose her--but to accept that I did and somehow go on.

-- Alan (Prologue paragraph 4)

Importance: This line not only describes Alan's motivations in going on with his life, but it underscores one of the themes of the novel.

You don't know much about me. I'm a thirty-two-year old former advertising executive, and sixteen days ago I walked away from my home in Bridle Trails, Seattle, leaving everything behind, which, frankly, wasn't much by the time I started my trek. I'm walking to Key West, Florida--that's about 3,500 miles, give or take a few steps.

-- Alan (Chapter 1 paragraph 2)

Importance: This line introduces the reader to Alan and gives some background information the reader who did not read the first novel might need.

As I said, my problem wasn't with Spokane as a locale, it was with my being stuck there. I was still running from Seattle, and my legs had been taken out from under me just a few miles from the Washington-Idaho border. I wanted out of the state more than I could say.

-- Alan (Chapter 8 paragraph 5)

Importance: This quote shows the reader how emotionally frustrated Alan is with being stuck in Washington until winter just a few hundred miles into his journey.

Whenever I got frustrated with a difficult task, my father would say, 'How do you eat an elephant?' I'd look at him as if he'd lost his mind, then he'd say, 'One bite at a time.'

-- Alan (Chapter 11 paragraph 4)

Importance: This quote is how Alan explains why he did not plan out his entire journey, just a segment at a time.

It seemed to me that Angel was on a slope of sorts, and I didn't know where or how far it fell.

-- Alan (Chapter 15 paragraph 5)

Importance: This quote shows that Alan recognizes that Angel is in trouble, but he does not yet understand how badly.

Maybe this is just my interpretation, but basically he wrote that when a man loses his vision of the future he dies.

-- Bob Christoffersen (Chapter 25 paragraph 20)



Importance: Alan's father tells this to Alan to show he understands Alan's need to walk cross country, even if it scares him.

In the last two months, I had lost my wife, my business, my home, and had been beaten and stabbed. And now I'm 'lucky'.
-- Alan (Chapter 30 paragraph 31)

Importance: This is Alan's reaction to Falene tell him he is lucky for surviving his attack in Spokane.

Nicole, he's dead.
-- Alan (Chapter 32 paragraph 24)

Importance: Alan says this to Angel/Nicole after they find Bill unconscious in his house.

Kailamai was exhausted and I slowed my pace considerably so she could keep up. She never complained about the distance, but several times apologized for slowing me down and said if I needed to leave her I could. I didn't want to . I liked her company.
-- Alan (Chapter 39 paragraph 9)

Importance: This quote shows Alan's joy in having someone to share his journey with despite having started this thing alone and intending to be alone. It also shows how delightful Kailamai's personality is and how quickly he grows fond of her.

Great isn't it, not getting all mixed up in names and brands? Just being. Out here, names are superfluous. It's how it should be.
-- Alan (Chapter 42 paragraph 38)

Importance: This is what the former adman says to Alan when Alan asks his name. This shows the reader how anti-society this man has become since losing his wife and his job. It is a hint at the kind of life Alan desired, but one the reader suspects he will never fully embrace.

Somehow I woke in my own bed, the soft white sheets tucked in around me. I miss that. Childhood was magical that way.
-- Alan (Chapter 47 paragraph 20)

Importance: This quote is part of Alan's memories of his childhood. This quote illustrates not only the innocence of childhood, but the fact that Alan and his father had a trusting relationship before his mother's death.

Every one of us is faced with a task equal to Korczak's, one as gorgeously absurd--to chip away at the stone of our own spirits, creating a monument to light the universe.
-- Alan (Epilogue paragraph 8)

Importance: Alan finds inspiration in the work of Korczak Ziolkowski's Crazy Horse

Monument. For this reason he compares the need of all people to find peace in their souls with Korczak's amazing, but nearly impossible, work.