

# **Take Me With You Study Guide**

**Take Me With You by Catherine Ryan Hyde**

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# Plot Summary

August Schroeder is a high school science teacher who lives in San Diego, California. August is weary of his job and life in general as he comes to grips with the recent death of his 19-year-old son, Philip. Philip died in a car accident when another car ran a red light and hit the passenger side where he was sitting. August's now ex-wife had been driving the car and had been slightly inebriated but was not liable for the accident. Even though the accident is not her fault, August secretly blames her for the tragedy and he stops drinking altogether and attends Alcoholics Anonymous meetings.

August is on a road trip to Yellowstone National Park where he plans to scatter some of his son's ashes because he had planned to make the trip with his son before the tragedy. August's RV breaks down and he is towed by a mechanic named Wes who determines that it will take a couple days to make the repairs. While he waits, August strikes up a tentative friendship with Wes' boys, 12-year-old Seth and 7-year-old Henry. Shortly before it is time for August to leave, Wes asks him if he will take Seth and Henry for the summer because he has to serve a 90-day jail sentence for DUI. August is stunned by the request from a stranger but he softens and agrees to take them so they won't have to go into the county care system.

August and the boys soon develop a relationship of trust as August silently mourns his son and the boys learn what it's like to be around a trustworthy adult. Their trip takes them to several national parks where they camp and Seth develops an interest in hiking and mountain climbing. At the end of the summer, August returns the boys to their home but they are sad because their father is an alcoholic and does not know how to be a real father to them. Wes is also jealous of the relationship that has developed between August, Seth and Henry.

Over the next eight years, August has limited contact with Seth and Henry because they can't risk their father finding them talking to him. One day when Seth is in college, August calls him to tell him that he has muscular dystrophy and can't walk well anymore so he is going to sell the RV. Seth offers to buy it as long as August will let him make small monthly payments. When summer comes around again, August is surprised when Seth and Henry come to San Diego to pick up the RV and announce that they are taking August on a road trip for the entire summer. The boys take care of everything that August needs just like he took care of them their first summer together. When summer ends, August has to return to his teaching job and the boys return to school but they promise to take August on a summer road trip every year from now on.



# Part One: Early June; Chapter One, August Standing Still; Chapter Two, This Will Sound Crazy; Chapter Three, New Deal; Chapter Four, Meetings

## Summary

A middle-aged man named August Schroeder is stalled on his trip to Yellowstone National Park because his RV has broken down. He is waiting at the shop of the mechanic located in the California desert. The mechanic is a tall man named Wes who works as diligently as possible to make the repairs to the RV. August tells Wes that his trip to Yellowstone won't happen now because the RV repair costs will take all the money he has allotted to get to his destination. August tells Wes that he is a high school science teacher in San Diego and he takes a road trip that lasts all summer, every summer. As he waits, August watches Wes' two boys, 12-year-old Seth and 7-year-old Henry, as they play in the dusty parking lot. August lets his dog, Woody, out the back door of the RV and the boys are happy to play with him. August notices that Seth seems to take charge while Henry is reticent to talk. Wes tells August that he wants to ask him something before he leaves and says he will come to see him in his trailer tonight but he doesn't show up.

In Chapter Two, Seth knocks on the RV door the next morning, asking to play with Woody so August lets the dog outside. Wes apologizes for not coming to see August the night before, saying that he thinks August would have thought he was crazy when he told him what he wanted to. Wes agrees to tell August before August leaves. The boys bring Woody back to the RV and tell August they will be back for him after lunch but they never return. Eventually August sees Seth angrily hitting a tennis ball against the wall of the shop but Henry is nowhere in sight. Seth barely responds when August tries to engage him in conversation. August tells Seth that he had planned to go to several national parks this summer and that he had hoped to have his 19-year-old son, Philip, along with him but Philip had died in a car accident.

As Wes finishes the RV repairs, he finally asks August if he will take Seth and Henry with him on his summer trip if Wes doesn't charge August for the RV repairs. Wes has been sentenced to 90 days in jail and doesn't want Seth and Henry to be cared for by the county system like what happened the last time Wes was in jail. Wes also offers extra money for the boys' food on the trip. August contends that the boys wouldn't want to go with a stranger but Wes asks him to sleep on his final decision. August also has a hard time believing that Wes would send his children with a stranger for three months.

In Chapter Three, later that day August goes into Wes' shop and states that he hasn't seen the boys around and Wes tells him that he ordered them to stay away from August



so they wouldn't influence his decision. At about midnight that night Wes awakens August who is asleep in his RV to tell him that he will not charge August for the repairs to the RV, no strings attached. The next morning Wes tells August that he will finish the repairs a few hours earlier than he thought so August can plan for his departure. Later that day August starts up the RV to take it for a test drive and he looks over and sees Seth and Henry standing next to little suitcases but has to look away because they look too sad.

August tests the RV and returns to the garage where the boys have not moved. August's heart breaks at the sight of them but has to tell them that he has to leave without them. Suddenly though August relents and tells the boys to put their things in the RV. August gives Wes his cell phone number and Wes tells him that he can receive calls from the boys three days a week at the jail. August tells Wes that he's going to take good care of the boys and then Wes gives him some money for food. Wes begins to cry and enters the RV to tell the boys goodbye.

In Chapter Four, the boys are excited to cross into Nevada because they've never been to another state before. Seth asks August to stop so they can take a picture of the Nevada state line sign and August obliges. A little later they stop at a rest area and eat lunch. Seth asks a lot of questions about how August feels about having them for the entire summer but Henry never says a word. When they stop for gas later on, August buys a disposable camera for each of the boys. Seth is thrilled with the cameras because they never had one before.

Later that evening the RV pulls into a town in Nevada and August parks and tells Seth that he has to go in for a meeting and leaves Seth and Henry, who is sleeping, in the RV and goes in to an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting. August shares with the group that he has been sober since a year ago last November third, the day his 19-year-old son, Philip, died. Philip had been riding in a car driven by his mother who moved into the intersection when the light turned green and another car hit theirs on the passenger side, killing Philip. August's wife--now ex-wife--walked away with no injuries. August figured that she had been drunk because she didn't double check before pulling into the intersection but the reports came back showing that she hadn't been drunk, even though she did have a small amount of alcohol in her system. August can't help but blame his ex-wife for Philip's death because she had some alcohol in her system and was not as careful as he thinks she should have been.

## Analysis

The author establishes the main components of the story in this section. August has his own personal demons of trying to stay sober and grieving the death of his son. Wes has his own issues with alcohol and has to rely on the kindness of strangers to care for his sons while he is in jail. Seth and Henry are really good boys who haven't had much exposure to anything outside their own home environment so the summer holds lots of potential for them to experience new things and see new places.



Alcoholism will be an important theme in the story. August states that he had been a drinker but he stopped drinking on the day his son died in a car accident. It has been a year and a half and August still has to work at staying sober, even stopping while on the road trip in a little town in Nevada to attend an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting. August still blames his ex-wife for their son's death even though she was not legally drunk, she had been drinking and he thinks that slowed her response time. Alcohol is also a big part of the lives of Wes, Seth and Henry. Wes has been sentenced to jail for 90 days for second time for driving under the influence. It will come out later that he has had more than two DUI offenses and that his being an alcoholic has dramatically impacted how Seth and Henry feel about him as a father.

Grief will also be an important theme in the story. August is still mourning the loss of his son and he has to continually fight the feelings and emotions that rise up in him at unexpected moments. It seems natural that having Seth and Henry along on the trip will create moments when he remembers his own son when he was small, giving way to strong emotions and personal grief.

Seth and Henry also experience a feeling of grief because they have lived without their mother for most of their lives. This will be revealed later in the story but they have experienced the physical and emotional losses of both parent; their mother who left the family home and their father who leaves every night to get drunk. So when August enters their lives, it is the first time they have any sense of security. August will treat them respectfully, engage them in interesting activities, feed them regularly and do what he promises to do. These things are critical to children and Seth and Henry are drawn to August for the stability he provides them in just the short time they will know each other on the road trip.

## **Discussion Question 1**

Why would Wes let his sons go with August, a complete stranger, for the entire summer?

## **Discussion Question 2**

What makes August change his mind about taking the boys along with him on his summer road trip?

## **Discussion Question 3**

Why does August still blame his ex-wife for his son's death even though she was not legally drunk?



## Vocabulary

hydraulic, lanky, gouging, tentative, disparate, pointless, yip, drone, distorted, stance, transfixed, lolled, scuffing, upstanding, figuratively, geysers, quiver, rumbly, dinette, subtext, resonated, miscellaneous, sardonic, wry, rig, trifle, chastened, apprehensively, torso, pushback, situational, spontaneous, evoke, somber, classify



# Part one: Early June; Chapter Five, The Glove Compartment; Chapter Six, There; Chapter Seven, The Very Top; Chapter Eight, What He Told Me

## Summary

The next morning August tells Seth the nature of the Alcoholics Anonymous meetings since he had been so interested. He tells Seth that he tries to attend the meetings even when he is traveling because it helps him stay strong and not drink anymore. Seth asks if he could go along to a meeting sometime and August tells him he can. As they drive, Seth opens the glove compartment to get his camera and August yells at him for getting in there. Seth tries to hold back tears and August pulls off to the side of the road. Seth's camera had been sitting on an old iced tea bottle and he doesn't understand what he did wrong so August apologizes, telling him that some things are meant to be private. By evening, the crew arrives in St. George, Utah, and August parks in an RV campsite. As August dumps the tanks of the RV, he tells Seth that the old plastic iced tea bottle contains some of his son's ashes.

As August and the boys eat hot dogs around a campfire, Seth reveals that Wes drinks and that he has been in jail for it three times before. August is surprised because Wes had told him this was only his second offense. Seth wants to go to the AA meetings with August to see if he can learn anything that might help his father.

In Chapter Six, August, Seth and Henry take a shuttle into Zion Canyon and Seth is mesmerized by the big mountains of rock. Seth is particularly interested in some climbers who look like small dots on the side of a mountain in the distance. August lets Seth use his camera because it has a zoom lens so he can see more detail. Seth tells August that he wants to climb those rocks someday and August cautions him that it is a dangerous sport. August promises the boys that they can hike to the top of Angels Landing tomorrow and Seth thinks it will be like being on the top of the world.

That night, Seth is too excited to sleep and asks August to talk to him so August tells him about Philip and how much he loved to camp and hike too. He also says that Philip loved bottles of iced tea and the day he died he had left a half-finished bottle of tea on the dining room table when his mother asked him to go to the store with her. The car accident occurred when they were gone and Philip never came back. August didn't have the heart to throw away the iced tea bottle for weeks until the tea started to get moldy. August had put some of Philip's ashes in it to spread at Yellowstone National Park because he and Philip had planned to go there.





In Chapter Seven, August, Seth and Henry take the shuttle to The Grotto to begin their hike up to Angels Landing. Seth bounds ahead and August cautions him that the trail is harder than it seems, especially toward the end when it goes straight up and there are several drop off areas. Seth is undaunted but August picks up Henry to carry the smaller, tired boy. When they reach Scout Lookout, the end of the trail, August sets Henry down. They can see the vertical height of Angel's Landing ahead but August is determined that they're not going to attempt it. Seth, however, really wants to go so August makes him call Wes to get permission first because August doesn't want the responsibility of giving Seth permission to go should anything bad happen to him. Seth explains the situation to Wes and then turns the phone over to Henry who listens but says nothing. Finally August takes the phone and is able to tell Wes the reality of the situation but Wes gives his permission for Seth to continue on.

While August has Wes on the phone he asks Wes about his being in jail four times and not two like he had told August. Wes is evasive and August says that he had hoped everything Wes had told him was the truth but he said he just wasn't thinking clearly when August left with the boys that day. August is relieved to see two young men hiking up the trail and they agree to accompany Seth to the top. Several minutes later August and Henry hear a scream indicating that Seth had made it to the top of Angel's Landing. On the way down the trail, Henry stops walking and whispers to Seth that his feet hurt. Henry has blisters on his feet because his socks are thin so August plans to buy the boys hiking socks. August carries Henry down the trail and Seth is overjoyed at his own hiking accomplishment today.

In Chapter Eight, the next evening August and the boys hike another trail and they are happy because Woody gets to come along on this one. Seth is caught up in the beauty of the scenery and August lets him use his camera because it has more features. Seth is happy to take the shuttle back to the campground because he has blisters on his feet but he hesitated to tell August, thinking that Henry's having blisters was enough of a problem. As Henry walks back down the trail with Woody, he phones his AA sponsor, Harvey, in San Diego. August tells Harvey about having the boys and the new issue of Wes' lying about how many times he has been in jail. Harvey wonders if Wes was also lying about the length of his jail term and August is caught up short, thinking that he may have to deal with the boys longer than he thought. Harvey also suggests that having Seth and Henry fills a void in August's life where Philip used to be.

August and the boys have moved on to Bryce Canyon National Park where they've been for more than a week. August leaves the boys in the RV one day so that he can call the jail where Wes is incarcerated and get Wes' real release date. The deputy can't give August the information he wants but tells him that Wes will have to give the approval to release the information first. The next time that the boys call Wes, August asks to talk to him too about his release date but Wes is evasive. August tells Wes to give the authorities the approval to release the information to August and Wes said he will but he hangs up without even saying goodbye.



## Analysis

Seth gets a graphic lesson about death when he learns that the plastic iced tea bottle contains some of Philip's cremated remains. At first, August is not sure that he wants Seth to know what's in the bottle because it seems much too personal to be shared, but August has hurt Seth's feelings by shutting him out so abruptly so August relents and tells him. This is a learning experience for August, too, who has become so isolated in his life that he forgets what it means to share intimate things with other people. August and the boys are becoming better acquainted and learning to trust each other and Harvey may be right in that Seth and Henry are filling a hole in August that was left vacant by Philip's death.

Explaining about the contents of the iced tea bottle is a sensitive topic, too, because August is not aware of what Seth and Henry know about death. He has just met the boys, really, and is learning about them but the topic of death has not yet arisen. Some people don't like their children to be exposed to the topic for fear that it will frighten them and bring unnecessary angst while others want to be up front with their kids and treat death as a part of life. August's reaction is quite normal though because both because he is not quite ready to share any information about Philip with the boys and also because he doesn't know what they know about death and the incident startles him on both counts.

Trust becomes a big issue in the story. As the boys begin to learn that August is someone they can trust, they grow closer to him. It seems that the only person who can't be trusted is Wes who has lied to August about how many times he has been in jail and is evasive whenever August questions him about anything. August begins to wonder if he will end up having responsibility for the boys long past the time that Wes had originally stated. And because August has grown closer to Seth and Henry, he becomes wary of returning them to a situation with a father who doesn't seem to have many redeeming qualities. Already, August feels more responsibility toward Seth and Henry than their own father does. At first, August didn't know if he wanted the care of the boys for the summer but the more he learns about Seth and Henry's home life, the more he wishes he could take them out of it. August has a sense of wanting what is best for the young boys that their father cannot or will not own and it will be a source of anxiety for August as the story extends.

There is foreshadowing in this section as Seth falls in love with hiking and climbing. He has never even been close to a mountain before but seems like a natural in the environment and comes alive when allowed the opportunity to climb. He is already wanting to take risks that August is uncomfortable with. August even has Seth call his father to get permission to try a certain hiking trail because August doesn't feel comfortable giving his permission for Seth to do something he considers to be so dangerous. This will be important as the story extends and Seth's character develops.

As the story develops, Wes will begin to sense that the boys have grown to love August and he resents their close relationship. Already, Wes is hanging up on August when he



calls because he feels like he's being challenged. August doesn't like Wes because he has essentially abandoned his sons and lies about everything and Wes doesn't like August because his sons are getting close to a man who was a complete stranger in their lives just a short time ago. This antagonism will only grow as the story continues.

## Discussion Question 1

Why is August so upset when Seth mentions the old plastic iced tea bottle in the glove compartment?

## Discussion Question 2

Why is August so upset when Seth tells him that Wes has been in jail four times?

## Discussion Question 3

Why does Seth not tell August that his feet hurt because he has blisters when they are out hiking?

## Vocabulary

tendons, obviously, nudging, fierce, nonpotable, nozzle, deflate, vaguely, shrieked, patriarchs, majestic, startlingly, lever, drenched, marvel, technically, humane, grotto, enthusiasm, dread, steep, underestimate, comically, retaining, formation, moleskin, solemn



# Part One: Early June; Chapter Nine, Open; Chapter Ten, Four Strikes; Chapter Eleven, In a Barrel

## Summary

August calls Harvey again to tell him that the jail wouldn't give him Wes' release date and he asked Wes to authorize them to do it but he hadn't done it as of yesterday. When Seth and Henry talk to Wes the next time, August asks to talk to him too but Wes hangs up before August can say anything. Later that day, Seth tells August that he would like to find an AA meeting so it's OK if they leave Bryce Canyon now. As they drive, August tells Seth that he needs him to ask Wes when his release date is and Seth agrees to do it the next time they talk.

August and the boys reach another town and August takes Seth in to an AA meeting while Henry sleeps in the RV. Seth listens as the people in the meeting share their experiences with alcoholism and trying to stay sober. August notices that Seth begins to look ill so he sends him to the camper to wait for him. When August returns to the RV, Seth begins to cry and tells August that he had hoped he could get some information that he could give to his father but as it turns out, an alcoholic needs to want to stop drinking in order for sobriety to work. Seth wants to know if August thinks Wes is an alcoholic and he tells him that he thinks he probably is.

In Chapter Ten, Seth is outside the RV talking on August's cell phone when August wakes up. August goes out to talk to Seth who tells him that the authorities are trying to pin another charge on Wes and that he could be in jail for another 90 days. Seth tells August that there's no point in asking Wes anything anymore because Wes lies. Seth told Wes to tell the guard to tell August about his true release date. Seth asks August not to tell Henry because he would only get upset. Seth wonders what will happen to them when August returns them to their home in September and Wes is still in jail and August tells him he'll have to think about it. August makes a phone call to the jail and learns that there is no extra charge pending against Wes; his release date had always been December 3. Seth and Henry can tell that the news is not good just by looking at August and he tells them that he has to think about everything.

August and the boys reach the Grand Teton National Park and August parks the RV so they can have lunch. Seth sits outside to eat just so he can have an unobstructed view of the mountains. Henry tells August the Seth is thinking about climbing and August is shocked to hear so many words out of the usually silent boy. Seth tells August that he feels so much bigger when surrounded by the mountains, like there's more room inside him than there used to be.



When August and the boys reach Yellowstone, Seth wants to know if August wants help in figuring out where to spread Philip's ashes and August tells him he can make suggestions if he wants to. When they're sitting around a campfire, Seth suggests that they put some of Philip's ashes in the fire so August agrees. Seth says a few words about how much he and Henry like August and wish that Philip could have been on the trip with them too and then August releases some of the ashes. August is taken over by a panic attack and rushes into the RV to wash his hands. Seth follows him in and realizes that August looks ill but August tells him that he isn't sick, he just hadn't been prepared for the rush of emotions. Both Seth and Henry hug August until he says he feels better.

Later that night, August tells Seth and Henry that at the end of the summer, he will take them home with him to San Diego because he'll need to get back to work. They can stay with him until Christmas break when he can drive them home. The boys think it's a great plan and Henry cries a little bit in relief.

In Chapter Eleven, August wakes Seth and Henry early so they can get out to see Old Faithful before the crowds get too big. August gives them a science lesson about geysers and they're amazed when Old Faithful finally erupts. Later as they drive through the park, Seth asks permission to drop more of Philip's ashes when they see bison running and August lets him release some out the RV window. The next morning, Seth wants to spread some more of the ashes in a lake at Yellowstone and they let Henry wade into the water and drop some ashes. The next day, Seth convinces August to let him spread some more ashes in a river and August reluctantly agrees. August has to hold on to Seth as he stretches out on a rock but suddenly the iced tea bottle slips out of his hands and falls into the rushing river. Seth feels bad about losing the bottle but August tells him that Philip had been a risk taker and would have loved splashing in the river; in fact he would have loved going over Niagara Falls in a barrel if he had known he would have survived it.

## Analysis

Alcoholism continues to be an important theme in the book. Seth wants to go with August when he attends another AA meeting yet he is almost sickened when he hears the stories shared by the attendees. Seth had hoped that he would glean something that he could take back home and help Wes get sober but unfortunately Seth learns that sobriety is not a quick fix and there are no easy answers. It is amazing that none of the participants of the AA meeting seem to think it is odd that Seth wants to participate in the meetings. Unfortunately, children of alcoholics also struggle with the effects of the disease yet there is no organization dedicated to helping them. The meeting experiences will be valuable to Seth even though he finds them distressing at first.

Seth also has to come to terms with the fact that his father is a liar as well as an alcoholic. He knows that Wes has lied to August about how many times Wes has been in jail and now Wes has lied about his release date. This introduces another theme into the story: coming of age. When a young person learns some realities that are



sometimes difficult to understand, it is called coming of age because he or she is learning about the frailties of human beings and how the world works. Seth is becoming disillusioned about his father who stands in stark contrast to August who seems to be a man of his word and has been kind and supportive to Seth and Henry in the short time that he has known them. This summer road trip is not only about viewing national parks and roadside scenes; it is a trip for emotional growth as well. Seth was going to find out about his father's shortcomings at some point soon so it is good that he is with August when he realizes some of them because August can provide a perspective on his father's behavior and can counter the negative with positive reinforcement.

August's relationship with the boys, especially Seth, is becoming stronger, supporting the theme of intergenerational relationships. August is older than Wes and the boys are not used to being with someone who is older, responsible and more mature. August is building a relationship of trust and accountability which will prove to be invaluable to the boys and something they will treasure forever. It is highly possible that Seth and Henry would have never opted to leave with August for three months but necessity has forced them into this situation. The relationship that grows between August and the boys is beautiful and they come together at a good time for all of them. Seth and Henry are forming opinions on what it's like to be a man in the world and August has a void in his life left by the death of his son. They are all filling in the gaps for each other in positive ways and the author shows how relationships between people of different generations can not only happen but they can be robust and life altering.

## Discussion Question 1

Why is Seth so upset after he attends the AA meeting with August?

## Discussion Question 2

What finally makes Seth admit that his father is a liar?

## Discussion Question 3

Why does Seth take such an interest in where Philip's ashes are spread in Yellowstone?

## Vocabulary

impromptu, cawing, elevation, hoodoo, alcoholism, sobriety, panicky, poring, intervention, audibly, glance, restrain, consciously, outrush, elaborate, excruciating, cremated, gritty, coherent, antibiotic, vulnerable, scoured, geothermal, fumaroles, geyser, distinguish, consistently, whiz, instinctively, intent, exasperated, assure, fascinated



# Part Two: Late August; Chapter One, Sad Good News; Chapter Two, Stay Found; Chapter Three, One Real Good Dog; Chapter Four, Last Stop

## Summary

When August and the boys reach Arches National Park in Utah there are only 13 days left until the end of summer. They hike up to Delicate Arch with more stamina than they had earlier on the trip. That evening August notes several voice messages from Wes on his phone but the boys aren't interested in talking to him. When the boys are occupied with Woody, August retrieves the voice messages and Wes states that he has good news and wants someone to call him back. Seth thinks it's a ruse just to get them to call him and asks August to call instead. Wes is disappointed to hear August's voice instead of one of the boys. Wes tells August that he will be released on September 3 to do the balance of his sentence under house arrest. This should be good news but it hits August hard because he had planned to have the boys with him until Christmas. Seth and Henry are less than thrilled with the news too. August calls Harvey because he's not sure the boys will be safe with Wes because he's an alcoholic and talks to him about staging an intervention. The next day August assures Seth and Henry that they can call him anytime when they get home and that they can stay with him if Wes has to go to jail again.

In Chapter Two, August locates an AA meeting held in a trailer parked on a dirt road in Utah. August and Seth leave the sleeping Henry in the RV and enter the trailer to be warmly welcomed by three people, one of them a 53-year-old Native American named Emory. Seth talks about their life with Wes, that he's not abusive but mostly he's just not around. Seth reveals that their mother left when Seth was seven and Henry was two; he's not really sure why. And then it occurs to Seth that he needs to tell Wes that since their mother left, it's even more important that Wes be a better father because your kids are supposed to be your most important thing. So when Wes is drinking, he leaves them too and it makes him and Henry feel terrible. Seth says that he wishes they could just stay with August and then he feels bad that he has betrayed his father. Seth loves being with August because he does what he says he is going to do and they can talk to him about their feelings and things change if they need to, things that are not working with their father. Emory tells Seth that he should never apologize for telling his true feelings and that he should just say a little prayer for the right words when he is ready to talk to Wes. After the meeting, August realizes that Henry and Woody are not in the RV so the authorities are called. It is pitch black and the men are worried about the coyotes roaming in the area. August is advised to stay at the RV and not join the search because it is treacherous territory if you're not familiar with it.



In Chapter Three, August and Seth both feel guilty for leaving Henry alone in the RV. Emory stops in the RV to tell August that he has helped search with the police for awhile but he's going home. Emory then spots Woody running toward the RV, clearly trying to get August's attention to come with him so he and Emory decide to follow Woody to see if he can lead them to Henry. Woody leads them to the home of a couple whom Emory knows but they are not at home so they sit for a few minutes to get their breath and talk about what to do next. Emory suggests that the couple may have taken Henry to the police station. August and Emory walk back to the RV and Seth is inside but all the police officers have left. Suddenly a police car pulls up and August is relieved to see Henry in the vehicle. It turns out that Emory was right; the couple who own the house found Henry and took him to the police station and they're all happy that Woody is a good, smart dog.

In Chapter Four, the next morning, August thinks he should just take the boys home, bypassing stops at Spider Rock and the Grand Canyon, because Henry's disappearance last night has made him apprehensive. August relents, though, and takes the boys to the stops as planned. The Grand Canyon is their last stop on the trip and Seth wonders how long the experience will live within him.

## Analysis

The theme of intergenerational relationships continues to be important in this section. Seth and Henry have established a close relationship with August and do not want to return home when they learn that Wes will be getting out of jail in September. Seth states in the AA meeting that life is good with August, that he does what he says he's going to do and if there's a question about anything, August is open to talking about things, not just ignoring the boys like their father does. The boys are experiencing trust and security for the first time in their lives and they don't want to lose it.

August, too is experiencing a new world as the boys are showing him how to view the world differently. August has been caught up in grief over the death of his son and the end of his marriage and has become tired of living. The boys have introduced a sense of wonder and inquisitiveness into August's world that he thought had left forever. When August learns that Wes will be released from jail in September and that the boys won't be going home with him to San Diego, he feels down because for the first time in a long time, he had been looking forward to something. Over the course of the summer August and the boys have built a relationship that will last forever which will be revealed as the story extends.

August has shown some interpersonal growth during the summer, too, by being in circumstances that he never would have been in had the boys not come into his life. August talks to Harvey regularly about his summer experiences and Harvey tends to tell him that he is normal in his reactions of being protective about the boys. At the beginning of the summer, August tells Harvey that he wonders what he's gotten himself into, but by the close of the summer, August has developed a paternal feeling toward





Seth and Henry and doesn't even want to return them to their father because he's afraid of what might happen to them while under their father's care.

The theme of coming of age continues to deepen as Seth has a moment of truth at the AA meeting. When he begins to speak, he's not sure what he's going to say but it finally comes out that the boys' mother left them five years ago and they don't really know why. So when Wes leaves them alone to go drinking, he is essentially leaving them too and it's not right for children to be abandoned. Seth thinks that a parent's children should be the most important thing in their lives and when Wes drinks he is showing that that is not true. This is what Seth wants and needs to tell Wes when they get home. Seth realizes that he and Henry have voices and rights and that it is OK for him to speak about what terrifies them and how they should not be abandoned ever again.

## Discussion Question 1

Why are Seth and Henry less than thrilled with Wes' "good" news?

## Discussion Question 2

Why is August not very happy about having to return Seth and Henry in September instead of December?

## Discussion Question 3

Why does Seth feel like he has betrayed his father when he states that he would rather stay with August?

## Vocabulary

delicate, freestanding, steep, cairns, derisively, distinct, vehemently, obstruction, mesas, conscience, sovereign, potentially, scenario, partially, lolling, vegetation, negligence, anonymity, bliss, heartfelt



## Part Two: Late August; Chapter Five, Some Kind of It; Chapter Six, Good-Bye; Chapter Seven, It Won't Be

### Summary

August's heart sinks as he drives the RV into the driveway of Wes' mechanic's shop. August and the boys walk around the back of the building to where they live and see Wes standing in the doorway. Wes doesn't move to hug the boys or even acknowledge them, he simply glares at August. Wes tells Seth that since he has an ankle monitor and can't leave the house, Seth will have to take a cart and walk to get groceries for them. Seth refuses to buy liquor for his dad though and Wes blames August for putting those kind of thoughts in Seth's head. August stays so that Seth can tell his dad about how he feels about their home life and Wes behaves defensively, dismissing what he has to say. August senses that it's time to leave and Seth helps him get their things out of the RV. Henry refuses to come out of his room to say goodbye.

In Chapter Six, August gives Seth his contact information and they make arrangements to talk on Skype. August gives Seth the fifty dollar bill that Wes had given him for the boys at the beginning of the summer and tells Seth to use it if he ever needs to get to safety and call August. Wes grudgingly thanks August for taking the boys this summer and August says goodbye to Seth but Henry still doesn't come out of his room. Finally, as August backs out of the driveway, he hears Henry's voice and Henry comes running and jumps into August's arms to hug him.

On his way home, August is overcome with emotional and physical fatigue and pulls into a Walmart parking lot to sleep. When he wakes hours later, he calls his ex-wife, Maggie, who is surprised to hear from him. August wants to know if Philip had been much of a thrill seeker; would he have wanted to go over Niagara Falls in a barrel if he could have been sure he would have lived. Maggie thinks that Philip did have an adventurous side. August also apologizes to Maggie for silently blaming her for the accident when he himself had often driven after drinking alcohol. All that makes them different is that August just got lucky and nothing ever happened when he had been driving.

In Chapter Seven, August meets Harvey at 10:00 in the evening at a coffee shop after an AA meeting. August has the first day of the new school year in the morning but he feels the need to talk about Seth and Henry and their relationship with Wes. Harvey tells August that Wes will always be a problem for August because August has seen him at his worst and his boys have seen a better way with August. Harvey suggests that losing Seth and Henry has rekindled August's grief for Philip. Harvey advises August to understand that the summer with the boys was a one-time thing but that he needs to get on with his life without expecting any contact with them.



One evening when August is working at home, Seth contacts him via Skype. Henry also pops into the picture and the boys are happy to see Woody sitting on August's lap. Suddenly the boys click off but Seth contacts August later and tells him that Wes doesn't want them to talk to August online. Before long, August has to end the conversation because his ex-wife has shown up at his house. She had thought that maybe August wanted to get back together since he had called her the other night but August apologizes and tells her that he is not interested in that. Seth doesn't contact August again until December and August makes sure that he knows that he and Henry can come to August's house anytime if they need to escape. And then August tries to heed Harvey's advice and just let the boys go.

## Analysis

August gives Seth the \$50 bill that Wes had given August at the beginning of the summer to pay for food for the boys. August wants Seth to know that he can use the money if things ever get so bad in the house that they need to leave and get to a phone to call August. The \$50 bill will appear later in the story so it is an important symbol of hope and trust for Seth and Henry.

The theme of love is important in this section. August has grown to love Seth and Henry who were complete strangers to him just three months earlier. Perhaps the boys fill a void in August's life left there by the death of his own son but maybe the boys are bringing out things in August that he thought had died long ago. Seth and Henry have also grown to love August. It is a new experience for them to have a consistent sense of security in their lives and they are drawn to August's integrity because he does what he says he is going to do. For the first time in their lives Seth and Henry have someone they can count on to encourage them to grow and who values them for who they are as people. August's demeanor is steady, too, which is a change from Wes' erratic behavior caused by drinking. The boys can sense that August loves them because he wants them to be happy and wants what is good for them.

August is lucky that he has a good friend like Harvey to keep him centered. Harvey has been around for all the bad things that have happened to August so he knows why the boys have been a positive influence on him. Harvey, however, is able to be objective because he's not emotionally invested and he keeps August from making decisions that would not be good for anyone involved. Harvey is also a motivator for August and he encourages him to move forward with positive influences in his life but he knows that those come with boundaries and Harvey is able to provide those for his friend.

It is unfortunate that August and the boys have to be separated when they have just really found each other and the joy that their relationships bring to their lives. Life seems to be a process of loving and losing for them and it will be interesting to see how they manage through the next phase of their lives having learned lessons from each other.



## Discussion Question 1

Why is Wes so antagonistic toward August when August returns Seth and Henry at the end of the summer?

## Discussion Question 2

How has August's time with Seth and Henry made him more forgiving toward his ex-wife?

## Discussion Question 3

What is Harvey's philosophy and advice for August about August's relationship with Seth and Henry?

## Vocabulary

interminable, dissatisfaction, hissed, instinctive, interjected, pathetically, chronicle, vaguely, whimper, perspective, obligation, queasy, tangible, icon, tentative, aggravated, tolerate, coincidence, defensive, repetitive, upright



# Part Three: Late May, Eight Years On; Chapter One, Weakness; Chapter Two, Grown; Chapter Three, Rigorous Honesty; Chapter Four, Climbing

## Summary

It is now eight years since August, Seth and Henry took their road trip and Seth is a sophomore in college. August talks to Seth via Skype and today he tells Seth that he has muscular dystrophy and that he can't walk very well anymore. August's car is being fitted for hand controls which will allow him some mobility but he wants to sell the RV because he simply can't get up and down the steps anymore. Seth then offers to buy the RV if August will accept small monthly payments. They agree that Seth will come to San Diego to pick it up in two weeks when school ends for the summer. Later that night Henry calls August because Seth had told him about August's condition and he wants to talk to August about it. Henry is now fifteen and August thinks he sounds like a grown man. Henry tells August that he will be coming with Seth when he picks up the RV and August is so happy that he gets to see both of them again.

In Chapter Two, August picks up Seth and Henry at the bus station in San Diego. They have a happy reunion and the boys tell August that they won't be taking the RV home right away because they're going hiking and climbing. August feels a sadness wash over him because he's not able to go with them and do those things anymore and he wishes the boys weren't leaving tomorrow morning. The boys are impressed with the hand control on August's car and they head to August's house. After dinner, Seth starts packing things for August and tells him that they are taking him with them on their summer road trip. August is happy but concerned that he can't move around very easily and Seth assures him that they'll help him with anything he needs. When Seth is finished packing August's clothes he tells August that they also need to bring along some of Philip's ashes.

In Chapter Three, it is the end of the first day of the road trip but Seth still won't tell August about their final destination. Seth has also made arrangements to attend an AA meeting and August and Henry join him. After the meeting Henry tells August that he didn't get Wes' permission to come on the road trip; he had just left a note telling him that he was going away for the summer with Seth. Henry also couldn't tell Wes that August was also going to be on the trip so he just avoided any direct confrontation.

In Chapter Four, August awakens the next morning to the sounds of Henry fixing breakfast. Seth has gone climbing. While they are talking, Seth's cell phone rings and it is Wes so Henry decides to talk to him and get the confrontation over. August can hear Henry lie to Wes about August's not being there but he's afraid that Wes will catch on



when Woody starts bark. Henry tells August that Wes doesn't like August because the boys idolize him and have since their summer together eight years ago. Henry then drives the RV down to a place where they can park and watch for Seth climbing a mountain. August is shocked to learn that Seth climbs without ropes or any other type of safety equipment. Finally August spots Seth in his camera and shoots some photos of him climbing. When Seth returns to the RV, Henry tells him how terrified August is of his climbing without ropes but he tries to tell August that he is safe. Henry also tells Seth that Wes had called and he told him that Wes had heard Woody bark so Seth has to remember that they have taken Woody on their trip but not August. That night as August and the boys sit around the campfire, he tells himself to memorize every detail because this will be his last summer on the road.

## Analysis

Eight years have passed since August, Seth and Henry made their RV trip. August has hardly heard from the boys during that time because Wes would not allow any communication with August. But now that Seth is in college, he has more freedom and talks with August on a more regular basis. The connection between August and the boys is still strong in spite of the fact that they have not seen each other for years. In fact, August feels sad when he has to tell Seth that he has Muscular Dystrophy because it is almost like telling his own son. Henry is distraught when he hears about August's medical news and it is clear that August means a lot to him. The bond forged between August and the boys is one that doesn't have to be physically seen to be strong and relevant. August has had such a strong impact on their lives that what he has taught them and showed them will live with them forever.

The relationship with the boys is strong, though, and they decide to take August with them on their summer road trip and take care of everything he needs just like August took them and took care of their needs eight years ago. August is not only moved that he has made such an impact on the boys that they would want to include him in their plans, but also because he thought that his medical restrictions had removed any more fun from his life. The story of August and the boys has come full circle. August rescued them and showed them a new world at a time when they needed someone desperately. Now Seth and Henry are repaying August's kindness and showing him a world that he thought was closed to him forever.

There is foreshadowing when Seth tells August that they need to take some of Philip's ashes with them on the trip. This is reminiscent of the ashes being a big part of their first RV trip and will become significant soon in the story in an event that will move August beyond words.

## Discussion Question 1

Why is August able to talk to Seth more now than he talks to Henry?



## Discussion Question 2

How has August's illness impacted his life?

## Discussion Question 3

Why does Henry just leave a note for Wes that he is spending the summer with Seth?

## Vocabulary

status, prediction, awkwardly, scrunched, diagnosis, distal, extremities, upshot, speculation, sentimental, bayonet, reverberating, assessment, succinctly, exclamation, disembodied, dismissive, figurative, cryptic, massive, torrent, comprehensive



# Part Three: Late May, Eight Years On; Chapter Five, Raison D'etre; Chapter Six, Chalky White Hands; Chapter Seven, Or Bust; Chapter Eight, The Truth

## Summary

August awakens the next morning and Henry is again cooking breakfast and Seth is out looking for a climbing partner to climb with because August had given him such a hard time about climbing solo yesterday. Henry reveals that August's comments hurt Seth because Seth has been climbing for eight years and really knows what he's doing and how to be safe. Seth returns with a young man named Dwayne who has agreed to climb with Seth and Seth tells August not to say anything bad about climbing in front of Dwayne. Seth and Dwayne will take the last shuttle tonight to the mountain to begin climbing by moonlight. It might take Seth and Dwayne a few days to complete the climb. Seth tells August not to watch them climbing because it's not as hard as it looks and he's afraid he will pick up August's negative energy.

Later that day August takes a shuttle into town to buy a helmet camera for Seth to use on his climbs. August and Henry take a shuttle into Zion Canyon for something to do even though August had promised Seth he wouldn't watch him climb. August asks Henry if he plans to go to college but Henry is not sure because he doesn't have good grades like Seth and there's no community college near where they live. August offers Henry a place in his home if he wants to go to school in San Diego and Henry is grateful.

In Chapter Six, it is the following evening and Henry and August are at their campsite talking when Seth arrives looking totally exhausted. In spite of looking worn out, August notes that Seth looks completely happy. Seth, August and Henry view the footage that Seth captured on his helmet cam and August is visibly upset by how precarious Seth looks when he climbs. August starts to have a panic attack and needs help to get outside to get some fresh air. August tells Seth that he feels like he is watching Seth commit suicide and Seth erupts in anger because he is insulted that August questions his skill and passion for climbing. He yells that August is angry at anything having to do with fitness because he can't do those things anymore. Henry then jumps on Seth, yelling and beating on him for talking to August so disrespectfully. Henry demands that Seth apologize to August and he does but August tells him it's not necessary.

In Chapter Seven, Seth pulls the RV into Pikes Peak and Seth plans to hike its trail in just one day. A couple days later, Henry drives the RV to the Pikes Peak railroad station and they board a train to take them up the mountain. As they ride, August tells Henry that maybe they should call Wes because he calls every day and their not responding





will only make the situation worse. At the top of the trail, August and Henry get off the train to wait for Seth and it turns out that Seth had finished his hike and had been waiting on them for two hours.

In Chapter Eight, August wakes up in the passenger seat at night and Seth tells him they are in Kansas. August wonders why Seth seems to be in a rush to get somewhere and Henry says that they're afraid that Wes will send the authorities after them and they don't want to be found. When August wakes at dawn the RV is parked on the side of a road and Henry and Woody are in the back but Seth is gone. Henry tells August that the RV has broken down and Seth left to hitch into town to get some mechanic's tools so he can fix the RV. Henry borrows August's cell phone to call Wes and he tells August that Wes hung up on him. Seth returns, being dropped off by someone in a green pickup truck. Seth is miffed because the driver is a mechanic in town who loaned Seth some tools for \$100. The mechanic also kept Seth's driver's license and credit card. After he works on the RV for awhile, Seth realizes that the mechanic sold him the wrong piece and he has to hitch a ride back into town to get another one. Seth has not returned by 10:00 that night so August and Henry decide to try to get some sleep.

## Analysis

August needs to come to terms with his relationship with Seth and Henry because they bristle at some of the things he says now, especially related to Seth's climbing. August has not seen the boys for eight years and they are no longer the children they were then and August has a hard time coming to terms with that. In August's mind, they still need someone to watch over them, especially related to Wes' drinking and abandonment, but they have survived as people told August they would. They have learned how to navigate the world and manage their situation with their father without anyone's intervention. It would be hard, though, for August to not be concerned for them and to see Seth taking such risks with mountain climbing would be difficult not to say anything. August cares for them and never wanted any harm to come to them and it seems to August that Seth is deliberately putting himself at unnecessary risk. They will have to come to a place where they can understand each other now that so much time has passed and the boys are young men, not boys. Perhaps Philip's death has some impact on how August views Seth and Henry because Philip died when he was a boy and in August's mind he will always be that same age while Seth and Henry have lived and grown.

The theme of intergenerational relationships continues to be important. Early on in the story it was charming that Seth and Henry were learning from August and he felt good about what he could do for them. Now, though, the tables are turned and August is the one in the position of having to learn. This is initially difficult for August to accept. Relationships, regardless of the ages of the people involved, are dynamic, growing things and it is important for August and the boys to re-learn each other as they move through the different stages of their lives together.



## Discussion Question 1

Why does it make Seth so angry when August warns him about being careful when he is climbing?

## Discussion Question 2

How have Seth and Henry changed since they took their first road trip with August eight years ago?

## Discussion Question 3

Why are Seth and Henry so afraid that Wes will find out that August is with them on the road trip?

## Vocabulary

interminable, oppressive, coincidence, dissatisfaction, interjected, awkward, pathetically, vaguely, inconvenient, intervention, fatigue, toboggan, fathom, resentful, conversational, reclaimed, arbitrary, dismissive, reasonable



# Part Three: Late May, Eight Years On; Chapter Nine, Flashing Red, Chapter Ten, Falling; Epilogue: August in Late August

## Summary

August is awakened by the sound of a two-way radio and sees flashing red lights outside the RV. Two state police officers have come to take Henry into custody because Wes has reported him as a runaway. They let Henry get dressed and he is put into the back seat of the cruiser. Henry asks to call Wes to see if he will withdraw the runaway report. August talks to one of the officers about the family's problems but the officer has a duty to return Henry based on Wes' complaint. Suddenly August can hear Henry shouting at Wes on the phone, telling him that he knows Wes is making this trouble simply because he hates August for being a better man than Wes is. Henry also tells Wes that he can't respect him because he does mean things all the time. Wes withdraws the runaway report and Henry is allowed to stay with August in the RV. August then tells the officers about their mechanical problems and that Seth is missing so they offer to go see if they can find Seth. When the officers leave, August tells Henry that he was so good in the way he handled the situation with Wes and Henry is proud.

A short time later, the officers pull up to the RV and drop off Seth who tells August that the mechanic's shop had to order the part Seth needed and the shop owner had gone home, leaving Seth's credit card and driver's license locked up. The mechanics wouldn't let Seth use their phone to call August either. Seth didn't have any cash so he couldn't even get a hotel room or any food. Later that morning after Seth had fixed the RV, they drive to the mechanic's shop to return the tools and August accompanies Seth inside. The owner grudgingly gives Seth his credit card and driver's license but August makes no move to leave. August tells the man that they have lost a day of travel thanks to his inept behavior and that Seth was seriously inconvenienced due to his negligence. August refuses to leave until the man refunds Seth's \$100 for lending the old tools. The man finally relents and gives August five \$20 bills and August returns one because the man had driven Seth back to the RV the first day.

In Chapter Ten, August wakes from a nap in the back of the RV and realizes that the shades are drawn and the privacy curtain is pulled closed. When he tries to look out, Henry admonishes him, telling him that he can't look outside for another few hours because they're taking him for a surprise. When August wakes again, he is in his fully made bed; Henry had made it up for him because the boys are driving through the night to get to their destination. August hears a loud, roaring sound and Henry pokes his head around the curtain to tell August to get dressed because they have arrived. The boys tell August that he has to close his eyes and Seth guides him out of the RV where August



can feel mist hitting his face. When August opens his eyes he realizes that they are at Niagara Falls.

Henry gives August a little barrel they had brought with them. Seth then hands the plastic bag containing Philip's ashes so that August can put them inside the barrel. The boys walked further up the trail to drop the barrel into the water so that August could see it going over the falls. The boys run back to August and he collapses onto them, hugging them tightly. August is moved from all the emotion but the boys are happy that their mission was a success. The boys tell August that they can linger now that their plan is complete.

In the Epilogue, August wakes and peeks out the blinds to see Yosemite National Park. Seth has left a few days ago to go climbing with some friends. Later that day August and Henry drive out to a meadow to position their chairs to watch for Seth. Henry asks August again if his offer to stay at his house while going to college is still open and August tells him that it is. Henry tells August that he still has the \$50 bill that August left with them eight years ago and he could take a bus to San Diego. Henry tells August that knowing him has made all the difference in their lives. They always knew that if their father let them down, August would be there to catch them.

Seth returns to camp three days later and as they sit around the campfire, August tells Seth that he is proud of him for being able to take on a challenge as big as climbing. Seth admits that August's fear is just as much a part of August as climbing is to him and he has no right to make August feel bad about it. August tells Seth that fear isn't something to aspire to though. August is sad when Seth mentions that they have only six days left because this is the end of the life August has always known. August's mood lightens though when Seth tells him that they plan on taking August with them every summer until he's not able to go anymore. August knows that he can face the year ahead knowing that he'll be spending the summer with Seth and Henry.

## Analysis

The thing that August and the boys have feared may come true has happened: Wes has called the authorities to report Henry as a runaway. The only good thing that comes of this experience is that Henry is able to find his voice and yell at his father for being such a disappointment and someone who doesn't deserve any respect. He tells his father that he hates August because the boys love him and the reason they love him is because he supports and respects them. The message must get through to Wes who does drop the runaway report and the boys continue on their way with August.

For years, Henry has been a quiet boy and it is only on this second road trip that he has been able to tell his father what he really feels. Even Seth is surprised when he learns what Henry has done. Perhaps it is being with August again that reinforces in Henry the idea of what a real man is and how he should treat people and that emboldens Henry to stand up for himself for the first time ever.



August continues to show the boys what a real role model does when he addresses the mechanic who has taken advantage of Seth. This not only indicates that the mechanic showed poor business judgment but also that people have a right to protest when something unfair like this happens to them. As long as Seth and Henry spend time with August, he will continue to be a good example for them to emulate.

August learns that Henry still has the \$50 bill that he had left with the boys eight years earlier. But even more than that, Henry tells August that just knowing that August was out there as a support for them if they needed it was what got them through the difficult times with their father. This is so gratifying for August to hear and he knows that his time with them had been very well spent.

And, finally, the boys repay August's kindness and show respect for their relationship with the symbolic act of sending some of Philip's ashes over Niagara Falls in a barrel. In this way, they show that Philip is a part of the group dynamic even though he isn't physically present and it brings closure to their discussions about whether Philip would have been a risk taker had he known he would have been OK. August is touched by the boys' sentimentality which further cements their strong relationship.

## Discussion Question 1

What is the tipping point that allows Henry to tell his father what he really thinks about him?

## Discussion Question 2

What is the significance of the \$50 bill that Henry tells August he still has?

## Discussion Question 3

Why did Seth and Henry want to take August to Niagara Falls?

## Vocabulary

status, prediction, awkwardly, scrunched, diagnosis, distal, extremities, upshot, speculation, sentimental, bayonet, reverberating, assessment, succinctly, exclamation, disembodied, dismissive, figurative, cryptic, massive, torrent, comprehensive



# Characters

## August Schroeder

August Schroeder is a middle-aged science teacher who lives in San Diego, California. August divorced his wife, Maggie, after the death of their son Philip who was killed in an accident while Maggie was driving. August grieves for his son nearly two years later and is on his way to Yellowstone National Park to spread some of Philip's ashes. August and Philip were supposed to be taking this trip together so August thinks this will be the best he can do symbolically.

When August's RV breaks down, he comes in contact with a mechanic and his two sons, Seth and Henry, whom August takes with him on the RV trip for the summer. As children of an alcoholic, Seth and Henry don't know what security and respect mean until they spend time with August. August takes care of them and makes them feel special just by supporting them. He reasons with the boys instead of becoming enraged and they learn what it's like to look up to a male role model. August also learns from the boys during their summer and is able to view things in not such a black and white manner and is eventually able to forgive his ex-wife for driving the night that Philip died.

August is a recovering alcoholic and seeks support from AA meetings as well as his sponsor, Harvey, who becomes his really good friend. August is stricken with muscular dystrophy but he still tries to maintain a good life with a positive attitude. August is the happiest, though, when he thinks about Seth and Henry and knowing that he will be going on many more summer RV trips with them.

## Seth

Seth is the older of two boys whose father is named Wes. Seth is 12-years-old when the story begins. He is a very responsible boy, often taking care of his younger brother, Henry, because his father, Wes, is drunk a lot and not available to care for them properly. Seth acts as if he has the world on his shoulders and August can't help but be moved by his mature demeanor for someone so young.

Seth knows what a treat it is to be allowed to go with August on the road trip and he tries not to irritate August in any way so August won't get mad. It is obvious that this is behavior Seth has learned from living with his volatile, alcoholic father. Seth acts like the parent to Henry and tries to keep him in line on the trip so that August will think they are good and not take them back home too early. Seth has experienced being sent away to relatives and to foster care when their father has been incarcerated for drinking and driving so he knows how to become invisible and not be a problem for those taking care of him.

On the road, Seth develops a yearning to climb mountains and it is the first time he has seen anything like them. Seth tries to fix the dynamic in the family and even attends



Alcoholics Anonymous meetings with August in the hopes that he can learn something that will help Wes with his drinking. Finally, Seth comes to understand that his father and mother have abandoned him and Henry; his mother left the family and Wes leaves every night to go drinking. Something else has always been more important to them than Henry and him and he is finally able to tell his father that in a small intervention. Seth never forgets how loved and secure August made Henry and him feel so when he is old enough, he takes August with them on a road trip for the summer. Seth becomes a very accomplished college student and adept climber due to the confidence that August gave him during the time he knew them.

## Henry

Henry is the younger of two brothers being raised by an alcoholic father. When the story begins, Henry is just seven-years-old. Henry barely speaks and when he does, his voice is soft and not directed to anyone in particular. Henry is the product of an abusive home life and he relies heavily on his brother, Seth, because his father is out drinking a lot. Henry lets Seth do most of the talking for both of them. When Henry warms up to August and begins to trust him, he is able to speak a little bit which surprises both August and Seth. Henry tries to be good and not cause any trouble which could result in August taking the boys home earlier than they have to go.

By the end of the story, Henry is 15-years-old and has grown to be a confident, well-spoken young man. Henry loves August and tells him that he and Seth were able to grow up in their environment knowing that August would always be available to them if they ever needed him. Henry finally finds his voice and is able to tell his father why he doesn't respect him after his father has him picked up for being a runaway. Because of August, Henry feels confident to make plans to attend college and he has a bright future ahead.

## Wes

Wes is the mechanic who tows and then fixes August's RV when it breaks down in the California desert. Wes is an alcoholic and is headed to jail for his fourth DUI charge at the time he meets August. Wes asks August to take his two sons with him on his summer trip because the boys will have to go into state care if he can't find a place for them while he's in jail. Wes is initially grateful to August but ends up hating him because his sons have grown so fond of August and his jealousy gets the best of him.

## Emory

Emory is a man whom August meets at an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting. Emory and August become friends, if only for a brief time, because Emory understands why August is upset about the potential futures of Seth and Henry. It is Emory who helps August search for Henry one night when Henry has left the RV and gotten lost.



## Harvey

Harvey is August's Alcoholics Anonymous sponsor in San Diego. Harvey is supportive of August's grief over Philip's death and talks to August on the phone and meets him whenever he wants to talk. Harvey tries to give August some perspective on the situation with Seth and Henry when August wonders if he should try to be more involved. Harvey remains friends with August for years and even drives him to AA meetings when August can no longer drive due to muscular dystrophy.

## Maggie

Maggie is August's ex-wife. They divorced after their son, Philip, died in a car accident while Maggie was driving. Even though Maggie was not legally drunk, she had been drinking and August has a hard time forgiving her for Philip's death. After August spends time with Seth and Henry, he doesn't see things in black and white terms anymore and tells Maggie that he forgives her.

## Philip

Philip was August's teenage son who died in a car accident while his mother was driving. Philip loved to buy bottles of iced tea and left one on the dining room table to go on an errand with his mother the night he died. August then puts some of Philip's ashes in an iced tea bottle to take to Yellowstone and spread in different spots in the park.

## Dwayne

Dwayne is a mountain climber who teams up with Seth to climb Moonlight Buttress in Zion National Park in Utah.

## Seth and Henry's mother

Although she doesn't appear in the story and her name is not revealed, Seth and Henry really suffer because their mother made the decision to leave the family. It is learned later that she had another man and wanted more for her life which is wounding to Seth and Henry because they feel that kids should be the most important thing to a parent.





# Symbols and Symbolism

## Cameras

When August takes Seth and Henry on their summer road trip, he buys each of them a disposable camera to take photos of what they like. They had never had cameras before or traveled very far from their home. Seth also begins to use August's digital camera to capture images of the mountains and canyons scenery. The cameras symbolize how August totally opened up their lives by exposing them to things they had never before experienced.

## The Philip bottle

The iced tea bottle filled with Philip's ashes symbolize Philip's presence on the trips. Philip was supposed to have been with August on a trip to Yellowstone so taking his ashes is the best that August can do now. Philip had loved bottled iced tea and had left a partial one on the dinner table when he left to run errands with his mother on the night of the accident. August couldn't bear to throw that bottle away so he put the ashes in there instead.

## The RV

The RV is the place where Seth and Henry learn that there is more to the world than an abusive parent. The lessons August teaches them and the places he shows them all come about because of the RV. At the end of the book, Seth and Henry return the favor by taking August in a trip in the RV so he can experience things he has never seen before and wouldn't have had the chance to do given his physical limitations due to muscular dystrophy.

## Niagara Falls

Seth and Henry want to surprise August by taking him to Niagara Falls. On their first summer trip they spread some of Philip's ashes at Yellowstone National Park and they talked about whether or not Philip was a risk taker who would have gone over Niagara Falls in a barrel if he could have been assured that he wouldn't have died. They come to the conclusion that he probably would have done it so Seth and Henry take August there and they put some of Philip's ashes in a little barrel and send it over the falls. It was a very sentimental moment for August because it meant that Philip was remembered by the boys eight years after they first learned who Philip was.



## The \$50 bill

Wes gives August a \$50 bill to help pay for food for Seth and Henry on the road trip. At the end of the summer, August gives the money back to the boys so that they could use it if they ever needed to contact him in an emergency. Eight years later, August learns that the boys kept the \$50 bill because it reminded them that they had a safety net in August.

## AA meetings

Because August is a recovering alcoholic, he wants to attend Alcoholics Anonymous meetings while on the road trip. Seth attends with him in the hope that he can learn something that will help his father. Instead, Seth learns how to get to the root of the family dysfunction and can then stage an intervention with his dad.

## The mechanic's old tools

When the RV breaks down on the second road trip, Seth hitches a ride into town and finds a mechanic who allows him to borrow his rusty, old tools. This is symbolic of his father's mechanic's tools because they represent a way of life that Seth has rejected. Seth is intent on having a better life than his father and is attending college and staying away from alcohol in order to achieve it.

## Woody

August's dog, Woody, is the stabilizing element throughout the story. He is devoted to August, Seth and Henry and even alerts them when Henry is lost. Woody is as glad to see Seth and Henry after eight years as August is and he's a fixture on the second road trip just as he was on the first one.

## August's canes

Eight years after their first road trip, August must tell Seth and Henry that he has to sell the RV because he has muscular dystrophy. August must now use canes to walk but the boys don't see that as an impediment to who August really is. He may need the canes physically, but he has the love of Seth and Henry to hold him up during the trip and during the time until they can see each other again for the next road trip.

## Campfires

August, Seth and Henry spend many hours sitting around campfires in the evenings during their road trips. The campfires offer the opportunities for them to bond and learn about each other.



# Settings

## The RV

Much of the action in the story takes place in August's RV. The RV is the reason that August meets Seth and Henry because it is towed to their father, Wes', shop when it breaks down. The RV becomes a source of security for Seth and Henry when they travel with August on their first summer trip. Later on when August's disability prevents him from being able to drive or navigate in the RV, he sells it to Seth. Seth and Henry then decide to take August with them for every summer trip he can make because it represents the place where they first grew to love each other.

## Wes' mechanic's shop

When August's RV breaks down on his trip to Yellowstone, he is towed into Wes' mechanic's shop in the California desert. This is where Wes asks August if he'll take Seth and Henry for the summer. It is also where August first comes in contact with Seth and Henry.

## Zion Canyon National Park and Bryce Canyon National Park in Utah

Seth and Henry have never been more than 50 miles from home so they are thrilled to go on the summer RV trip with August. Two of the places that they visit are Zion Canyon National Park and Bryce Canyon National Park located in Utah. It is here that Seth falls in love with the idea of climbing mountains and it becomes a life objective.

## Yellowstone National Park in Wyoming

August's final destination on his summer RV trip is Yellowstone National Park. He and his son, Philip, were supposed to have taken the trip together but after Philip dies, August plans to spread some of his ashes at the park instead. Seth and Henry help August spread the ashes while on their trip together.

## Grand Canyon National Park in Arizona

August, Seth and Henry stop at the Grand Canyon on their way home to California from Niagara Falls.



# Themes and Motifs

## Alcoholism

The theme of alcoholism is an important one in *Take Me With You*. Wes is an alcoholic whose sons have been negatively impacted by his choices. For the fourth time, Seth and Henry must be placed somewhere for care because their father is going to jail for driving under the influence of alcohol. Not only is their dad in legal trouble, he essentially abandons the boys when he leaves every night to go drinking. It is revealed that Seth and Henry have spent time with relatives in the past but they will no longer keep them because Wes refuses to give up his drinking. This really has no impact on Wes because he's not the one who is continually uprooted to spend time with relatives or in foster care. Seth and Henry are the ones suffering from Wes' alcoholism.

Wes asks August to take the boys for the summer so that they will have somewhere decent to go but he doesn't realize that August is a recovering alcoholic. August stops at Alcoholics Anonymous meetings while on the trip and Seth accompanies him in the hope that he'll learn something to help his alcoholic father. This is very mature for a boy of Seth's age but being the son of an alcoholic has forced Seth to grow up quickly. Usually it is the oldest child who tries to fix the dysfunction in the family and we see that Seth is frustrated because the problem of alcoholism is something so big that no child should ever hope to have to solve it.

What Seth learns is how to put his feelings about living with an alcoholic father into the right words so he can stage an intervention. August's ex-wife, Maggie, is an alcoholic and had been drinking on the night she was driving the car in which their son, Philip, died. Although Maggie was not found to be legally drunk, she did have alcohol in her system and August has blamed her for the accident because her responses were not as acute as they should have been.

## Inter-generational relationships

The theme of inter-generational relationships is an important one in *Take Me With You*. When they first meet, August is a middle-aged man who is grieving the death of his son while Seth is 12-years-old and Henry is 7-years-old. August is feeling lost because of his son's death and the boys have never had a mature male figure to look up to. While they find their way with each other on the summer road trip, a real respect develops; August for what the boys have endured in their lives, and the boys for August's integrity and the sense of security he provides.

Eight years later when Seth is 20-years-old and Henry is 15-years-old, they return to August to take him on a road trip as a form of re-payment for all he has done for them in their lives. The tables have turned in the relationship at this point, though, and it is now August who is in the position of having to learn and lean into new ideas. This is



challenging because he still thinks he needs to protect the boys, especially Seth who loves to climb mountains, but they find a place where they come to terms with each other and accept who they are as different people now and that's really all you can ask of any relationship.

Even though the characters are of different generations with completely different experiences, they find a way to relate to each other and provide things in each other that no one else ever has. Their bond is unbreakable and it is encouraging to see young people value an older person for his insight and perspectives. On the other hand, it is good to see an older person be willing to change and stay open to new experiences as a result of his relationship with young boys.

## Coming of age

The theme of coming of age is an important one in *Take Me With You*. Coming of age means the transition period in which a child becomes a young adult. There is no set age for this transition because it is different for each character. Some characters reach young adulthood through the natural progression of age and maturity while some children face traumatic situations which essentially force them to grow up more quickly than their peers.

In literature, Coming of Age usually features a protagonist who struggles with a belief system or other challenge in order to begin to identify as an adult. In *Take Me With You*, both Seth and Henry come of age as they grow up by the end of the story. Seth and Henry begin as frightened boys living with an alcoholic father but their experience with August shows them more of the world and opens them up to a relationship with a male role model.

From August, Seth and Henry learn that some people tell the truth, they do what they say they're going to do, and they don't abandon people who need help. These were all emotional wounds the boys had suffered by living in a dysfunctional family. The encouragement August gave them in the short time they were together on their first road trip stayed with the boys as they grew up and they were able to advance their lives and eventually engage with August again to secure the relationship. There is mutual respect between August and the boys and they have grown as a result.

## Grief

Grief is an important theme in *Take Me With You*. The most obvious example is the grief that August suffers because of the untimely death of his son, Philip. Philip has been dead nearly two years by the time that August meets Seth and Henry and he admits that he is still not right. There is no time limit on grieving for someone you miss and August is fully aware of the time that is passed and that he still feels the pain of missing his son.

Seth and Henry also experience grief because they have essentially lost both their parents. Their mother left with another man, abandoning the boys to their alcoholic



father who leaves them every night to go to town to get drunk. The boys grieve the emotional and physical presence of their parents and what a healthy family unit should be.

August also experiences a grief when he must part from Seth and Henry at the end of their first summer road trip. He wishes he could save them from a life of living with their alcoholic father but he is advised that he has to let them go and so he does.

August has minimal contact with Seth and Henry for years but is elated when they come to San Diego to take him on a road trip. August feels like the boys are his own, he loves them and he has grieved the loss of them from his life as well. Fortunately, as the boys have gotten older, they are more independent and can communicate with August more regularly and plan to keep him in their lives. August has also had to grieve the loss of his marriage which ended in divorce after his son died. Death and divorce are major losses so it is understandable why August is not quite himself throughout the first part of the story.

## Love

Love is an important theme in *Take Me With You*. What begins as an awkward attempt at establishing a caring relationship ends up as a loving one between August and the boys. He takes Seth and Henry with him when they are just boys and he tries to get to know them and mend their emotional wounds just by being a steady presence in their lives.

August also gives them a sense of security, which to these boys, is like outright declarations of love. They have never experienced security or any sense of continuity in their lives and they are completely drawn to August because he gives these things to them freely.

August is mourning the death of his son and it is possible that Seth and Henry fill that void in his life and give him someone to love but August comes to love Seth and Henry as individuals, not just placeholders in his life.

When they are older, Seth and Henry have not outgrown their love for August and they repay the kindnesses he has shown them by taking him on a road trip in which they take care of him. This is the only way the boys have of showing their love for August and they do it willingly. By the end of the story the love between August and the boys is fully fledged and they reciprocate for all that he has meant to them.

# Styles

## Point of View

Like many novels, *Take Me With You* is written in the third person omniscient point of view. This means that the author writes the story using third person pronouns such as "she" and "he." The author also has insight into what the characters are thinking which makes it an omniscient view, as opposed to a limited view where only the activities of the characters are reported. For example, the author writes, "August felt a rush of discomfort. This tall, odd man wanted something from him. And he couldn't imagine what it might be. He couldn't imagine what he had that the mechanic would need or even want. He briefly tried on the idea that the man was hitting on him. But it didn't feel quite like that. But it felt equally personal, scary, and emotionally important." Not only does the author share what is going on with August, she shares what August is thinking which adds more depth to the story.

## Language and Meaning

The story is set in California and the West Coast in modern day so the language is current. The author uses actual location names in the state parks to lend authenticity and believability to the story. The dialogue for each of the characters remains true to each of them throughout. August's dialogue is measured and he thinks before responding because he knows Seth and Henry measure everything he says. Seth's dialogue is fast and animated in keeping with his assertive personality. Henry, on the other hand, doesn't speak much at all as a young boy. It is almost as if he wants to be invisible to avoid punishment or abuse. However, when Henry is a teenager, he finds his words and is able to tell his abusive father what he thinks of him and why it is difficult to respect him. Overall, the author writes in an engaging style and moves the plot along while maintaining authenticity in the characters' voices.

## Structure

The structure of a novel usually takes one of four forms: character, milieu, event, or idea. And while a story can contain all four forms, one usually predominates. *Take Me With You* takes the structure of a character form. These types of novels tend to show a character's personal growth as the story extends. A character structure shows transformation as being important as opposed to an event story which is more concerned with what a character does. It is easy to identify a character structure novel because there comes a point in the story when the main character reaches their limit of frustration with life or a set of circumstances that are no longer acceptable for personal growth. The character then decides on changes, both small and dramatic, that will move the character's life in a different direction. The story concludes then when the character has resolved his or her issues and feels satisfied with the transformation or decides to



stay in the current situation. In *Take Me With You*, Seth reaches the point where he can no longer be silent about his father's alcoholism and stages an intervention. Seth and Henry also attain the support of August which gives them the courage to live their lives with their father because they know August will always be available to them if they should need help. These are two pivotal points in the story and change the course of Seth and Henry's lives, allowing their characters to develop in different ways from where they were headed originally.





## Quotes

Look," he said after a time, "I know you're being the best father to them you know how to be. But you don't even know me. You don't even know for a fact that I can be trusted with a child.

-- August (Part One, Chapter Two paragraph 2)

**Importance:** August finds it hard to believe that Wes would entrust his two boys with him for an entire summer because they are virtual strangers. Wes has good instincts about August, though, and he wants them to have an enriching summer which they would not get by staying with strangers in the county system.

Seth," he said. "The longer you live, the more you'll see that the inside of everybody is a lot like the inside of everybody else. If you're feeling something, more likely than not it's just what anyone would feel.

-- August (Part One, Chapter Five paragraph 11)

**Importance:** Seth has been very cautious about what he asks or tells August on the trip and Harry doesn't even talk at all. August tries to let Seth know that it's ok to ask questions and share feelings but it seems as if they have been repressed for a long time. August hopes that he can get them to open up to him and stop being so afraid all the time.

I thought if I went to a meeting I could sort of... pick up something there that I could bring home to my dad. Like I could find this thing that works for people to stop drinking... and... you know... give it to him. But it totally doesn't work like that. Does it, August?

-- Seth (Part One, Chapter Nine paragraph 11)

**Importance:** Seth had accompanied August to an AA meeting in the hopes that he could learn something that would help his father and his drinking problem. Seth has had to be a responsible boy from a very early age and he thinks that it is also his job to fix his father's problems and he is upset when he realizes that this isn't going to happen.

Bigger," he said after a time. "Just on the inside, though," Seth said. "Like in my chest. Like I breathe air into my chest, and there's more space in my lungs than before. But not my lungs really. I just feel there's more room inside me than there used to be.

-- Seth (Part One, Chapter Ten paragraph 6)

**Importance:** Seth and Henry have never really traveled anywhere before and they are in awe of their experiences with August. Seth, especially, is enjoying the majesty of the mountains and canyons. He is overwhelmed by what he is experiencing and tries to share that with August which is just another step in the building of their bond.

That's what I should tell him! I just figured out what I should tell him when we do our intervention. That when your mom leaves because you're not important enough to stay for, you need your dad to stick around. And I know he'll say he did. That he stays with us



every day and takes care of us. But every night he leaves us alone, because the drinking is more important. Yeah. So it's not my imagination. Your kids are supposed to be the most important thing. But we had to go to a child services group home thing because he put drinking first, which... I guess I can see he didn't know that would happen. But then... even then he didn't stop. He didn't stop drinking, and he didn't stop driving after he drinks. So it's just like what Mom did. He was supposed to put us first but he didn't. And it makes us feel terrible. And I think that's what I should tell him when we have our intervention.

-- Seth (Part Two, Chapter Two paragraph 4)

**Importance:** Seth is given the chance to speak at an AA meeting and he finally is able to voice his pain related to the impact that his dysfunctional parents have had on his and Henry's lives. Seth is wise beyond his years because he is the older child and has had to take care of his brother. Seth has seen a lot and experienced things that a child shouldn't have to and he is glad that he is finally able to articulate the family issues and how he can explain them to his father in order to change the dynamic.

There were some tough times. But, you know what? I grew up. Kids are pretty sturdy. Even when times are tough, mostly they grow up. So maybe something'll happen if they're with their dad. Then again, maybe it won't. I mean, they made it this far. And, not to make you feel bad, but... you're sober, and something bad happened tonight. Sometimes stuff just happens, you know? There's not always some simple thing to point to, like if you just don't do this, nothing can go wrong. Something can always go wrong. But we don't like to think that way, so we point a lot.

-- Emory (Part Two, Chapter Three paragraph 2)

**Importance:** Emory has offered to help August look for Henry who has gone missing and August tells him that he doesn't want to send Seth and Henry back to their alcoholic father because he's afraid something bad will happen to them. Emory tries to tell August that Wes is the boys' father and you can't take custody away from him because you think something bad might happen. Things may or may not happen regardless so August has to let them return home and pray that they will be OK.

Do you honestly believe that before Seth met me he was happy with how things were going around here? You really think that dissatisfaction is coming from me? Like if I hadn't told him to mind, he wouldn't?

-- August (Part Two, Chapter Five paragraph 1)

**Importance:** Wes is antagonistic toward August when August brings Seth and Henry home from their road trip. Wes blames August for putting thoughts into Seth's head about how Wes is a bad parent and their home life is dysfunctional. August tries to tell Wes that Seth is feeling those things on his own and doesn't need August to tell him that life with Wes is not as it should be.

And then you got put in jail for it, and we had to go to Aunt Patty's, which was sort of okay, because at least we were okay there. But it still sucked, because it meant you left us. First Mom left us for whatever. Then you left us because drinking was more



important than us. And then you did it again. And then Patty said this was the last time, which I still think sucked, because she was mad at you, not us, because we were always good when we were there. It sucked that she took it out on us that you wouldn't stop, but she warned you she would. So Henry and me, we figured you wouldn't do it again, because we'd have no place to go if you did. But you did. And we had to go to this place where kids go when they're orphans, because you cared more about drinking. We weren't the most important thing to you.

-- Seth (Part Two, Chapter Five paragraph 6)

**Importance:** Seth stages an intervention with his father and tells him what has been bothering him about their dysfunctional family life. For the first time, Seth has the courage and confidence to tell his father the impact his drinking has had on him and Henry in the hopes that his father will understand and change his behavior.

He would've asked questions. He would've gotten it out of me. Nothing was going to keep me from doing this, August. Nothing.

-- Henry (Part Three, Chapter Three paragraph 10)

**Importance:** Henry has come on the road trip with Seth and August without talking to his father about it. Henry did leave him a note but he couldn't risk a face-to-face conversation with his father because he wouldn't have allowed him to come knowing that August was also along. But seeing August was so important to Henry that he risked his father's wrath in order to come on the trip.

He reminded himself again, 'Take it in, imprint it. Enjoy it. Because this is your last summer out in the world.

-- August (Part Three, Chapter Four paragraph 1)

**Importance:** August has to remind himself to remember everything about the road trip with Seth and Henry because it will be his last summer trip. It is a bittersweet time for August because he loves being with the boys but he is sad that his physical limitations are narrowing his world.

This is the worst thing you ever did to me! How could you do this? You do this because you hate August, because you think he's a better man than you are. Well, I've got news for you, Dad. He is a better man than you are. Because he would never do a thing like this. You do these mean, jealous things, and then you expect me to respect you. How can I respect you when you do things like this? If you think I look up to August more than I look up to you, maybe this is why. Maybe try acting like a good person and I could look up to you, too. Why don't you try that, Dad? Why don't you try showing me something I can respect, and then maybe I can respect you.

-- Henry (Part Three, Chapter 9 paragraph 4)

**Importance:** Throughout the story, Henry has been very quiet but he finally finds his voice when his father has him picked up on a runaway charge. It is the tipping point for Henry after years of abuse and neglect from his dad. Going on the trip with August is something that Henry really wanted to do and he knew that his father would ruin it if he



found out that August was along. It turns out that Henry is not meek at all, he just chooses when to unleash his anger at the appropriate time. This will change the dynamic between Wes and the boys going forward.

Not the money, August. You. You're the reason things were pretty okay after that. I know you think we just went on with our lives, and I'm sorry we didn't know you really wanted us to keep in touch. Now I wish we had. But still. It changed everything. It changed us. Whether we talked to you or not. Before we met you, we were always scared that our dad was just about to let us down. But after that summer, we knew if he dropped us you'd be there to catch us. You have no idea how much of a difference it made.

-- Henry (Epilogue paragraph 10)

**Importance:** Henry tells August that he still has the \$50 bill that August left with the boys at the end of their first road trip. The money was to be used in the event that the boys needed to get away from their father and call August. August is pleased that they had kept it all those years and is so happy when Henry tells him what he has represented for the boys in their lives.