

Wild: From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail Study Guide

Wild: From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail by Cheryl Strayed

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Plot Summary

"Wild: From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail" is a book by Cheryl Strayed that tells the story about Cheryl's journey of self-discovery as she completes a three-month solo hike on the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT). Throughout her journey, Cheryl learns what it means to confront her fears and emotions, to appreciate the simple things in life, to take life day by day and to trust that enjoying the present moment of life is enough. The book is divided into five parts and, in each of these parts, Cheryl shares with the reader not only her current experiences on the PCT but memories from the past that she remembers while hiking and that have influenced her decision to hike the PCT.

In the first part, Cheryl discusses the main reasons she feels led her to hike the PCT, most notably her mother's shocking cancer diagnosis and death. Cheryl shares her family history, including stories of her abusive father and her relationship with her step-father and siblings. Cheryl discusses her inability to process her emotions after her mother's death and her search for intimacy that led to multiple affairs and, ultimately, the end of her marriage. At the end of part one, Cheryl is barely able to carry her backpack but determined to begin hiking the PCT.

In part two Cheryl begins her hike of the PCT, quickly realizes that she is highly unprepared and immediately contemplates quitting. She remembers when hiking the PCT was just an idea and she shares with the reader more reasons that led her to follow through with this idea: a brief period of heroin addiction, an unplanned pregnancy and an abortion. Throughout the chapters in part two, Cheryl meets several trail companions along the way. She learns much about hiking and backpacking from them, and their encouragement in her provides her with a renewed energy to continue hiking the PCT.

Cheryl continues to hike the PCT in part three. Her struggles on the trail, including shoes that are too small and tearing her feet apart, low money supply, having to bypass part of the trail, unexpected snow and getting lost, cause her to recount stories about her abusive father, her sadness about the deterioration in the relationship with her step-father and the death of her mother's horse as a sign that nothing in her life will ever be the same.

Cheryl's strength and speed on the trail continue to grow in part four. Her emotional pain begins to lessen as well, too, as she finds comfort and wisdom in her interactions with people as she hitchhikes and in her interaction with the PCT. Cheryl finds that the hole in her heart seems to be shrinking and she comes to a major realization when she notices that nature offers so much more to be amazed by and that she no longer needs to be amazed that her father was unable to properly love her.

Part five brings an end to Cheryl's story as she enters into Oregon and the last leg of her journey. In the chapters found in part five, Cheryl is finally able to face her feelings about her mother and come to a peace about who her mother was and how strong her mother's love was, allowing her to release the pain she's been holding since her



mother's death. She also finds that she is able to begin the journey of letting of the relationship with her ex-husband and forgiving herself for the mistakes she made in their marriage. Cheryl completes her hike of the PCT and, at the end of the book, she finds herself feeling thankful for what the trail taught her and for being able to be at peace with the unknowns that her life will bring.



Prologue, Part I: Chapter 1, The Ten Thousand Things

Prologue, Part I: Chapter 1, The Ten Thousand Things Summary and Analysis

The author, Cheryl, is on the top of a mountain in northern California. She is staring into the tree tops below, where one of her boots just fell. Realizing that having one boot is of no use to her, she throws the other boot over the mountain as well. Cheryl thinks about how, before hiking the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT) - a continuous wilderness trail that spans California, Oregon and Washington - only 7 months earlier, she was throwing her life over the edge as well. She shares her hopes that the PCT will help her to find herself through her grief and struggling. Cheryl remembers making the decision to walk the trail, feeling that she had nothing left to lose. As she finds herself bootless on the top of a mountain, she realizes that her only choice is to keep walking.

The first chapter begins with the author, Cheryl, thinking about what led her to make the decision to do the three-month solo hike of the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT). Cheryl remembers that, after completing the hike, she realizes that her decision to hike the PCT began many years before, when she learned that her mother was going to die. Cheryl takes the reader back several years to when she was in the Mayo Clinic with her mother and step-father, Eddie. Cheryl remained in denial about her mother's diagnosis until the doctor stated that her mother had late-stage lung cancer, that treatment would not help and that their focus would be pain relief.

Cheryl remembers ever further back to her childhood. She remembers the extreme love her mother has had for her and her siblings and how much of their childhood was spent with their mom as a single mother working numerous jobs. Cheryl states that her mother was 19 when she married their father and that, after 9 years of physical abuse, her mother finally left. She remembers the lengths her mother went to in order to make their lives special and meaningful when she was single and they were poor. She talks about her mom meeting Eddie and moving to a farm where they had no electricity or running water, bringing their family closer.

Throughout the chapter, she depicts how close she and her mother have always been and shares her anger, frustration and hopelessness with watching her die. She also shares her frustrations regarding her siblings' absence throughout their mother's diagnosis, illness and hospitalization. Cheryl remembers the day that her mother died, and shares the guilt she feels for not being there the moment her mother died and implies that this guilt plays a large part in many of the feelings she experiences and decisions she makes after her mother's death.



Chapters 2-3, Splitting, Hunting in a Remotely Upright Position

Chapters 2-3, Splitting, Hunting in a Remotely Upright Position Summary and Analysis

Cheryl begins chapter 2 with discussing what a map would look like if it depicted the various moves she made in the four year period after her mother's death and how it would not point out how she tried to keep her family, her marriage and herself together and failed. Before arriving in Mojave, CA on the night before beginning the PCT, Cheryl visited her mom's grave in Minnesota, telling her mother everything that's happened since her death and that she's leaving Minnesota. Cheryl tells her mother that she's taking her spirit with her.

The next day, Cheryl leaves for Portland with her truck and food packages that she will have her friend mail to her at different destinations along the PCT. After leaving her truck and her supplies, Cheryl flies to Los Angeles and then is driven to the town of Mojave. While filling out some information at her motel, Cheryl realizes that all of her connections with friends and family have faded away. She thinks about getting herself a companion at a local bar to escape all of her negative emotions, something she's done often in the previous years, but decides against it. As she lays out all of the materials for her hike tomorrow, Cheryl remembers a conversation she had with her now ex-husband, Paul, about her inexperience with backpacking.

Cheryl then takes the reader back to the unraveling of her marriage with Paul, how she wanted to be alone but didn't want to lose her marriage, how she began kissing other men shortly after her mom's death- longing for any intimacy and how, as she and Paul moved around the country, her affairs became more involved and more frequent. Cheryl remembers telling Paul about the affairs, their separation, the loss of her friends and her pain at being unable to decide what to do about her marriage. The chapter ends with Cheryl deciding to visit her friend in Portland. When she arrives, she believes that she is escaping her troubles but soon realizes that she finds more.

In chapter 3, Cheryl wakes up on the day that she is going to begin her hike of the PCT. While brushing her teeth naked in the bathroom, she feels she can see her true self and knows that she is a woman with a hole in her heart that has led her to look for intimacy with strangers and that has led her to hike the PCT. She points out her new blue horse tattoo and reveals that Paul has the same tattoo to remind them of their lasting bond. In this chapter, Cheryl identifies each of the many items she has gathered for her hike over the past six months including clothes, shoes, food, chairs, sleeping bags, lamps, cooking supplies, knives, rope, instruction guides, toiletries, personal items, water bottles, blankets, journals, pens, a whistle, a camera with supplies and back-up supplies.



She remembers feeling like a semi-expert after researching which items were the best for her to buy. Now looking at all of the items, she feels humbled and knows that her lack of experience could be a problem. Undeterred, she packs all of the items into her backpack and, when she's done, she remembers that she needs to bring a good amount of water because she didn't realize at the time of planning of her trip is that she is beginning her hike at one of the driest places on the trail and that it would take her two days to reach the first water source. After filling her water bottles, Cheryl decides that it's time to leave.

But when she reaches down to pick up her backpack, which stands as tall as her waist, she is unable to lift it off the ground. Unable to leave any supplies behind, Cheryl musters all of her strength and is finally able to somewhat stand with her backpack. As she staggers around the room, she wonders if this is what it's like to be a backpacker. Not knowing, she decides that it's time to go and she leaves her room.



Part 2, Tracks, Chapters 4-5, The Pacific Crest Trail, Volume 1: California, Tracks

Part 2, Tracks, Chapters 4-5, The Pacific Crest Trail, Volume 1: California, Tracks Summary and Analysis

Chapter 4 begins with Cheryl questioning her decision to hitchhike to the beginning of the PCT, although she knows it's a necessary evil. As she begins her hike, she feels good about herself however, when she realizes that hiking is harder than walking, Cheryl can't help but notice how different hiking the trail is than what she imagined. Cheryl remembers when she first looked at the book that inspired her trip. She was in Sioux Falls, South Dakota with her friend, Aimee, to pick up her truck. It was while waiting in line that she first saw the book, although she didn't give much thought to it then.

Cheryl's trip to Sioux Falls became even more involved, though, when she noticed that her body felt funny and she questioned if she could be pregnant. She remembered having sex with a guy named Joe several weeks ago and Cheryl takes the reader even further back in time to discuss her relationship with Joe, a guy she met while visiting her friend Lisa in Portland about a year ago. Cheryl reveals that she moved in with Joe and that they spent their days using heroin and having sex. Cheryl was confronted by her friend Lisa and, two weeks later, her then husband Paul drove from Minnesota to intervene as well. Although reluctant at first, Cheryl eventually went back to Minnesota with Paul.

When Joe came to visit Cheryl a few weeks later in Minnesota, they used heroin again and had sex several times, after which Cheryl discontinued her relationship with Joe and with heroin. Cheryl takes the reader back to Sioux Falls, where she reveals that she's pregnant. After getting an abortion, Cheryl decides to hike the PCT and begins focusing on preparing for the trip. Back on the PCT, Cheryl takes a break after three hours and realizes that she can't continue that day. As she sets up her camping area, she finds sage and is reminded of her mother and of the reasons she decided to do this hike.

In chapter 5, Cheryl wakes up from her first night on the PCT. Unable to move at first, she eventually walks outside of her tent and decides to eat, although she's not hungry. As she sets back on the trail, she sees animal droppings and wonders what animal could've been near her camp. Cheryl continues on the trail and, by midday, she is at 6,000 feet elevation and the weather has cooled. After taking an unexpected nap, Cheryl continues on the PCT throughout rain and dense fog. Her body is beginning to hurt and, as she ascends, she notices that the terrain is changing and there is a point where she reaches the top of the mountain and encounters snow.

Due to fatigue and physical pain, Cheryl does not reach her destination of Golden Oak Springs until the morning of the third day. Unable to leave the comfortable settings,



Cheryl spends her third day at Golden Oak Springs studying how to use her compass and exploring the area. Before leaving on the fourth day, she refills her water bottles and bandages her wounds the best she can, although she is still bleeding and in considerable pain. When she sees mountain lion tracks on the road in front of her, she begins to get afraid but her focus is taken off of the lion when she is charged by a bull. As she's overcoming these obstacles, Cheryl is realizing that the PCT is forcing her to face her fears and it's not allowing her to escape what's in front of her.

She is accomplishing 9 miles a day, less than expected, and on the 8th day, she is hungry but is unable to use any of her cooked food because her stove is broken. Cheryl decides to leave the PCT for one of the jeep trails close to it. She eventually finds three men, Frank, Walter and Carlos. Frank decides that Cheryl will come back to his house for a hot meal, shower and a bed.



Chapters 6-7, A Bull in Both Directions, The Only Girl in the Woods

Chapters 6-7, A Bull in Both Directions, The Only Girl in the Woods Summary and Analysis

Chapter 6 begins with Cheryl having dinner and a shower at Frank's house. The next day, Cheryl hitched a ride to Ridgecrest and had her stove repaired. She decides to spend the night and the motel manager informs her of the snowy conditions on the Sierra Nevada. The next day, Cheryl continues to hike the PCT, working hard not to focus on her aching body. That night she went to sleep gracious for the warmth. But the next day, she found herself hiking through heat so horrible that she contemplated quitting. Another reason she thought to quit was that she decided to hike the trail in order to process her emotions but yet she had not done so because of her physical state.

Needing to press on at least for a few more days, Cheryl is able to camp that night by a cool stream. The next morning, she is approached by another hiker, Greg, and they talk about the challenges of hiking the PCT. Their conversation boosts Cheryl's confidence and they agree to meet at Kennedy Meadows. The next day, Cheryl hikes with a new found energy. Despite obstacles she encounters on the trail, Cheryl continues to find that she is developing a fondness for the PCT. She also identifies that realizing she can bear the unbearable when it comes to physical pain is a sentiment that has seeped into her emotional life as well.

On day 14, she is approached by more hikers, a father and son, Albert and Matt. When they tell Cheryl that more hikers are behind her, she is determined to make it to Kennedy Meadows before they do. On the way, she thinks about her name- Cheryl Strayed- and she remembers how she chose this last name after the divorce. She remembers the pain of divorcing Paul even though they still loved each other and the deep pain, hurt and guilt she carries for being unable to make their marriage work. Cheryl remembers the day they got divorced and the last time they saw one another.

In chapter 7, Cheryl arrives to her first stop, Kennedy Meadows, and receives the resupply box she had her friend send to her. She also received a postcard from Joe but was somewhat sad that she didn't hear from Paul. Cheryl meets Ed, a fifty year old man who spends his summers at Kennedy Meadows being a trail angel, someone who feeds and cares for the PCT hikers. Also at the campsite were Cheryl's friends that she met on the trail, Greg, Albert and Matt. After Albert helps Cheryl lighten her pack, he finds her supply of condoms and she feels embarrassed for thinking she would need them.

But then she meets Doug and Tom and, when she finds herself particularly attracted to Doug, she thinks that maybe the condoms weren't a bad idea after all. Cheryl enjoys the time she has with her fellow campers and, when she realizes that she's going to go out



to dinner with six guys, she becomes more critical of what she looks like. Cheryl ponders the idea that, on the PCT, she has no choice but to blend in with the guys and she is forced to suppress her womanly nature. Doug invites her to the river with the rest of the campers, where he gives her a feather for good luck. While talking with the other campers about whether or not to continue into the High Sierra due to snow, Cheryl realizes how hard she's worked to get this far and decides that she is not ready to give up trying to see that part of the trail yet.

Greg gives her a tutorial on how to use her ice ax and she, Doug and Tom plan to set off on the trail together in the morning. As Matt and Albert are taken to the hospital due to illness and Greg decides to stay at camp one more day, Cheryl realizes that she may not see many of the people again, although she feels she knows them.



Part Three, Range of Light, Chapters 8-9. Corvidology, Staying Found

Part Three, Range of Light, Chapters 8-9. Corvidology, Staying Found Summary and Analysis

Cheryl, Doug and Tom get back on the PCT in chapter 8 but it isn't long before Cheryl makes up an excuse for Doug and Tom to go ahead so she can be alone. Cheryl contemplates how far she's gone on the trail but has growing doubts about her ability to tackle the High Sierra. While continuing on the trail the next day, she encounters a patch of dangerous ice and, after struggling to cross it, she realizes that she is not prepared to cross the High Sierra and that she must bypass it. She feels sad because she will miss what she feels is the highlight of the trail.

When she camps with Doug and Tom that night, she tells them about her plan to bypass the High Sierra but they invite her to join them in attempting to cross it. Although flattered, Cheryl declines their invitation, telling them the point of her hike is to do it alone and she decides to hike 500 miles through Oregon instead. The next day, she meets up with Greg and, when they realize they are both bypassing the High Sierra, they develop a plan to bypass it together. During her travels with Greg, Cheryl realizes that she is running low on money but knows that she has no more money to her name other than what will be in her resupply boxes.

Along their bypass travels, Cheryl encounters a girl who tells her that the black feather given to her by Doug is related to corvidology - the study of ravens/crows and how they symbolize the void, where things are born and begin. Cheryl and Greg stop for the night and have rooms next to each other, which causes Cheryl to think about how she is able to detach during sex. She remembers her relationship with her father, the abuse she and her family suffered at his hands and the on/off again relationship between her mother and father. To escape these thoughts, she takes a bath and drifts into another world.

After having bypassed the High Sierra, Cheryl and Greg set back out on the PCT in chapter 9, although they part ways soon after the chapter begins. While she now finds the PCT to be familiar and a kind of home, Cheryl is disappointed and surprised when she begins to encounter snow that accompanies the trail throughout the rest of the chapter. Having left her ice ax behind due to her belief that she bypassed all of the snow, Cheryl feels unprepared to handle the snow. To make matters worse for Cheryl, the snow is covering up the PCT and, for the entire chapter, she is hiking through the snow with only a small idea of where she is, hoping that she is still on the PCT.

She thinks back to the guide books she read and attempts to use her compass and the formulas the guides suggested to keep her from getting lost but Cheryl finds it almost impossible to remember or use any of the suggestions. Freezing, sore and probably



lost, Cheryl continues to forge ahead. Although she has been skeptical about many things in her life, she finds that she is not skeptical about her journey, feeling sure that the clarity of the wilderness would guide her through. One morning, as she rested on a fallen tree, she encountered a beautiful fox.

They shared a moment of peace in the snow-covered forest and, just as Cheryl's fear of the fox was dissipating and she begins to enjoy his presence, he continues on his path. Cheryl finds herself calling out to the fox to come back and then suddenly shouting "MOM" over and over again. The next day, Cheryl comes across a road and celebrates, thinking that she has remained on the PCT and has made northward progress. It isn't until she is offered a ride that she finds out she has made virtually no northern progress at all.



Chapter 10, Range of Light

Chapter 10, Range of Light Summary and Analysis

In chapter 10, Cheryl arrives at the Packer Lake Lodge. A waitress tells her that there is snow further north and that many hikers have returned because of it. The next day, Cheryl encounters two camp workers who give her a ride to a spot where the PCT begins. When the girls ask Cheryl about her parents, she neglects to tell them about Eddie.

This causes her to think of Eddie, how much of a father figure he was to her and how, after her mother's death, Eddie pulled away from the family and quickly began dating someone else. After being dropped off at the designated spot, Cheryl sees that the PCT is 2 miles away. Cheryl decides to risk staying at a campsite without paying. Unfortunately, she is found out by the camp hosts and evicted. Afraid, Cheryl hikes through the woods at night but sets up her tent when she finds a clearing.

Cheryl's horse tattoo reminds her of her mother's horse, Lady, how Lady gave her mom energy and hope after her divorce and the sadness, guilt and horror that accompanied putting Lady down after her mother's death. The next day, Cheryl takes an alternate path to the PCT that could be free of snow. She meets three men who invite her to camp with them and she has a meaningful conversation with one of the men named Paco. They talk about her walk through the Range of Light and he gives her a Bob Marley shirt because he feels that she walks with the spirits of the animals, earth and sky.

As she hikes the next day, she descends into Beldon Town, where she receives her resupply box. She meets fellow hikers Trina, Stacy and Brent. Cheryl learns that Greg quit the trail because of the snow and she feels somewhat disheartened by the news. Cheryl writes Joe a letter and, while in town to mail it, she is approached by a handsome bartender who invites her back to his place, although she declines his offer.



Part Four, Wild, Chapters 11-12, The Lou out of Lou, This Far

Part Four, Wild, Chapters 11-12, The Lou out of Lou, This Far Summary and Analysis

While hitchhiking to get back to the trail in chapter 11, Cheryl meets Jimmy Carter, a reporter for the Hobo Times. Although Cheryl explains that she is hiking the PCT, Jimmy continues to insist that she lives like a hobo and says he will write a story about her in the next issue of Hobo Times. Before leaving, Jimmy gives Cheryl a care package and warns her that she is heading into Bigfoot country. After enjoying the contents of the care package, Cheryl returns to hitchhiking and is picked up by a woman named Lou, her fiancé, Dave, Dave's brother, Spider, and their dog, Stevie Ray.

They share spirited conversation and music together, and Cheryl notices a picture of a boy hanging from the rearview mirror. She asks Lou about the picture and she says that it's her son who was killed by a truck driver at 8 years old. When she dropped her off at the designated spot, Lou tells Cheryl that her son's death took the "Lou out of Lou" and Cheryl completely empathized with her feelings. She says goodbye to them and sees Stacy and Trina. They hitch a ride to Old Station and enjoy the commodities of the stop. The next morning, Trina and Stacy had moved on but Cheryl decided to wait another day.

Thinking about her desire to write a novel and feeling badly that she hasn't already, Cheryl begins to write that day. She calls Paul and they have a loving conversation that leaves her missing her old life but not necessarily wanting it back. As she pondered her situation that night, she realized that one third of her trip is over but that she feels she is just now starting to explore whatever it was she is out here to do. Cheryl still feels like the woman with the hole in her heart but feels the hole is getting smaller. She still feels more alone than anyone in the world but thinks that maybe that's alright.

In chapter 12, Cheryl continues her hike of the PCT. She notices the advancements she's made in backpacking and how much stronger her body has gotten, although her feet and toes remain severely wounded. Before leaving camp, she fills up her 2 64-oz. water bottles because she has to hike through a 15 mile dry environment. Cheryl continues to drink her water, expecting to come across a water tank. However, when she gets closer to the tank, she sees signs that say the water tank is empty.

Cheryl is more scared than she's ever been on the trail but she checks her guide and finds out that there are alternate water sources several miles away. She opts to go to the less-recommended but closer water reservoir and, when she arrives, she sees that the water is thick. Severely dehydrated, she uses her water purifier and iodine pills to decontaminate the water. After drinking 128 ounces of water, she falls asleep only to be awakened covered in black frogs. The next day she encounters blazing heat again and



decides to stop in Cassel. She meets Rex, another hiker who informs her that the store that sold her the hiking boots will send her a new pair if she is dissatisfied with the current pair. Reaching her destination the next day, she calls the store and they agree to overnight a bigger pair of boots.

When her boots don't arrive, she speaks with the company who explains they are having trouble overnighting them to where she is. Angry and not wanting to get behind schedule, she tells them to mail the boots to her next stop. She contemplates wearing her flimsy sandals or her too-small boots. She thinks of an astrologer who told her that she is wounded the same way as her father and that, to heal her wound, she will have to go into battle. Cheryl puts on her sandals and heads for the next stop.



Chapters 13-14, The Accumulation of Trees, Wild

Chapters 13-14, The Accumulation of Trees, Wild Summary and Analysis

Chapter 13 begins with Cheryl giving a brief history of how the PCT came into existence. After this overview, she realizes that the people who fought so hard to have the PCT created had her in mind when they were creating it. She realizes that no amount of modern conveniences could take away the pleasure of being in the wild. Cheryl is on her 6th week of the trail now and, as she hikes throughout most of this chapter, she is wearing her sandals (which are duct taped to her feet) because her boots went over the side of the mountain by accident.

As she sets up camp one night, she longs to speak with one of her siblings or with Eddie, to be near family. Cheryl remembers the last time she saw her brother, Leif, and how they communicated indirectly about the loss of their mother. The next day, Cheryl sets off on the trail but soon loses track of the PCT due to debris in the road and crisscrossing side roads. With sandals that are torn to shreds and will barely stay on, she continues hiking in what she hopes is the right direction over the next two days. She finally reaches a major highway and hitches a ride to a place where the PCT starts again. Cheryl follows the road and reaches Castle Crags, where she receives a new pair of boots, some letters from family and friends and her next resupply box.

She is surprised to see some hikers she met previously on the trail and relieved to know that she is not the only one that got lost. After spending the night in Castle Crags and getting drunk with her friends, she wakes up the next morning and is ready to continue hiking. She and another hiker share their excitement of being close to Oregon but Cheryl tries to focus on just finishing California first.

In chapter 14, Cheryl observes that the PCT seems like a constant uphill climb. She realizes that, while her bigger boots have more room, they are re-blistering her feet all over again and she is again in ongoing pain. At lunch, Cheryl accidentally takes a nap but is awakened by the same dream she's had for several nights- Bigfoot escorts her into the woods to be with a Bigfoot camp but that, with a closer look, she realizes that it's not Bigfoot, it's a man wearing a mask and a hairy suit. Since she's had the dream so many times, Cheryl begins to wonder if the dream is a sign. Cheryl meets up with Stacy and Rex to camp overnight and they decide they want to attend the Rainbow Gathering that will be held not far from where they are.

However when they arrive at the supposed location of the gathering, no one is anywhere to be found. They talk about how Cheryl's nickname could be the Hapless Hiker because of all of the troubles she's encountered along the way. Although she agrees that the nickname is fitting, Cheryl would rather be known by a stronger

nickname. Cheryl continues her hike alone the next day and, while eating lunch in a field, a llama runs up to her, followed by two hikers, Vera and Kyle. She learns that Kyle is on a hike with Vera while his mom straightens out her life. She and Kyle share that neither of them knows much about their father.

While hiking the next day, Cheryl thinks about Kyle and about her father and about how she's amazed that her father was not able to love her the way he needed to. But looking at her surroundings, she realized that she didn't need to be amazed by him anymore because there's a lot more in the world to be amazed by. Cheryl cries for the first time on the PCT and contemplates that she will soon be leaving California.



Part Five, Box of Rain, Chapters 15-16, Box of Rain, Mazama

Part Five, Box of Rain, Chapters 15-16, Box of Rain, Mazama Summary and Analysis

Cheryl experiences an extreme change in weather at the beginning of chapter 15, as it is now rainy and cold. She celebrates when she finally reaches Oregon and she fantasizes about her next resupply box because it contains a large sum of money and "regular" clothes. While hitching a ride into Ashland, Cheryl learns that Jerry Garcia died but is unable to focus on anything else when she realizes that her resupply box has not arrived and that she is low on money.

Cheryl goes back to the post office and finds that her box was there all along. After eating dinner, Cheryl and Stacy head out to the Jerry Garcia festivities. It is there that she meets Jonathan, a slightly older, handsome man who invites her to a show and for a date the next night. Although she tries to convince herself not to see him the next day, Cheryl meets him at the club where he's working. Afterwards, Cheryl and Jonathan leave and go back to his place, a luxurious tent on an organic farm. They stay up all night talking and being somewhat physical with each other.

The next day, Jonathan invites Cheryl to the beach and she accepts. When they arrive, Cheryl realizes that she's been to this beach with Paul before. She walks alone down the beach and writes Paul's name in the sand, something she's done at every beach since she fell in love with him, but knows that she will not do it again because she wants to move on from him. She ponders forgiving herself and wonders what that would mean. Cheryl walks back to Jonathan and they eat lunch however, shortly after starting to eat, they begin to get physical and make love on the beach. The next day, feeling somewhat lonely, Cheryl sets back on the PCT again.

Chapter 16 begins with Cheryl explaining that her next destination, Crater Lake, used to be a mountain called Mount Mazama, a volcano that erupted 7,700 years ago. She explains that Crater Lake is the deepest lake in the U.S. and among the deepest in the world. As she continues to hike the PCT, she notices that the trail in Oregon is much denser with trees and forest and that she no longer has sweeping views of her surroundings like she did in California. One morning, she woke up to snow on her tent and saw the temperature was 26 degrees- it was the day of her mother's birthday, the day her mother would've turned 50.

Hiking that day, Cheryl becomes increasingly angry with her mother for not living to see her 50th birthday. To keep positive memories out of her mind, she thinks of all of the mistakes her mother made throughout their childhood and about how angry she is that she didn't get the chance to grow up, accept her mother's faults and appreciate her for who she was. As hard as she tried, however, Cheryl is unable to stay angry with her



mother and instead thinks of how wonderful of a mother she was and how strong her love was. Cheryl also reveals that, on the day she laid the tombstone and the ashes on their property, she refused to let go of some of the largest pieces left in the ash and swallowed them whole instead.

In chapter 16, the reader learns for the first time that Cheryl's mother's name was Barbara "Bobbi" as Cheryl contemplates on who were mother was a whole person. The next day, Cheryl arrives to Crater Lake National Park and catches a stunning view of Crater Lake from 900 feet above it. As she walks around the camp and admires the lake, Cheryl thinks about the pregnancy she ended and how she would've been due the same week of her mother's birthday. She begs the universe to give her the chance to become who she needs to be before becoming a mother. Cheryl thinks about her mother and how she felt she never had the chance to be herself and she hopes that she will be able to be different.



Chapters 17-18, Into a Primal Gear, Queen of the PCT

Chapters 17-18, Into a Primal Gear, Queen of the PCT Summary and Analysis

Chapter 17 finds Cheryl hiking through Oregon. She is enjoying the feeling that she has almost reached her goal, thinking about how far she has left to go and how much stronger her body and mind has become. Although the PCT has become easier for her and she finds that she loves it, there are times each day that she is exhausted and that her body takes over and she thinks of nothing but going forward. She arrives to Shelter Cove Resort and meets three young, handsome men hikers named Rick, Josh and Richie, nicknamed the Three Young Bucks.

Cheryl has a profound respect for them because they have hiked the entire trail, through snow and everything. She enjoys her time with them but is disappointed when she realizes that her resupply box doesn't include the money she needs. When her hunger wins out a few days later, she is left with only two cents until her next stop. She continues hiking and when she reaches the area known as the Three Sisters, she is no longer alone on the trail. Cheryl spends a long lunch with two men from the Army and, the next day, she encounters highly difficult terrain on her hike. The day after, Cheryl finds herself on an alternate route to the PCT by mistake but isn't worried because the route is outlined in her guide book.

She encounters two hunters who are somewhat lost and in need of water. She agrees to let them use her water purifier on the pond water but she begins to get an uncomfortable feeling because one of the hunters seems to be eyeing her, and is making comments on her figure and on her being alone in the woods. In an effort to get away from them, Cheryl says she's moving on and they leave but when one hunter returns, Cheryl knows she was right to be scared. He seems to be making advances on her but, when the other hunter finds him, they both leave. Cheryl packs up her tent, walks as far as she can down the trail and then runs.

Cheryl wakes up to the rain in chapter 18 and it continues to rain throughout most of the chapter. She arrives at Olallie Lake, her next destination, and knows that she will be in Portland in less than a week, causing joy and some feelings of sadness. That night, unable to sleep, Cheryl thinks about what her life will be like in Portland after she finishes the trail. The next day, Cheryl stops the ranger and gets her resupply box that has more than enough money for her to finish the trail, as well as three letters from family and friends. Cheryl wonders if she should stay at the camp but her decision is made when the store owner invites her to dinner.

Cheryl is surprised to see the Three Young Bucks when she returns to her campsite. The slightly odd ranger invites her to his house and she agrees to go only if she can



bring the Three Young Bucks. Cheryl realizes that she has a crush on Rick and she sits next to him while at the ranger's house, although the ranger seems drunk, tells inappropriate stories and doesn't seem to notice anyone but Cheryl. The next day, the Three Young Bucks tell Cheryl that her trail name is the Queen of the PCT because everyone is always doing things for her or giving her things. She and the Three Young Bucks stay at Olallie Lake one more night in a cabin in order for their gear to dry out.

While in the store to buy snacks, Cheryl runs into her friend, Lisa, with whom she'll be living in Portland. Lisa explains that she wanted to come and see Cheryl on the trail and, along with Lisa's boyfriend and the Three Young Bucks, they go to a nearby hot springs. On the way back to camp, Cheryl lays next to Rick in the back of the truck and they talk, with Rick saying that he will also be living in Portland after the trail and suggesting that they should hang out. Cheryl acknowledges her attraction to him but knows she's not going to touch him. She notices that, for once, she isn't thinking of herself as the woman with the hole in her heart.



Chapter 19, The Dream of a Common Language

Chapter 19, The Dream of a Common Language Summary and Analysis

In chapter 19, Cheryl wakes up in Olallie Lake and is the only camper left. The ranger gives her one more box that has chocolates and wine in it. Not wanting to carry the wine, she is about to leave it at the general store when she runs into Doug, who has been trying to catch up with her on the trail. They decide to hike on together and, that night, they share a campsite, the wine and stories of hiking the PCT. After he went to sleep, Cheryl thinks of Eddie as she looks at the fire, realizing all of the things he taught her and that, in one way or another, she would likely not be on the trail if not for him. She realizes that Eddie loved her well when it mattered in her life. When Cheryl, Doug and Tom- who caught up with them on the trail, reach Timberline Lodge, Cheryl continues the hike alone so that she can finish her journey alone. She wonders how living in the woods became normal life for her but she realizes that it's somewhat scary to think about not doing it. At a river, she thinks about where her mother is and, when she thinks "on the other side of the river," she feels a weight released inside of her.

As she continued on her last full day of hiking, she enjoys the scenery and decides to spend one more night on the trail so that she can see the Bridge of the Gods, her final destination, in the glory of the sun. When she wakes up the next morning, Cheryl knows that her trip is over and that there is no way to make it continue. She heads into town, becoming familiar with the sounds of the interstate and of the town. She touches the Bridge of the Gods and stands on it, looking down at the Columbia River, expecting herself to cry although she doesn't. She heads to a restaurant recommended to her for their ice cream and buys an ice cream cone. While eating it, Cheryl meets a man about her age in a BMW who offers her a ride to Portland, although she declines so that she can stay a little longer.

As he leaves, Cheryl finally cries the tears she was expected, thankful for everything she's learned and everything that's in her but that she doesn't yet know. Cheryl shares with the reader that she will be married in four years, have two children within 7 years after that and share ice cream with them at that very place. She shares that she will eventually reach out to those she met on the trail and find out that Doug was killed in a sailing accident. Cheryl shares that, although her future was unknown to her that day, it was enough for her to trust what she'd done. It was enough for her to just see and know what was at the surface, to know that her life was mysterious, present and hers. Cheryl realizes that it's wild to let her life be.



Characters

Cheryl Strayed

Cheryl is the author and she wrote the book based on her life and, more specifically, her journey of self-discovery while hiking the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT). In most of the stories she shares in the book, Cheryl is between the ages of 22 and 27, although she references her younger childhood and the years that follow her hike as well. The reader will likely find Cheryl to be intelligent, strong, thoughtful and willing to take responsibility for her mistakes. However, through the text, Cheryl also reveals herself to be hurt, lost, lonely and angry. She appears to think about herself as failure in many respects, mostly as a wife and as a daughter who could keep her family together after her mother's death. Throughout the book, the reader learns about the deep pain and guilt Cheryl experiences after her mother's death, her search for intimacy that leads to multiple affairs and the end of her marriage with her husband who she loves, her painful experiences surrounding her biological father's physical abuse and abandonment of the family, her experience with substance abuse and addiction, the anger she feels towards herself, her situation and everyone around her and her overall sense of being lonely and lost in the world without her mother.

Having spent much of her childhood on a farm in Minnesota, Cheryl feels a calling to hike the PCT feeling that, in some way, it could put her back together again. Although hiking the trail is not what she expected, she finds that, throughout her journey, interactions with others and with the wilderness itself, she is forced to confront her fears and emotions. As a result, Cheryl completes the trail having found a sense of peace and relief about the hurts she's carried for so long. She no longer appears angry or bitter towards the world but content with her situation and feelings, looking forward to the surprises that life could bring.

Barbara

Bobbi is Cheryl's mother and, although Cheryl mentions her constantly throughout the book, she doesn't reveal her name almost until the end. The reader learns towards the beginning of the book that Bobbi was shockingly diagnosed with advanced lung cancer and died less than two months later, at the age of 45. Although Bobbi passes away, she is one of the most important people in the book because she seems to influence or be a part of every thought, feeling and decision that Cheryl experiences. It is clear to the reader that Bobbi and Cheryl had an extremely close relationship, having been bonded together by years of physical abuse by Cheryl's father, living poorly when Bobbi was single mom with three kids, living on a run-down farm that was miles from anyone and going to college together.

Through Cheryl's stories of her mom, the reader knows that Bobbi was determined to be as loving of a mother as possible, to make every experience as positive as she could



and to be optimistic at any cost. But Cheryl underlines a sadness in her mother's personality, too, sharing with the reader that Bobbie never felt as though she had control of her own life, that everything she did was for someone else. While Bobbi's untimely and unexpected death caused Cheryl to experience feelings of anger, loneliness and confusion about who she is, it was the values, independence, strength and love that Bobbi instilled in Cheryl that pushed Cheryl to hike the PCT, to complete it and to become a changed person at the end.

Paul

Paul is Cheryl's now ex-husband. Conversations between him and Cheryl appear often in the book and many of Cheryl's memories while hiking the PCT center around him. In her accounts of their relationship and communication with each other, Cheryl portrays Paul as kind, loving, patient and understanding. While they married when Cheryl was only 19, she shares that they were deeply in love. However, Cheryl became more distant with Paul when her mom got sick and she eventually had multiple affairs, which ended their marriage, although both Paul and Cheryl still loved each other and debated many times whether or not to get divorced.

Through their separation and after their divorce, however, Paul remained loving and supportive toward Cheryl and she described him often as her best friend. However, Cheryl carried significant guilt about her actions during their marriage, and was constantly questioning whether or not getting divorced was the right thing. Paul becomes less significant towards the end of the book when Cheryl decides to start forgiving herself for her mistakes in their marriage and to let Paul go.

Eddie

Eddie is Cheryl's step-father and he is mentioned throughout the book. While Cheryl instantly fell in love with him when she first met him at 10 years old, and considered him to be her father, she is frequently saddened by the thought that he quickly became a stranger after her mother's death. Through her hike on the PCT, however, she realizes that Eddie loved her in her life when it mattered the most and, although still sad by their deteriorating relationship, she is grateful for his contribution to her life.

Karen

Karen is Cheryl's older sister. While the text suggests they were close in childhood, Cheryl expresses a fair amount of anger towards Karen for being largely absent during their mother's illness and death. Cheryl mentions that, after their mother's death, Karen remained absent, wrapped up in her own life.



Leif

Leif is Cheryl's younger brother. Cheryl feels that she had a large hand in raising Leif, as their mother worked many jobs during their childhood. Although Cheryl and Leif have a close relationship, he appears mostly irresponsible, impulsive and immature. Cheryl has anger towards him as well for being absent during their mother's illness and death and after her death as well.

Cheryl's Biological Father

Although not named in the book, Cheryl mentions him often. He is described as physically abusive and mostly absent from Cheryl's life after she was 6. Cheryl speaks often of her amazement at the fact that he was not able to love her properly but, as she hikes the PCT, she realizes that there are many more things in the world about which to be amazed.

Joe

Joe is Cheryl's ex-boyfriend from Portland with whom she continues to stay in touch. During her separation from Paul, Cheryl lived with her friend, Lisa, in Portland. It was during that time that Cheryl met Joe and began having an affair with him. Shortly after, they began using heroin together and did so until Paul came to Portland and took Cheryl back to Minnesota. Joe visited Cheryl in Minnesota, where they continued their affair and heroin use, however Cheryl discontinued her relationship and drug use after Joe returned to Portland. Several weeks later, however, Cheryl discovered that she was pregnant with Joe's child. It was directly after ending her pregnancy that Cheryl decided to follow through on her idea and hike the PCT.

Greg

A fellow PCT hiker that Cheryl meets on the trail. He is 40-ish, kind and an expert backpacker. Greg teaches Cheryl many things about being a hiker and, through his stories of having to grow and learn as a hiker and because of his constant encouragement, Cheryl feels inspired and energetic about her ability to complete her hike. Greg and Cheryl spend time together several times throughout the trail. Towards the end of the book, Cheryl learns that Greg quit the trail for that year because of record-breaking bad weather.

Doug

A fellow PCT hiker that Cheryl meets. He is about her age and she describes him as a "golden boy." They meet up several times on the trail and, during their first encounter, Doug gave Cheryl a black feather for good luck, a feather she still has to this day. At the



end of the story, Cheryl shares with the reader that Doug was killed in a sailing accident soon after hiking the PCT.

Tom

A fellow PCT hiker and Doug's hiking partner. Cheryl meets up with him several times on the trail.

Albert

A fellow PCT hiker, Eagle Scout and expert hiker that Cheryl meets on the trail. Albert is around her age and provides her with valuable information about how to lighten her backpack. He has to stop hiking the trail when he gets a water-borne illness and is transported to the hospital.

Matt

A fellow PCT hiker, Eagle Scout and expert hiker. He is Albert's father and hiking partner as well. He also has to stop hiking the trail when he gets a water-borne illness and is transported to the hospital.

Trina

A fellow PCT hiker, Eagle Scout and expert hiker. He is Albert's father and hiking partner as well. He also has to stop hiking the trail when he gets a water-borne illness and is transported to the hospital.

Stacy

A fellow PCT hiker. Cheryl meets up with her several times on the trail and becomes close friends with her. Towards the middle of her journey, Stacy becomes hiking partners with Rex.

Rex

A fellow PCT hiker who becomes hiking partners with Stacy. Cheryl meets up with him several times on the trail.

Richie

A fellow PCT hiker, known as one of the Three Young Bucks. Cheryl meets up with him several times on the trail. She describes him as handsome, funny, odd and mysterious.



Josh

A fellow PCT hiker, known as one of the Three Young Bucks. Cheryl meets up with him several times on the trail. She describes him as handsome, intelligent and sweet.

Rick

A fellow PCT hiker, known as one of the Three Young Bucks. Cheryl meets up with him several times and, out of all three of the Three Young Bucks, she has the biggest crush on him. He appears to return the feelings as well. Cheryl describes him as a good conversationalist, handsome, funny, kind and insightful.

Lisa

Cheryl's friend in Portland. Cheryl lives with her for a brief time during her separation. She also plans to live with her after hiking the PCT. Lisa sends Cheryl resupply boxes to addresses on the PCT and visits her at one point near the end of her trip.

Jonathan

A slightly older man Cheryl meets while staying in Ashland, Oregon. They appear to have a lot in common and they spend approximately two days together and engage in a physically intimate relationship.

Sam

A fellow PCT hiker Cheryl met on the trail. He is married to Helen and is her hiking partner. Cheryl encounters him several times on the trail.

Helen

A fellow PCT hiker Cheryl met on the trail. She is married to Sam and is his hiking partner. Cheryl encounters her several times on the trail.



Objects/Places

The Pacific Coast Trail (PCT)

The main setting of the book. Although the PCT spans from the Mexican border to the Canadian border, Cheryl's trip covered most of California and all of Oregon.

Monster

Cheryl's affectionate name for her backpack.

Minnesota

Cheryl's home state.

Portland, Oregon

A city where Cheryl lived briefly, mentions often and plans to live after hiking the PCT.

The Pacific Crest Trail, Volume 1: California

Cheryl's "bible" throughout most of her journey. She mentions it and references it often throughout the book.

The Pacific Crest Trail, Volume 2: Oregon and Washington

Cheryl's "bible" for the Oregon part of her trip.

The Dream of a Common Language

A book of poetry by Adrienne Rich that serves as inspiration and encouragement for Cheryl along her journey.

The Black Feather

An object of good luck given to her by fellow hiker, Doug. At the end of the book, Cheryl reveals that she's kept the feather to this day.



Bridge of the Gods

Cheryl's final destination on the PCT and her beacon throughout her journey.

The Ten Thousand Things

A reference about the ten thousand things names in Tao Te Ching's universe made by Cheryl's mom to say that she loved her children more than these ten thousand things. Cheryl thinks of this reference often throughout the book.



Themes

The Importance of Confronting Your Fears and Emotions

Throughout the book, Cheryl names several main reasons that she decided to hike the PCT including the death of her mother, the end of her marriage, the deterioration of her family after her mother's death and an unplanned pregnancy that she chose to end. However, after a closer look, the reader may decipher another pattern in Cheryl's behaviors as well: the way she utilizes negative outlets to escape the negative feelings surrounding the loss of her mother. More specifically, Cheryl shares how her multiple affairs, constant moving around the country and brief but serious experience with drug addiction served as her escape from what was happening in the real world.

Being virtually alone in the wilderness of the PCT forced Cheryl to come face-to-face with her fears and emotions. She could no longer use men or drugs to escape the pain and guilt of her mother's death, the choices she made that led to the end of her marriage, the hurts given to her by her biological father or the pain of feeling like a failure for being unable to keep her family together after her mother's death.

Throughout the book, Cheryl's positive and negative interactions with the PCT caused her to have revelations about each of these issues that, while possibly causing immediate pain, ultimately brought her to a place of peace and acceptance about the negative things she's experienced in her life. By confronting her fears and emotions, Cheryl was able to break down her own walls of hurt and anger in order to discover who she truly is, something for which she is thankful. Although she doesn't have all of the answers at the end of her journey, Cheryl feels content with where she is in her life and ready to take on the rest of what life has to offer.

Leaving the Past in the Past

From the beginning of the book, it is clear to the reader that Cheryl is holding on to hurt and anger from her present situation and from her past including the unexpected cancer diagnosis and death of her mother, the physical abuse and abandonment by her biological father, the lack of support from her siblings during and after their mother's sickness and death, the deterioration of her relationship with her step-father after her mother's death, the unraveling and ending of her marriage and her decision to engage in multiple affairs. Cheryl finds herself being bitter, confused and lost as a result of these events and decisions and she appears to contemplate them often, usually defining herself by these events while doing so.

Her inner emotions can be seen through the many passages in which Cheryl curses her mother for dying when she did, torments herself about whether or not she made the right decision divorcing Paul, replays what happened with her biological father and



wonders what she could've done differently to keep her family together. Although she begins the PCT carrying these feelings, Cheryl soon begins find clarity and peace on many of these issues as her hike on the PCT progresses.

Perhaps because her focus on the trail was so often on simply moving forward, Cheryl begins to do so in her emotional life as well. She finds a way to make sense of what she's been through, forgive those that have hurt her and, perhaps most importantly, she finds that she is able to start forgiving herself for the mistakes of her past. Having found a way to move forward in her life, Cheryl leaves the PCT less angry, hurt and bitter. Instead, she is looking forward to experiencing the unknowns of her future.

The Healing Power of Nature

When Cheryl decided to do a three-month solo hike on the PCT, she did so because she knew she needed to make major changes in her life. In a way, hiking the PCT was a return to her childhood, where she spent many days playing on an isolated, run-down farm. Although she didn't know what to expect, Cheryl somehow knew that being in the wilderness, in nature, would be exactly what she needed to get her life back on track after her mother's death. While she was unsure of her decision to hike the PCT after first starting, Cheryl soon realized that her instinct to return to nature was a good one to follow.

Shortly after beginning the PCT, Cheryl begins to develop an affection for the trail, feeling that it's home, although it is often brutal. Being alone gave Cheryl the time and space she needed to sort out her life however, due to the difficulty of the PCT, Cheryl found that she was too physically tired or hurt to even think about her emotional pain. Cheryl's focus on her physical pain, her inability to escape the pain and her realization that she could get through the pain and that it got better seemed to trickle down into her emotional life as well. Problems that seemed insurmountable at the beginning of her hike either became less significant due to the physical feats she accomplished each day or became more easily resolved in the peace and truth offered by the PCT.

While at times she felt like the loneliest person in the world, her appreciation for the beauty around her, the expanse of her view and the ongoing reality of the wilderness somehow helped Cheryl to feel safe in the world. Her hard work to complete each mile of hiking and the appreciation for surviving nature each day helped her to appreciate many other things in her life as well. At the end of her journey, Cheryl found herself feeling thankful to the PCT for all it had taught her about life and about herself.



Style

Perspective

"Wild: From Lost to found on the Pacific Crest Trail" is written by author, Cheryl Strayed. Because the book is autobiographical in nature, the story is told through Cheryl's perspective. She engaged in and completed her hike of the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT) at the age of 26, approximately four years after the unexpected death of her mother. Although Cheryl decided to embark on the three-month trip alone, she makes it clear that she was an amateur hiker and that she virtually made an impulsive decision to hike the PCT, feeling she had nothing left in her life to lose. Although she did research on the materials she would need, she clearly lets the reader know that she was highly unprepared to hike the PCT.

Based on the stories she told of her childhood, Cheryl was not exactly a stranger to nature. She spent much of her childhood on an isolated, run-down farm that had no electricity and no running water. Perhaps because of her childhood experiences, Cheryl was predisposed to falling in love with the wilderness and the PCT, whereas other amateur hikers may have enjoyed it less. Cheryl also makes mention several times in the book that she often felt alone, lost and wandering throughout her life, so much so that when she got divorced, she picked the last name "Strayed" for herself. These experiences may have also contributed to Cheryl enjoying the alone time on the PCT and to her never worrying too much when she thought she was lost.

Tone

The tone found in "Wild: From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail" is most appropriate for the adult audience. While there is frequent use of inappropriate language and a fair amount of sexual content, the book also contains a complex emotional palate, full of subtleties and inferences that would likely be too mature for the adolescent and/or child audience.

As the book is mostly autobiographical in nature, and because the author is writing about a significant period of self-discovery in her life, the tone of the author's writing changes as the book progresses. At the beginning of the book, Cheryl's tone is angry, hurt, bitter and sarcastic, however she does express remorse for many of the impulsive decisions she made after the death of her mother. She is less hopeful about the future and the reader gets a clear understanding that she feels lost and alone in the world after her mother's death.

When Cheryl begins her hike, her focus shifts to successfully completing each day of the hike. As a result, the tone of her writing changes as well. She sounds less angry and hurt and attempts to use positive thinking to boost her confidence in her ability to complete the hike. As her hike of the PCT continues, she thinks about the situation with



her family and with her life in general but her tone becomes more accepting and forgiving. By the end of her journey, the tone of the book is one of peace, acceptance and forgiveness.

Structure

"Wild: From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail," is a three hundred and eleven page book consisting of nineteen chapters grouped into five parts. The chapters range from moderate to long in length and each part contains between three and five chapters. The book also contains a prologue that is approximately four pages in length.

Part one introduces the author, Cheryl, and the reasons behind her decision to embark on a three-month solo hike of the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT). She reveals that the main reason was the unexpected death of her mother, which led her to engage in many impulsive decisions that ultimately ended her marriage and left her feeling lost and confused. Cheryl provides a fair amount of background information about her family and childhood as well.

In parts two and three, Cheryl shares her experiences of hiking the PCT while, along the way, revealing more information about her family, her past decisions and the emotions that all led to her decision to hike the PCT. The reader also gets an account of the struggles Cheryl encounters on the PCT, how they relate to her life and how they contribute to her goal of getting her life back together again.

In parts four and five, it's clear that Cheryl's strength and speed are improving on the PCT. She is more confident with her ability to complete her journey and to handle any obstacles she faces. Cheryl also appears to be experiencing more breakthroughs in her emotional journey as well, as she seems able to make a stronger connection between her experiences on the PCT and her experiences in the other parts of her life. The book ends with Cheryl having a clearer sense of who she is, feeling a sense of acceptance for what's happened in her life and feeling content with facing the unknowns of the future.



Quotes

"She was going to leave my life at the same moment that I came into hers, I thought." (1, 11)

"I'd put her somewhere else. The only place I could reach her. In me." (2, 29)

"There was the woman I was before my mom died and the one I was now, my old life sitting on the surface of me like a bruise." (2, 33/34)

"Every now and then I could see myself—truly see myself—and a sentence would come to me, thundering like a god into my head, and as I saw myself then in front of that tarnished mirror what came was the woman with the hole in her heart." (3, 38)

"I was here. I could begin at last." (4, 49)

"The thing about hiking the Pacific Crest Trail, the thing that was so profound to me that summer—and yet also, like most things, so very simple—was how few choices I had and how often I had to do the thing I least wanted to do." (5, 69)

"I'd come, I realized, to stare that fear down, to stare everything down, really—all that I'd done to myself and all that had been done to me." (8, 122)

"It had only to do with how it felt to be in the wild. With what it was like to walk for miles for no reason other than to witness the accumulation of trees and meadows, mountains and deserts, streams and rocks, rivers and grasses, sunrises and sunsets." (13, 207)

"Of all the wild things, his failure to love me the way he should have had always been the wildest thing of all. But on that night as I gazed out over the darkening land fifty-some nights out on the PCT, it occurred to me that I didn't have to be amazed by him anymore." (14, 234)

"What if I forgave myself? I thought. What if I forgave myself even though I'd done something I shouldn't have?" (15, 258)

"I didn't get to grow up and pull away from her and bitch about her with my friends and confront her about the things I wished she'd done differently and then get older and understand that she had done the best she could and realize that what she had done was pretty damn good and take her fully back into my arms again. Her death obliterated that." (16, 267)

"They simply were not there anymore. There was only the stillness and silence of that water: what a mountain and a wasteland and an empty bowl turned into after the healing began." (16, 273)



"For once I didn't ache for a companion. For once the phrase a woman with a hole in her heart didn't thunder into my head. That phrase, it didn't even live for me anymore."
(18, 299)

"How wild it was, to let it be." (19, 311)



Topics for Discussion

Discuss the transformation Cheryl made throughout the book and throughout her journey.

In what ways did Cheryl's physical struggles on the PCT help her deal with her emotional struggles?

What are the three guide books that Cheryl references most often to help her navigate the PCT?

Identify and discuss two specific life lessons Cheryl took from hiking the PCT.

Name five specific contributing factors in Cheryl's decision to hike the PCT.

Based on the text, was Cheryl ever really happy in her relationship with Paul or did it begin to fall apart only after her mother died? Explain.

Discuss the importance of Eddie in Cheryl's life.

Discuss how Cheryl's relationship with her biological father affected her worldview and her view about herself.