

# Exploring Trauma and Resilience in Jon Krakauer's *Into the Wild*

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## Abstract

*Trauma Theory, an interdisciplinary framework within psychology, to explore the complexities of traumatic experiences and their effects on individuals, using the case study of Christopher John McCandless in *Into the Wild* in 1996 to illustrate the intersection of past childhood traumas. It explores on how traumatic events can impact our thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. It helps us to understand profound impact of overwhelming experiences on our lives. Trauma theory is an interdisciplinary field of psychology that explores an individual how they react in a particular situation. It examines the way they respond or react. In the context *Into the wild* trauma theory help us to analyse the mindset of the protagonist Chris Mc Candless he underwent childhood traumas from his own parents. The theory examines the impact of trauma which he faced during his childhood. It deeply analyse the situations how it affects him until his death. The trauma behind his death. The past exercise and challenges are elucidated through this Trauma Theory.*

**Keywords:** *Childhood Trauma, Resilience, Emotional impact, Family dynamics, Abuse, Independence, Preparation*

## Introduction

The trauma that Chris faced in his childhood from his parents made him live alone. Improper parenting makes a child ruin his whole life. His childhood trauma affected him to this extent. A child ruined his whole life. It made him selfish, without emotions. And he couldn't find which is true love and which is true life. Chris McCandless was successful in his academic life. As his sister Carine said, "He was always strong; he succeeded in everything he tried." And one more thing: family life for Chris was not that easy for him. Chris' family life was more complicated than his sister Carine's. Walt and Marcia got divorced when Chris McCandless was four years old. Chris McCandless didn't know that he was the son of the second wife of his father. Walt still had an affair with Marcia after their divorce. This situation made Chris McCandless greatly upset greatly. During one vacation, Chris McCandless and Carine came to know their half-siblings, and Walt brought them to Bilie's home, where Chris and his family lived.

Walt McCain was an abusive husband to both of his wives, and he was most dominating and beating his wives. He threatens and verbally abuses his wife badly. Carine said that Chris always grabbed her when her parents were fighting with each other. Their mother screamed out and asked

them to see what their father had done to her. Their father asked them to get in and said what their mother had made him do. Walt threw Bilie down on the bed in front of Chris and Carine. Bilie ran out and hugged them, asking them to apologize to her. Carine and Chris's half sisters, Shelly and Shawna, said they were also witnesses to his father's extreme outburst temper in their home with their mother, Marcia Mc Candless. Walt was not only an abusive husband; he was also an abusive father. One day he punched Chris on his right spin, and then Chris turned and looked at Walt and had a puff of disgust on his lips. Carine said that day she saw fear on his father's face, and Chris walked away.

In real life, Chris McCandless's parents refused to talk about Chris's childhood to the press. In the writing of Carine, she mentioned her traumatic childhood with his brother. She discusses her and Chris' mental struggles. Walt and Bilie totally declined this accusation. They never treated their children like what Carine said in her writing was fabricated. That was not true. They said that they never did anything wrong with their beloved son, Chris. The journey that he made was his dream; he was not pulled away from his house. So, he decided to continue his dream of succeeding. The accusations made by their daughter in her writing were wrong, and they were spiteful.

In Carine's "Return to the Wild," Chris's story, she added more information about Chris's state of mind before he left the place. Carine received numerous letters that were written by Chris before his journey. Carine says about Chirs that he was not antisocial; he was very kind to himself. He had friends and spent time with them. Everybody liked him. He was a loner, but he was not alone; he could be allowed to be alone. She says that her parents always tied office work to incredibly long hours; they had been in the office working when Chris and Carine came home in the afternoon, and they had been in the office working when Carine and Chris were in bed at night. They ran a good business together and gained good profits. But they failed in family life and as parents. Chris and Carine's existence in the house was stressful, and they could survive without their mom and dad. In his childhood, Chris traveled at many paces with his family. He was so interested in traveling that it may have caused his desire to travel. Walt says that Chris has so much talent naturally.

Walt says an incident was that he was a player of racquetball. When Chris was eleven, he was taught to play racquetball. Chris was very quick and did a lot of favors. Because by the time he was fifteen and seventeen, he was beating his father regularly in the game. He defeated the old man; he was the player; he defeated him even though he tested Chris after knowing his strategy for winning. Chris won by a lot more points than him.

Chris was also a motivator for his friends. He viewed running as spiritual exercise. So he used religion to motivate the runners. His friend Eric Hthaway says about Chris that he was telling them to think about all the hatred they received from the world while running and imagine themselves running against the darkness of the world. There is an evil wall that restricts us from running to our best. Chris motivational speech may deliver his personal life that life refers to running. The worldly hatreds refer to societal norms and beliefs.

The darkness of the world refers to poverty, illness, arrogance, depression, and some negative traits of people. The evil wall refers to his parents because they only restricted him from everything. They thought they were protecting him; actually, they pulled him down and controlled him by compelling him to do their wishes. Chris has another side that he couldn't bear his failure, as said by his female teammate, Kris Maxie Gilmer. She says that Chris was serious about running. She remembered that Chri was standing on the finish line, and he seemed low because he wanted to do well, but he didn't do as he wanted. He couldn't satisfy himself. He wouldn't even talk about that race. He put himself down so much. The contradiction and mental instability peaked with these incidents. Because he was a mind-blowing motivational speaker, he couldn't accept his failure and tackle it with optimism. He failed to do that, and the contradictions reveal that he had mental instability.

Gillmer tried to console him, but he acted annoyed when she came to console him. He didn't want someone to give him advice or ask him to do something. He was a self-reliant man. Moreover, he was punished by beating himself. This is more serious because a human has both failures and successes in their life. We should accept both good and bad. If we cannot accept failure, we will love our lives and cannot learn from mistakes. Chris was an all-rounder. He was good at everything, as evidenced by his success throughout his life. A sudden failure led him to this state of mind. A real warrior has to face both positives and negatives. Ready to face both. We should be confident about what we do. Chris may have had over confidence in his past achievements. So the sudden failure made him this much worse. Eric Hathawy He was African; he was a competitor in running races; later, he became friends with Chris. Both of them had conversations about life, the state of the world, and some serious things. Chris was very serious about racial discrimination. He often raises questions about stuff faced by Africans. Chris took his life's inequities to heart. During his higher studies at Woodson, he became obsessed with racial oppression in South Africa. He spoke about how to smuggle weapons, get into war, and end apartheid.

Chris had no boundaries; he wants to work independently. He wouldn't work under the system. He insisted Eric raise enough money to go to Spain on their own. On the weekends, every high school pal enjoys it, but Chris hides and goes to George Town and chats with prostitutes and homeless people, providing food for them and suggesting ways to enrich their lives. Later, Eric said that was the best talk he had ever heard in high school. As a high school student, his speech was mind-blowing. Chris always believed that our mental health was good and we would all get success. Even in a small way, it would work in our lives. Chris is good at academics, but he doesn't want to continue his studies. His mother, Billie, made him aware of the studies by using his field of interest. Chris helped the needy during his high school years; he always had conversations with prostitutes, pimps, and poor people. He spent his holidays with them, helping them. He teaches them how to make their lives better. He spent his money on them to buy food for them. Billie convinces him to study; if you study, you will help them and make their lives better. After he joins the college, he acknowledges his father's relationship with his first wife, Marcia.

Chris was so upset with his family. He made a distance and frustrated about his life. He had only contact with his sister Carine properly; he sent a letter to her and wrote about his parents and their behavior toward him. Chris told Carine that Walt and Billie suspected him of being homosexual. He was so frustrated about their interrogations that he already used to be with them again. Their filthy words to him made him hate their presence. The letters tell about the true color of his parents, and he made many allegations about his parents and his traumatic childhood. Carine wants to release those letters, which were written by Chris, to get a better understanding of her brother among people. She wants to raise awareness among parents and children by using Chris's life. She says there are a lot of lessons to be learned from Chris's life, and they will be helpful to a lot of people. She said that in the situation of their parents, Walt and Billie, as parents, they deserved sympathy, and they also tried a lot to find Chris. So, they hired investigators to find Chris, and he was impossible to find because he traveled by his fake name, so he left no traces to find him.

Carine McCandess said that she wouldn't blame Walt and Billie for Chris McCandess's death. But she holds them accountable for the disappearance of Chris McCain. The unpreparedness of Chris brought trauma to another angle. He wasn't aware of the things that he was going to face in Alaska. He has no knowledge about traveling or surviving in the wild. He had no proper equipment for hunting and no proper belongings. His blind interests lead him to exit this society, and he wants to live away from this traumatic society. He often used to scold and curse society with people he met along the way.

He had a gun with low power that was not worthy enough to kill animals. Jim Gallien, a union electrician, He was the first to go along the way to his anchorage, while he was ready to drop Chris wherever he wanted, and he noticed that Chris had bags and food packs for the trip. He recalled that Chris carried a 10-pound bag of rice. He says that a 22-caliber gun is too small to kill big animals. Alex boots were cheap leather hiking boots that were neither waterproof nor well insulated. He had no ax, no bug dop, no snowshoes, and no compass. He had a tattered state road map, which he scrounged in the gas station. In his childhood, the main thing about traveling was to carry a map, which is the basic way to travel in unfamiliar territory. He failed, and it showed his unawareness and carelessness. Chris prepared mentally, but physically, he was not ready to go on an adventure. He follows his mind, and he leads his life as simply as that. He hates to live under societal norms and conditions. Often, Chris yelled at society and the government. His desire is to live off this land and lead a peaceful life in isolation, but now the isolation is leading to the destruction of his life. He faced mental trauma when he was in the Alaskan wilderness. Even though he was a loner, he realized that being alone is not real happiness; he says, "Happiness is real when shared." His whole life is a tragedy, and his life has taught many life lessons for tramps and also for human beings. His story reminded him of the importance of mental well-being and being prepared for challenging adventures.

## Conclusion

The life of Chris McCandless conveys the profound impact of childhood trauma on an individual's psyche and behavior. His experiences with abusive parents and a tumultuous family life played a significant role in shaping his thoughts and emotions. His life story serves as a vital reminder of the importance of addressing mental health struggles, seeking help when needed, and being properly equipped for the challenges life presents. Chris McCandless's life and tragic end offer valuable lessons on the importance of mental well-being, resilience, and the inherent human need for connection and shared experiences.

## References

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