

FROM KEIRAN TO NICK JANS

Hello Nick,

I am a high school student out of Colorado who is currently reading *Into The Wild* by John Krakauer. There is a clip of a letter in the book in response to an article that Krakauer wrote about the life and death of Chris McCandless in *Outside* magazine many years ago. You say that his journals sound like a "a somewhat histrionic high school kid..." I am emailing you because I would like to know more about your reasoning for this statement. I also partially disagree with you because I would argue that his texts are less melodramatic if you look at the writing as a transcendental text. Which in my opinion is what they are. Now this opinion is influenced by the fact that McCandless seemed to find great joy and value in reading Henry David Thoreau and some of Tolstoy's texts.

I do not have interest in Chris McCandless's stupidity of traveling into Alaska fiercely unprepared. I am only intrigued by your statements about his writing. I have found that whether or not McCandless was being ignorant, he was searching for the unfiltered experience. For him it was being in a place as harsh as Alaska without any training or preparation. As of now whether his action were ill advised or not is inconsequential because he did, in his own way, achieve happiness and meaning. He almost achieved his own eudaimonia, of some sorts. Not according to Aristotle's terms of course.

If you could give more explanation about your statements on his McCandless's writing that would be much appreciated.

Thank you for your time.

NICK JANS RESPONSE:

Hey Keiran,

Thanks for the intelligent and thoughtful note regarding my opinions of Chris McCandless's writing. Reader response of a text is always valid, but also highly subjective. Frankly, too, I wrote that note from a little Eskimo village in the upper left corner of the state a few years before you were born. Not sure I recall most of what I wrote. I do recall the gist, though, and the fact that Jon Krakauer took snippets of a long letter and dispersed them out of context through his text, giving the certain impression that I was more than one person. Jon did stuff like that in a few places, disregarding by not reporting documented, easily accessed facts that changed the character of Chris McCandless, and his story, and his adventures, into something that they weren't.

So anyhow, I wasn't so much trying to smack down Chris as I was taking Jon to task for not getting the story right.

I certainly don't begrudge Jon his success. It's a hard thing to hit a homer commercially and I do think we writers are all in this together.

But that's also the story behind my comments on Chris, written give or take half drunk 25 years ago, taken way out of context.

Transcendent, huh? Well, go for it dude. That's a subjective reader response and so you're right. Me, too. I'm not being snide here, nor am I claiming I'm right. But having lived 20-some years in country way off the grid, and traveled many tens of thousands of wilderness miles, often alone, and knowing folks who did the same, I found Chris's perspective totally uninteresting and the exact opposite of transcendent. In a never-shown interview on ABC's 20-20, I asked Jon if a competent 13 year old cub scout would have died here, a one-day hike downstream to a road, and he agreed probably not. I don't mind people going off into the country to make something of themselves for better or worse; that's what I did when I was 22 and I sure had my chances to disappear. But that doesn't mean I, like most of my friends and neighbors with similar experiences, sensed much of anything in Chris McCandless's bumbling around and unfortunate death in a damn school bus practically within earshot of the Parks Highway, nor his breathless prose musings. But again, that doesn't mean they don't speak to you. Obviously they do. And I do mean go for it.

Here's an Alaska Magazine piece of mine, part of my upcoming 12th book. BTW, I'm about to turn 61 and still go off far by myself and think it's the best thing I've ever done on this earth.

JOURNAL #12:

1. Was Chris McCandless on a transcendental odyssey? With whom do you agree more: Nick Jans or Keiran Eagen?

AND

2. What wisdom might we glean from this communication about interpretation or intertextuality? OR What do you think about "Reader Response" theory that says that the audience of a text plays an active role in determining its meaning?

OPTIONAL JOURNAL 12b: READ NICK JANS piece that he sent to Keiran, "Going Alone" [here](#)! Is he more "transcendentalist" than Chris? Add some thoughts of response to your journal entry.