

Text 1: excerpted from *Into the Wild* by Jon Krakauer

“I wanted movement and not a calm course of existence. I wanted excitement and danger and the chance to sacrifice myself for my love. I felt in myself a superabundance of energy which found no outlet in our quiet life.”

-Leo Tolstoy, "Family Happiness"

*Passage highlighted in one of the books found with Chris McCandless's remains*

“It should not be denied. . . that being footloose has always exhilarated us. It is associated in our minds with escape from history and oppression and law and irksome obligations, with absolute freedom, and the road has always led West.”

-Wallace Stegner, *The American West as Living Space*

In early April a long letter arrived in Franz's post-office box bearing a South Dakota postmark. "Hello Ron," it says,

*Alex here. I have been working up here in Carthage South Dakota for nearly two weeks now. I arrived up here three days after we parted in Grand Junction, Colorado. I hope that you made it back to Salton City without too many problems. I enjoy working here and things are going well. The weather is not very bad and many days are surprisingly mild. Some of the farmers are even already going out into their fields. It must be getting rather hot down there in Southern California by now. I wonder if you ever got a chance to get out and see how many people showed up for the March 20 Rainbow gathering there at the hot springs. It sounds like it might have been a lot of fun, but I don't think you really understand these kind of people very well.*

*I will not be here in South Dakota very much longer. My friend, Wayne, wants me to stay working at the grain elevator through May and then go combining with him the entire summer, but I have my soul set entirely on my Alaskan Odyssey and hope to be on my way no later than April 15. That means I will be leaving here before very long, so I need you to send any more mail I may have received to the return address listed below.*

*Ron, I really enjoy all the help you have given me and the times that we spent together. I hope that you will not be too depressed by our parting. It may be a very long time before we see each other again. But providing that I get through this Alaskan Deal in one piece you will be hearing from me again in the future. I'd like to repeat the advice I gave you before, in that I think you really should make a radical change in your lifestyle and begin to boldly do things which you may previously never have thought of doing, or been too hesitant to attempt. So many people live within unhappy circumstances and yet will not take the initiative to change their situation because they are conditioned to a life of security, conformity, and conservatism, all of which may appear to give one peace of mind, but in reality nothing is more damaging to the adventurous spirit within a man than a secure future. The very basic core of a man's living spirit is his passion for adventure. The joy of life comes from our encounters with new experiences, and hence there is no greater joy than to have an endlessly changing horizon, for each day to have a new and different sun. If you want to get more out of life, Ron, you must lose your inclination for monotonous security and adopt a helter-skelter style of life that will at first appear to you to be crazy. But once you become accustomed to such a life you will see its full meaning and its incredible beauty. And so, Ron, in short, get out of Salton City and hit the Road. I guarantee you will be very glad you did. But I fear that you will ignore my advice. You think that I am stubborn, but you are even more stubborn than*

*me. You had a wonderful chance on your drive back to see one of the greatest sights on earth, the Grand Canyon, something every American should see at least once in his life. But for some reason incomprehensible to me you wanted nothing but to bolt for home as quickly as possible, right back to the same situation which you see day after day after day. I fear you will follow this same inclination in the future and thus fail to discover all the wonderful things that God has placed around us to discover. Don't settle down and sit in one place. Move around, be nomadic, make each day a new horizon. You are still going to live a long time, Ron, and it would be a shame if you did not take the opportunity to revolutionize your life and move into an entirely new realm of experience.*

*You are wrong if you think Joy emanates only or principally from human relationships. God has placed it all around us. It is in everything and anything we might experience. We just have to have the courage to turn against our habitual lifestyle and engage in unconventional living.*

*My point is that you do not need me or anyone else around to bring this new kind of light in your life. It is simply waiting out there for you to grasp it, and all you have to do is reach for it. The only person you are fighting is yourself and your stubbornness to engage in new circumstances.*

*Ron, I really hope that as soon as you can you will get out of Salton City, put a little camper on the back of your pickup, and start seeing some of the great work that God has done here in the American West. You will see things and meet people and there is much to learn from them. And you must do it economy style, no motels, do your own cooking, as a general rule spend as little as possible and you will enjoy it much more immensely. I hope that the next time I see you, you will be a new man with a vast array of new adventures and experiences behind you. Don't hesitate or allow yourself to make excuses. Just get out and do it. Just get out and do it. You will be very, very glad that you did.*

*TAKE CARE RON, ALEX*

*Please write back to:*

*Alex McCandless*

*Madison, SD 57042*

Astoundingly, the eighty-one-year-old man took the brash twenty-four-year-old vagabonds advice to heart. Franz placed his furniture and most of his other possessions in a storage locker, bought a CMC Duravan, and outfitted it with bunks and camping gear. Then he moved out of his apartment and set up camp on the bajada.

Franz occupied McCandless's old campsite, just past the hot springs. He arranged some rocks to create a parking area for the van, transplanted prickly pears and indigobushes for "landscaping." And then he sat out in the desert, day after day after day, awaiting his young friend's return.

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Text 2: excerpted from *The Power of Now* by Eckhart Tolle  
**How can we travel just by seeing the world with new eyes?**

"I was awakened by the chirping of a bird outside the window. I had never heard such a sound before. My eyes were still closed, and I saw the image of a precious diamond. Yes, if

a diamond could make a sound, this is what it would be like. I opened my eyes. The first light of dawn was filtering through the curtains. Without any thought, I felt, I knew, that there is infinitely more to light than we realize. That soft luminosity filtering through the curtains was love itself. Tears came into my eyes. I got up and walked around the room. I recognized the room, and yet I knew that I had never truly seen it before. Everything was fresh and pristine, as if it had just come into existence. I picked up things, a pencil, an empty bottle, marvelling at the beauty and aliveness of it all. That day I walked around the city in utter amazement at the miracle of life on earth, as if I had just been born into this world.”

— Eckhart Tolle, The Power of Now

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Text 3: excerpted from *Walden* by Henry David Thoreau

**Can the buzzing of a mosquito be equivalent to “any trumpet that ever sang of fame?”**

"Renew thyself completely each day; do it again, and again, and forever again." I can understand that. Morning brings back the heroic ages. I was as much affected by the faint burn of a mosquito making its invisible and unimaginable tour through my apartment at earliest dawn, when I was sailing with door and windows open, as I could be by any trumpet that ever sang of fame. It was Homer's requiem; itself an Iliad and Odyssey in the air, singing its own wrath and wanderings. There was something cosmical about it; a standing advertisement, till forbidden, of the everlasting vigor and fertility of the world...

We must learn to reawaken and keep ourselves awake, not by mechanical aids, but by an infinite expectation of the dawn, which does not forsake us in our soundest sleep. I know of no more encouraging fact than the unquestionable ability of man to elevate his life by a conscious endeavor. It is something to be able to paint a particular picture, or to carve a statue, and so to make a few objects beautiful; but it is far more glorious to carve and paint the very atmosphere and medium through which we look, which morally we can do. To affect the quality of the day, that is the highest of arts.

I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practise resignation, unless it was quite necessary. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to live so sturdily and Spartan- like as to put to rout all that was not life, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms, and, if it proved to be mean, why then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it, and publish its meanness to the world; or if it were sublime, to know it by experience, and be able to give a true account of it in my next excursion – *Thoreau's Walden*

These three excerpts all share a thirst for life beyond routine and its potential for dulling. We'll follow them up with questions that push us to reflect on our own lives. Are we living for vacations or finding the wonder in our everyday life? Can daily life itself be a kind of journey? Is travelling an act of movement or an exercise of the mind's eye?