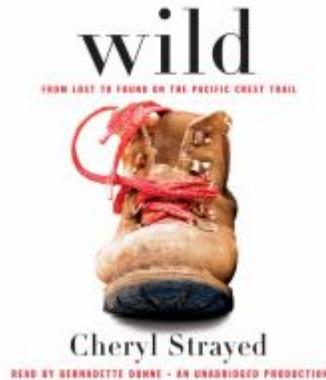


Oliver Wolcott Library
Wild: From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail by Cheryl Strayed
Book Discussion Guide
Prepared by Patricia Moore



About the Book:

At twenty-two, Cheryl Strayed thought she had lost everything. In the wake of her mother's death, her family scattered and her own marriage was soon destroyed. Four years later, with nothing more to lose, she made the most impulsive decision of her life. With no experience or training, driven only by blind will, she would hike more than a thousand miles of the Pacific Crest Trail from the Mojave Desert through California and Oregon to Washington State—and she would do it alone. Told with suspense and style, sparkling with warmth and humor, *Wild* powerfully captures the terrors and pleasures of one young woman forging ahead against all odds on a journey that maddened, strengthened, and ultimately healed her.

Source: CherylStrayed.com

About the Author:

Cheryl Strayed is the author of #1 New York Times bestseller *WILD*, the New York Times bestseller *TINY BEAUTIFUL THINGS*, and the novel *TORCH*. *WILD* was chosen by Oprah Winfrey as her first selection for Oprah's Book Club 2.0 and optioned for film by Reese Witherspoon's production company, Pacific Standard. *WILD* was selected as the winner of the Barnes & Noble Discover Award, an Oregon Book Award, a Pacific Northwest Booksellers Award, and a Midwest Booksellers Choice Award. Strayed's writing has appeared in *THE BEST AMERICAN ESSAYS*, the New York Times Magazine, the Washington Post Magazine, *Vogue*, *Allure*, *The Missouri Review*, *The Sun*, *The Rumpus*--where she has written the popular "Dear Sugar" column since 2010--and elsewhere. Her books have been translated into twenty-eight languages around the world. She holds an MFA in fiction writing from Syracuse University and a bachelor's degree from the University of Minnesota. She lives in Portland, Oregon with her husband and their two children.

Source: CherylStrayed.com

Book Reviews:

"Sexy, uplifting . . . Fierce and funny . . . Strayed hammers home her hard-won sentences like a box of nails. The cumulative welling up I experienced during *Wild* was partly a response to that too infrequent

sight: that of a writer finding her voice, and sustaining it, right in front of your eyes. . . . Riveting.” —
Dwight Garner, The New York Times

“An addictive, gorgeous book that not only entertains, but leaves us the better for having read it.”
—*The Boston Globe*

“Devastating and glorious . . . It is voice—billowing with energy, precise—that carries Wild . . . By laying bare a great unspoken truth of adulthood—that many things in life don’t turn out the way you want them to, and that you can and must live through them anyway—Wild feels real in many ways that many books about ‘finding oneself’ do not.” —*Melanie Rehak, Slate*

“Arresting . . . So many heal-myself memoirs are available that initially I hesitated about [Wild]. Then I considered the source: Cheryl Strayed, the author of a lyric yet tough-minded first novel [called] *Torch*—a Great Lakes Book Award finalist . . . Wild [is] Strayed’s account of her 1,100-mile solo hike along the Pacific Crest Trail, from the Mojave Desert to Washington State. Shattered at 26 by her mother’s death, her family’s fragmenting, and the end of her marriage, Strayed upped and decided to do something way out of the realm of her experience; here she confronts snowstorms and rattlesnakes even as she confronts her personal pain. Wish I had her guts!”
—*Barbara Hoffert, LibraryJournal.com*

Discussion Questions:

1. “The Pacific Crest Trail wasn’t a world to me then. It was an idea, vague and outlandish, full of promise and mystery. Something bloomed inside me as I traced its jagged line with my finger on a map” (p. 4). Why did the PCT capture Strayed’s imagination at that point in her life?
2. Each section of the book opens with a literary quote or two. What do they tell you about what’s to come in the pages that follow? How does Strayed’s pairing of, say, Adrienne Rich and Joni Mitchell (p. 45) provide insight into her way of thinking?
3. Strayed is quite forthright in her description of her own transgressions, and while she’s remorseful, she never seems ashamed. Is this a sign of strength or a character flaw?
4. “I knew that if I allowed fear to overtake me, my journey was doomed. Fear, to a great extent, is born of a story we tell ourselves, and so I chose to tell myself a different story from the one women are told” (p. 51). Fear is a major theme in the book. Do you think Strayed was too afraid, or not afraid enough? When were you most afraid for her?
5. Strayed chose her own last name: “Nothing fit until one day when the word strayed came into my mind. Immediately, I looked it up in the dictionary and knew it was mine...to wander from the proper path, to deviate from the direct course, to be lost, to become Wild, to be without a mother or father, to be without a home, to move about aimlessly in search of something, to diverge or digress” (p. 96). Did she choose well? What did you think when you learned she had assigned this word to herself—that it was no coincidence?
6. On the trail, Strayed encounters mostly men. How does this work in her favor? What role does gender play when removed from the usual structure of society?

7. What does the reader learn from the horrific episode in which Strayed and her brother put down their mother's horse?
8. Strayed writes that the point of the PCT "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" (p. 207). How does this sensation help Strayed to find her way back into the world beyond the wilderness?
9. On her journey, Strayed carries several totems. What does the black feather mean to her? And the POW bracelet? Why does she find its loss (p. 238) symbolic?
10. Does the hike help Strayed to get over Paul? If so, how? And if not, why?
11. Strayed says her mother's death "had obliterated me.... I was trapped by her but utterly alone. She would always be the empty bowl that no one could fill" (p 267). How did being on the PCT on her mother's fiftieth birthday help Strayed to heal this wound?
12. What was it about Strayed that inspired the generosity of so many strangers on the PCT?
13. "There's no way to know what makes one thing happen and not another. . . . But I was pretty certain as I sat there that night that if it hadn't been for Eddie, I wouldn't have found myself on the PCT" (p. 304). How does this realization change Strayed's attitude towards her stepfather?
14. To lighten her load, Strayed burns each book as she reads it. Why doesn't she burn the Adrienne Rich collection?
15. What role do books and reading play in this often solitary journey?

Further Reading:

The Camino: A Journey of the Spirit by Shirley MaLaine

This is the story of a journey. It is the eagerly anticipated and altogether startling culmination of Shirley MaLaine's extraordinary -- and ultimately rewarding -- road through life. The riveting odyssey began with a pair of anonymous handwritten letters imploring Shirley to make a difficult pilgrimage along the Santiago de Compostela Camino in Spain. Throughout history, countless illustrious pilgrims from all over Europe have taken up the trail. It is an ancient -- and allegedly enchanted -- pilgrimage. People from St. Francis of Assisi and Charlemagne to Ferdinand and Isabella to Dante and Chaucer have taken the journey, which comprises a nearly 500-mile trek across highways, mountains and valleys, cities and towns, and fields. Now it would be Shirley's turn.

Contents May Have Shifted by Pam Houston

Pam Houston's latest takes us from one breathtaking precipice to the next as we unravel the story of Pam (a character not unlike the author), a fearless traveler aiming to leave her metaphorical baggage behind as she seeks a comfort zone in the air. With the help of a loyal cast of friends, body workers, and a new partner who inspires her to appreciate home, she finally finds something like ground under her feet.

Eat, Pray, Love: One Woman's Search for Everything Across Italy, India & Indonesia by Elizabeth Gilbert

This beautifully written, heartfelt memoir touched a nerve among both readers and reviewers. Elizabeth Gilbert tells how she made the difficult choice to leave behind all the trappings of modern American success (marriage, house in the country, career) and find, instead, what she truly wanted from life. Setting out for a year to study three different aspects of her nature amid three different cultures, Gilbert explored the art of pleasure in Italy and the art of devotion in India, and then a balance between the two on the Indonesian island of Bali.

Into the Wild by Jon Krakauer

In April 1992 a young man from a well-to-do family hitchhiked to Alaska and walked alone into the wilderness north of Mt. McKinley. His name was Christopher Johnson McCandless. He had given \$25,000 in savings to charity, abandoned his car and most of his possessions, burned all the cash in his wallet, and invented a new life for himself. Four months later, his decomposed body was found by a moose hunter....

Never Cry Wolf by Farley Mowat

More than a half-century ago the Canadian Wildlife Service assigned the naturalist Farley Mowat to investigate why wolves were killing arctic caribou. Mowat's account of the summer he lived in the frozen tundra alone-studying the wolf population and developing a deep affection for the wolves (who were of no threat to caribou or man) and for a friendly Inuit tribe known as the Ihalmiut ("People of the Deer")-is a work that has become cherished by generations of readers, an indelible record of the myths and magic of wild wolves.

Woodswoman: Living Alone in the Adirondack Wilderness by Anne LaBastille

Ecologist Anne LaBastille created the life that many people dream about. When she and her husband divorced, she needed a place to live. Through luck and perseverance, she found the ideal spot: a twenty-acre parcel of land in the Adirondack mountains, where she built the cozy, primitive log cabin that became her permanent home.

~This book discussion guide including the further reading recommendation list was prepared by the Oliver Wolcott Library.