

## Discussion Questions for Wild by Cheryl Strayed

These discussion questions were prepared by the National Network to End Domestic Violence (NNEDV) for the [Reader with a Cause](#) book club on Goodreads.

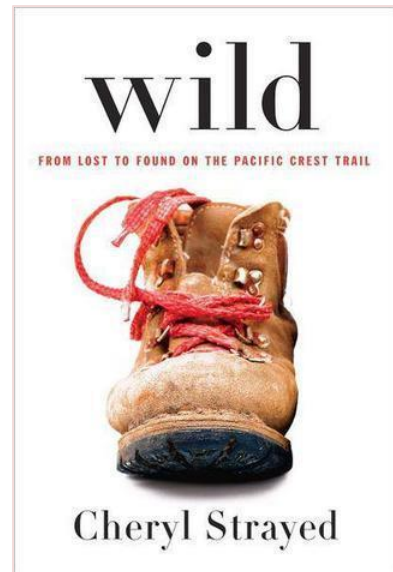
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### 1. Overall Opinions & Thoughts

What did you think of *Wild*, overall?

Do you like the memoir format? Why or why not?



### 2. Self-Discovery

As we heard at the United State of Women summit, knowing yourself is of paramount importance: [First Lady Michelle Obama said](#), *“...our first job in life as women, I think, is to get to know ourselves. And I think a lot of times we don't do that. We spend our time pleasing, satisfying, looking out into the world to define who we are -- listening to the messages, the images, the limited definitions that people have of who we are.”*

In *Wild*, Strayed describes her decision to hike the Pacific Crest Trail as feeling right: *“Something bloomed inside me as I traced its jagged line with my finger on a map.”* (4)

It may seem like an extreme decision, but in the end, the trail helped her *“both make me into a woman I knew I could be and turn me back into the girl I'd once been.”* (4)

How have you undertaken the task of knowing yourself? Has your journey of self-discovery been unique in any way? If so, how has your unique path of self-discovery contributed to your sense of self-worth or empowerment?

### 3. Fear

Hiking the Pacific Crest Trail alone takes incredible strength and courage. Fear is something that Strayed needed to overcome - and quickly - to make this journey. She describes fear as a choice, a *“story we tell ourselves, and so I chose to tell myself a different story from the one women are told. I decided I was safe. I was strong. I was brave. Nothing could vanquish me. Insisting on this story was a form of mind control, but for the most part, it worked.”* (51)

Do you believe that repeatedly telling yourself new and empowering mantras, like Strayed did, can work in overcoming limiting beliefs and fears? Why or why not? Have you ever used this tactic?

#### **4. One foot in front of the other.**

*“The thing about the PCT...was how few choices I had and how often I had to do the thing I least wanted to do. How there was no escape or denial. No numbing it down with a martini or covering it up with a roll in the hay.” (69)*

This isn't just true on the trail, it's true in life and in healing. Sometimes, there's nothing else that we can do except move forward in hard times and keep putting one foot in front of the other, even if they are baby steps.

Has a hard time ever helped you to build strength? Why do you think we build strength during hard times?

#### **5. Grief**

Grief can be a dark, confusing, seemingly unending, and sometimes surprising experience. Strayed describes it as follows:

*“I'd let my mother go and my father go and I'd finally let Eddie go as well. But the table was another thing. It hadn't occurred to me that I'd have to let that go too.” (211)*

Has grief ever surprised you, as it did with Strayed and the table? How did you cope with that? What did it teach you? Have you ever dealt with grief in a way that seemed strange to other people?

#### **6. The Threat or Fear of Gender-based Violence**

For a woman alone, there's often also the added weight of fear of sexual violence in addition to all of the other fears she has to conquer. Simply because of the world in which we live - where we admonish girls “not to get raped” instead of teaching boys not to rape - a woman alone in the wilderness has all the “normal” things to worry about (e.g., exposure, endurance, food/water, injury, predators, etc.) in addition to maintaining vigilance for sexual predators.

Strayed experienced this uniquely female fear a few times while on her journey (the moment in Frank's car, when she gets the ride with Lou, and when the sandy-haired man returned to her campsite). As she described it:

*“I could hardly hear my own words for what felt like a great clanging in my head, which was the realization that my whole hike on the PCT could come to this. That no matter how tough or brave I'd been, how comfortable I'd come to be with being alone, I'd also been lucky, and that if my luck ran out now, it would be as if nothing before it had ever existed, that this one evening would annihilate all those brave days.” (286)*

Did you also feel the fear Strayed describes in these passages? How do you think we can end rape culture and empower women to feel safe at home, on the street, and on the trail?

## **7. Book vs. Movie**

A movie adaptation - starring Reese Witherspoon - came out in late 2014 and received a 90% score on Rotten Tomatoes. (link: [https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/wild\\_2014/](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/wild_2014/))

For those of us who have read the book and seen the movie - how did the two compare for you? What did you think of Witherspoon's performance?

What scenes do you think translated especially well? Which scenes were you waiting for, but were ultimately left out or altered for the movie release?