



Relationships with parents.

Extracts from chapter 12, 3

Chris seldom contacted his parents that year, and because he had no phone, they couldn't easily contact him. Walt and Billie grew increasingly worried(*sont devenus de plus en plus inquiets*) about their son's emotional distance. In a letter to Chris, Billie implored, "You have completely dropped away (*s'éloigner*) from all who love and care about you."

In the spring of 1990, when Walt, Billie, and Carine attended Chris's graduation ceremony, they thought he seemed happy. As they watched him stride across the stage and take his diploma, he was grinning from ear to ear. He indicated that he was planning another extended trip but implied that he'd visit his family in Annandale before hitting the road. Shortly thereafter, he donated the balance of his bank account to OXFAM, loaded up his car, and vanished from their lives. From then on, he scrupulously avoided(*éviter*) contacting either his parents or Carine, the sister for whom he cared immensely.

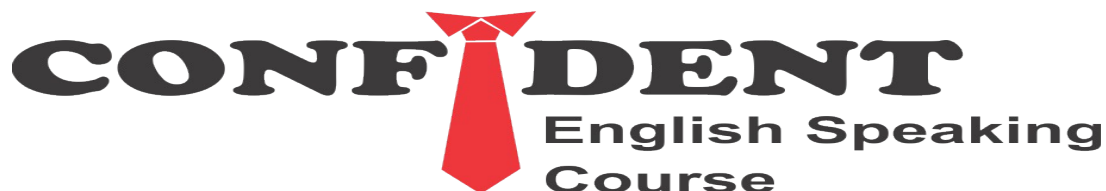
"We were all worried when we didn't hear from him," says Carine, "and I think my parents' worry was mixed with hurt and anger. But I didn't really feel hurt by his failure to write. I knew he was happy and doing what he wanted to do; I understood that it was important for him to see how independent he could be. And he knew that if he'd written or called me, Mom and Dad would find out where he was, fly out there, and try to bring him home."

Walt does not deny this. "There's no question in my mind," he says. "If we'd had any idea where to look—OK—I would have gone there in a flash, gotten a lock on his whereabouts, and brought our boy home."

As months passed without any word of Chris—and then years—the anguish mounted. Billie never left the house without leaving a note for Chris posted on the door. "Whenever we were out driving and saw a hitchhiker," she says, "if he looked anything like Chris, we'd turn around and circle back. It was a terrible time. Night was the worst, especially when it was cold and stormy. You'd wonder, 'Where is he? Is he warm? Is he hurt? Is he lonely? Is he OK?'" In July 1992, two years after Chris left Atlanta, Billie was asleep when she sat bolt upright in the middle of the night, waking Walt. "I was sure I'd heard Chris calling me," she insists, tears rolling down her cheeks. "I don't know how I'll ever get over it. I wasn't dreaming. I didn't imagine it. I heard his voice! He was begging, 'Mom! Help me!' But I couldn't help him because I didn't know where he was."

Driving west out of Atlanta, he intended to invent an utterly new life for himself, one in which he would be free to wallow in unfiltered experience. To symbolize the complete severance from his previous life, he even adopted a new name. No longer would he answer to Chris McCandless; he was now Alexander Super-tramp, master of his own destiny.

Let's talk...



- **What can you say about the relationships between Chris and his parents? Which adjectives can you use to define them?**

- **In the second extract, at the ceremony, his parents thought Chris seemed happy . Can you imagine why?**

- **Can you imagine why Chris' parents worry that much? What about his mother?**

- **In your opinion, why did Chris decide to change his identity?**