



'Heading to Alaska'

Extracts from Chapter 7, 12.

On McCandless's final night in Carthage, he partied hard at the Cabaret with Westerberg's crew. The Jack Daniel's flowed freely.

To everyone's surprise, McCandless sat down at the piano, which he'd never mentioned he knew how to play, and started playing .

"He could really play. I mean he was good. We were all blown away (*surprised*) by it."

On the morning of April 15, everybody gathered at the elevator to see McCandless off. His pack was heavy. He had approximately one thousand dollars tucked in his boot. He left his journal and photo album with Westerberg for safekeeping and gave him the leather belt he'd made in the desert.

When McCandless hugged Borah good-bye, she says, "I noticed he was crying. That frightened me. He wasn't planning on being gone all that long; I figured he wouldn't have been crying unless he intended to take some big risks and knew he might not be coming back. That's when I started having a bad feeling that we wouldn't never see Alex again."

A week later Westerberg received a card with a Montana postmark:

APRIL 18. Arrived in Whitefish this morning on a freight train. I am making good time. Today I will jump the frontier and turn north for Alaska. Give my regards to everyone.

*TAKE CARE, **ALEX***

Then, in early May, Westerberg received another postcard, this one from Alaska, with a photo of a polar bear on the front. It was postmarked April 27, 1992.

"Greetings from Fairbanks!" it reads,

This is the last you shall hear from me Wayne. Arrived here 2 days ago. It was very difficult to catch rides in the Yukon Territory. But I finally got here.

Please return all mail I receive to the sender. It might be a very long time before I return South. If this adventure proves fatal and you don't ever hear from me again, I want you to know you're a great man. I now walk into the wild.

ALEX.

Stuckey and McCandless arrived in Fairbanks on the afternoon of April 25. The older man took the boy to a grocery store (*kind of supermarket*), where he bought a big bag of rice, “and then Alex said he wanted to go out to the university to study up on what kind of plants he could eat. Berries (*baies*) and things like that. I told him, ‘Alex, you’re too early. There’s still two foot, three foot of snow on the ground. There’s nothing growing (*pousser*) yet.’ But his mind was pretty well made up.

Stuckey drove to the University of Alaska campus, on the west end of Fairbanks, and dropped McCandless off at 5:30 P.M.

“Before I let him out,” Stuckey says, “I told him, ‘Alex, I’ve driven you a thousand miles. I’ve fed you and fed you for three straight days. The least you can do is send me a letter when you get back from Alaska.’ And he promised he would.

“I also begged and pleaded with him to call his parents. I can’t imagine anything worse than having a son out there and not knowing where he’s at for years and years, not knowing whether he’s living or dead. ‘Here’s my credit card number,’ I told him. ‘Please call them!’ But all he said was ‘Maybe I will and maybe I won’t.’ After he left, I thought, ‘Oh, why didn’t I get his parents’ phone number and call them myself?’ But everything just kind of happened so quick.”

At the conclusion of his preparations in Fairbanks, McCandless loaded up his pack and started hiking (*faire du stop*) west from the university.

Let’s talk...

- On your phone, locate Carthage and Fairbanks on the map of the United States.
Do you remember Chris' starting point? What can you say about that?
- Can you imagine the reasons why people were surprised by the fact that Chris could play the piano?
- What do you think about : “I noticed he was crying. That **frightened** me. He wasn’t planning on being gone all that long; I figured he wouldn’t have been crying unless he intended to take some big risks and knew he might not be coming back. **That’s when I started having a bad feeling that we wouldn’t never see Alex again.**”
What can we imagine from that sentence?
- In your opinion, was Alex conscious of the risks he was going to take? Why? Justify your answers.
- Can you describe, define the feelings of Stuckey at the end of the extract? Why did he ask Chris to call his parents?
- What is the general feeling of these extracts? Pick out the positive and negative words? What can you imagine for the rest of the story?