My name is Cheryl Strayed and I wrote a book called *Wild: From Lost to Found on the Pacific Coast Trail* which was published in March of 2012.

This book details my three month experience in 1995 when I hiked 1,100 miles of the Pacific Crest Trail by myself. As someone who had never even backpacked once, trekking from the Mojave Desert in California to the Bridge of the Gods in the Columbia Gorge was an incredibly challenging undertaking but one I felt compelled to take after my mother died of lung cancer when I was only 22 years old.

Throughout my memoir, I weaved in many of my experiences growing up in poverty with a single mother who I adored, and the falling out I had with my older sister, younger brother, and step father after her death, not to mention my marriage that could not survive the immense grief I felt.

My plans to hike PCT came about by accident as I caught sight of a hiking guide while waiting in line at a sporting goods store. It was a crazy idea, but I felt that the time alone and the physical challenge was what I need to move on with my life. There are so many things I can tell you about my 1,100 mile journey especially how incredibly ill prepared I was. When I started out, my backpack was so full of unnecessary items that I literally could not carry it on my back. It wasn't until a kind hiker helped me throw away much of what I had intended to carry that I was able to put it on my back. It was still far too heavy for someone my size and I was in terrible pain those first few weeks. I began to call it Monster. Along the way many people who saw me on the trail took note of how ridiculously large Monster was, but over time I got stronger.

Just before the trip, my divorce became final and I used the change in my life to make a change in my name. I wanted to start fresh. Looking through the dictionary, the word "strayed" caught my attention. Its many definitions struck a chord with me. Strayed means to wander from a proper course, to be lost, to be without a mother or father or a home, to move about aimlessly in search of something. These all spoke to where I was in life enduring the big hole that my mother's death left in me. Changing my name was a big deal and the name I chose over 15 years ago still is mine despite the fact that I am now remarried and have two children and feel like I am anything but a stray.

One interesting story about "strayed" is that right before I began my adventure, I wrote many of my friends to let them know what I would be doing and where they could write me along the way as there were rest stops and general stores that were known for holding mail for those who were hiking the Pacific Crest Trail. About halfway through my journey, I received a package from a friend who had had a necklace made for me. It was a cursive "strayed" cut out of metal, but for whatever reason, when anyone looked at it they believe it said "starved" which wasn't all wrong as there were times on my journey when I was physically starved having not figured out the correct amount of food to pack between the stops during which I could reload. I also felt starved for my mother's presence and my family with whom I had lost touch. In many ways I was just as starved as I was a stray.

As I mentioned, I was ill prepared for my journey in many ways beyond my "monster" backpack. I also had not properly worked in my hiking boots which turned out to be too small for me. I knew this because of the beating my feet took and the six toenails I lost during the journey. Whenever I stopped to rest, I would take off my shoes and socks and look at my destroyed feet. Once, about half-way through my journey, I did this on a cliff. In my haste to take off my boots, one slipped from my grip and tumbled down a mountain side. I knew I could not wear just one and proceeded to throw the other off the cliff. At first I thought how liberating it was to get rid of those heinous boots that had caused me so much pain; then I realized it was just plain stupid. It took me a while to figure out how I was going to proceed. For days I hiked in shower sandals wrapped in duct tape until the sandals disintegrated. Then it was just socks wrapped in duct tape untiI I was able to call REI, the place where I had bought the boots. Would you believe they sent a new pair, one size larger, to the general store at which I had stopped and they didn't even charge me?

My experiences on the trail were challenging for so many reasons beyond my lack of preparation. I encountered swarms of vicious mosquitoes, bears, rattlesnakes, mountain lions, unrelenting heat and rain, ice, and record snow. Once I woke up completely covered in frogs. Most surprising were the many strangers I met along the way who were extraordinarily kind to me.

The bottle of Snapple I have here reminds me of my trip. Often it was the thing I craved most when I made it to one of the general stores along the way. These would come at two to three week intervals, just when I was about to lose hope, wondering if I would survive. It is amazing to me how satisfying a bottle of Snapple can be. Ultimately, when I finally made it to Cascade Locks, Oregon, where the Bridge of the Gods is, I was amazed at what I had accomplished and how this incredible journey helped me heal some. While earlier in my life, I may have tried to dull my pain in dangerous ways such as using drugs or cutting off contact with people who loved me. Now I realize that an ice cream cone or a bottle of Snapple can have a magical impact on my life as can exploring the grandeur of nature, connecting with kind strangers, and accomplishing something as amazing as walking over 1,000 miles by myself.

I now live in Portland, Oregon, where I am a professional writer. I am married and have two young sons. I am excited to share with all of you that Wild is being made into a movie starring Reese Witherspoon. It will be in theaters starting on December 5th. I can't wait!