

# Alexander Supertramp



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A few days ago I watched a film called *Into the Wild*, the story of Christopher McCandless, and this film has made a very big impact on me which I hadn't really expected at all. I was going through those lists that you do after Christmas when you've watched a lot of films, looking for some good action or adventure films, and this one was listed. Sean Penn is the director and it was made in 2007. It looked intriguing and Penn is a good director.

So it's the story of a young man who rejects careerism and normal life completely after graduating from university in the early 1990s. The backdrop is the classic young man going out and finding America, the great outdoors and a sense of adventure. You almost think it's going to be like a Disney film. But in fact what unfolds is really a very, very moving story of a man who is trying to find the value of life and his way through the turmoil of materialism and the career expectations of a usual westernised existence.

So he gives away all his money after he's graduated and leaves home without really saying anything about where he's going to go and at first the story is him going into a variety of different American states and doing odd jobs and living a hobo lifestyle. It is quite compelling viewing, there's a certain quiet brave value in his developing character. You slowly become attached to this young man. Sean Penn's direction is really strong, with amazing cinematography and colours, as the panorama of American life and landscape is so photogenic. He makes his way up to Alaska. His whole aim is to go to Alaska, the last frontier as he sees it, because his real aim is to reject absolutely everything about modern living. He does not even take a map. The viewer begins to sense something bad, an impending doom might be on the horizon. A variety of mini stories are played out of his short time there, I think he only spent 2 months in Alaska, living in an old bus, bus 142, 'The Magic Bus', at the end of an old mining trail. He finally starves to death and as a viewer you are completely unprepared for this if you're not familiar with the story (it is a true story), and so you're left quite, I wouldn't say upset, but certainly full of thought about what has happened and why it happened.

For people like me who reject much of normal society, characters like Chris McCandless are appealing. I've never been particularly impressed by materialism, success, fame or the trappings of modern society. Unlike several people I know, I've never gone so far as to live in a field, off grid, but I've certainly experienced periods of life where I've lived off the land, lived in communes and done many other things that are not like usual living. I value things in people that are much more about character, vision and ideals, artistic talent or charisma and even True Grit. So McCandless represents some of these things, but perhaps taken to a greater extreme.

After the film I was unprepared really for how much it stayed with me and the first night I dreamt incredible dreams based on parts of the film and then fantastical additions that had no firm basis in the film at all. I kept on thinking about this story and the implications of those kinds of actions and the emotions that went with them.

Then I did what you usually do, I went and searched for Chris McCandless and I found his Wikipedia page. The Chris McCandless story attracts quite a lot of controversy especially about how and why McCandless died. As is sometimes or even often the case with some young people, stories are taken very literally and they look on things in perhaps a more simplistic way. Consequently other young people have died (even quite recently) following the Stampede trail and his life in Alaska at the magic bus. McCandless has become an immortalised anti-hero, an almost religious style figure of purity to some who are looking for truth and meaning.

None of this quite explains why the McCandless story has captured my imagination and thinking so much. It's now

almost a week since I watched that film. Yet it is still occupies my mind for all kinds of reasons, I'm still thinking about this story, about his actions and actions that are like that, about living in a free-spirited way.

He gave himself a new name when he set out, Alexander Supertramp. Yey Alex.

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Links:

- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chris\\_McCandless](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chris_McCandless)
- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stampede\\_Trail#Bus\\_142](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stampede_Trail#Bus_142)