

# SUMMARY

BY ALYSSA BURNETTE

## LOST ON THE WAY

BY BLAKE FARHA



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# **Summary of Lost on The Way by Blake Farha**

**Written by Alyssa Burnette**

Learn how taking a hike can change your life!

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# Introduction

Have you ever felt totally hopeless? Like everything is unfair and you've just given up on life? If you're like most people, you probably know exactly how that feels. The sad truth is that most of us have been there. But it's empowering to know that these circumstances don't define us. Our response to challenging circumstances allows us to change the narrative and reclaim control.

That's exactly what Blake Farha learned-- and his discovery completely changed his life. Over the course of this summary, you'll follow along with Blake's literal, mental, and emotional journey as he embarks on a hike that will reinvent his life. And because Blake tells his story in the form of a raw, unedited journal, this summary will be told in first- person, just like Blake's journal.



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# Blake's Journey

Have you ever wanted to just run away from everything? To disappear and find yourself? Many people have cherished the fantasy of disappearing off the face of the earth-- leaving technology, responsibilities, and relationships behind for the allure of the open road. But as much as they cherish this dream, most people never fulfill their fantasy.

We struggle on with our insufferable day jobs, unfulfilling relationships, or insecurities. We carry on with all the things that made us want to run away in the first place. But my life changed for the better when I was given the opportunity to do what most people only dream about. Unfortunately, however, in my case, this event was precipitated by some very unwanted circumstances.

If you read a lot of adventure stories that follow the journeys of people going on extreme journeys of self-discovery, you've probably noticed a few common themes. And one of the most common themes of adventure stories is an unfortunate life circumstance that motivates you to revolutionize your life and leave everything behind. That's exactly what happened to me when I was fired from my job on a very sad day in 2017.

After working with my company for the past three years, I was both shocked and disheartened to learn that I was being laid off. The list of people who were being laid off alongside me was very, very long, so it wasn't as if I was the only person to be losing my job. But at a time like this, I didn't really care that I wasn't the only one.

And now that I was unemployed, with no way to pay my bills and no real sense of purpose for my future, I suddenly found myself feeling unmoored and unmotivated. However, that's not to say that I absolutely loved my job. In reality, I was in that all-too-familiar position that many people have found themselves in: stuck in a job that you don't love and don't hate. I didn't want to do this job forever but being employed gave me a sense of purpose. And now that that security had been ripped away, I felt uncertain and adrift.

And as I poured these thoughts into my journal, it occurred to me that this feeling is probably very familiar to a lot of people. Because sometimes it's easy to feel trapped by the competing pressures of our life. We feel pressured to get a good job, to be successful, to settle down in a happy and socially acceptable relationship. But as stressful and confining as those pressures can be, it's equally easy to feel empty and uncertain when those socially acceptable boundaries are unexpectedly removed.

When we're chafing at the presence of society's expectations, sometimes we look to the future and imagine the bright, glorious emptiness of the road before us. We like to imagine the freedom of a wide open road, with no responsibilities or expectations to fetter us. We fantasize about what we would do if the everyday stresses of our lives were removed and we were free to do what we want.

But sometimes, when that vision suddenly and unexpectedly comes true, we quickly find ourselves feeling lost and confused. When a relationship ends or we lose a job, all of a sudden, the future doesn't look quite so bright and hopeful. Without the expectations that tie us to relationships and careers, it's easy to feel frightened and adrift as we ponder our next steps.

And that was exactly how I felt as I contemplated the options before me. I had previously worked in web development, but I didn't want to go back to doing that. I had also worked as an English teacher; I didn't want to do that again either. In fact, prior to starting my former job of three years, I had actually developed a pretty eclectic employment history! I had managed yogurt shops, worked in finance, worked in customer service, and even tried to make it as a singer-songwriter.

All of those jobs had been unique experiences and I learned a lot from each of them. But none of those opportunities-- including my former job-- had led me to a career that I wanted to pursue for the rest of my life. And as I pondered the crushing unfairness of this latest development in my life, I

considered the fact that this was not the first time I had felt lost and hopeless in life.

As a young teen, I battled undiagnosed depression and frequent suicidal ideation without realizing that there was a name for the thoughts which beset me. At the time, I thought I was simply a sensitive guy who felt everything a little too deeply. But over time, and with the help of my then-girlfriend, I came to realize that the feelings I was experiencing weren't normal. I also discovered that my feelings didn't make me an "overly sensitive" dude-- they were hallmarks of severe clinical depression.

Fortunately, this discovery motivated me to get help by connecting with a therapist. And by working with my therapist, I was able to retrain my brain and embrace positive coping mechanisms that helped me battle my depression. I also learned a lot of new habits and new thought processes that empowered me to make healthy choices. And, as a result, I was able to enjoy a much happier quality of life.

But as the weight of this new setback dawned on me, I recognized that the shock and sadness of losing my job had the potential to undermine all that hard work. I didn't want to lose any of the progress I had made with my therapist, so I settled on a new solution: getting away from it all. Although this might seem like an unconventional option, for me, it was the perfect solution! I could take a break and clear my head by going on a long hiking expedition. And that's how I decided that I would walk the Camino.

The Camino is a common abbreviation for a popular Spanish walking trail called the Camino de Santiago, located in the North West of Spain. In English, this name literally translates to "The Way of St. James" and it's often simply called "The Way." The Camino is called "The Way of St. James" because the trail leads to the shrine of Saint James the Great in Santiago de Compostela. And because of this religious significance, many people walk the Camino as a type of spiritual pilgrimage. The people who do so believe that taking a long hike to a religious site will help them clear their minds and strengthen their faith.



But whether you're hiking for your faith or simply for the sake of immersing yourself in nature, getting lost on The Way can be a transformative experience. I know because I experienced it firsthand! However, I'd also like to point out that The Way is more than just a fun hike. It's not the same as taking an hour-long trek to a waterfall. That's because the entire route is more than 800 km (497 miles) long and it takes approximately 5 weeks to walk the full Camino trail. I've always enjoyed camping, hiking, and the outdoors, so I had some experience with long treks of this type. And I felt that the invigoration and introspection of a journey on the Camino would be just what I needed.

However, I also recognized that this expedition came with a few vital caveats. For starters, taking a 5-week long hike by yourself can be pretty lonely. With nothing to do but walk and think, I knew that it would be easy to get lost in my own head. And sometimes it can be toxic to spend that amount of time being lost in your own thoughts.

For many people who are hoping to unlock an experience of self-discovery, it's awesome to "find yourself" by "getting lost" on a wilderness adventure. Some people find that disconnecting from the chaos of modern life and reconnecting with their own thoughts can be extremely beneficial. But if you have a history of struggling with depression, sometimes your own mind can be a pretty dark place.

I had gotten lost in my own thoughts before and discovered that the experience resulted in a great deal of anxiety and toxicity. So, since my past experience had proven that getting lost in your head isn't a great idea, I understood that I would need to think carefully about my mental health and wellbeing on this trip. I decided that I would manage my mental health by implementing some of the strategies I had learned from my therapist along with the advice from a book I had recently enjoyed.

The book was entitled *Happier* and it was written by Dr. Tal Ben-Shahar, a Harvard- educated psychologist who had gone on to teach at his alma mater.

As a professor of positive psychology, Dr. Ben-Shahar regularly gave lectures on humanity's most elusive emotional state: happiness. His courses are typically divided into three parts with the following respective titles: "What is Happiness?", "Happiness Applied" and "Meditations on Happiness."

In these courses, Dr. Ben-Shahar teaches that happiness isn't as vague or elusive as people typically think! Instead, he posits that all emotions exist on a fluctuating spectrum; we can be happy and sad and everything in between, but none of these emotions are our permanent state. We can experience all of them at different times in a healthy way because that's how emotions are supposed to work.

When we let go of the belief that we should be happy all the time, we can learn to embrace the emotional spectrum in a healthy way. And, in Dr. Ben-Shahar's opinion, health begins by cultivating self-awareness. He recommends cultivating self-awareness by investing in the benefits of journaling.

This particular piece of advice really stood out to me. I was especially impressed by Ben-Shahar's research on the correlation between journaling and mental health. According to Ben-Shahar, journaling is uniquely beneficial for people who have a tendency to ruminate in unhealthy ways. If you're not familiar with that term, rumination is a common self-destructive thought process that afflicts many people who struggle with their mental health.

While creative problem-solving is almost always a good idea, rumination is pretty much the opposite of that. Rumination occurs when you dwell on the same dark or anxiety-inducing thoughts, allowing them to run unfettered through your mind in a ceaseless toxic cycle. People who experience depression and anxiety are often prone to rumination and it can have a very negative impact on their mental health. Unfortunately, I was very familiar with rumination and I knew exactly how toxic it could be for my own mental health.

So, with this knowledge in mind, I decided that if I was going to walk the Camino, I should take up journaling. I also decided that I needed to implement a few rules for myself to ensure that the journaling was effective. Firstly, I needed to resist his inner critic. My experience with rumination and depression meant that I often tended to be my own worst enemy. I knew I could be overly critical of myself and I knew that this tendency would likely extend to my journaling.

So, I decided that if I was going to start a journal, I needed to resist that criticism and, with it, the temptation to edit. Going forward, I wanted to live in the moment. I also wanted to give myself room for positive and productive thinking that would help me process my new circumstances and emotions. If I wanted to really do that, I needed to avoid self-censorship, rumination, and editing. So, with these parameters in mind, I began my journey and my journal.



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# Getting Lost on The Way

In an effort to create a genuine and authentic reflection of my time on the Camino, I committed to writing a raw and completely unedited journal. This book is that journal. But I want to make it clear that I never set out to write a publishable or aesthetically pleasing book. Many people cultivate careers as travel writers that begin when they go on a long journey and write things that other people want to read. They tailor their stories to the audience, including or omitting details to entice prospective readers.

That's not what I set out to do. In fact, when I began this journal, I never intended for it to be read by anybody other than me. This was simply a book that I wrote by myself, for myself. I wrote because I wanted to give myself a safe, raw, and unedited space in which to record everything I felt and saw. I also took up journaling as a sort of personal challenge, with the aim of improving my mental health. I later decided to publish it because I hoped that my story might encourage other people. So, I can't stress enough that when you're reading this book, you're not reading a professionally written or edited travel journal that was written for other people's eyes. You're reading my authentic heart and soul. You're reading everything that happened to me, exactly as I felt and saw it.

And, believe it or not, recording everything you feel and see can be stressful! It can be difficult to resist that inner critic, to resist the temptation to edit, and to fight your own low self-esteem. Because, as you record your thoughts and feelings, it's easy to think, "That's stupid!" or "Why am I even bothering with this?" But, as tough as it was sometimes, I had a feeling that this journal would be important for my personal growth and development.

So, I stuck to my commitment to document everything I thought, felt, and experienced during my journey on the Camino. Even if my opinions were unpopular, even if I was in a bad mood while I was writing, I remained true to the promise I made to myself. So, I wrote about the people I encountered along the way, including Olivia-- a woman from the Ukraine who was the same age as me, and who remained my walking companion for a large part

of my journey-- Jacob, an older man from Canada, and Abigail, a cheerful fellow hiker from Denmark.

As I walked the Camino, I made more friends than I ever expected. I developed intimate connections with people from many different countries and different walks of life. And as I got to know them, I developed a new level of respect for myself, for other people, and the human traits that connect us all, regardless of our differences.

As I connected with my fellow travelers, I noticed that I was quick to forgive mistakes in others, but slow to forgive myself. And so I learned that I needed to practice self-compassion, to be tolerant of my own mistakes, and to be as kind to myself as I would be to others. Throughout my five-week journey, I laughed, cried, danced, and reflected.

The solitude of the road was occasionally broken by the companionship of other travelers, but I was often alone for many portions of my trek. And when I was alone, I used that time to listen to music, journal, and think. I enjoyed a playlist of oldies tunes and, on one notable occasion, laughed and danced to the classic Bee Gees song, "Stayin' Alive!"

These little moments of spontaneity showed me how to get in touch with-- and appreciate-- myself. I discovered that, sometimes, depression and circumstances such as losing my job clouded my vision and prevented me from seeing all the things I could love about life and myself. Although it could sometimes be difficult to see, I learned that in reality, there was so much joy to be found in life and so many positive qualities I could appreciate about myself.

Most people don't like to think of themselves as being conceited, so practicing self-love and self-compassion can be difficult. It feels awkward and stuck up to say, "I like myself!" and I certainly felt that way. But my interactions with my fellow travelers and my moments of quiet self-reflection with my journal helped me to see the world-- and myself-- in a new way.

By the time I finished walking the Camino, I was both exhausted and transformed. My outlook on life had changed completely and it was all thanks to the experience of walking the Camino and journaling the entire time. One of the most beneficial journaling practices I started involved two separate lists of three things. Every time I started and finished a journal entry, no matter how much or how little I had to say, I wrapped up the entry with two lists entitled “Pride” and “Gratitude.”

Under these headings, I listed three things I was proud of and three things I was grateful for. Often, they were small things like, “I’m grateful that the rain fell AFTER we finished our journey today!” or, “I’m proud of the beautiful photos I took today!” But those small accomplishments made a big difference in my life because they taught me to appreciate the little things.

And by the time I finished walking the Camino, I emerged with a new sense of purpose, self-esteem, and hope for my future. As a result of my journey, I learned to live by a quote I liked: “the road is life.” This phrase might mean different things for different people, but for me, it meant that I needed to enjoy and appreciate the journey.

It’s easy to want to rid yourself of life’s ups and downs. It’s easy to get frustrated when life doesn’t work out as you planned. Everybody feels that way from time to time and that’s okay. But you can’t spend your life wishing to be free from the hard parts or wishing you were happy all the time. Instead, it’s freeing to understand that the road is life. No matter where your journey takes you, it’s important to be present in the moment and ask yourself what you can learn from, be proud of, and be grateful for about this moment on the road.

That’s what I learned from getting lost on The Way. And I believe that everyone can benefit from learning that too.



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## Final Summary

Sometimes, life doesn't go your way. We all suffer devastating setbacks that make us feel depressed and cause us to question our purpose in life. But it's how you deal with those setbacks that matters! Blake Farha learned that firsthand when he lost a job that really mattered to him.

This setback rocked his world and reawakened his depression, prompting him to wonder what he wanted to do with the rest of his future. But instead of giving in to his depression, Blake decided to rediscover himself by finding new perspective in a five- week long hike through the Camino de Santiago.

Through the course of his invigorating journey, Blake made new friendships, learned more about himself, and developed a new outlook on life that infused him with hope for the future. He also developed some positive coping mechanisms such as journaling that helped with his depression and altered his perspective.

Although Blake's choice might seem extreme, the good news is that you don't have to follow his exact path. If you can't get lost on a five-week long hike, that's okay! You don't have to! You can implement the lessons Blake learned right now-- no hike needed! You can develop a daily journaling habit and make a list of 3 things you're grateful for and 3 things you're proud of every day.

You can also invest in your relationships with other people and remember to extend the same kindness to yourself that you give to other people. These are the principles that changed Blake's life and they can change yours too!



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