

The background of the cover is a photograph of a vast, open landscape. In the foreground, two covered wagons with white canvas tops are parked on a grassy field. The middle ground shows rolling hills with sparse vegetation. The sky is a mix of blue and golden-yellow, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The title 'where the lost wander' is written in a large, white, cursive script across the top and middle of the image. The words 'where' and 'the' are on the top line, 'lost' is on the second line, and 'wander' is on the third line. The words are connected by long, flowing white lines that sweep across the sky and hills.

where
the
lost
wander

a novel

AMY HARMON

Bestselling author of *What the Wind Knows* and *From Sand and Ash*

WHERE THE LOST WANDER

In this epic and haunting love story set on the Oregon Trail, a family and their unlikely protector find their way through peril, uncertainty, and loss.

The Overland Trail, 1853: Naomi May never expected to be widowed at twenty. Eager to leave her grief behind, she sets off with her family for a life out West. On the trail, she forms an instant connection with John Lowry, a half-Pawnee man straddling two worlds and a stranger in both.

But life in a wagon train is fraught with hardship, fear, and death. Even as John and Naomi are drawn to each other, the trials of the journey and their disparate pasts work to keep them apart. John's heritage gains them safe passage through hostile territory only to come between them as they seek to build a life together.

When a horrific tragedy strikes, decimating Naomi's family and separating her from John, the promises they made are all they have left. Ripped apart, they can't turn back, they can't go on, and they can't let go. Both will have to make terrible sacrifices to find each other, save each other, and eventually ... make peace with who they are.



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Genre: Historical, Romance

Recommended for ages: +16



ATTENTION

**THIS DOCUMENT INCLUDES SPECIFICS YOU MIGHT WANT TO AVOID
UNTIL YOU HAVE FINISHED READING THE BOOK.**

BOOK CLUB KIT – WHERE THE LOST WANDER

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CHARACTERS

There were an abundance of characters to know in Where the Lost Wander - who were your favorites?

Who did you like least? Why?

Do you think the characters were realistically portrayed? Describe these character's personalities.

How does being a "two-feet" affect John? How does it change how people see him?

John and Naomi had an almost instant connection, did you believe their feelings?

Why do you think Naomi's mom and brothers instantly loved John too?

Was Naomi held back by her former husband's parents? Why would traveling with them be difficult?

What connected Naomi to Lost Woman?

What is motivating the actions of the characters in the story?

What do the sub-characters want from the main characters and what do the main characters want with them?

Were there any moments where you disagreed with the choices of any of the characters? What would you have done differently?

What past influences are shaping the actions of the characters in the story?

Did any of the characters remind you of yourself or someone you know? How?

What were the dynamics of "power" between the characters? How did that play a factor in their interactions?

Do the main characters change by the end of this novel?

Do they grow or mature? What events trigger such changes?

What do you think will happen next to the main characters?

QUOTES

Discuss the following quotes.

“The pain. It’s worth it. The more you love, the more it hurts. But it’s worth it. It’s the only thing that is.”

“If all I have is my will, I must use it well.”

“That’s what hope feels like: the best air you’ve ever breathed after the worst fall you’ve ever taken. It hurts.”

“It is impossible to explain to someone who is surrounded by their own language and people just how lonely it is to not understand and to not be understood.”

Were there any particular quotes that stood out to you? Which ones and why?

STRUCTURE, WRITING & GENERAL DISCUSSION

Did you appreciate the dual perspectives of John and Naomi throughout the story? Was there one perspective you enjoyed more?

What did you think of the overall structure of the novel?

Were you engaged immediately?

What did you think about the time-line and point of view? How did you feel reading it?

Which emotions conveyed the story?

Did the story keep you interested?

Would you say this is a plot-driven book or does the story unfold slowly with a focus on character development?

Were you surprised by the plot? Or did you find it predictable?

How credible did the author make the setting and dialogue?

What scene did you find was the most pivotal for the book? How do you think the story would have changed had that scene not taken place?

What scene resonated most with you personally in either a positive or negative way?

Did certain parts of the novel make you uncomfortable?

Were there any scenes that made you laugh?

What is the significance of the title? Did you recognize it in the book?

Would you have given the book a different title? If yes, what is your title?

What surprised you the most about the book?

What did you learn about this time period from reading the book?

Based on the prologue, did you expect the ending or were you surprised?

Did you think the ending was appropriate?

How would you have liked to have seen the ending go?

Have any of YOUR views or thoughts changed after reading this book?

What do you think about the cover of this book? Would you change it? How?

Has this book changed you, broadened your perspective?

What did you learn from, take away from, or get out of this book? Did your opinion of the book change as you read it? How?

Discussion questions by chapter

Prologue

This story starts with a bang! What are some of the emotions you immediately experience with the characters?

How does this big moment set the tone for the story? Are you excited to continue?

Chapter 1

John Lowry and his father have a strained relationship. What do we learn from the men's' conversation? What about in John's conversation with Jennie?

John has made this trip to Fort Kearney before. Why does this parting feel different? Do you have any predictions about what is to come?

Chapter 2

This chapter describes the brutal life of being a pioneer. Can you imagine walking along with a wagon train? Does anything about this lifestyle appeal to you?

Naomi's ma tells her, "Anger feels a whole lot better than fear." Do you agree? Or do you think it is useless and futile as she says later?

Chapter 3

John and Naomi's awareness of one another grows. Can you describe the challenges they face if they become friends or more?

Do you think John's tactic of being cold and rough with Naomi will work?

Chapter 4

Naomi admits to her mother that she wants John Lowry. What are you able to gather about Naomi's relationship with her mother?

We see little Wolfe enter the world and several leave in this chapter. Do you think people handled loss better in the past? If so, why?

Chapter 5

John thinks people take the admission of love too lightly. Do you agree?

Discuss Naomi's heroics as the group crosses the river.

Are you feeling the connection between her and John?

Chapter 6

How did you feel as John was cared for by Naomi during his sickness? Why would a sickness on the trail be more difficult?

Can you relate as Naomi says "grief is draining," and "I am hoarding my strength and my stamina for life"? Have you ever felt this way?

Chapter 7

Do you think John made a good trade with the Pawnee?

Are you inspired by Naomi's compassion toward the Caldwells though she doesn't want to give it? Do they have a right to be angry with Naomi?

Chapter 8

Elmeda wants to push Naomi to marry someone she doesn't want. Then, Naomi and John discuss the necessity of marriage. Can you imagine this need? Do you think it's a good or bad thing?

Naomi says, "I have never known such utter and complete exhaustion and yet...I am happy." Have you felt this way? When? Why does hardship often leave extra room for happiness?

Chapter 9

Was Naomi being reckless in her attempts to trade paintings for a horse?

What qualities does Naomi display in this chapter? How do you feel about her actions?

Chapter 10

This chapter touches on the topic of justice on the trail. How would it differ from modern justice? Do you think there would be an abundance of lawlessness or about the same as we have today? Why?

Do you understand John's fears about committing to Naomi? Do you think they are necessary or should he let go and marry her?

Chapter 11

What did you think of Winifred's speech to John? Is she right in encouraging him toward Naomi?

After a warning, Naomi gets her father's approval of John. Is his warning warranted for this time period? How did you feel about this conversation and the earlier proposal from John?

Chapter 12

Does John's story at camp remind you of another story? What are the similarities?

Discuss the touching moment between Hanabi and Winifred. Did the kindness between strangers of different cultures inspire you?

Chapter 13

In what ways will Naomi's marriage to John be different from her previous marriage to Daniel?

John finds good fortune in Fort Bridger after a tense moment and unmet expectations. What was going through your mind as John was speaking to Washakie?

Chapter 14

John has to weigh the importance of a wagon versus his mule. Have you ever made a trade that felt like a huge sacrifice?

Naomi realizes how dirty she is after traveling along with the wagon train. Can you imagine living without the ease of hygiene we have today? What would be most difficult for you?

Chapter 15

Life on the trail is hard for women - from menstrual cycles to pregnancy, can you imagine this way of life as a woman? What are some of the unique challenges we have seen and can you think of more?

What is going through your mind as you read of the Indian attack?

What can we learn from John's advice to Webb after Webb says he hates Indians?

Chapter 16

Do you think "the things we fear most tend to find us"? How would you be feeling if you were in Naomi's situation? Can you feel the despair along with her?

Why does Washakie tell John to leave the white people out of their ordeal? What might happen otherwise?

Chapter 17

What do you think made John realize he was loved by his parents?

Naomi concludes the same people who fed her family also killed her family. Are they really the same? Is she justified in blaming them all?

Chapter 18

Do you think the trade at the chief council was fair? Could you see another way it might have gone?

John says he has nothing to offer, but Hanabi says, “What is nothing? You have mules. You have your woman...We will build you a Wickiup. You will hunt. You have all things.”

Why do you think sadness makes people feel as if they have nothing? Discuss John’s perspective versus Hanabi’s.

Chapter 19

What character traits does John show as he bets Wahatehwe and then battles Magwich? Did he handle himself well in this scene?

Why does Naomi react as she does when John tells her how he came to possess her satchel and the horses?

Chapter 20

How does intimacy grow between Naomi and John while they discuss Naomi’s fight for Wolfe? Did you expect this conversation to go differently?

Naomi reflects on the two separate worlds of men and women among the Shoshoni. Do you agree there are two worlds among men and women? Do they overlap? How and when?

Chapter 21

Washakie says, “The problem with the white man is they want to tell the Indian how to live.”

Why do you think humans naturally want to impose their ways of life upon others?

Naomi says she is “trapped where the lost wander” and she doesn’t see a way out. What does this mean? Why is she lost? Can you relate in some way? How does one find their way again?

Chapter 22

Multiple characters have prophetic dreams in this novel. Have you ever experienced this or know someone who has? Do you believe it can happen?

How does this chapter affect you? Can you feel the serenity of loss, as if everyone is now where they should be? Did you shed a few tears?

Epilogue

Are you pleased with the ending? Did the story end how you envisioned? What surprised you?

Discuss the Author's Note.

Q&A with Amy Harmon

What were three things you would miss on the Oregon trail?

Being clean. Being cool. Being alone!

What inspired you to write WHERE THE LOST WANDER?

I was inspired by my husband's ancestor, the real John Lowry. He was half Native, half white, and came west in the 1850s to make a life for himself.

What was the root of that instant maternal connection Naomi had with Wolfe?

I truly think our greatest connections are born from the responsibility we feel. Naomi knew how much Winifred needed her, how much Wolfe needed her.

Was there a significance to Naomi's name, given what her namesake goes through in the Bible story?

Not really, though I thought about Naomi from the Bible. In some ways, it is John whose story mirrors Naomi of the Bible. He gives up who he is (in some ways) for Naomi.

I love that John Lowry was a real person (and one that you have that close connection to!). What kind of research did you do when writing this novel? Was there anything you learned that didn't make it into the book that you wish had/wish more people just knew?

I read so many pioneer journals! I studied maps too, and emigrant guides. I wish more people knew about the Native tribes and people of their areas. People like Chief Washakie. I hope people are inspired to dig into this part of the American story.

Where did you come up with the names for the chapters and what goes into deciding that?

The chapters were locations, and since this was a journey, I thought that appropriate and probably the way the pioneers marked their way as well.

What made you decide/what is the thought process for deciding to include a prologue and more specifically what made you decide on that scene for the prologue?

As far as the prologue, it informed the entire tale. Beginning with it created tension that wouldn't have otherwise been present. It also prepared the reader so it wasn't so jarring later on.

I was immediately struck by all the brothers' names starting with W (and happy you explained why Naomi was not a "W" name). Was there any particular backstory to your decision?

No backstory to the W's. Sometimes characters just make themselves known, names and all. These characters truly told me their names.

I was curious to see what your response would be to the native American experience as well as that of emigrants interacting with them for the first time compares to the modern-day and how they can grow in a positive direction?

I don't think it does compare to modern-day. It is truly a lost time. I have Native friends. It's been very difficult for them to preserve their culture, language, and traditions. I think telling stories like *Wander* are so important for keeping the history alive.

I love the way you play with memory regarding John and his father. As the book progresses we really come to understand that his father was a good man and father. I love how you slowly exposed his character as the book progressed and we got to see John's memories adjust to what he learns about his dad. I think you were very clever in a subtle way. Did you plan for John's father to be better than he was originally portrayed or do you figure that out as you wrote and let the story drive John's revelations?

I actually planned for him to be worse than he was. Jennie too. But as John and I "traveled together" we changed our minds.

Did you have a "Winifred" in your life? Who was your inspiration for this amazing character?

My mom is a very strong woman, a mom of six kids who always made the best of every situation. My mom is a doer. My mother's ancestors were pioneers—the Mays—so Winifred truly is a tribute to her.

Did you grieve for any of the characters that died in the book?

I think it permeated the whole story, didn't it?

Did you have a reference or person you turned to for thoughts about how John felt being split between his different cultural worlds?

I mentioned that John Lowry was my husband's ancestor. I knew he had "passed" as a white man when he went West, and being raised in a white family, that makes sense, but it was not hard to imagine the turmoil that would have caused in him, especially as he saw firsthand the way of life that was disappearing, and the heritage he could not preserve.

What was the most challenging scene for you to write?

Wow. That's a tough one. For me, the emotional scenes are always the "easiest" because it's easy to tap into it and be carried away by it. Logistics and plotting are always much more difficult; making sure the pieces fit. The ending in this story was also very difficult. Happy endings that still capture historical realities are challenging.

I loved the mules as well. Do you have a background in husbandry? Or was this also something you had to research?

My father in law and husband love mules and we have a couple. But yep. I had to do my research.

Mules were such a big part of the story of the West and westward expansion.

How was the rest of the journey for Naomi's brothers while they were waiting for John and Naomi?

I couldn't go with them, simply because of the way the story was told. We had to stay with John and Naomi. But I imagine those young boys left their innocence and youth behind them. They grew up, and they grew strong.

I love that you presented history in a realistic and unbiased way but we're still able to illustrate a beautiful story. Were there any historical details you wish you could have included? Or any other storylines or details?

I think sometimes we do focus on the hard and ugly and not enough on the good and noble. I was impressed in pioneer journals by the strength and general goodness of the people. It gave me hope. I also was impressed by the goodness of people like Washakie and Lost Woman. Their stories need to be told.