This course examines five narratives of survival. We’ll begin with Jon Krakauer’s *Into the Wild*, which brought an obscure news report of the death of Chris McCandless, whose body was found in the bush in Alaska in the summer of 1992, to worldwide attention. We will then move on to three autobiographical narratives, including Tara Westover’s story of her unusual upbringing in a devout Mormon family in rural Idaho, Eric Lomax’s story of his internment in a Japanese prisoner-of-war camp, and Viktor Frankl’s account of his experience in the death camps of Nazi Germany. We will end with Ian McEwan’s *Atonement*, which blends autobiography and fiction in a narrative of survival, love, and forgiveness.

What all these narratives share in common is the attempt to come to grips with personal trauma. While not all of the accounts are true (McEwan’s is fictional), all of them examine the problem of narrative perspective. Who is telling the story? Even in the case of nonfictional autobiography there is a split between internal and external perspectives. The narrating self is not the same as the narrated self. Indeed, this is precisely the premise of Westover’s idea of becoming “educated.” An education is not just an exercise in learning facts. It is also a process of self-discovery and self-transformation.

To help us develop this idea, we will read Peter Goldie’s theory of narrative perspective. As we will see, a narrative includes the idea of the narrator who gives shape, emotion, and meaning to the events narrated. We will also read Robert Frank’s argument about the role of luck and the significance of gratitude.

**Texts:**

- Viktor Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning* (1946)

**Assignments:**

I haven’t fully decided what writing I will require for this course, but I will likely ask you to write one short paper (800 words), one long paper (1500 words), and a final exam.