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## What is Lost

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## **Description (Optional)**

My thoughts on being lost and losing.

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Lover of Jesus, coffee, traveling, and ultimate frisbee.

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*Nonfiction by Brianna Martinez*

## WHAT IS LOST

Historians believe the compass was invented around 250 BC when the Han Dynasty ruled China. Before that, people generally relied on the direction of the sun. The first compasses were made of lodestone, a naturally magnetized ore of iron. Most of the early compass designs were magnetized needles attached to a piece of wood or cork that floated freely in a dish of water. Later, compasses were made of iron needles, magnetized by striking them with a lodestone. In the early 20th century, the liquid-filled magnetic compass replaced all other compass types in economically developed countries.

Now compasses are composed of steel and cobalt needles, with plastic or steel for the outer compass, clearly etched in silver on its top and bottom and each side the initials N, S, E, W. Most compasses also mark the combination of directions located between any two perpendicular tick marks: Northwest, Southeast, Northeast, Southwest. Whenever the tinny, magnetic needle rotates and points North, travelers reorient themselves and hopefully find out where they're supposed to be going.

Compasses have always been used to gain a sense of direction. While first used to locate places on land, decades after its invention people began using compasses for navigation on the vast blue ocean. Now compasses are made specifically for individual occupations: thumb compasses are used by mountain climbers, gyrocompasses direct ships towards "true North," the Qibla compass guides Muslims' prayers towards Mecca.

Despite the hundreds of thousands of people who own the palm-size compasses, and the fact that now every iPhone user has access to one with the tap of a finger, around 2,000 people still get lost in the woods each year. Many of them are children who wandered off, found hours later by neighborhood search parties; others are hikers found as deteriorating remnants of torn flannel or bone or frozen under avalanches of snow, never to be seen by human eyes again. Psychologist Paul Dudchenko claims that every person has an innate sense of direction, or an inner compass. And yet, people continue to get lost, to lose themselves. Getting lost seems inevitable.

I've been lost in emotion, books, the tenth aisle of my local Wagoner's grocery store when I was five years old. In middle school, I "lost" one of my friend's t-shirts so I could keep it for myself. If I had a penny for every time I lost one, I'd no longer have an empty bank account and I could actually buy that pack of peppermint Extra brand gum I have to be chewing constantly. I could not even begin to count the number of instances where I've lost track of time. I've lost sleep over the fact that I don't know where my future is going, and I don't know where I will end up this side of eternity. My senior year of track and field I lost the 300 meter hurdle race when I barely nicked the last hurdle and fell hard on the bumpy black rubber in shamed defeat. Last year I lost control of my brother's old black Alero and spun sideways into a deep snowbank. Sometimes I lose my appetite.

I'm frequently lost in thought about the fifteen page printed copy due at 5 pm on Friday and how I can make the introduction just a little longer so that I have at least one full page by the end of the hour. Lost in thought about the boy in the green and brown and beige military camouflage who used to live out of his van and made me laugh until my stomach ached and taught me how to ride a motorcycle, who now resides thousands of miles away in Columbus, Georgia, maybe to never be seen again. Lost in thought about my mother cooking alone in the kitchen, talking to the two black and silver-haired labradoodles who are her only company at night. Lost in thought about how God could ever want to love or help someone as deprived as me.

I lost my brother to a hatred that froze his emotions like ice, only cracked when pressed upon, only expressed in shattered, piercing bits. Last year I lost contact with my father. Or, maybe instead, I lost the idea of contacting him. I lost my grandma to depression and the inability to forgive. I watched my mom lose herself in pieces to a man she loved too much, drifting away from the person I remembered her as, like ashes in a cool summer night's breeze. And I watched her aimless shadow-self bend to sweep them up into a dustpan, along with black Labradoodle hairs and crumbs of broken ramen noodle bits and missed tan and rusty red star-shaped cat food.