

# Sicked: the true story of a lost childhood



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

**Sickened by Julie Gregory**

1. " Oh, God, Jewelly, you are burning up, just burning up. I better call the squad.' Grandma is serious, her face etched in worry and hovering inches from mine. Her fingers spread my eyelids apart, looking for signs that she can report to the hospital. Maybe I am feeling something in my tummy. Maybe I do have a fever. What does it feel like, Grandma? Am I sick, Grandma?" (18).
2. This passage hints that early on Julie was abused by not only her mother, but her grandmother as well. Grandma Marge had given Julie a piece of candy and then convinced Julie that she was sick. From the line, " What does it feel like, Grandma?" the reader gathers that Julie does not know how she feels and only begins to feel sick after being told she is sick. Although Julie is only three, the event this passage describes is the beginning of her abuse.
3. After reading this passage, I began to wonder if MBP was genetic. Julie's grandmother displayed the same behaviors as did Julie's mother. I also wondered if Julie's mother's behaviors were initially in response to Grandma Marge telling her that Julie was sick. The similarities between Julie's mother and grandmother means that MBP is either genetic or can be observed and repeated. However, later in the memoir, Julie proves that she will not follow her mother's behaviors and treat her children that way.
4. " I look between both of them. What is a headache, exactly? Is it when my eyes hurt? Is it when I'm dizzy on the bus? I'm trying to guess, hoping it's the right answer," (26).

5. This passage represents the struggles Julie must face at each doctor's appointment in an effort to please her mother. Here, Julie does not even understand what a headache is. Throughout her story, she sights various occasions in which she does not understand what the doctors or her mother say. When Julie says she is trying to answer correctly, she must guess at what her mother wants to hear. Julie lies to doctors so her mother will not get upset. I can not imagine having to lie about my health and the fear Julie faces. If Julie tells the truth, her mother may return home yelling at her father. If Julie lies about her symptoms, she will be forced on medication she does not need which could make her ill. Julie is an innocent girl, and this passage causes the reader to empathize with Julie and wish to grab her hand and help her.
6. " And Mom was always on the lookout for cruelty to animals. If we were driving along the highway and there was a black trash bag puffed up and knotted at the top, full of trash someone'd thrown out their window, she'd pull over and have me run out and check to make sure it wasn't full of kittens," (58).

This passage is ironic because Sandy is against animal cruelty, but does not realize how she abuses her own daughter. Sandy feels she needs to care for everything and make it well and healthy. With the animals, she would take them into her home, such as the farm dogs, and feed them. However, she would abuse them by breeding and selling their puppies for extra money. With Julie, Sandy would inflict symptoms of illnesses on her in order to take her to the hospital or doctor's office and make her better. The irony of the

situation is that Sandy does not realize her illness and continues to inflict pain on others, whether it is Julie, animals, or her future step children.

1. " I pride myself on how little space I take up. I am going to shrink and shrink until I am a dry fall leaf, complete with a translucent spine and brittle veins, blowing away in a stiff wind, up, up, up into a crisp blue sky," (63).
2. This passage explains the emotional toll Julie has suffered from her mother's abuse. Julie wants to disappear into the sky and not be alive. I cannot imagine a girl at about the age of twelve wishing not to be alive. The imagery used in the passage is beautiful as well. Julie realizes how weak she is with brittle veins and a tiny body, yet she takes pride in it. I wonder if she takes pride in being small because then her mother can keep pretending she is sick or because the thinner she gets the closer to disappearing. This passage is Julie speaking of not only her physical state but her mental state as a result of her mother's abuse.
3. " Let's get one thing straight, Sandy.' He growls low. ' You're going to leave Daniel Joseph Gregory the Second alone from now on. That's my boy in there,' he cracks her wrist against the counter like rock candy, her cry twists my stomach, ' and my boy's just fine," (78).
4. This passage is important because it reveals that Julie's dad knows that Sandy is hurting his daughter. I think that he realizes that it is too late to help Julie, but he still has a chance to save Danny. Although Dan Sr. is an aggressive father who often appears not to care about his children, I think by standing up for Danny's health he proves that he

does care about his children as do all fathers. However, I think Dan beating Sandy will not stop her from abusing Danny. She has a disease that she cannot control, and all Dan really is doing is scaring Julie with her mother's screams and harming Sandy.

5. " At last, I'll just take one medication that will fix everything. I'll have friends, be in sports, go to movies. Mom'll be happy; she won't have to stay at home or clean up after old men or foster kids. And I'll be a real kid and not miss school anymore," (98).
6. This passage discusses Julie's feeling when she hears that the doctors finally know what is wrong with her. The passage reveals that Julie is far from numb of her illness and her mother. She says that she wants her mother to be happy. Throughout each doctor visit, Julie pretends to have symptoms in order for her mother to be happy. She must lie and suffer. Julie loves her mother because she does not realize the abuse she is receiving; she is so convinced that she is ill. Julie dreams of being normal, being able to do well in school and have friends. I pity her for not being allowed a real childhood because her mother is ill. Julie does not deserve it. This passage is heart breaking as well, because the reader knows that the treatment will not save Julie, and Julie's hope will be crushed.
7. " Well, honey, I just can't see my little girl go out there in a bathing suit and get laughed at. You got no tits, no hips, no ass, Sissy. You look terrible in a bathing suit. Kids are cruel, sweetie, they'll just make fun of you," (154).

8. This passage characterizes Julie's father as loving yet harsh. Dan does not want Julie to be embarrassed and laughed at, however does not know how to deliver the message. He harshly criticizes her body, which cannot help Julie's self esteem. I found the situation ironic as well. At first, when Dan took Julie into the bedroom, I thought he was going to molest her. Later, once Julie has a new job set up at the hospital, I think that maybe Dan was trying to help Julie get out. At the hospital, Julie was offered counseling and help. Throughout Julie's story, the character of her father troubles me because he seems to want to help Julie yet is easily manipulated by Sandy.
9. " I look in the largest mirror. She's a natural beauty. I'm a sickened beauty. I'm beautiful, but with an inch-thick layer of sick covering me," (201).
10. This passage is Julie's revelation and the beginning to her rebuilding. Julie realizes what she really looks like and how sick she is. She no longer prides her self in her lack of space. Julie sees that she is beautiful just hurt from the abuse of her mother. The house of mirrors will help Julie see herself become stronger and healthy. Julie is on her way to becoming a self sufficient woman and eventually be able to confront her mother about the pain she caused her.

**Book Analysis:**

" Munchausen by proxy may be the single most complex—and lethal—form of maltreatment known today," (v). Julie Gregory's memoir, *Sickened* is a heart-wrenching story of a child affected by Munchausen by proxy and the deadly abuse she receives. Gregory does a spectacular job pulling an

emotional response from the reader while granting the reader a complete understanding of MBP.

With each paragraph and each situation Julie faces, the reader is more engaged into Julie's character. Sickened is a true story, therefore the reader is more connected with the story. Through first person narrative, the reader gains Julie's thoughts about her illnesses and understands how Julie is trained to believe she is sick, even when she is not. Julie's feeling of wanting to please her mother and taking migraine medicine causes the reader to want to come into Julie's life and save her. For example, when Julie is going to court to press charges against her parents, Julie's father convinces her that she is being tricked and her parents are the ones pressing charges on Julie. One wants to tell Julie that he is lying, but Julie believes him and does not testify. When Julie finds the truth out, the reader wants to reach out and hug her. Julie is always so alone and leaves the reader helpless wanting to erase the pain Julie suffers.

The doctor visits and recollections of her daily family life supply the reader with an understanding of how MBP affects the child and how the mother acts with MBP. Julie's mother takes her to various doctors trying to convince each that Julie has a serious illness. Julie is often confused not understanding why she must be shaved or what a headache is. MBP is a terrible form of abuse which convinces children they are ill and leaves children unaware of how to take care of themselves. When Julie leaves home, she only knows to eat cake batter. Gregory retells her story supplying the reader with an appreciation of her strength and an understanding of MBP and the torture of Julie's childhood.

Sickened is a well written memoir which any reader would enjoy reading. The emotional responses from the reader cause the reader to continue to read Julie's story in hope that she may get help and escape her mother. After finishing Sickened, words of Julie's journey sink into one's head and the power of the story sets in. MBP is a powerful disorder and living with it creates a powerful story which all should hear.