

Essay on the glass castle

[Family](#), [Parents](#)



The Glass Castle is a harrowing read on several counts but is also very revealing and matter of fact, an eye opener on a tragic situation which eventually makes good.

In this novel, Jeanette Walls epitomises the situation she had in her childhood where she was brought up with two eccentric parents, particularly her father who was a depressive alcoholic. Her home was full of regular shouting matches, beatings and general disorder which obviously had a profound and distinctive effect on her childhood.

Obviously the memoir stirred considerable commotion and controversy when it was published. The opening part where Walls describes herself waiting in a taxi outside while her mother hollers away inside the house is poignant as the author felt like 'Alice in Wonderland Through the Looking Glass'. This theme returns often in the book and one can only feel sorry for Walls as she had to face this daily grind of indignities and iniquities.

Walls also had three siblings who reacted to the situation differently. Some were rather retrospective and closed up about the memoir while others loved the publicity brought upon by the book. Still, the rather harrowing situations which are described by Walls remain imprinted in one's mind, especially the parts when her father, an eccentric inventor clashes with her artist mother.

Obviously there are some situations which also reveal the social context of the times, especially with regard to family interaction. Dysfunctional families are not an uncommon thing in the United States but the real marvel of this all is the fact that Walls managed to survive in such a sort of family without any real permanent scars. Notwithstanding all this, her narrative reads

extremely well and is hugely perceptive especially in the parts which summarize her daily indignities.

" Why not?" Mom said. " Being homeless is an adventure."

This is what Jeanette's mother tells her daughter when she appears on her doorstep after the girl had fled to New York to escape the terrible life she had to lead locked up in that home without hope or future. Homelessness remains an issue in the US and her Wall's mother, this was actually an adventure, hard to believe at some stage but depending on her eccentricities quite a rational thing. Here, it is interesting to note that Walls' is put in the role of the mother, a role reversal as you could have it and her reflections on the situation she has to face are very poignant.

Sexual abuse is also a theme which runs concurrently in the book with other terrible situations. Walls' observes her uncle jerking off next to her and she is herself abused by her father later on. What this tells us on the nature of the household is rather harrowing and one can only admire Wall's perceptive and almost unemotional handling of the situation. She almost feels pity and compassion for her father who really has a drinking problem and asserts that if she were to leave him, she would still feel the effects of his abuse.

Consequentially, the abuse theme is one of the most important social commentaries in the book as it reflects on these terrible situations. Some deal with it in a strong manner while others deal with it rather differently. Walls seems to be a much stronger personality than her siblings as she speaks matter of factly about everything, at one point even observing that there is much to gain from this experience. The book creates a social

conscience and message for all those abusers out there who wish to continue perpetrating their terrible deeds behind closed doors thinking that their actions will be of no consequence.

“ Mom says I'm mature for my age and she lets me cook for myself a lot”

This is what Walls tells to the nurse when she ends up in hospital after trying to cook on her own and burning herself. What is not initially clear is that the girl is only three years old and she has just burnt herself and her dress trying to make a hot dog. The social commentary which comes out of this line is not only harrowing but pretty disturbing. That a mother of a three year old girl insists that the child cooks for herself is incredibly sadistic and rather berserk to say the least.

One is reminded of the film Sybil where the mother constantly abused her child who ended up with a split personality disorder, a situation which she never actually recovered from.

Walls is rather matter of fact about the situation although you can sense a certain element of anger as she recounts what occurred. It is also intriguing to note what a fantastic memory the child has as she actually remembers most of what used to happen even at a tender age.

West Virginia

The family's move to West Virginia cannot be said to be an unqualified success as her father eventually sank deeper and deeper into alcoholism.

West Virginia is probably one of the most backward states in the country but intriguingly enough, it was here that Walls managed to make her own

breakthrough by going to Barnard and eventually starting off into a journalistic career. Her gift for writing was immediately apparent and she began to have some success at the age of 17 when she began writing for the student paper.

Walls has now come a long way from sifting through trash cans at school to find something to eat. The story as told in her book is masterfully controlled and if you have pity for her situation, you can always feel that there is some greatness in everything she will eventually achieve. Obviously it is not a tale for the faint hearted but it simply provides a harrowing and at times rather disturbing social commentary into the mores of the day but with particular focus on the brutality of a childhood which could have been lost but was eventually transformed.

One can only reflect on what might have been for several other children who found themselves in similar situations through no fault of theirs but who had to cope accordingly without any hope of getting better. Walls book is certainly an eye opener for such children and in similar vein to Dave Pelzer's trilogy starting with ' The Lost Boy', she manages to convey her experience into a truly positive one. It is indeed a hugely recommended read that should be on the shelf of those who wish to make something out of their life after they have plumbed the depths of despair.

Works cited:

Walls J (2005); The Glass Castle; Scribner