Overcoming Obstacles

By:

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The Glass Castle was truly an inspiring and uplifting book. I was so impressed and moved by the way Jeannette Walls and her siblings overcame their hardships growing up and became productive adults. I realized that all those times I whined and complained to my mother about “wanting” and “needing” as a child were definitely irrelevant to the experiences that Jeannette and her family went through. Jeannette Walls and her siblings were the adults in their upbringing and should praise no one but themselves for the way they turned out and all their accomplishments.

Jeannette Walls’ family was dysfunctional, but I don’t believe the children realized how dysfunctional they actually were until they were older or if they realized it at all. As a mother of two I know it’s my responsibility to protect and provide for my children, so it’s shocking to me on how Rex and Mary Walls raised their children. I know of many families who have moved from one place to another on several occasions, but have been able to provide some form of stability for their families unlike Rex and Mary Walls did for their children. A parent is suppose to raise, love, nurture, and instill good qualities in a child and at the same time provide a good livable shelter, food and all the necessities required to survive. Rex and Mary Walls showed no signs of good parenting, because I believe they valued their own happiness and needs over their children.

Rex Walls was a brilliant man with the mind of a genius, but being an alcoholic dampened his ability to accomplish anything in his life. Instead of being a good husband and father, Rex focused on all his big ideas and dreams and gave his family nothing but
empty promises. As a child I grew up with an alcoholic step-father who was a loving and wonderful man, but because of his disease he was destroying our family as a whole. I don’t believe Rex Walls saw his drinking as a disease let alone a problem. Just like my step-father, Rex Walls was not only unable to hold down the many jobs he obtained, but once that paycheck was in his hands it was as good as gone before he supplied his family with their needs.

On her tenth birthday Jeannette’s wish was for her father to get sober and completely stop drinking and although he attempted that one time there was really no solution to his problem without him wanting to stop and seeking professional help. During the time Rex tried to stop drinking he did something no parent should every do and that was allowing his children to witness him detoxing, which was an awful experience for them.

Mary Walls was also brilliant and an amazing artist, but far from being a good mother. Just like her husband, Mary couldn’t keep a job and would make any excuse to not work. Mary was a teacher and there were times when she’d prefer to lay around and do nothing but paint and her children would do her schoolwork to keep her on schedule and they’d encourage and motivate her. The roles of who were the parents and the child were definitely reversed in this family. I believe that Mary had many regrets in her life and one of them was having children and being a mother. Mary showed more love and appreciation for her art than she did for her own children.

One of Jeannette Walls’ earliest memories was when she was three years old and standing on a chair over the stove cooking hot dogs for herself while her mother was in the back room painting. Jeannette’s dress caught on fire and caused severe
burns to her body and Mary just reacted calmly. There were many incidents where the children injured themselves and Mary told them that they should show no emotions and pretty much suck it up and that any pain and suffering they endured was good for them and it immunized their body and soul.

Not only did Jeannette Walls and her siblings move around a lot with no stability, but the places they lived in where unsanitary and had no electricity or running water. Rex was able to buy his alcohol and cigarettes and continue with his bad habits and Mary was able to buy all the art supplies she needed, but their children would go hungry for a long period of time and this was acceptable to them both. There was a time when Jeannette and her brother Brian wouldn’t have any money for lunch at school and Jeannette would wait for her classmates to throw their lunches away and she’d retrieve them from the garbage. The children became great scavengers and learned to search and hunt for food. Maureen, the youngest of the Walls’ children had plenty to eat, because she spent a great deal of her time with the neighbors she had befriended and they began to look at her as one of their own children.

One day when Rex wasn’t around, since he disappeared for days at a time, the children were hungry and trying not to think of food and they had seen that their mother was chewing on something. After questioning her and getting many excuses they discovered she’d been eating a chocolate candy bar and her excuse was that she had a sugar addiction and compared it to Rex’s alcoholism. I can’t even imagine eating knowing that my children are hungry. Rex and Mary Walls didn’t realize that they were inflicting their children with many forms of abuse and in this time of age the way Rex and Mary raised their children they’d be charged with neglect and their children would
be taken away from them. I believe that Rex and Mary Walls felt that they were good parents and they raised their children the way they thought was right.

Rex and Mary Walls were educated, had great imaginations and were free spirited people, but they had no common sense. I believe that they were mentally unstable and that’s one of the main reasons they approved of their lifestyle and choices. Being together Rex and Mary had no clue that they were enabling each other in their bad habits and in a sense were discouraging and abusing each other and like the saying goes, “misery loves company”. They both were homeless and comfortable visiting soup kitchens, dumpster diving and sleeping in churches and parks.

Jeannette and the rest of the family knew that Mary had inherited land in Texas years ago but had no idea it was worth millions and all those times of having no food, plumbing or electricity could’ve been prevented. All that money and land and you have to wonder why Mary chose for her family to struggle and suffer and she’s happy being homeless.

After years of abusing his body Rex Walls eventually died and Mary continued to live on the streets. Maureen had drifted in the wrong direction dabbling in drugs and moved to California and Jeannette, Lori and Brian all became successful with full lives.

I think Jeannette Walls wrote The Glass Castle at a time in her life where she felt it was right and by doing so she has allowed herself to be free from the past and can now focus on the future. The Glass Castle will encourage those people who have or are going through the same trials and tribulations that Jeannette Walls and her family encountered realize that you can overcome any obstacle and all your dreams can come true.