When I finished reading this book, I was amazed that the Walls children had survived through their childhood, having the type of parents that they had. When I think of parenting, it is more complex, such as making sure your children have well child visits with their pediatrician, constantly worrying about their safety, and helping them do well in school. I don’t think about feeding them, clothing them, or providing a home with water, and electricity. These things are a given. Anyone that has started a family would automatically know that they are required. I find it inhumane to start a family without the decency to want to always provide food, shelter, and utilities. I know that hunger in America is a growing problem today, especially with the downward economy, however any good parent would do whatever it takes to feed their children. Rex and Rose Mary are not good parents though, and should have never become parents. The Walls children, in my eyes, had to live through neglect and abuse, because hunger is grueling, and painful. We look at abuse as something that leaves bruises on the outside of a person, when we need to consider how a child feels when they have to go without the proper nourishment. Being hungry can affect everything in someone’s life. Jeanette deals with hunger her whole childhood, and the shame that comes with it. Although in the end it seems to make her stronger, she still lives with the memories of what her parents put her and her siblings through.

Starting when Jeanette was 3, she was already showing signs of hunger when she was cooking hotdogs by herself, which resulted in her dress catching on fire. Sitting in the next room painting, Rose Mary lacked the motherly instinct
to know that a 3 year old should not be cooking, I know that children will have
accidents that sometimes can’t be avoided, unfortunately for Jeanette, this could
have been avoided if her mother wasn’t so preoccupied with painting, but more
concerned with feeding her children.

The family moves from town to town, lacking any plans for the future. Every time they settle somewhere, Rex will go out for days drinking, while Rose
Mary paints away, not worried about any of their problems, especially not dinner.
When their situation is “better”, meaning when Rex is working some, their normal
means for food is, pinto beans, which they eat for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, or
sometimes if they are lucky, they might have a whole ham. Since they don’t own
a refrigerator, after about 4 or 5 days them ham went bad, and had maggots
crawling on it. Despite the maggots, Rose Mary urges Jeanette to still eat the
ham, “just slice off the maggoty parts,” she says. This to me is another form of
child abuse. Rose Mary should have found a way to feed her children better,
even if Rex doesn’t help her. It seems to me that since Rose Mary is okay with
eating ham with maggots in it, that she thinks it is okay for her children to do so
too. Not the case in the “real world”. Good parents want better for their children,
or at least food that won’t poison them.

Not only does hunger cause pain, it can cause humiliation. When the
family moves to Welch Virginia, the children struggle even more. Rex and Rose
Mary have completely given up. Rex is always out drinking, and Rose Mary
doesn’t even try to feed the children anything. Jeanette and Brian have to find
food on their own. They would pick crab apples and wild blackberries in the
summer. Certainly the most humiliating moments was when Jeanette would wait for others to throw away their leftovers from lunch in the trash can, and then she would retrieve them. Jeanette would find apples, cheese and crackers, hard boiled eggs, and half pint cartons of milk. Jeanette was terrified that she would get caught, and everyone in her class would find out that she was rooting through the trash for food. Brian and Lori were probably doing the same. When I think back to my own childhood, I remember always having confidence in my parents, and never worrying about where my next meal would come from, however, we were not poor, and my parents did care about me. In the case of Jeanette, her parents are void of normal parental duties, and put alcohol and painting ahead of their own children.

Throughout this book I constantly struggled with the idea that Rex and Rose Mary were allowed to raise these children. He is a raging alcoholic, with violent tendencies, and Rose Mary blocks out all problems and neglects her children their whole childhood lives. It truly disturbs me that nobody, not a teacher, or a neighbor, tried to help these children, or at least report the abuse to the authorities. If that kind of abuse and neglect happened now, the children would have been removed from the home and put into foster care. Even though Jeanette survived through it, and became successful, so many different accidents could have happened. It is a true story that makes the reader think “what if” through the whole book. At the end, this story did enlighten me to the fact that hunger is out there, in our own country. It can be our very own neighbors. This book opened my eyes to the signs of starvation and
mistreatment, so that I will know when it is time to be of assistant to others. Now that I have read this book, I want to make sure that I donate to food drives, and that I try to help out my neighbors, or anyone in need. It would be worth something at least, if this book inspires others to be better parents, and do more for their community. Our country is full of people who live in their own little worlds, never considering what less fortunate Americans might have to go through.