

The Glass Castle Hunger Analysis

Throughout the childhood of Jeannette Walls, she recalls back on some times where she was going hungry, not just her but also her entire family. Walls and her other siblings would struggle and do anything for food. Walls also looks back on the moments when there was food and money to spend on food. Whenever there was food, it seemed as if everything was going right in her and her family's lives; those were her greatest moments and instances in her childhood. However, whenever there was not food, she would struggle and scrape by. Her insecurities about going hungry led her to not reach out or tell anyone, but rather resort to methods such as stealing or earning a little bit of money herself in which seemed normal to her at the time. There were even instances in which Jeannette and her brother, Brian, would go dumpster diving looking for some food. Food was almost always a problem in the childhood of Jeannette Walls and her siblings, and their food insecurity led them to resort to methods that no child should ever have to do or endure.

Going back to Jeannette's earliest memory of hunger that she wrote in her book, *The Glass Castle*, she states, "We were sort of like the cactus. We ate irregularly, and when we did, we'd gorge ourselves. (22)" This is the first instance in the book that one might become aware that she went through long periods of starvation and scraping by. Walls uses imagery and a sort of opposite personification to show that her family showed the attributes of a cactus. Which a cactus will endure long periods of drought and then when it rains, will suck up all the water that is can get. Sort of like the Walls family, enduring long periods of hunger and then gorging themselves whenever there is food. Jeannette goes on to talk about how their family would eat whatever they could get their hands on, "Once when we were living in Nevada, a train full of cantaloupes heading east jumped the track. I had never eaten a cantaloupe before, but Dad brought back crates and crates of them. (22)" and also "One time in California, the grape pickers went on strike. The vineyard owners let people come pick their own grapes for a nickel a pound. We drove about a hundred miles to the vineyards, where the grapes were so ripe they were about to burst on the vine in bunches bigger than my head... For weeks afterward, we ate green grapes for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. (22)" In contrast, one could say that this was a good time in Jeannette's childhood. She and her siblings were eating food for weeks straight and not going hungry. One could also say that this isn't a good way for a child to live. Eating the same exact

fruit for all three meals a day for weeks straight does not supply all the nutrients that a child needs to grow and thrive.

Moving a little further into *The Glass Castle*, Jeannette shares an experience in her life where she and her family lived in Las Vegas and were living large. “At the end of the day, Dad came to get us, his pockets full of money. He bought us cowboy hats and fringed vests, and we ate chicken-fried steaks in restaurants with ice-cold air conditioning and a miniature jukebox at each table. (32)” Here, it seems like a normal childhood going on. The Walls family is not worrying about food and able to go out to eat and purchase gifts and accessory items. All is well and great. Moving a little further into this section, “Dad told us we were having something special for dessert - a flaming ice-cream cake. The waiter wheeled out a tray with the cake on it, and the woman with the gloves lit it with a taper. Everyone stopped eating to watch... Everyone started clapping, and Dad jumped up and raised the waiter’s hand above his head as if he’d won first prize. (32)” Walls uses imagery again here to show that this was a fantastic time in her life. They were living luxurious, and having incredible foods that she only could’ve imagined eating due to their poorness and struggling to get a full stomach. Even the father of the Walls family was overly excited about having such a treat as he raises the waiter’s hand and acts like he won first prize in something big. Jeannette Walls is able to describe in great detail this moment of her childhood because it seems like it is one of the happiest memories, food is good so life is good.

Later on, some other experiences occur with food. Except this time, things aren’t good and hunger is a real problem. Walls goes on to talk about food being problem and shows how she felt about it. “I didn’t go hungry. Hot lunch at school cost a quarter and we could usually afford that. (110)” Here one can see how Walls felt about “usually” being able to afford a hot lunch at school. She states that she didn’t go hungry but that was because usually, not all the time, her family could muster up a quarter to spend for her meal. It may have been a while ago, but a quarter for a lunch is not that costly at all. Jeannette almost seems like at this point in her life it was normal for her to go without meals and not have the little amount of money it cost to purchase a school lunch. “One afternoon when Brian and I came home to an empty fridge, we went out to the alley behind the house looking for bottles to redeem. (110)” Continuing on with Jeannette’s struggle with hunger, here she basically states that she did what she had to do to get by. She did what no child should have to do: earn their own money to be able to get something in their stomach. A parent should be responsible for feeding their children, not the children being responsible for their own food. “We pigged out on chocolates, and from then on, whenever mom was too busy to make dinner or we were out of food, we’d go back to the dumpster to see if any new chocolate was waiting for us. (110)” Walls uses a couple of key words here to indicate how she felt about going and looking in a dumpster for leftover/gone bad chocolate. She says that she and Brian would go to the dumpster to look for chocolate whenever her mom was too busy to make dinner or there was no food. A mother should never be too busy to feed her children and

Walls clearly was annoyed by it but hiding her feelings. She acts as if she didn't care when typing this part, but the purpose of her putting that in there was because she was upset and annoyed that she had to resort to dumpster diving for food.

Food was almost always a problem in the childhood of Jeannette Walls and her siblings, and their food insecurity led them to resort to methods that no child should ever have to do or endure. Throughout the childhood of Jeannette Walls, she recalls back on some times where she was going hungry, not just her but also her entire family. She used her words in her novel and show her moments where she connected with food, both good and bad. Walls went through some major hardships without food and scraping by; she showed her insecurities about it by using words and tones to show the meaning of her text. In conclusion, no child should ever have to grow up early and do the things Walls did to get something in her stomach and to survive. No parent should ever be how they were to Jeannette and her siblings and let them manage getting meals by themselves.

