

The Glass Castle Essay
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“Everyone has something good about them,” she said. “You have to find the redeeming quality and love the person for that.” (Walls, P144)

From *The Glass Castle* by Jeannette Walls

As kids, almost everyone has had an experience of listening to the life stories of some heroic figures, successful people, or of their own parents. Usually, the stories include a struggle, a resolution, and possibly, a lesson. It is not unusual to see a person who is facing troubles, or even experiencing it personally. However, some people thrive after what they have been through, while some people collapse due to the struggle, and never got up. What is it that causes the difference? Are certain problems just harder to overcome than the others? In the memoir *The Glass Castle* by Jeannette Walls, the main character, Jeannette, encounters various problems in terms of her relationships with other people throughout her childhood. At first, just like any other children, she complains in front of others, in hopes of getting support, but Jeannette’s mother, Rose Mary Walls, tells her that she should show more compassion. As she grows up and becomes more mature, Jeannette works to follow the guidance of her mother whenever she is faced with a problem. Throughout the course of the novel, Jeannette turns from an immature kid who does not want to appear vulnerable, and therefore always tries to act tough in front of those who might hurt her, to an adult who learns that resilience does not refer to a tree that never bends even in the strongest wind, but to the field of grass that know to bow down while the wind blows, so they can bounce back up immediately after the blast. Jeannette shows readers that resilience is gained by showing empathy through the process of attempting to understand the ones that bring you pain, and trying to forgive them for their mistake.

Billy Deel moves to Battle Mountain, where the Walls family lives at the time, right after Jeannette’s eighth birthday. Even though Jeannette mentions that she is secretly happy about Billy’s desire to be her boyfriend, there is no doubt that Billy is a source of dismay to Jeannette. When Billy shows her the scene of his father peeing his own pants, and when he compares his father to Rex, Jeannette gets exasperated. The strong bond between Rex and Jeannette is evident throughout the novel. At the age of eight, Jeannette loves and respects her father immensely. Therefore, it is understandable that she would do anything to defend Rex at this point. However, being only eight years old, Jeannette’s way of dealing with the problem is merely trying to out-talk Billy. This is when Jeannette’s mother, Rose Mary, tells her that she is a fortunate child, and therefore should show more compassion towards those who face struggles in life, such as a juvenile delinquent like Billy. Empathetic in nature, Jeannette is not able to hate Billy, and eventually decides to be his friend. However, Billy betrays her effort by sexually assaulting her and humiliating her in front of her friends. When Jeannette declares that she no longer wants to be his friend, Billy shouts out, “Guess what?... ‘I raped you!’” (Walls, Pg. 87). By shouting back “Big deal!” (Walls, Pg.87) without even knowing what it means to be raped, Jeannette shows readers that at this point of her life, resilience simply means to be undefeatable to her. This is the time when Jeannette still thinks that she should never show any

vulnerable side of her, and the time when she categorizes those who are unkind to her as her enemies.

Jeannette's understanding of resilience continues to develop as the Walls family moves from Battle Mountain to Phoenix, then finally, to Welch. Although it is not the first time that Jeannette has gotten into fights, the bullying in Welch has casted shadows on Jeannette's school life for her last two years in elementary school. The significance of the bullying in Welch is that Jeannette is only targeted because she is different. The bullying, however, has helped Jeannette in becoming a more resilient person. This can be seen when Jeannette mentions that she has tried to make sense of Dinitia. Instead of merely accepting the fact that she is not welcome to the other kids, Jeannette starts wondering why. She begins to do what her mother has told her to ----- showing compassion. She tries to put herself into Dinitia's shoes, rather than just feeling miserable whenever she thinks about the beatings and think that Dinitia is a bad person for doing what she does. It is because of Jeannette's effort to understand Dinitia that later on, when Dinitia decides to be kind to her, Jeannette is able to let go of the negative emotions, and does not hold grudges against her. Judging from the reason why Dinitia has decided to stop bullying Jeannette, it can be concluded that if Jeannette has chosen to believe that Dinitia is a bad person, it is highly possible that she would have thought that the rest of the people in Welch are the same, since the bullying started due to the fact that she is different. As a result, she would have not considered being kind and helping the little kid, who happens to be Dinitia's neighbor, and the bullying would have just continued because she would have continued to appear as if she thinks she is superior to the others. Therefore, it is evident that Jeannette has made the right choice in trying to be empathetic towards Dinitia, and that her empathy has led to both the resilience in her personality and the relationship between her and Dinitia, which leads to the morning in the pool, where she finally feels truly accepted.

It will not be difficult to agree to the statement that Jeannette has had a tough and difficult childhood. One can also easily conclude that her tough childhood has contributed to her success later on in her life, that because she has gain resilience from her experiences as a child, she is able to overcome the difficulties that she faces as she becomes an adult. Rex, Jeannette's father, is the parent that Jeannette is deeply related to. He has once declared Jeannette to be his favorite child; and Jeannette, as a kid, has always thought that Rex is the best man in the world, just like how most little girls think of their fathers. However, as Jeannette grows older, she starts to realize the faults in her seemingly perfect father. Starting from his alcoholism, Jeannette continues to discover the shortcomings of her father, and begins to believe that Rex is, in reality, not a good father. But due to their intimate relationship, Jeannette has always tried to either defend him, or to understand him. However, when the family lives in Welch, Rex has gone so far as to use Jeannette to earn money, and beating her knowing that she actually has said the right thing. This is the point where Jeannette feels a sense of betrayal towards Rex, and when she has decided to leave for New York. Jeannette certainly does not like the fact that Rex has repeatedly attempted to use her for his own benefit, but due to the fact that they are, or used to be, in such close relationship, Jeannette can not bring herself to hate him. On the day that Jeannette leaves Welch, however, she realizes that she has stepped into

Rex's shoes. Making the same decision to never come back, Jeannette can see how Rex feels defeated when he has to return to the place that he has desperately wanted to leave from. Jeannette also realizes, at this point, that despite of what Rex has done to her, he does truly love her. This can be proven by the quote "It seemed to make him feel like he was doing what a father should, plucking up his daughter's courage, helping her face the terrors of the unknown" (Walls, Pg.240). These understandings later lead to Jeannette's ability to reconcile with Rex. Even though Jeannette has tried to conceal her past, thinking that it is necessary for her to gain success, she is never able to shake off the influences that her parents or her childhood has had on her, and has felt sorry for not being able to help her parents out. When she finds out about Rex's imminent death, the knowledge that "he loved me in a way no one else ever had" (Walls, Pg.279) gives her the ability to reconcile with her father, so there is no regret. Had Jeannette not been empathetic and hated her parents for not keeping their promises of building the Glass Castle, which symbolizes hope and dreams, she would not have been able to forgive the shortcomings of her parents as parents, and reconcile with Rex before he dies. Jeannette's empathy ends up keeping the strong bond between her and her father, and has led to her resilience to face her past and the birth of this touching memoir.

Resilience is not about the idea of a tree, standing tall and straight when the wind blasts. Because when the wind begins to blow even harder and harder, and as the tree growing wearier and wearier, eventually the trunk of the tree will snap. When facing difficulties, one should act like grass, that bends in whatever direction that the wind blows, but is always able to stand back up immediately. Through the memoir *The Glass Castle*, the author and main character Jeannette Walls suggests that when confronting with a struggle in a relationship with someone else, instead of hating the person and blaming them for all the pain, if one can try to understand the reason behind the other person's action, and forgive them for what they did, one can gain resilience both in the relationship, and in their personality, which will help them get through other difficulties that they may face in the future.