

# 'Glass Castle' author, Jeannette Walls, recalls difficult past wearing a smile

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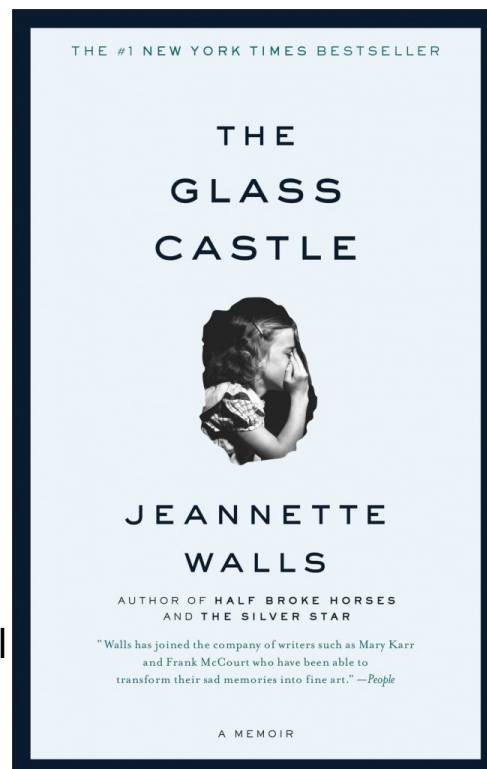
"Life is the greatest inspiration there is," author Jeannette Walls said. "There's always a story behind what we see."

This is the essence of the childhood Walls described in her memoir "The Glass Castle," which was the required reading for incoming freshmen this fall as part of the Buckeye Book Community.

Walls spoke at Mershon Auditorium on Tuesday to an auditorium of students, faculty and fans all eager to hear the author's insight on her unconventional upbringing.

"The Glass Castle" tells the story of Walls and her siblings' life with parents who were loving yet negligent, inspiring and yet irresponsible. Although her family dynamic didn't lead to an easy childhood, Walls maintained she does not wish her life had gone any differently.

"(I) wouldn't change a thing about myself," she said to the audience. "It all depends on your perspective. That's what life is about."



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Some student readers said Walls' perspective and outlook on life made her a role model in how to make the most of any situation. Walls' childhood was riddled with a number of trying circumstances, including an alcoholic father and a grandmother who took sexual advantage of Walls' brother.

"She went through so much and she's still so positive about everything," said Haylee Brown, a first-year in zoology. "It's so crazy that somebody who's so well off now can go through something as terrible as she went through and then look at it as a blessing."

Beyond simply retelling her story in the book, Walls turned many memories that could seem like nightmares into light-hearted anecdotes. It was a habit some students appreciated.

"I thought it was kind of funny that she can laugh at all the bad things that happened and she just looks at it as a humorous event in her life even though it's something that to other people would be tragic," said Erika Moore, a first year in exploration.

Whether she was recounting the crazy antics of her now 80-year-old mother's continued endeavors at being a respected artist or her own life mishaps, the author's smile did not once leave her face. Yet for as much humor as there was heartache, "The Glass Castle" aims to connect people to those whose life experiences seem to exist in different worlds, Walls said.

"We all put up these facades and then storytellers get behind the facades and behind the stereotypes," Walls said. "So many of us have stories and so many of us hide those stories."

Although she's open about her experiences today, Walls hid her story nearly all her life before writing "The Glass Castle" over a decade ago. The memories were vivid, but she said writing the book did not come easily, and

neither did describing her parents.

“How do you explain these incredibly complicated people who are so brilliant on the one hand and so giving on the one hand and on the other hand are neglectful?” Walls asked. “Certainly they do not play by the roles of society.”

When writing a book with so much emotion and history, Walls said having the right perspective is key.

“I tried to write it when I was younger ... and I couldn't do it. I don't think I had enough perspective,” Walls said. “I wrote the first version in six weeks and then I spent five years rewriting it, trying to be honest and trying to figure out, what is the story.”

Walls' candor with her audience regarding her past is one quality some fans held dear, and audience members recognized this unabashed openness.

“I was just surprised the way she spoke so candidly and openly about her family and about her mom and dad,” said Jacqueline Roussos, a first-year in health and rehabilitation sciences. “(Speaking about it) takes a really strong person.”

Walls said she has always strived to be honest with her readers and make sure her work represents truth.

“The thing I keep coming back to is authenticity,” she said. “I think readers are so smart and the minute (a book) starts ringing not true and phony (they) throw it out the window. It has to feel true.”

This sincerity is what many students found so endearing about both “The Glass Castle” and Walls' address.

“It was really refreshing to see she’s not a fake author,” said Molly Ciszewski, a first-year in exploration. “She’s actually real and seems genuine.”

A standing ovation followed the author’s speech.

“One of the blessings of my childhood is I’m a fighter and a scrapper,” Walls said. “There’s no shame in falling and needing a hand to get up. I think we’re all stronger than we realize.”