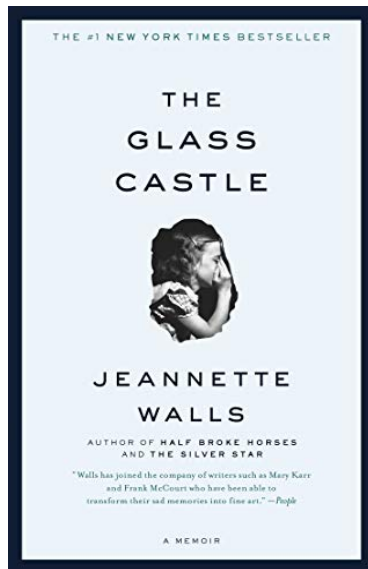


## #1 Book Summary: The Glass Castle, by Jeannette Walls

by Allen Cheng

<https://www.allencheng.com/the-glass-castle-memoir-summary-jeannette-walls/>



*The Glass Castle* is the harrowing tale of Jeannette Wall's life growing up in poverty with wayward parents. Jeannette and her siblings were often left to fend for themselves as their parents engaged in alcoholic binges or flights of fancy. The siblings ultimately resented their parents' neglect and became independent, moving far away.

Following the Walls family through the desert to the coal-mining region of West Virginia to the fast-paced life of New York City, this memoir explores the nature of family, loyalty, and tragedy and what it takes to survive together and apart.

### 1-Page Summary of The Glass Castle

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**what it takes to survive together and apart.**

## **Father Knows Best**

Rex Walls was a smart but unruly patriarch. He was a former Air Force pilot and had vast knowledge of science, physics, and engineering. He was known as a man who could fix everything and talk his way out of anything. These traits should have added up to success for Rex and his family, but his inability to settle down and follow the rules added up to the opposite.

**During Jeannette's early childhood, Rex moved the family around the desert like a traveling circus.** They'd stop in one small cowpoke town after another, set up a life for a few weeks to months, then pack up and start again somewhere else. Rex said they had to keep moving to stay ahead of the law, which was always on his tail, or wealthy businessmen who wanted to steal his ideas. Rex fancied himself an inventor and always had some scheme or another that was sure to help him strike it rich. In reality, Rex was simply dodging bill collectors.

**Striking it rich was Rex's goal, as was being able to build the Glass Castle for his family, a sprawling home made completely of glass and powered by solar energy.** He carried the blueprints everywhere the family went, and Jeannette and her siblings would help him design it.

Jeannette believed in her father and his plans for the future, but until those plans came to fruition, she and her family suffered.

## **Fend for Yourself**

Jeannette's siblings—an older sister, Lori, a younger brother, Brian, and later, a baby sister, Maureen—were often left to their own devices for sustenance. Their mother, Rose Mary, had a lifelong dream of being an artist and spent most of her time painting and what little money she had on art supplies. **Rose Mary's art was her priority, even over feeding her children.**

This priority is what led three-year-old Jeannette to cook hot dogs by herself if she was hungry. She'd stand on a stool and stir the hot dogs in boiling water on the gas stove. One day, while Rose Mary painted in the next room, Jeannette's dress caught on fire. The flames consumed half of her little body, and she received skin grafts at the hospital. **\*\*Her parents didn't believe in western medicine, and after six weeks, Rex showed up and kidnapped her from the burn unit. \*\*He said they were checking out Rex Walls style.**

Rex could never hold down a job for very long. He either quit or was fired for fighting with his superiors. He was an alcoholic and drank much of the family's money away. With Rex drunk and unemployed most of the time and Rose Mary focused on her art, there was never much money or guidance in the Walls household.

All throughout her childhood, Jeannette and her siblings staved off starvation. She would rifle through garbage cans at school for discarded lunch items or forage for whatever she could find on the streets. On the rare occasions that there was food in the house, the family would gorge until it was gone. **There was no sense of management or rationing when it came to food in her home, and by the end of every**

**month, she'd be back to rummaging for garbage.**

## **Survival of the Fittest**

Jeannette and her siblings surmounted great adversity in their lives to become stable professionals. Not only were they always hungry, but they were also always too poor to afford clothes, shoes, and other necessities, like toothpaste, heat, and running water. **The children were also victim to many close calls with their safety along the way.**

For instance, when Rex and Rose Mary moved the family from Blythe, California to Battle Mountain, Nevada, the kids were forced to ride in the back of the U-Haul truck their parents had rented. On the trip, the doors to the storage cab flew open, and the children were almost sucked out as Rex barrelled down the highway without noticing.

On another occasion, Jeannette fell out of the family's car while driving down the highway. She sat on the side of the road for what felt like hours waiting for her parents to notice she was gone and come back for her. When they finally did, the family had a good laugh about it.

Jeannette was also the target of bullying and aggression often. In one location out west, a group of older girls beat her up after school. At another school in West Virginia, she was beat up every day for being poor and dirty. In Battle Mountain, a delinquent child took a liking to Jeannette and tried to sexually assault her when she was eight years old. After she got away, the boy came to her house and shot at her and her siblings with a BB gun at close range.

**Her parents never took these incidents very seriously, and Jeannette and her siblings grew close as they looked out for each other and kept each other safe.**

## **Family Drama**

Rex and Rose Mary fought often. Once, Rex tried to run down a pregnant Rose Mary with his car in the desert after they'd argued about how far along she was. There was the time Rose Mary and Rex argued about money and whose responsibility it was to support the family. The fight was so loud, it brought out the entire neighborhood and ended with Rose Mary dangling from an upstairs window after she tried to jump out.

**There were also times when the fights were started by Rex after stumbling home drunk.** He'd scream at the kids and destroy the house, and often, he became violent and threatening to Rose Mary. For example, after the family had moved to a house in Phoenix that Rose Mary had inherited, Rex broke all of the family heirlooms and threw Rose Mary on the ground. They each grabbed a knife, but within minutes, they were laughing and back in love.

Rex's drinking caused many problems for his family, but there were a few stints of sobriety along the way, such as when Jeannette told him her birthday wish was for him to stop drinking. He detoxed in an upstairs bedroom and stayed sober for a couple of months, but he always fell off the wagon.

**After the family moved to Rex's hometown of Welch, West Virginia, his drinking became a full-time job.** The town was small and blue collar, and the family lived in a dilapidated house on the side of the hill. The family would stay in that house until each child eventually packed up and moved to New York City as teenagers. But over the years, the house had fallen down around them. By the time Jeannette left for New York at seventeen, the only way in or out of the house was through the back window.

## **A Fresh Start**

Lori and Jeannette couldn't wait to get out of Welch and away from their parents. Lori was a talented artist and moved to New York City after graduating from college. She found a job, took art classes, and saved money for an apartment. **\*\*A few years later, no longer able to take her mother's indifference and laziness and Rex's destructive behavior, Jeannette moved after her junior year and joined her sister. \*\***Brian would follow a year later, and Maureen a few years after when she was twelve.

In New York, the Walls children moved forward and started to make something of their lives. Jeannette had found a penchant for journalism back in high school. After a year of interning at a low-level newspaper in Brooklyn, she enrolled at Barnard College and took a job as an editorial assistant for a high-profile magazine. Brian was training to become a police officer, Lori was working as an illustrator for a comic book company, and Maureen was attending public school in Midtown.

Not long after Maureen left home, Rex and Rose Mary followed their children to New York. They stayed with Lori for a while and lived in a van for a few months, but eventually, they became homeless. **\*\*Despite all of their children's efforts to try to help them, Rex and Rose Mary liked the freedom of homelessness. It was another adventure for two adventure junkies. \*\***

Jeannette radiated with shame about the way her parents lived. She felt guilty, embarrassed, and burdened, and she struggled to find contentment with her life, even after marrying a wealthy man and moving into a swanky Park Avenue apartment. Her career had taken off after college, and she was part of the New York social scene, writing columns about the comings and goings of high society. Whenever someone asked about her background or parents, she lied.

## **The Ride Comes to an End**

All of the Walls children were adults and thriving in their chosen professions, all but Maureen. **Maureen had never truly fit into the family because of how much younger she was than the other children, and she struggled to find direction in New York.** She dropped out of college, moved into a tenement building where her parents were squatting, and eventually was sent to a mental hospital in Upstate New York after stabbing Rose Mary. When she was released, she moved to California and never came back.

During one winter in New York, Rex contracted tuberculosis and was hospitalized for six weeks. **\*\*He was sober again for the first time since Phoenix and moved Upstate to get off the streets and stay that way. \*\***But Rose Mary didn't want to be alone when winter rolled around again, so he moved back to the city and regained his old habits. All of the drinking and smoking finally caught up to him, and he died at the age of fifty-nine.

Without their patriarch, the Walls family became estranged. Brian got married, had a daughter, and became a detective in the NYPD. Jeannette divorced her first husband, remarried, and moved Upstate to a large farmhouse, where she wrote this book. Five years after Rex's death, the family came back together to celebrate Thanksgiving, minus Maureen. **They reminisced about their wild past and agreed that life with Rex Walls was never dull.** At this, at least, they all could finally agree.

## **Full Summary of The Glass Castle**

### **Introduction: A Familiar Face**

**Jeannette Walls saw the unmistakable image of her mother digging through trash one March night.** Wind whipped down the streets of New York City. It had been months since Jeannette had seen her mother. She was in a taxi dressed up for a fancy party, and her mother, Rose Mary, stood fifteen feet away.

Rose Mary's hair was worn, mussed, and gray, and she was thin with sunken features. For a second, Jeannette remembered other images of her mother—swan diving off cliffs, painting landscapes, reading Shakespeare to Jeannette and her siblings.

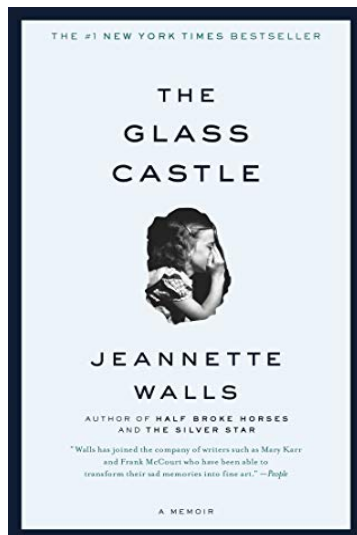
When Rose Mary glanced up, Jeannette ducked below ...

**---End of Preview---**

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