



House Rules

Rachel Sontag

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A compelling, at times horrifying work that is impossible to put down, **House Rules** will stand beside **Running With Scissors** and **The Glass Castle** as a memoir that cracks open the shell of a desperately dysfunctional family with impressive grace and humour.

Rachel Sontag grew up the daughter of a well-liked doctor in an upper middle class suburb of Chicago. The view from outside couldn't have been more perfect. But within the walls of the family home, Rachel's life was controlled and indeed terrorized by her father's serious depression. In prose that is both precise and rich, Rachel's childhood experience unfolds in a chronological recounting that shows how her father became more and more disturbed as Rachel grew up.

A visceral and wrenching exploration of the impact of a damaged psyche on those nearest to him, **House Rules** will keep you reading even when you most wish you could look away.

In the middle of the night, Dad sent Mom to wake me. In my pajamas, I sat across from them in the living room.

I was sure Grandma had died and I remember deciding to stay strong when Dad told me.

"What did you say to her?" he asked. His elbows rested in his lap.

"What do you mean?"

"You spent a good half hour alone in that hospital room. What did you talk about?"

"I don't know, Dad"

"What do you mean, you don't know? You know. You know exactly what you talked to her about."

"You talked about me, Rachel."

"No. I didn't."

"To my own mother?"

. . . .

I wondered how he'd been with Mom, how she'd missed the signs. He couldn't have just turned crazy all of a sudden. I wondered if his own father had infected him with anger. But mostly, I wanted to know what he saw in me that caused him to break up inside. Was it in my being born or in my growing up?

--from **House Rules**

House Rules Details

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From Reader Review House Rules for online ebook

Anne Ross says

Definitely a painful read--the cruelty was suffocating. The writing was magical, and the narrator's present-day perspective lent much to interpreting the events. Extremely well done!

Tari says

This book was amazingly, brilliantly written and recounts a childhood consisting of cruelty and emotional abuse. It is a perfect illustration of the devastating yet subtle effects of abuse that is psychological but not physical, and that exists in a life of so-called privilege. It also speaks to the resiliency and strength that exists in Rachel to find a way out and reclaim herself. This book is heartbreaking to read, but I couldn't put it down. Then again, I tend to love depressing memoirs.

Madeleine says

I have a tendency to annotate, underline and lovingly deface my reading material. I promised myself that I'd go easy on this one, settling for the less-permanently-marring dog-ear method when something really jumped out at me; otherwise, I'd be leaving a trail of graffiti that would render this memoir unreadable should I want to revisit it in the future. My reserve lasted for 21 pages: The line "I always wondered what gave Dad the right to decide this maid or that driver was the person he assumed them to be," after I recovered from the way it struck every vulnerable nerve I have, was the moment I realized that this was going to be an excruciatingly familiar story.

I haven't spoken to my parents in almost three years. Three years without my mother's toxic narcissism and my father's inflexible, controlling approach to life. Three years without pretending everything's okay and smiling through the outbursts that exposed a rage not even in the same universe as being proportional to the instigation. Three years without holidays turning into both battlegrounds and showcases of superficiality in equal measures (let me tell you about the Thanksgiving that my now-husband and I were kicked out of my parents' house after asking for help in paying for our wedding). Three years without my "bleeding-heart liberal" perspective trivialized or my feelings negated. In other words, these have been three of the most peaceful, enjoyable years I've ever known. I finally feel like I'm coming into my own as an adult because there is no one telling me how wrong I am and making me feel like a disobedient child every step of the way.

This is Rachel Sontag's story, of course, but I superimposed so much of my own on hers that it was impossible to separate the two by the time I arrived at the last page. Rachel's journey and mine didn't align precisely and perfectly, of course, but hers was the first that made me feel like someone, somewhere, gets it - hence this memoir reading like an understanding hug (which is still just as true as it is corny).

Because the bare necessities aren't enough for a child. Having things like a home and a full belly and both parents doesn't automatically equate to feeling swaddled in safety and security and love, as those necessary abstracts are not found in objects but in gestures. Attempting to manipulate a child into some predetermined parental ideal without showing any regard for her worth as an individual with her own wishes and aspirations

and potential by belittling and bullying her does not make her stronger: It makes her scared and instills in her a smattering of issues that are going to make the ordinary act of living a daily victory (and some therapist a little richer).

There are three main differences between Rachel's story and mine: She had some early inkling that things were not normal about her family dynamic, that adhering to a stringent set of rules was not the glue keeping most families together and that most daughters didn't live like even the slightest deviation from a father's ironclad commandments would set the end of the world in motion, whereas I hero-worshipped my father until some time after college; she had extended family present in her life to occasionally rescue her and call her father out on his impossible expectations or reconstructed realities, whereas my paternal family is far-flung and was never that involved with my nuclear family during the few years they lived nearby (and, besides, my father was always not speaking to at least one of his siblings at any given time) -- and I don't even know my maternal family, as the last contact I had with them was in the mid-'90s; and her mother was weak-willed, another target at the mercy of a tyrannical force (though she at least demonstrated the ability to say "I'm sorry," a phrase I've *never* heard my own mother deign to offer), whereas mine lives like people are supporting characters in her movie and only seemed interested in presenting a united front with my father when it offered an opportunity for tag-teaming a child into psychologically battered submission.

The dissimilarities of our childhoods were why I was able to tear through this memoir in less than 24 hours *without* being reduced to a wobbling puddle of tears and self-pity. They kept reminding me that, for as much as I hate my own parents, at least my mother never physically weighed me down so she could wallop me or my father never woke me up at ungodly-o'-clock in the morning to accuse me of slowly killing my sickly grandmother by unloading some imaginary bitterness on her.

But, as *Infinite Jest* had taught me, there is a crucial difference between identifying and comparing, and I did keep that in mind while reading this. Because while some kids would kill for Rachel's Cancun vacations and European excursions, all she wanted was to "feel like somebody's child." She was lonely and alone, which she realized at 15. I got caught up in the illusion of normalcy (with a healthy serving of denial on the side) for so long that it took some caustic blow-outs and nasty e-mails for Adult Me to finally see my parents for what they are rather than what I wished them to be and decide that I was better off without that poison in my life.

And even though Rachel and I didn't travel the same path, different issues manifested in similar ways. Her mother's problem can be distilled down to her vision of marriage being a way to fill the void her own lack of a paternal figure had left in her, effectively seeking a father in a husband, a childhood in her own children and the dad for her daughters that she never had, regardless of the emotional cost. Rachel considers the possibility that neither of her parents had fully matured before their forays into marriage and parenthood, which I've often thought about my own mother and father, who were married at 19 and 22, respectively. And I distinctly recall a childhood trip to Disney where my father told my brother and me that "this is like a second childhood for your mother, since she never got to do things like this" -- a comment that didn't seem terribly significant until many, many years later when I realized that my mother got married as an escape and finally accepted that having children would encourage my father to both stay with her and leave the place she was trying to flee.

Like Rachel, my parents didn't physically abuse me (I was spanked once, which made my ass involuntarily clench every time someone raised their voice for the next decade; Rachel's mother hit her a few times but that was just.... *sad* more than anything else) but they also never said they were proud of me, or supported my decisions or made me feel like I was anything other than another possession for them to exert control over. The difference between abuse and neglect (and how the two are equally as damaging in their own

ways) are explored subtly in this book until Rachel mentions a foster-care seminar she attended where the two extremes' end results were outright explained: "Neglected children feel invisible, as if their presence had no bearing on anyone or anything. Abused children feel all too visible, as if they were the center of everyone's world, because they had been the center of someone's world, the recipients of an abnormal amount of attention."

While Rachel clearly identifies with the abused-child personality, being her father's primary target (her younger sister, however, embodies much of the neglected child's symptoms), I feel it both ways. And that led me to a realization that a few years of unassisted but diligent psychological diggings hadn't yet unearthed: That I feel verbally abused but emotionally neglected. Rachel agonizes over whether a complete stranger she passes on a bus will be offended when she opts to sit next to another stranger, while I often feel the same way but then counter my inner turmoil with "... but who am I to think that I matter enough to be more than a forgotten blip on a perfect stranger's radar?"

Even after all the parental destruction, what hit me hardest was the efforts Rachel and her sister have made to repair their relationship, as they know they are the other's most understanding source of comfort. The last time my little brother and I talked, we had agreed that we both feel like lonely planets (I can't remember which one of us invoked the comparison but it was something we both felt illustrated the point well): There's nothing for us to orbit but we've picked up satellites in the form of friends and significant others along the way that make the loneliness easier to bear and, occasionally, we find ourselves in tandem trajectories along our self-propelled paths. It's still hard for me to see him as anything other than either the competitor my mother set him up to be (nothing like telling your kids which one was "better" that day and playing favorites to feed into sibling rivalry, eh?) or my failure as a big sister to shield him from the damage I didn't even see 'til years later, but his girlfriend is turning out to be just as good to him as she is for us. She's the sister I always wanted and the good-hearted guidance he's always needed, as well as the outside observer who made me realize that I miss the hell out of the only person who truly understands how fucked up it was growing up in the conditions we did. The little glimpses of Rachel and her sister slowly rebuilding their bond made me just as certain that this is something my brother and I can handle as it did reinforce my determination to never, ever have children because I fear ruining a child even more than I fear being attacked by spiders in the shower (which is to say, psychotically so).

Quite honestly, I am tired of writing this "review" and am a little more than emotionally wrung out from it -- no one's fault but my own, yes, but true nonetheless. I'll end this with the passage that I could have written myself but am so grateful that I didn't have to: "There were simple things I needed to learn. Things that seemed to be common sense for most of my friends.... I didn't know how to tell the truth. I'd become so accustomed to arranging my words around what I was supposed to say, or what I thought most people wanted to hear, that basic communications were almost impossible for me. Saying "no" when I didn't want to do something, admitting to my own mistakes, asking for the things I wanted."

(ETA: I think I'll give this one a more traditional review in the future -- Rachel's story deserves more attention than I gave it here -- but I had to purge myself of all the old feelings this book brought to the surface first.)

Kim says

I am not sure why I do this to myself - I seem unable to stop reading books about the screwed up situations

people grew up in. What is wrong with people that they treat their kids so strangely?

Rachel's dad is cruel and abusive in the weirdest way. What he does seems loving and protective and were it maybe 10% of what it is, he would've been a loving dad. Instead he was a crazy bastard who treated one daughter with no respect at all whiel pretendign to really respect her, and competely ignored the other daughter.

Rachel was accused of all sorts of things teenagers may possible be guilty of, but which she was not. and most of them, even if she were guilty, would not have been the end of the world.

This story shows what abuse can really be all about. Steve Sontag never hit Rachel, never physically abused her, gave her a good education and foreign holidays - but also made her repeat that she was shit,the scum of the earth, worthless and that she hated herself. He abused her in such an awful way that i am amazed she survived at all.

He is also funny and a doctor and on the outside, a great all round human being. Like so many abusers he never showed the puclic what was goin on behind closed doors. Inthis book, Rachel Sontag does.

Its a brave book which seems to be about a 'lesser' abuse because no bones were broken or bodies hurt - but which shows what awful power adults can have over children. And how easily that can be abused. There is no lesser abuse.

M says

Wow is this a trip. Sontag describes in painstaking - literally - detail the horrors she grew up with under the thumb of a controlling, abusive father who, while he never hit her, hurt her in far deeper ways, and her mother who refuses to take a stand. This read like a darker Glass Castle; at that, it read like a novel and I was deeply moved by the insight Sontag reaches as she gets through her nightmare.

As she paints a picture of a truly sick father, I kept wondering about Rachel's teachers, neighbors, friends' parents- where were they?? And yet I felt all the more troubled thinking of how many Rachel Sontags I personally teach, either not knowing or even hearing about her home life and sighing a deep sigh and cutting her more slack on her poor essays and then moving on with my life.

This was so beautifully written and just heart breaking, all the more given Sontag's amazing maturity. I did wonder how much of her retroactive telling was affected by her later insight as well as imperfect memory/adolescent drama, but for the most part this was gripping. Sontag describes the issues people who were abused encounter - if they were neglected, they proceed to always feel invisible, whereas abused children experience severe narcissism in thinking that people focus on them much more than they actually do. I have seen this for myself and it was fascinating to see it in her personal account.

I am still on the fence about this whole gut spilling phenomenon- Sontag herself says she could not live without sharing this, but I wonder why that is? On the one hand it is not only cathartic but i imagine a real gift to people who suffered similarly, but at the same time it is bothersome as well, that I was so privy to such intimate and painful stories. It made it hard to rate this, as well, much in the way that when my students write personal essays I am flummoxed as to how to mark poorly written yet very touching stories. It feels cheap somehow.

All that aside - I strongly recommend this book. For all that Sontag gets preachy and is the hero of her own story, it is a powerful one and while disturbing, worthwhile.

Kim Brittingham says

For anyone who's been on the receiving end of emotional abuse from a less-than-stable parent, *House Rules* is something of a comfort. It's a reminder that you're not the only one who understands that abuse doesn't always leave a child black-and-blue -- at least not in a physical sense. And for those of us who've decided life is better without a dysfunctional parent in it -- and without regrets -- Sontag's memoir reaffirms our choice. Sometimes, estrangement really is the healthiest thing. Equally fascinating as the book itself is Sontag's father's response in the form of his personal web site at [sontaghouserules dot com](http://sontaghouserules.com). Where Sontag's father hopes to convince the world that *House Rules* is a malevolent misrepresentation of life in an idyllic suburban home, his obsessive, irrational and paranoid catalog of Sontag's childhood letters, mementos and photographs only serves to reinforce (and keenly so) the portrait Sontag paints of her father.

Jaime says

This memoir illustrates the emotional abuse the author suffered at the hands of her father. Steve Sontag was sick--that's obvious. He was the ultimate manipulator, playing mind games and challenging Rachel to bouts of emotional "chicken." What I found most bothersome, however, was her mother's uncanny ability to stand by and watch her husband inflict this mental abuse on her own daughter. Actually, I was disgusted by it.

I also found Rachel's attitude toward the abuse unbelievable. Mostly, she stood by and humored her father when he was on one of his ridiculous tirades. Even as a young girl, Rachel held strong; she rarely cried and was able to easily (in her mind) remove herself far from the situation occurring right before her eyes.

I feel bad that Rachel had to grow up in such a stern and rigid environment; however, I just couldn't get into this book or its characters. Half way through the book, I was already planning what I'd read next, and I was both happy and relieved when the book concluded.

Lydia Presley says

Imagine you are a young teenage girl. Imagine you had just been in an accident through no fault of your own, or your mother's (the driver). Imagine you are standing outside of the car, speaking to the police, with your home just down the road, and your mother sends you to get your father. Your kidneys are bruised, you can feel the pain spreading through your stomach. Your father is a doctor, surely he can understand some of the shock and pain you are experiencing. Imagine you get your father - and find yourself in the position of being chastised, harshly, for leaving the scene of an accident. Now imagine being belittled, humiliated and made to apologize for something your mother had told you to go do. There was no excuse for Rachel, not in her father's eyes. She had broken one of his rules, and it was her action that she was, alone, responsible for.

While reading *House Rules* by Rachel Sontag I found myself constantly comparing her story to the story of Jeanette Walls in *The Glass Castle*. While both Rachel and Jeannette had some of the same experiences (Both traveled extensively, Rachel on vacation, Jeannette out of necessity) those experiences were made completely different by the difference in wealth. Rachel never seemed to want for anything. She always had food, clothing a home and experiences most kids would love to have. Jeannette was often starving, without clothing or shoes and sometimes, without even a shelter over her head.

But the biggest difference between the two were their fathers. Both fathers were abusive in their own fashion. Jeannette's father, despite it all, loved his daughters. It's apparent that Jeannette felt this, even when things were at their darkest. He was sick, yes. He was neglectful, yes. But there were moments of brightness where the love he felt were made very apparent.

Rachel's father was not neglectful. He was abusive. There's no other word for it. Demeaning, belittling. Never physically abusive, but mentally horrifying. It's astonishing to me that Rachel was able to pull herself through the life he created in their home.

But despite the sickness of Rachel's father, the real "monster" to me in this book was Rachel's mother. A typical victim of abuse, she could never manage to take herself and her daughters from her husband. And my heart breaks when I think of how she broke her daughters heart over and over again by filling it with false hope.

This is one of those books I hate to rate with any type of star rating system. I didn't enjoy the book as I enjoyed something like Andrew Zimmern's Bizarre Truth. I didn't hate reading the book or I wouldn't have finished it. I felt saddened and hopeful for Rachel at the same time, and the story is an incredibly interesting one. I read through it quickly, and the pace never stops. I'm sure I'll be talking about this book to friends in the future, so for that reason alone I'm giving it four stars.

Jeanne says

ALA 2011 I can't believe that people have compared this memoir to Glass Castle. Sontag's father is a monster, but her writing style is whiny. It never seemed to me that Jeanette Walls was trying to make people feel sorry for her; she wasn't complaining about the way her family was--just describing it. The comparison to Running with Scissors is far more accurate.

Rhonda Rae Baker says

WOW...this is a memoir that everyone should read! Deeply moving and psychologically charged...I can't say enough good things about this story. It's real and life is real, this memoir will open your eyes. Whether you've been abused, neglected, or wondered what was going on in another person's family when you just know something is wrong...this will enlighten you and encourage you to break away or even help make a difference. Be sure to read a copy of this memoir that has the P.S. included...you'll want to read and read portions of the last half to make sure you've GOT it...absorbing everything that this young woman felt and forged through because she DID it...she broke free and is living her life as she chooses no matter what others think!

I know, from first-hand experience, what it is to live in a family and home that felt like PRISON for 28 years. It deeply injured me and even worse damaged my children! This memoir was so incredibly written and right ON in description as well as emotion of what goes on in dysfunctional families.

This memoir was so compelling that I simply could not put it down. As I read what happened within this family my own memories were surfacing...the deeper I traveled within the story, each page was read slower because I wanted to absorb the hope and encouragement another's life gave to me and for my children. I felt

every emotional scar and identified with the abused and the neglected.

Yes, a person that is neglected is totally invisible. A person that is abused is too visible. There is no way for anyone to come out of circumstances like this and be unmarked...but there IS hope.

Break yourself FREE...move forward and live your life for yourself! You have no one to answer to but yourself and you are not anyone else's puppet. Live your life full of integrity and honesty...never allow yourself to be manipulated by another person. The scars run deep and the identification a person feels with the one that abused you or neglected you may affect you for some time but there is liberty and victory to anyone that learns to be true to themselves.

I will be sharing this memoir with my children, I will re-read it again, my husband will learn from this, others that I know will benefit from this story, and we all can grow and learn together that we are valuable as well as important but more of importance is that we live our lives according to our own heart. We are never obligated to live in such a way that others will accept us. We are who we are and who we are meant to be and no other person has any right to expect us to act one way or another.

If you've felt trapped by your own past and want some insight as to how you can free yourself from those chains...read this memoir. You'll want to pass it along as I and you will find hope in breaking out of your cocoon and fly as the butterfly you were created to be. It won't be easy, as reading this memoir won't be easy...but your life could be changed for the better. You may carry the scars deep within but they will become your stronger parts and you can learn to be happy.

There are not enough words to say about this book. Rachel Sontag is my hero...she has encouraged me and I know now that I must write my story. I must get it out there in print. I must share this story so other members of my family can get their story out. My youngest daughter is my hero...she broke us all out...she was not afraid to tell the truth. Something that some of us had no idea was going on...yet something that others knew and couldn't step forward with because they didn't know how to face the realities of our prison! The road has been extremely difficult and I've often wondered if some of us weren't going to make it but now I know that we will...we all will. I have hope, I have reason to believe that no matter what circumstance or situation you've been in, you CAN overcome. You do not have to live your life feeling like there are chains that bind you. You can break free of this weight...WOW.

I know, from my own life that fantasies can and do come true...if you're stuck and don't know what to do, then maybe this book will give you the insight necessary to make that change and move forward...you can do it...you are special and you are your own person!

Jessica says

I think I have lost count on how many times I have been in trouble with my parents. I used to think that I was judged unfairly and quickly began to complain about how unfair life was. That is why "House Rules" by Rachel Sontag caught my attention. The main character, Rachel has always been verbally and mentally abused her father. She would have turned to her mother but her mom always agrees with her dad because she says it's an example she should set. Rachel is slowly growing up and learning how to defend herself from her dad. This leads to more drama and finally she decides to leave with a social worker. Finally, she decides to come back and stay until college. Rachel is then forced by her father to take a particular major. Will she agree or will she for the last time have an argument with her family and leave? I absolutely love this book

because it is so different and unique yet familiar to my own life's story. I would recommend this book to anyone who likes drama because the whole story is based on drama.

Bekki Fowell says

Slow & not as good as I was expecting, I feel bad in saying that because it is someone's autobiography, but I did not like this read.

Kayla Joy says

I did not enjoy this book. I felt like I read, read, read and I got no where in the book. There was no main event in the book, I felt like the author continuously just restated everything she already thought and felt. The only reason I kept reading the book is because I thought that there would be some type of climax in the book at some point, although it did not. This is the first time I read a book and I got to the end and did not feel sad for having finished it, reading this book felt like a huge waste of time. I've never finished a book and been like "wow that was a bad book".

Juliette says

I was going to give this memoir 2 1/2 stars, but then I started thinking about Catcher in the Rye and it bumped my rating up another half star. "If you really want to hear about it, the first thing you'll probably want to know is where I was born, and what my lousy childhood was like, and how my parents were occupied and all before they had me, and all that David Copperfield kind of crap, but I don't feel like going into it, if you want to know the truth. In the first place, that stuff bores me, and in the second place, my parents would have about two hemorrhages apiece if I told anything pretty personal about them. They're quite touchy about anything like that, especially my father." This is Holden Caulfield's first paragraph in Catcher in the Rye, and it really sums up what I think about Rachel Sontag's memoir. She grew up in a nice suburban home outside Chicago, and her dad was really controlling. He didn't beat her, or molest her, or deprive her of food/shelter/clothing/college/travel. He was a control freak and verbally abused her. Her mom did physically abuse her a few times, which seems to oddly go unmentioned in a lot of other reviews of this book. Her mom also seems to be quite codependent. Rachel Sontag's dad did have a virtual hemorrhage, and created a bizarre rebuttal website that includes pie charts about how much information he has from Rachel, odd bar graphs and time lines including how many nice vacations they took, and a lot of "deal with it!" type sentiments. What's really bizarre is that if you try to go to Rachel Sontag's website, it takes you automatically to her dad's website (SontagHouseRules) instead. I noticed that even the link from Harper Collins Publishing takes you to his website, which leads me to believe there was some sort of legal action instigated by her parents as part of a settlement to avoid a defamation/libel suit? If not, then it means Rachel (or Rachel and her dad?) created the site. Anyway, with all the he said/she said aside, this memoir is sort of slow and strange, and it seems like it all could have been avoided if Sontag's parents would just apologize for calling her worthless and wishing she had never been born. I'd say skip this one, unless Rachel Sontag writes a follow-up to this memoir. Also worth noting, she lists that she has an MFA in creative writing in her author bio, which made me suspect her memory in the writing of this memoir. Overall, I think most people, including Holden Caulfield, would find this book to be a bore.

Moira Russell says

A very good book, but no way would I compare it with *Running with Scissors*; it's far more hypnotic and harrowing, less jokey. Rachel Sontag's father never physically or sexually abused her, her sister or her mother; instead he went after them verbally with a ritual savagery night after night, while playing the part of a selfless doctor, devoutly religious man, and excellent father (trips to Europe and Cancun, wilderness and summer camps, &c &c) in the day. In effect and nearly in fact he imprisoned them, and this memoir is the story of Rachel's slow jailbreak out. Like all memoirs of this type, it trails off a little vaguely and the second half about young adulthood is nowhere near as mesmerizing as the first half detailing Rachel's childhood, but her writing has a quiet, vivid power and the book isn't junked up with pop therapy cliches.

And just in case you doubt Rachel's story or even think she might be exaggerating it a little, her father has put up a *completely batshit website* dedicated to "refuting" her book which instead horrifyingly confirms nearly everything she says. I have never seen anything like it in all my life. It's at sontaghouse.rules dot com. People react here <http://thehairpin.com/2011/07/you-may...> and here <http://www.metafilter.com/109621/All-...>

There's also a very interesting interview with her on UTU (despite a rather dickish host): Part 1, Part 2 What interested me was she said she got letters from people she didn't know, or hadn't seen in 20-25 years, who wrote to her agent saying her father had treated them the same way: family friends, family members, coworkers. My personal theory is that in this type of situation people go on about oh, we had no idea, such a professional, such a happy family, blahblah, *nobody knew*. Which is *bullshit*. Nobody had a clue about Ted Bundy! No, his girlfriend for one thing knew he disappeared for days at a time, faked plaster casts, &c. Nobody had a clue about Jerry Sandusky! Bullshit, Paterno knew at least as far back as 1998 Sandusky had molested children. The abuser covers up and terrifies the people he's abusing into not just not telling, but not being able to *tell themselves* what's going on, and the people who do maybe kinda suss out what's going on just don't know what to do. (It amazes me she was sent to a group home for abused girls by a social worker and then she just....went back home after a couple of months apparently. It *amazes me*.)
