

## I am a Penn Stater

July 31, 2012

I am a Penn Stater. I decided to go to Penn State the minute I stepped on to campus. I had visited many other schools, some big, some small, but the first thing that I noticed during my first visit to Penn State was the sense of pride and community between the students. Penn State sweatshirts were everywhere and I dreamed of wearing one myself. I had never heard of Joe Paterno, I had never seen a Penn State football game. I got student tickets my freshman year, because my mother told me it was an experience I wouldn't want to miss. My freshman year was amazing... we went undefeated. My next three years the team wasn't as successful, but the sense of community I felt on campus every day was unchanged. We were all Penn Staters regardless of what our football team was doing. It was more than football.

I had a brief conversation with Joe Paterno one day when my roommate and I ran into him at the Intramural Building. We gathered up the nerve to walk over and say "hello". He asked us where we were from, we nervously responded about our home towns... the entire conversation lasted less than two minutes, I am sure, and then, as we walked away he reminded us, "You girls work hard in school" and smiled.

It was an experience I will never forget... and it can't be taken away from me by the Board of Trustees, President Erickson, or the NCAA.

I find myself challenged while listening to the media's representation of my Penn State community. As I said before, I am a Penn Stater. Let me be clear... I am not a child molester. I do not condone or support child molestation. I do not think that anyone who in any way injures or abuses a child is above the law. I am a Penn Stater and proud of it and I do not think that the two are mutually exclusive.

I also do not worship football players or loosen my morals based on a football program. I never experienced that while at Penn State, I have never witnessed it since graduation. I do remember standing next to Kerry Collins during the homecoming parade my freshman year. I was star struck, I was young. He was the quarterback of the football team. He was a celebrity. Outside of that encounter I do not think I ever encountered any football players throughout the rest of my four years. I went to Penn State to get an education, and I got an excellent one.

Since graduating from Penn State I have devoted my career to helping others, in my role as a wife, a mother, a daughter, a physical therapist and as a US Army Reservist who voluntarily activated to Walter Reed Army Medical Center, a place where celebrities frequently visited. Unlike my chance encounter with Kerri Collins, I was more mature by then, and no longer in awe of their celebrity status. I was more in awe of the people I met and the stories that were told right there by the Service Members whom I had the honor to treat. I continue to find myself in awe of people who seem to look for the good in others and who stand up for what they believe.

I am not perfect. I have found myself in more than one situation as a mother, as a healthcare provider, or simply as a human being where I had to make a tough decision and did not have the benefit of a glass ball to look into and see possible outcomes. I have made decisions based on the information I had at hand, choosing the path I felt most comfortable with at the time. I haven't always been right and I have looked back upon decisions and wished I had done things differently. I can't imagine that anyone on this planet has not found themselves in similar situations.

I hope that if any of my decisions were ever called into question, that one might give me the benefit of the doubt that I was making the best decision I could and that I anticipated the best possible outcome. I hope that one would assume I had everyone's best interest at hand. I hope that I would be given that benefit based on what people know about my character.

Since the Sandusky scandal broke in November, I have joined my Penn State community in requesting and being stunned by the lack of due process for those accused of having a role in what has been described as a massive cover-up of information allegedly by individuals having firsthand knowledge of Jerry Sandusky's criminal behavior. I find it so hard to believe in my heart that these men could have truthfully known that Jerry Sandusky was abusing young boys and chose, not only to turn a blind eye, but to intentionally cover-up this behavior.

I do not know anything about Curley, Shultz or Spanier because those three men have not been the focus of any media attention. I do know a little about Paterno. I know he was a man who intentionally benched players for poor academic performance. I know he was a man who respected his players and would field senior year players over younger teammates that may have had more talent often to the dismay of the fans. I know he was a man who consistently was seen in press conferences saying things like "It's not about the record books," or "it's not about this award or that award"... he always seemed like such a genuine guy. I am not saying that it is impossible that I wasn't duped like everyone else. I support Paterno and continue to support Paterno not because I feel he was a god who is without sin. I support him, because the accusation that he intentionally participated in deception and a covering-up of information related to the heinous acts of Jerry Sandusky appears completely out of character.

Not only is it out of character, but it is actually inconsistent with statements made in the Grand Jury Statement (yes, I have read that). It is not supported anywhere in the Freeh Report (I have read that too) expect for Mr. Freeh's opinion-based summary of his vague findings.

Mr. Paterno (and Mistery Spanier, Curley, and Shultz), have been stripped of one of the basic rights of our society, a right that Mr. Sandusky WAS afforded. They were stripped of the right to stand up, speak for themselves and to defend the accusations against them. Furthermore, Mr. Paterno was not given the benefit of the doubt to hold judgment until proven guilty. It is for that reason that I believe the Penn State community feels beaten and attacked by the actions of the Penn State Leadership (removal of any sign of Paterno's very existence from the university), the NCAA and the Big Ten.

I am a Penn Stater. I am not a child molester, and I do not condone child molestation. I believe that Mr. Sandusky is a child predator and I am glad that the courts have held him accountable for his actions. I do think that we need to focus on the crime, focus on the victims, learn from this and move forward.

I do not think that the Penn State community needed the NCAA to tell them to become leaders in the fight against child abuse. I think the action of PSU for RAINN speaks for itself with donation of >\$500,000 of funds in less than one month and done completely voluntarily.

I do not think that the NCAA needs to tell Penn State to "change its culture" and "focus on academics". Joe Paterno's SUCCESSFUL "Grand Experiment" continues to boast high graduation rates. The NCAA may need Penn State to tell THEM how this is done so that other schools might benefit!

I am amazed and in awe of the character of some of the Penn State football players who were asked to accept without an opportunity to speak for themselves a very harsh punishment earlier this week. A punishment for a crime they did not commit and played no role in. I am amazed by those who were offered an opportunity to jump off a potentially sinking ship but who are still saying they will stay at Penn State. I am proud of fellow Penn Staters who are rallying together because WE ARE focused on Community, WE ARE focused on Academics, WE ARE going to remain strong, WE ARE learning from past mistakes, and GUESS WHAT SPORTS ILLUSTRATED.... WE ARE PENN STATE!!!!!!!

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