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Subject: Washington Post Story
TO: Members of the Board of Trustees

Attached for your information is Sally Jenkins' article re interview with Joe Paterno, as reported in The Washington Post.

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Paterno: ‘I didn’t know which way to go’

1. Sally Jenkins

Saturday, Jan 14, 2012

STATE COLLEGE, Pa. — Joe Paterno sat in a wheelchair at the family kitchen table where he has eaten, prayed and argued for more than a half-century. All around him family members were shouting at each other, yet he was whispering. His voice sounded like wind blowing across a field of winter stalks, rattling the husks. Lung cancer has robbed him of the breath to say all that he wants to about the scandal he still struggles to comprehend, and which ended his career as head football coach at Penn State University. The words come like gusts. “I wanted to build up, not break down,” he said.

Crowded around the table were his three voluble sons, Scott, Jay, David, daughter Mary Kay, and his wife of 50 years, Sue, all chattering at once. In the middle of the table a Lazy Susan loaded with trays of cornbread and mashed potatoes spun by, swirling fast as the arguments. “If you go hungry, it’s your own fault,” Paterno likes to say. But Paterno, 85, could not eat. He sipped Pepsi over crushed ice from a cup. Once, it would have been bourbon. His hand showed a tremor, and a wig replaced his once-fine head of black hair.

Paterno’s hope is that time will be his ally when it comes to judging what he built, versus what broke down. “I’m not 31 years old trying to prove something to anybody,” he said. “I know where I am.” This is where he is: wracked by radiation and chemotherapy, in a wheelchair with a broken pelvis, and “shocked and saddened” as he struggles to explain a breakdown of devastating proportions. Jerry Sandusky, his former assistant coach at Penn State from 1969 to 1999, is charged with more than 50 counts of sexually abusing young boys over a 15-year period. If Sandusky is guilty, “I’m sick about it,” Paterno said.

How Sandusky, 67, allegedly evaded detection by state child services, university administrators, teachers, parents, donors and Paterno himself, remains an open question. “I wish I knew,” Paterno said. “I don’t know the answer to that. It’s hard.” Almost as difficult for Paterno to answer is the question of why, after receiving a report in 2002 that Sandusky had abused a boy in the shower of Penn State’s Lasch football building, and forwarding it to his superiors, he didn’t follow up more aggressively.

“I didn’t know exactly how to handle it and I was afraid to do something that might jeopardize what the university procedure was,” he said. “So I backed away and turned it over to some other people, people I thought would have a little more expertise than I did. It didn’t work out that way.”

Former athletic director Tim Curley and school vice president Gary Schultz face charges of perjury and failing to report suspected child abuse, based on their inaction. They have pleaded innocent. Though he is not charged with a crime, Penn State president Graham Spanier was fired on Nov. 9, along with Paterno.

Paterno is accused of no wrongdoing, and in fact authorities have said he fulfilled his legal obligations by reporting to his superiors. Nevertheless, the university Board of Trustees summarily dismissed him with a late-night phone call four days after Sandusky's arrest. At about 10 p.m., Paterno and Sue were getting ready for bed when the doorbell rang. An assistant athletic director was at the door, and wordlessly handed Sue a slip of paper. There was nothing on it but the name of the vice chairman of trustees, John Surma, with a phone number. They stood frozen by the bedside in their nightclothes. Sue in a robe and Paterno in pajamas and a Penn State sweatshirt. Paterno dialed the number.

Surma told Paterno, "In the best interests of the university, you are terminated." Paterno hung up and repeated the words to his wife. She grabbed the phone and redialed.

"After 61 years he deserved better," she snapped. "He deserved better."

The firing provoked a riot on campus that night.

To Penn State students, Paterno was less a person than a beloved monument. He had arrived at a "cow college" in 1950 as an assistant coach armed with a flathead haircut, a Brooklyn accent and a degree from Brown. As the head coach from 1966 on, he struck an austere iconic pose, managing to be both fierce and bookish, with his black cleats and his thick black-framed glasses. To his rivals, he was a holier-than-thou prig who intimated he was more principled than they were.

Under his leadership Penn State football became a kind of gross national product as he won more games than any other coach in history, yet regularly posted high graduation rates — his team was ranked No.1 academically out of the top 25 football teams in 2009 and 2011 by the New America Foundation's Academic Bowl Championship Series. The "cow college" grew into a public research university with \$4.6 billion in revenue and buildings as large as airplane hangars. Beaver Stadium was renovated and enlarged six times during his tenure.

But after 61 years on the campus, Paterno cleared out his office in the space of one day. It was an end he was unprepared for. Yet it came with the realization that as the face of the university, people assign him greater responsibility than other officials.

"Whether it's fair I don't know, but they do it," he said. "You would think I ran the show here."

Over two separate conversations on Thursday and Friday, Paterno discussed his career and his actions relating to Sandusky. His attorney Wick Sollers of the Washington law firm King & Spaulding, and a communications adviser, Dan McGinn of TMG Strategies, monitored the conversations, in part to be sure Paterno was lucid, since he has experienced foggy from his chemo treatments, one of which he underwent the day before the first interview.

Since the scandal broke, Paterno has been largely silent while dealing with his health issues, despite scathing criticism that included accusations that he protected Sandusky and wielded more power in the cloistered community known as Happy Valley than the university president.

Paterno was initially reluctant to speak because “I wanted everybody to settle down,” he said. But he is so eager to defend his record that he insisted on continuing the interview from his bedside Friday morning, though ill. He was hospitalized for observation later in the day because of complications from the chemo but, according to the family, had improved by Saturday morning.

Mostly he sat in his wheelchair covered by a blanket, surrounded pictures of his children and grandchildren, in the modest stone-and-plate-glass home he bought for \$9,000 in 1966. The home, and the fact that his address and phone are still listed in the State College phone book, have oft been cited as evidence of his regular-Joe values. A good deal of what he earned has gone back to the university, in the form of donations to a library that bears his name and a campus spiritual center.

“My father said about money, ‘You have to have some. But you don’t have to have all of it. Just be honest with yourself.’?”

He displays only a few mementos of his football career, jumbled in a glass case in a dark corner of his old study, a small, woody space. Most of the items in the case are personal souvenirs. Tucked in one corner is a card that says, “This marriage is interrupted for football season.” There are game balls, the most prominent one from Oct. 29, 2011, when the Nittany Lions defeated Illinois, 10-7, to make Paterno the winningest coach in the annals of major college football, with 409 victories.

Sandusky was arrested just a week later.

What Penn State officials knew about Sandusky and when is the subject of no fewer than five formal investigations. They range from state Attorney General Linda Kelly’s criminal investigation of Sandusky, to an NCAA inquiry, to Penn State’s in-house inquiry led by former FBI director Louis J. Freeh. The best-case scenario is that the institutional leaders were guilty of blindness, and an unfeeling self-absorption. The worst case is a criminal cover-up to protect a wealthy university’s reputation.

This is Paterno’s own account:

On a Saturday morning in 2002, an upset young assistant coach named Mike McQueary knocked on Paterno’s door to tell him he had witnessed a shocking scene in the Penn State football building showers. Until that moment, Paterno said, he had “no inkling” that Sandusky might be a sexual deviant. By then Sandusky was a former employee, with whom Paterno had little to do. Although Sandusky had been his close coaching associate and helped fashion Penn State defenses for three decades, their relationship was “professional, not social,” as Paterno described it. “He was a lot younger than me.” Sandusky had been out of the program for three years, and in fact, Paterno said he cannot recall the last time he had seen or spoken to Sandusky. “I can’t,” he said.

Sandusky retired in 1999, shortly after Penn State made the Alamo Bowl. The timing was

curious. Paterno's understanding was that Sandusky took early retirement on his recommendation after Paterno told him frankly that he would not become his successor. The state was offering 30-year employees a handsome buyout, and Paterno believed Sandusky should take it. Paterno was frustrated that Sandusky spent so much time working on his youth foundation, the Second Mile, that he was not available to help in recruiting and other coaching duties. Authorities now say Sandusky used Second Mile to meet and groom his alleged victims.

"He came to see me and we talked a little about his career," Paterno said. "I said, you know, Jerry, you want to be head coach, you can't do as much as you're doing with the other operation. I said this job takes so much detail, and for you to think you can go off and get involved in fundraising and a lot of things like that. .??. I said you can't do both, that's basically what I told him."

Paterno insists he was completely unaware of a 1998 police investigation into a report from a Second Mile mother that Sandusky had inappropriately touched her son in a shower. The inquiry ended when the local prosecutor declined to bring charges. "You know it wasn't like it was something everybody in the building knew about," Paterno said. "Nobody knew about it."

Paterno contends that ignorance was the context with which he heard McQueary's disturbing story in 2002. McQueary, sitting at Paterno's kitchen table, told him that he had been at the football building late the evening before when he heard noises coming from the shower.

"He was very upset and I said why, and he was very reluctant to get into it," Paterno said. "He told me what he saw, and I said, what? He said it, well, looked like inappropriate, or fondling, I'm not quite sure exactly how he put it. I said you did what you had to do. It's my job now to figure out what we want to do. So I sat around. It was a Saturday. Waited till Sunday because I wanted to make sure I knew what I was doing. And then I called my superiors and I said, 'Hey, we got a problem, I think. Would you guys look into it?' Cause I didn't know, you know. We never had, until that point, 58 years I think, I had never had to deal with something like that. And I didn't feel adequate."

At that point, Paterno set up a meeting for McQueary and Curley, the athletic director, and Schultz, who oversaw university police. McQueary has testified that he gave both men a far more graphic description of what he witnessed, which he believed to be Sandusky sodomizing a boy of about 10, who had his hands against the shower wall. At the preliminary hearing for Curley and Schultz on Dec. 16, McQueary said he had been reluctant to go into similar "great detail about sexual acts" with Paterno, out of respect for the coach, who was 78 at the time.

Schultz and Curley have maintained that McQueary failed to impart the seriousness of what he saw to them as well. They never told police about the allegation, instead informing Sandusky he could no longer bring children to university facilities. Prosecutors say Sandusky continued to abuse boys for six more years.

Paterno has said, "In hindsight, I wish I had done more."

Paterno's portrait of himself is of an old-world man profoundly confused by what McQueary told him, and who was hesitant to make follow-up calls because he did not want to be seen as trying to exert any influence for or against Sandusky. "I didn't know which way to go," he said.

“And rather than get in there and make a mistake .??.”

He reiterated that McQueary was unclear with him about the nature of what he saw — and added that even if McQueary had been more graphic, he’s not sure he would have comprehended it.

“You know, he didn’t want to get specific,” Paterno said. “And to be frank with you I don’t know that it would have done any good, because I never heard of, of, rape and a man. So I just did what I thought was best. I talked to people that I thought would be, if there was a problem, that would be following up on it.”

Paterno declined to judge Sandusky, or his other Penn State colleagues. “I think we got to wait and see what happens,” he said. “The courts are taking care of it, the legal system is taking care of it.”

According to Sollers, the attorney, Paterno has no legal exposure in the Sandusky case. Paterno has cooperated fully with the investigation, and has “met on multiple occasions voluntarily” with representatives from the attorney general’s office, Sollers said. “In my judgment Coach Paterno has no legal liability in this matter. In fact, he acted completely appropriately in reporting the only allegation he received to his superiors and had every expectation that the allegation would be investigated thoroughly.”

Paterno has felt smaller repercussions.

His son Scott says Paterno has been “shunned” by many in the university, though he did hear from current Penn State President Rodney Erickson last week when he made a \$100,000 donation to the school. His name has been removed from trophies. The Maxwell Football Club of Philadelphia has discontinued its Joseph V. Paterno Award, which was to be given to coaches who made a positive impact. A nomination for the Presidential Medal of Freedom was withdrawn.

But Joe Paterno is not the victim here, he reminds you.

“You know, I’m not as concerned about me,” he said. “What’s happened to me has been great. I got five great kids. Seventeen great grandchildren. I’ve had a wonderful experience here at Penn State. I don’t want to walk away from this thing bitter. I want to be helpful.”

The Paternos say they think about the real potential victims every time they look at their own children. “I got three boys and two girls,” Paterno said. “It’s sickening.” His knee-jerk response is to go back to Flatbush. “Violence is not the way to handle it,” he said. “But for me, I’d get a bunch of guys and say let’s go punch somebody in the nose.” Sue Paterno is more blunt. “If someone touched my child, there wouldn’t be a trial, I would have killed them,” she said. “That would be my attitude, because you have destroyed someone for life.”

She sighed. “It’s a bad scene for this happy valley.”

The Sandusky investigation has torn apart a cloistered town-and-gown community where everyone knows everyone – including Sandusky. Old friends cannot talk to each other because criminal trials are imminent. Recently Sue went to the funeral of Tim Curley’s mother. The

Paterno has known John Surma for years – Paterno recruited his brother. Underneath the tension is the complicated knowledge that if Sandusky is guilty, he was as good at seducing the adults as he was the children.

If nothing else, the Paternos say, perhaps the Sandusky case will raise consciousness in other communities the way it has been raised in theirs. “We are going to become a more aware society,” Sue said. “Maybe we will look for clues.” She wonders what signs she missed signs all those years, when they felt so successful and sure of themselves.

“I had no clue,” she said. “I thought doctors looked for child abuse in a hospital, in a bruise or something.”

It remains to be seen, barring any new revelations, whether there will be a reappraisal of Paterno’s life and record at Penn State. Eventually, his family hopes, there will be healing and forgiveness in the community, and the outlines of the man they insist Paterno is, and not the monument or monumental target, will reemerge: A modest, decent, fundamentally devoted coach who always loved books more than money.

His starting salary was just \$20,000. In 1973 the New England Patriots offered him \$1.3 million to become coach and general manager. But at 5:30 a.m. on the day he intended fly to Boston to accept, Paterno woke up and realized it was mistake. He said to his wife, “You went to bed with a millionaire but you woke up with me. I’m not going.” He stayed at Penn State, though he was making just \$35,000. In 2008 his salary of \$1.03 million was still fractional compared to peers, some of whom now make \$4 million.

Paterno’s record is not perfect, of course. Anyone who won on his scale has an ungenerous competitive streak and nascent ego. His love for higher learning – he likes to name-drop Puccini and Virgil -- could tip over into superiority. He could show a temper, as he did in 1995 when a camera caught him delivering a profane on-field tirade.

His football program was not immune to the problems of big time college athletics. An ESPN inquiry found that from 2002 to 2007, 46 Penn State football players faced criminal charges. But he liked working with problem cases and turning them around. “Hotshots,” he still calls them today.

The 2007 team had 19 players who earned Academic all-Big Ten honors. “The bigger the problem the guy was, the more I enjoyed it when we had success,” he said.

Over the course of his career, 47 of his players made Academic all-American, the third-highest total among institutions playing at the championship level.

He loved his work. “They were all days I looked forward to,” he said. His philosophy was simple. “My thing was play as hard as you can, don’t be stupid, pay attention to details, and have enough guts in the clutch that you’re not afraid to make a play,” he says. “Some things I thought were important for a young man to know.”

Early on, Paterno vowed that he would try to never lose perspective. In 1968 he said: “We’re trying to win football games, don’t misunderstand that. But I don’t want it to ruin our lives if we

lose. I don't want us ever to become the kind of place where an 8-2 season is a tragedy."

Asked if he succeeded in keeping the vow, he says today: "I stayed on the track I wanted to stay on. I don't think I deviated from what I'm all about and what I thought was important. Whether you want to call that a legacy, or whatever you want to call it."

These are the things Paterno would prefer to reminisce about. Instead, he is tying up the loose ends of the abrupt end to his career. There are mounds of mail to deal with, 12,000 letters (his grandchildren counted them). Former Penn State running back Franco Harris, the Pittsburgh Steelers Hall of Famer, checks in regularly and is leading a furious campaign to depose the Board of Trustees for their handling of the scandal and Paterno's dismissal. Paterno tries to play peacemaker, although he admits his first reaction was, "Raise hell." There are still details to work out with the school, because he remains a tenured professor. On Jan. 2 the university sent him a retirement letter.

"Right now I'm trying to figure out what I'm gonna do," he said. "Cause I don't want to sit around on my backside all day." He grins and there is a light behind his glasses. "If I'm gonna do that I'll be a newspaper reporter."

Nevertheless, sitting is mostly what he does, surrounded by the photographs that have accrued on the walls for almost a half-century. They provoke memories. His father, Angelo, studying late at a kitchen table to become a court clerk, impressing on him the open-endedness of learning. His deep pride at being admitted to Ivy League schools, followed by chagrin when he visited Princeton and no one in the eating clubs would speak to him. "Bunch of stuffed shirts," he said. His wound when frat boys at Brown frowned at him for wearing sweaters instead of tweeds and said, "How did that dago get invited?"

His mother, when he called to tell her that he was finally ready to wed at 34, to a young woman he had met, of course, in the library.

"I'm getting married."

"To who?"

"Susie. You know Susie."

"That big German girl?"

"Yes, Ma, she's German."

"What the hell are you gonna eat?"

The big German girl is in fact slender as a schoolgirl and still has world-class cheekbones at 75. She tends to Paterno gently, ushering him from kitchen table to bedroom and back again, clasping his hand when it trembles. "Speak up," Sue tells him. Paterno smiles and rasps, "Ordinarily she tells me to shut up."

Every little while, Sue pulls a picture from a wall and shows it to Paterno or shares it with one of

his many visitors. They are invariably photos of children, of sons and daughters and grandchildren. The children are captured in time and they are all beautiful. They are new, unmarked, angel-faced, radiant. These are the images the Paternos cling to, through all the levels of distortion, the press maelstrom, the impending trials, the grotesqueries described on witness stands. Whenever someone in her family loses their emotional way, and sits at the kitchen table weeping for something that's been lost or torn down, Sue holds a frame out to them and shows them a photograph of unspoiled familial innocence.

"Look at this picture," she tells them. "This is who we are. And no one can take us from us."

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