

‘A rush to injustice’: Ex-PSU President Spanier pens book with his take on the Sandusky scandal



Former Penn State President Graham Spanier, shown here departing after his sentencing hearing at the Dauphin County Courthouse in 2017, has written a book, "In the Lion's Den," that shares his account of Penn State's involvement with the Jerry Sandusky child sexual abuse scandal. (AP Photo/Matt Rourke, File)AP

By: [Jan Murphy | jmurphy@pennlive.com](mailto:jmurphy@pennlive.com)

“So much of my life was my job and my job was so much of my life. It worked for me. It came to a screeching halt on November 9, 2011.”

That quote taken from an early chapter of former Penn State President Graham Spanier’s recently released 494-page memoir sets the stage for his account of how he went from nationally prominent higher education leader to inmate No. 21-0150/21-0279.

The book, “In the Lion’s Den,” details the nearly decade-long legal case that

ended in 2021 with Spanier spending two months in the Centre County Correctional Facility with work release and two months under house arrest for his role in the Jerry Sandusky child sexual abuse scandal. His misdemeanor conviction of endangering the welfare of a child is a crime he makes clear in the book he believes he never committed and one that wreaked havoc on his life and health.

He calls the ordeal a “rush to injustice” in the prologue.

“Being unjustly convicted of a crime after a lifetime as a law-abiding citizen is a sobering experience, to say the least. Reading about it in the newspaper almost every day makes it impossible to ignore,” he writes.

Spanier, 74, declined to be interviewed by PennLive because of what he sees as negative coverage of him and Penn State by the news site. However, he said in a brief conversation that he is working in the national security arena and as an advocate for changes in what he calls the “broken” justice system.

“We should have a system of justice that is capable of adjudicating and punishing genuine perpetrators while protecting the falsely accused,” Spanier wrote.

Here are a few takeaways from his book about what he calls “the real story of one of the biggest sports scandals in collegiate history”:

His resignation:

“Never could I have imagined such a scenario as an end to one of the longest university presidencies in history.”

Spanier titled the chapter about his departure as Penn State president “The November Massacre.” In it, he describes the days that led up to his decision to [resign under pressure](#) in the wake of the uproar over Sandusky’s child sexual abuse charges and accusations that two university employees – senior vice president for finance and administration Gary Schultz and athletic director Tim Curley – participated in a cover-up.

Having a gag order placed on him by Penn State’s Board of Trustees prevented him from managing the growing media firestorm, he said. Sensing he no longer had the board’s trust, “I concluded that the toothpaste couldn’t be put back into the tube and that I needed to resign so that the board could manage this evolving

crisis as they wished and as was their prerogative. I felt this would be a courageous, magnanimous, and dignified act on my part.”

He left his office at noon on Nov. 11. But, he said, “for months, board members preferred the narrative that I was fired, ignoring my dignified and gracious resignation.”

About Sandusky:

Spanier comes across as unconvinced the former assistant head football coach is guilty of the charges that have put him behind bars for the rest of his life. The questions arising about Sandusky’s guilt don’t stem from friendship — Spanier said he had no personal relationship with Sandusky. In fact, Spanier recalled only one conversation with him, about a pitch to start a football program at Penn State Altoona that he thought was a bad idea.

Given Sandusky’s reputation as a humanitarian, and the fact that he and his wife had fostered and adopted children — which would have required approvals from state and county officials — “it is difficult for those viewing the situation from a distance to understand how, if Sandusky was indeed a pedophile, others could not have known,” Spanier wrote.

Still, Spanier said he was “horrified by the magnitude of the charges” and said if even a fraction turned out to be true, they deserve “the gravest of consequences.”

But he also cites journalists who have written essays about testimony and victims’ stories that provide “compelling challenges to the public and prosecutorial narratives of Sandusky’s guilt.” And he points out Sandusky was found not guilty of “the most serious charge” of involuntary deviate sexual intercourse that “pertained to the incident that brought Penn State into the picture.”

It should be noted that jurors found Sandusky guilty of four of the counts in the case referenced by Spanier, including indecent assault and unlawful contact with minors. That case involved graduate assistant Mike McQueary who testified he saw Sandusky and a minor engaging in what he thought looked like sexual contact in a university shower facility.

That case also brought Spanier into it, in part because of an email thread between Spanier, Schultz and Curley in which they agreed to handle McQueary's complaint, rather than take it to police or child welfare authorities.

Defending JoePa:

Spanier makes it clear he considered it a privilege to have served as president during the last 17 seasons of Paterno's career. Spanier described him as "a person of impeccable character, an intellectual, and something of a social worker." Among other attributes, Spanier said Paterno cared more about his players and the university than winning football games.

He doesn't believe Paterno suspected Sandusky was a child predator and said he hasn't seen any credible evidence to suggest it. He said the two never had a conversation about it nor did they communicate through intermediaries about it.

Despite an accusation of "concealment" by the former FBI director Louis Freeh, and being accused by the Pennsylvania attorney general of a "conspiracy of silence," Spanier said: "The notion that Paterno and I were part of some conspiracy to protect Sandusky is absurd."

He went on to say: "Did Joe Paterno deserve any of this? No. Joe was strong-willed and even cranky at times, but he was a fierce advocate for what he believed and above all a man of great integrity – and honest to a fault."

A dimmer view of others:

Spanier doesn't mince words about those who he believes played a role in his conviction and the soiling of his reputation.

He called former university general counsel Cynthia Baldwin a "double agent" for the conflicting roles she played in presenting herself as representing both Penn State as an institution and Spanier and the other two administrators before an investigative grand jury.

He rips:

- Frank Fina, the lead prosecutor in the Sandusky scandal, who he wrote he came to believe "wanted badly to ruin me"

- Louis Freeh for issuing a report accusing the university of a cover-up that was initially accepted as fact by many that even though Freeh eventually admitted it was simply an opinion
- NCAA President Mark Emmert for a rush to judgment in handing down penalties against Penn State based on Freeh's report.
- And national, state and local media outlets — including The Patriot-News and PennLive — for what he called biased reporting of the story, among others. Among the long list of people he faulted, were PennLive reporter Charles Thompson and former reporter Sara Ganim, who won a Pulitzer Prize for reporting of the Sandusky scandal.

Corbett's role in his demise: The most high-profile person he faults for his "journey of victimization" is former Gov. Tom Corbett. He opines that Corbett had a dislike of Penn State and wanted Spanier removed as its president.

"I never saw myself as a political rival but it seemed the governor did," Spanier wrote.

Spanier said that on the night before his resignation, as chaos was breaking out in the community over Paterno's firing, "Corbett joined his staff at the American Ale House in State College, where Corbett was overheard celebrating my demise as president of Penn State."

He writes that in early 2013, "as Corbett was under increasing fire for his role in Paterno's and my demise," he invited Penn State football letterman to the governor's mansion for dinner. When pressed by some of the former players, "it was reported to me that Corbett commented that it wasn't really Paterno he was after. It was Spanier."

A spokesman for Corbett, Kevin Harley, said, "Governor Corbett does not believe the facts support the recollections of the author. He also hopes that the author will contribute profits from the book to a nonprofit organization supporting children who have been victims of sexual assaults."



Former Penn State President Graham Spanier said he declined plea deals he was offered several times, saying "I would rather risk going to prison than to plead guilty to a crime I did not commit." Dan Gleiter | dgleiter@pennlive.com

Turning down a deal: Unlike his two former colleagues, Curley and Shultz, Spanier chose to turn down a plea deal he was offered several times in the weeks leading up to his 2017 trial. He explained his decision in the book.

"I would rather risk going to prison than to plead guilty to a crime I did not commit," he wrote. "As a matter of principle and in accordance with my values, I could not abandon the truth of my innocence for the expediency of putting the matter behind me."

Spanier's position led to four years of legal wrangling that ultimately — after a series of different decisions by different courts — resulted in a dismissal of the most serious charges of perjury and obstruction of justice because an appeals court found Fina abused the grand jury process.

The counts were the heart of the Penn State cover-up case, and they died when Bruce Castor, then a senior aide to Attorney General Kathleen Kane, opted not to appeal their dismissal to the state Supreme Court.

Curley and Schultz ultimately pleaded guilty to the remaining child endangerment count. Spanier was convicted by a Dauphin County jury, and sentenced two months in jail and two months of house arrest.

Shapiro's role:

Pennsylvania Attorney General Josh Shapiro inherited the tail end of the prosecution of Spanier, Schultz and Curley. Yet Spanier said that didn't stop him from giving a post-trial "grandstanding performance," in which he celebrated the jury's decision to convict Spanier of misdemeanor child endangerment while disregarding that Spanier was acquitted of separate felony counts of child endangerment and conspiracy.

The guilty count was reduced from a felony to a misdemeanor because jurors found Spanier's failure to report a singular act, as opposed to a continuing course of conduct.

Spanier lambasts Shapiro for opposing his request for medical accommodation in lieu of going to prison. Spanier at that point had been diagnosed with metastatic prostate cancer and an abnormality in his heart requiring aortic valve replacement surgery.

"Shapiro made it clear that he wanted me to serve hard time and his outburst reflected his animus, not to mention his political ambition," Spanier wrote.

The day Spanier was report to jail, a federal court vacated his conviction. Spanier wrote he was elated but only until the next afternoon when Shapiro appealed that ruling and "issued a mean-spirited statement, saying that I deserved to be in jail."

That appeal led to a split Superior Court decision that upheld his conviction for his handling of the 2001 incident involving Sandusky with a minor in a university shower facility.

Learning experience: Despite efforts to avoid jail time, which Spanier described as a “horrible but educational experience,” he concludes, “I learned as much during my incarceration from interactions with fellow inmates as I did from the multitude of talented, brilliant, accomplished and successful people I have known.”

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