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American Horror Story

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Standing a few feet away from Jerry Sandusky, as he laughed and reminisced with friends in the front row of the courtroom, made me want to take a shower.

Just not in the Penn State locker room.

That was the gateway to horror where innocence was devoured by evil, over and over and over again, without a word being said. Just rhythmic smacking and slapping noises, silent screams, gutted psyches.

The lead witness in Sandusky's trial — the former defensive coach at Penn State is charged with molesting 10 boys over 15 years — was a nice-looking, short-haired 28-year-old in white shirt and tie, a narrow parenthesis of a man.

He seemed confident enough when he started, but, as he talked, he grew more and more agitated, running his hand and fist over his face, sliding glances at the 68-year-old, no-neck monster Sandusky at the defense table, staring at the pictures of himself as a young boy with a big grin and bowl cut, relishing the thrilling new world of football heroes that Sandusky had opened up to him. In the photos the prosecution put up on a screen, Sandusky's hand was usually gripped, *mano morta*, on the boy's shoulder.

By the end of his testimony, he looked haunted and acted jittery. His pain seemed fresh.

The prosecution charges that Sandusky used Second Mile, his charity for disadvantaged kids, as a perverted recruiting tool, putting asterisks next to the names of boys who were fatherless and blond, making up weird contracts for boys to sign, giving them money, ostensibly for doing good schoolwork, but really as a way to keep them from fleeing — and telling.

Like pedophile priests, Sandusky was especially vile because he targeted vulnerable boys. Later, when victims finally spoke up, there was a built-in defense: those boys were trouble; you can't believe them.

The first witness, who met Sandusky through Second Mile, said he was 13 when the nightmare started. His father was not in the picture and he didn't get along with his stepfather, so he mostly lived with his grandmother. The attention, trips and sports-equipment presents from Sandusky, who "would act like he was my dad" in front of

others, seemed heaven-sent, until hell yawned when Jerry kept putting his hand on the boy's knee in his car.

“Basically, like, I was his girlfriend,” the witness said, adding: “It freaked me out extremely bad.”

The horror grew worse. After racquetball and basketball games, the coach would say, “Let's get a shower.”

It would begin with a soap battle with liquid soap from the dispenser, the witness said, escalate to bear-hugging, slapping, rubbing, soaping, wrestling, maneuvering the child on the ground, kissing his thighs, forcing him to give and receive oral sex, and attempting anal sex.

“I was a little kid; he was a big guy,” the witness said, adding that he weighed “a hundred pounds, soaking wet.”

When he tried to push the slab of an older man away, he said, Sandusky would get mad and “play box” with open-hand slaps. Asked why he didn't tell his mother, he replied bluntly that he was “too scared,” and “other than that, the other things were nice and I didn't want to lose that” — going from unloved kid to a petted mascot for a legendary football team.

They never spoke of “the shower thing.”

“It was basically like, whatever happened there never really happened,” he said.

On road trips to bowl games, Sandusky would share a room with the boy, then covertly put a hand under the cover to grope him before he was awake. When the boy would wake up, he said, Sandusky would act as though he'd been doing sit-ups next to the bed. If the boy was recalcitrant, Jerry would threaten to send him home.

When the boys would try to get away, Sandusky grew clingy and possessive; he would even stalk them.

A string-bean who graduated from high school last week repeatedly broke down in sobs on Tuesday, recalling a similar pattern with Sandusky that would begin with blowing on his stomach. “I kind of thought he sees me as family, and this is just what his family does,” he said.

When he distanced himself, he said, Sandusky stalked him to his house and argued with his mother and grandfather about spending more time with him as he hid behind a bush. When he and his mother tried to tell authorities at his school, where Sandusky was a revered volunteer football coach who was routinely able to pull the boy out of classes and assemblies, they were met with skepticism. Sandusky, they were told, had a heart of gold.

When a wrestling coach walked in on the two lying on the floor face to face, after hours in a room with a rock-climbing wall, he accepted Sandusky's lame excuse that they were practicing a wrestling hold because, as he told the court on Tuesday, "Jerry would never do anything inappropriate." Adding, "I had the utmost respect for Jerry."

It's hard to believe that a monster like Sandusky was harbored by Happy Valley for so long. It was an open joke in Penn State football circles that you shouldn't drop your soap in the shower when Jerry was around.

Only the boys in the shower weren't laughing.