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Elie's doubt of survival.

Elie Wiesel was not only a Holocaust survivor and author of the memoir "Night" but was one of the most notable human rights advocates of the twentieth century. He was born in 1928 in a thriving Jewish community in Sighet, a village that was part of Hungary. When he was a boy, religious ideas fascinated him, especially the cabbala which is an old Jewish tradition of interpreting the Bible spiritually. He was also fascinated by Hasidic Tales, which are stories that teach how to find happiness and the divine in everyday life. At first, Elie was living a normal childhood until German troops arrived in Sighet and forced his family to live in two ghettos. Jewish ghettos were parts of the city where Jews were forced to live, segregated from others. A few months later, Elie and his family were deported to Auschwitz, where he would never see his mother or youngest sister again. He survived stays in five other concentration camps, until he was freed on April 11th, 1945. In "Night", Elie shares his survival experiences during the Holocaust when the Germans took his humanity, imprisoned his family and forced them to undergo the most brutal types of treatment.

Elie's torment began when he and his family arrived at Birkenau, the reception center for Auschwitz. First, he was placed in a line with his father, separating him from his mother and sisters. Some of his family were placed in the left lanes which led to the barracks, and the others were placed in the right lanes which led into a fiery ditch where bodies were burned. Elie, who was with his father, was walking to the ditch. He did not want to die in such agony, and briefly thought about "...running into the electrical wire. That would be better than slow agony in the flames." (Wiesel 31). His father said they would survive together. This comfort helped Elie choose life and he decided not to run into the electrical fence. Luckily, he and his father were sent to the barracks and not into the body flaming ditch which Elie described as, "So much bestial brutality!" (Wiesel 32). Soon afterwards, Elie and his father were stripped of their clothes, had their heads shaved, and were forced to have identifying numbers tattooed on their bodies. They were forced to do hard labor, marches, and other brutal acts, such as performing tiring drills. These acts of slavery were similar to their treatment at the other four concentration camps, cruel labor with cruel punishments. It was a harsh reality. One moment Elie and all the other Jews were living their normal lives and the next moment they were imprisoned or killed all due

to the hatred the Germans had towards the Jews and wanting to exterminate all European Jews. The continuous reoccurring torture made Elie doubt himself, that he could not survive. He lost faith. When it was Rosh Hashanah, a Jewish holiday, Elie thought to himself, “Why, but why should I bless Him? In every fiber I rebelled. Because He had thousands of children burn in pits? Because He kept six crematories working night and day, on Sundays and feast days? Because His great might He had created Auschwitz, Birkenau, Buna, and so many factories of death? How can I say to him: Blessed art Thou, Earternal, Master of the Universe, Who chose us among the races to be tortured day and night, to see our fathers, our mothers, our brothers, end in the crematory? Praised be Thy Holy Name, Thou Who hast chosen us to be butchered on Thine altar?” (Wiesel 62). The consistent torture made Elie doubt his beliefs, that he could overcome any obstacle with the help of the divine.

Elie doubted his survival even more due to the force of the Germans. When Elie and the other Jews first heard of Moshe the Beadle, a religious man who was taken away and almost being killed by the Germans, they thought the sad man just wanted pity. They even doubted that Hitler could exterminate them, “So many millions! And in the middle of the twentieth century!” (Wiesel 5). Moshe tried to warn all the Jews of Sighet, telling them that “...they could prepare themselves to have time to live” (Wiesel 4), yet they did not believe him. Even when the Germans came to Sighet, the Jews had no fear. At first, the Germans treated the Jews with politeness which gained their trust. The Germans’ politeness made the Jews not question their actions, making it easier for them to place them in concentration camps. However, on the seventh day of Passover, the Germans true motive was revealed. The betrayal started when the Germans arrested leaders of the Jewish community. Then, they created multiple, senseless laws for the Jews, like not leaving their homes for three days, or Jews had to be back to their apartment by six o’ clock in the evening. Next, they were put into two separate ghettos, a large ghetto and a small ghetto. After living in the large ghetto, Elie and the other remaining Jews of Sighet were put into the smaller ghetto, then they were transported in box cars to Birkenau. Upon arrival at Birkenau, Elie and his family were split into lines consisting of males and females. He separated from his mother and little sister which was his final time to see them. Now, Elie and his father were sent to the barracks, along with other Jewish prisoners where they received haircuts, tattoos, and prisoner outfits. After this brutal treatment, they were sent back to their barracks and later sent to Buna. Buna was the camp where Elie and the other Jews were made to do hard labor unless they were chosen to be a Kapo guard. Elie, along with his father, were picked for the orchestral unit, working inside an old warehouse. This is where they suffered the most. Elie’s father was beaten multiple times by the Kapo because he was a slow worker. Elie was also beaten by the Kapo because he witnessed the Kapo and a lady doing “inappropriate things.” Elie, his father, and other Jews were also tortured by being forced to walk forty-two miles to another camp in snowy, life-threatening conditions. The Germans shot anyone who worked slowly, forcing Elie and his father to keep their pace working with the other Jews until they made it to their destination. This experience made Elie doubt survival more because of his harsh treatment from the Germans and

the traumatizing events he witnessed. However, watching his father and fellow Jews willingness to survive, Elie kept hope.

Elie's harsh treatment received from the Germans made survival feel impossible. When he first arrived at Birkenau, he immediately was traumatized by the children and babies burning in a ditch, causing "Sleep to be fled from his eyes." (Wiesel 30) and his soul filled with fear. The Germans also made it hard for them to live, shooting anyone who was weak or too old to work, forcing Elie to work and fight for his life. From Birkenau to Buchenwald, Elie, along with his father and other Jews were forced to deal with this brutality multiple times for a year, always weary about death. When Elie and his father worked for the orchestral unit, Elie's father worked slower than the others, making him the recipient of severe punishment from the Kapo. Seeing his father beaten, Elie felt not only hopeless but anger towards the Kapo. He wanted to stop his father from getting abused by the Kapo, but if he interfered, Elie himself would also be beaten, or even worse, subject to death. Therefore, he did nothing but watch. Elie not only witnessed more torture but endured it when he and other Jews were placed in box cars by the Germans and only given breadcrumbs for food. While the Germans were starving them, the Jews' humanity deteriorated and they resorted to animal-like behavior, pouncing on other prisoners, just for the crumbs. They also witnessed the hanging of three Jews who were caught eating soup. One of those hung, was only a child, murdered because he was hungry. When the platform dropped on the gallows, the two adult Jews died instantly while the child did not, and he suffocated slowly to death after thirty minutes. Everyone, including Elie, were forced to watch the executions of these innocent people for the head of the camp said, "May this be a warning and an example to all prisoners" (Wiesel 54). The torment of the Jewish people, the mass extermination was all due to the Germans' hatred for Jews. Sadly, Elie's father became sick, unable to work and was killed by the Germans. He was stricken with grief by his death, but he continued to move on. Finally, on April 11th, 1945, after a year of countless deaths and hopelessness, Elie was liberated along with the other Jews of Buchenwald. "Our first act as free men was to throw ourselves onto the provisions. We only thought of that. Not of revenge, not of our families. Nothing but bread." (Wiesel 99). After a few days of freedom, Elie was hospitalized due to food poisoning. After he was released, he looked at himself in the mirror, but a corpse looked back, a constant reminder of his torment.

In conclusion, Elie Wiesel was known worldwide as one of the notable human rights advocates of the twentieth century and for his memoir "Night". He was born in 1928 where grew up in a thriving Jewish community in Sighet, and was very interested in religious ideas, his faith. His early life was normal, until he and the other Jews were imprisoned and taken to Auschwitz by the Germans. Elie suffered for over a year and was sent to five different concentration camps before he was liberated on April 11th of 1945. Through his memoir, Elie shares his horrible

experiences during the Holocaust which caused him to lose his humanity but his faith and perseverance helped him survive the darkest of times.