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Mrs. Graning

English 8

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Survival of the Weakest

Night is a wonderful, well written book by Elie Wiesel. It portrays the extreme levels of torture and manipulation that the prisoners endured during the times of the Holocaust. The Holocaust is one of the most successful genocides articulated and led by Adolf Hitler. Elie Weisel was born in 1928 and was not freed from the concentration camps until April 11, 1945. Elie's dad was by his side for a long time after he and his father were separated from the rest of the family. Wiesel went through multiple camps including Birkenau (the reception center to Auschwitz), Auschwitz, Buna, Buchenwald, and Gleiwitz. During these camps and selections Elie Wiesel had to learn how to be a person who survives through all odds even through the harrowing conditions that he and all the others faced.

Wiesel went through Birkenau and made it through his mother and sisters being forever lost within the endless torture of the concentration camps. While in this concentration camp Elie and his father went through many instances where survival was the only priority. On the way to Birkenau the family was crammed into a train car and met a woman who was thought to be lying, but was telling the complete truth. This woman's name was Madame Schächter. She was belting out in a very concerned, scared voice that there were flames and a furnace. She said, "Jews, listen to me! I can see fire! There are huge flames! It's a furnace!" . What they later learned was that there were flames and indeed a furnace. Something that they didn't know was

that most of them were going to unfortunately end up in the furnace. Birkenau was seen as the reception center to Auschwitz. When Wiesel and his family got to the camp the men and women were separated. Invalids and women were selected to go right to the gas chamber, and men and teenagers or able boys went left to go to the labor units. A man convinced Elie and his father to lie about their ages so they would be deemed eligible to work and survive the selection.

After Elie Wiesel survived Birkenau selection and was at Auschwitz for three weeks he was sent to work at a labor camp called Buna. When they first arrived they saw that the camp was relatively empty. They noticed that there were only a few prisoners there. At arrival, the prisoners had to go through the showers. Elie seemed to notice that one of the officers took interest in a couple of the children. What Wiesel eventually ended up learning was that children, especially younger kids were usually sexually abused in these camps. When they passed through the showers the prisoners were ordered to wait for their labor units to be assigned. This camp, out of all of them, was considered one of the better camps. The prisoners started to learn that they did not want to be transferred to the building unit, but unless they were transferred there survival would be the easiest it was going to get in those circumstances. This was realized when one of the prisoners said, “Buna’s a very good camp. You can stand it. The important thing is to not get transferred to the building unit.” Although they cared about medical illnesses, the only thing they cared about was checking for gold teeth. Later on while Wiesel was at Buna a man and child were hanged for just a ration of soup, afterwards the officers made Elie and all of the others march around the hanging bodies. When they were marching they realized the child was still alive and he stayed there for over half an hour struggling to breath.

Fortunately Elie and his father survived the selection. The selection dealt with the selecting of the Jews that were becoming too weak and thin to work being sentenced to

immediate death after the selection was over. The officers did not take the death of the Jews seriously, saying, "We can begin!" Once this one was over Elie's father was informed of another selection, a decisive one. Wiesel and his father survived the selection and were back together. When Christmas came the prisoners were only allowed a slightly thicker soup. With winter being present Elie's foot became swollen. He went to get it examined and was informed that if he did not get operated on he would have to get his toes and leg amputated. He got his operation and reunited with his father.

Eventually the prisoners were ordered to march in the cold, thick snow. Exhaustion was creeping up on Elie and his father with the coldness and pace becoming faster and faster. Eventually the prisoners made it to Gleiwitz even with the harsh words of the officers yelling, "Faster, you swine, you filthy sons of *****." They were there for three days without food or water. They were also not allowed to leave the barracks. After those days the prisoners were pushed into a train composed of cattle wagons with no roofs. There were one-hundred prisoners per wagon. After a while, they were ordered to throw all of the dead corpses out to make room and Elie slapped and rubbed his father to wake him up. Ten days and ten nights they traveled, sometimes stopping in German townships. The workmen once threw a ration of bread in the wagon and the men fought viciously for it. This fight resulted in death for a father and son and dozens of others.

Even though Elie Wiesel's story is greatly sad and gut wrenching, it shows the importance of the lesson learned from his experiences. In *Night* Elie shows what it is like to have to hold up and be brave to be able to have the enjoyment of life without fear of death and constant survival instincts taking over the ability to live. This book is informal while being a touching subject for most people. Elie Wiesel is one of the survivors of the horribly successful

genocide called the Holocaust. During these camps and selections Elie Wiesel had to learn how to be a person who survives through all odds even through the harrowing conditions that he and all the others faced.

Works Cited

Wiesel, Elie. *Night*. EMC Paradigm, 2003.