

Book Review – Night, By Elie Wiesel
Review by Walter S. Zapotoczny

Night is the story of young Elie Wiesel, the author, and his coming of age in the midst of the Holocaust. Fifteen-year-old Elie is just learning about his Jewish culture when the book begins. His teacher, Moshe the Beadle, is deported but returns in a few months to warn his neighbors about the horrors of the Gestapo, and Hitler. No one believes him and they all think he has simply gone mad. Not long after Moshe's warnings, the Gestapo force Elie and his neighbors into a tiny ghetto. Day by day, the people are packed onto cattle cars and shipped to Birkenau concentration camp. Upon arrival to the camp, Elie and his father are immediately separated from Elie's mother and sisters. This is the last time the two sides of the family will ever see each other. While waiting in line someone tells Elie to say he is 18 while they tell his fifty-year-old father to say he is 40. The two do as they are told and they pass the first "selection." The prisoners that will stay in the camp are worked harder than they have ever worked before, running on about a 500-calorie diet at most. Dealing with both mental and physical abuse daily, the ones who survive long enough are then marched to Auschwitz, the main extermination camp.

At first, the Jewish slave-laborers look out for each other and help to calm the fears of others. After endless beatings, exhausting labor, giving up gold teeth, and witnessing several hangings of fellow prisoners, however, the men are stripped of their faith and their pride and are only looking out for themselves. Soon, Elie is no longer praying for his survival, but the strength to not abandon his father. It is at this point, when Elie is losing grip with his faith, that the reader forgets that the narrator is just 15 years old. The pain and frustration in the story is that of a mature adult. The Nazis have not only taken his family and his hope, but also his childhood.

The Russians are now advancing toward the camp and the prisoners, including Elie with a broken foot, are forced to run a murderous 50 miles to the nearest concentration camp, Gleiwitz. Just a few days after leaving Auschwitz, the Russians liberate the camp. The 100 remaining prisoners in Gleiwitz are then loaded on to a cattle car and head for camp Buchenwald. Due to starvation, exposure, and overcrowding, only 12 survive to the end of the trip. Of the 12 are Elie and his father. Unfortunately, Elie's father dies of dysentery and exhaustion just a few days later. Elie is able to keep himself alive until America liberates Buchenwald. Elie Wiesel deals with his loss of faith during the holocaust, and relives the horrors of the concentration camp. He shows how such a life affected the people in the camps and how it changed many of them into something less than human.

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