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### Father and Son: Every Man for Himself

In the 1930s, Germany was filled with chaos when Adolf Hitler came into power. Hitler made promises to bring Germany out of the economic crisis by blaming others. Unfortunately, the Jewish people were the targets. Consequently, by 1933 the first Nazi concentration camps were built and put into use. The camp was used to decimate the Jewish people. As a result, many people died before they could be saved by the allies. Although the death rate was very high, there were some survivors; one such survivor was author Elie Wiesel. Wiesel wrote *Night*, a memoir of his experience as a teenager being taken from his home in 1944 and sent to Auschwitz. Wiesel suffered in concentration camp with his father. Both Wiesel and his father were unaware of the evil they were about to endure. Before the Nazis entered Wiesel's neighborhood in Transylvania, Wiesel looked up to his father with so much respect and never questioned his judgement. Ultimately, the father's choices would result not only in the murder of his own family but an agonizing two year of vicious mistreatment from the Nazis. Throughout the course of *Night* the strength of Wiesel and his father's relationship is tested, but eventually it becomes clear that it is everyman for himself.

Daniel Paquette author of "Theorizing the Father-Child Relationship: Mechanisms and Developmental Outcomes", states that a father's role in a child's life is very critical because the father introduces the child to the world without always relying on the mother (198). The importance of having a father is that the child will gain skills in order to become brave and be

able to adapt to any new environment (198). Unlike the research stated by Paquette, Wiesel's father has been present in the home, but absent in his families lives, especially Wiesel who wanted to learn the Kabbalah. Wiesel describes his father as a religious man, who was more involved with the welfare of others (Wiesel 4). As a result of his father's involvement in the community, he would ignore the chances of escaping Transylvania before the German army made its way into their neighborhood. At this point, Wiesel at age thirteen, heard many rumors and stories from around the neighborhood and from his tutor, Moishe the Beadle, of the evil heading their way. This concerned Wiesel who asked his father to liquidate everything at their family store and to leave, but his ignorant father made an excuse that he was too old to start a new life somewhere else (9). Of course, Wiesel did not question his father after their discussion but rather found it reassuring that his father was not worried. This scene in *Night* contradicts Paquette's theory that a father will teach his children to be more assertive. Since the lack of involvement Wiesel's father had in his son's life, it comes to no surprise that Wiesel is submissive even when he knows there is trouble coming. Afterall, sons tend to idolize their fathers. For some young boys, they would see their father as a role model, copying their every move, and working hard for their approval and attention, never to question their decisions.

After being in the camp for a couple of months, Wiesel and his father stayed clear of trouble in order not be beaten or killed. Soon both Wiesel and his father found themselves victims of Idek, an SS officer, who would take his daily anger out on the Jewish prisoners. For example, Wiesel writes of the situation of his father being beaten by Idek with an iron bar (Wiesel 54). Additionally, Wiesel notes as it all happened, he was unable to move, even when he saw his father "break into two like an old tree struck by lightning" (54). The first thought that came into Wiesel's mind was fear. He was afraid of being beaten for trying to get involved; he

wanted to get away from the situation. Even though he loves his father, it becomes obvious Wiesel was more concerned about his own well-being. Later as the fear went away, Wiesel felt angry towards his father who should've known better than to cross paths with Idek. Wiesel's anger came from his looking for guidance from his father but with no luck. Although Wiesel's father was the man of the house, the camp made him very vulnerable. Which was troubling for Wiesel, who relied on his father to get them through the camp. Consequently, Wiesel is now in charge of getting himself and his father out of the camp alive. To add, Wiesel finishes the paragraph saying, "this was what life in a concentration camp had made of me" (Wiesel 54). The burden Wiesel is now faced with is unquestionably challenging for a fifteen-year-old. Therefore, turning away from his own father seemed better than facing the rage of Idek.

Towards the final months of Jewish containment, Wiesel introduces a situation where Rabbi Eliahu was looking for his son (90). Eliahu and son became separated when the Jews were forced to run twenty kilometers to an abandoned village to escape the Red Army, who drew closer to the concentration camp. Wiesel wrote of the frantic Eliahu looking through dozens of frozen bodies for his son, but had no luck. Wiesel remembers the two were inseparable during their three-year stay at the camp, but as soon as the end seemed near, they became separated (91). The situation became clear when Wiesel realized he was running right next to Eliahu's son. Wiesel saw that Eliahu's son noticed his father falling behind, but he continued to keep running, showing no concern for his tired father (91). Therefore, Eliahu's son leaving his father behind caused Wiesel to parallel his own situation to theirs. The thought of no longer having the burden of his weak father crossed Wiesel's mind, especially since it would increase his chance of survival (Wiesel 91). Shortly after, the regret of having this terrible thought overwhelmed Wiesel. The online article "Trauma and Teenagers- Common Reaction" has evidence why Wiesel might

have felt this way. Teenagers compare themselves to their peers and friends; during this situation Wiesel noticed how Eliahu's son neglected his father. Wiesel thought also abandoned his father. Also, Wiesel had noted that other father and son bonds had been broken; some would beat their fathers while others killed their fathers. Although Wiesel had lost his faith, he vowed to never leave his father because Wiesel knew his father would not be able to survive without him. Wiesel and his father both needed each other's presence to keep fighting but their relationship was beginning to have some strands. Indeed, Wiesel doubts his father because his father was becoming more dependent of him.

The Jewish prisoners reached their final destination at Buchenwald. Upon entering the camp, they passed a chimney that once used to strike fear in the eyes of the prisoners. Now, the prisoners felt being dead was better than being alive, especially since living meant turning on loved ones. Shortly after their arrival, Wiesel's father became ill. At this point, the SS officers were no longer feeding the ill prisoners. Therefore, Wiesel would grudgingly give up half of his rations to his father causing Wiesel to question whether he should even share his food with his father. Wiesel felt the pressure from caring for his father and trying to stay alive himself. Wiesel would ponder the what if he just accidentally lost his father and no longer had this burden. Before long, his father became hysterical; he continued to beg for water due to his rising temperature but instead of receiving water, he would endure a violent blow to the head by one of the SS officers (111). Again, Wiesel would hide in fear of being struck just as his father. Except this time was different; Wiesel could no longer come to his father's aid. Wiesel knew the end of the concentration camp was near but his father was too weak, physically and mentally. Evidently, Wiesel would watch his father die, no longer helping preserve his life. The next day, January 29, Wiesel awoke to his father's cot already replaced and instead of weeping, he felt "Free as last"

(112). Wiesel couldn't cry for his father, the camp has changed so much of him, he was no longer a human but a corpse. A corpse that lost his emotion, faith, and father.

As a final thought, most fathers and sons will never endure a situation as horrendous as the Holocaust. It is troubling to think of the many sons who would turn their back on their fathers, to have a better chance at surviving. Indeed, the concentration camp was the ultimate test between father and son, sadly the camp was made to be "every man for themselves." Behind all the evil, Adolf Hitler, a human set out to murder an entire Jewish race. Hitler not only murder thousands of innocent people but broke the humanity of those who survived. But it is because of these survivors that the Holocaust will not die in vain. The true strength came from those survivors who were willing to relive this traumatic time in order to inform and educate those who were unaware. The stories continue to spread awareness seventy-six years later, of what one evil man could do and because of this people need to take a stand. There shall never be another situation of people losing their voice, being dehumanized, and forced to turn on their loved ones.

Works cited

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