

Question: What book that you've read in the past couple of years left the greatest impression on you? Explain why.

Night by Elie Weisel

In *Night*, Elie Weisel recounts his struggle for survival as a concentration camp prisoner during the Holocaust. At the opening of the novel, Weisel and his family lived as the typical Jewish-Hungarian family. They minded their own business and resided peacefully among their fellow townspeople. As the storyline progresses, and Nazi power increases, basic rights Weisel and his family once took for granted were now, at best, privileges. Forced to stay inside their homes during certain hours of the day and adhere to a strict curfew degraded them not only to second-class citizens, but likened their position in society to animals held in captivity. Inevitably, Weisel is separated from his family, taken from his home in Hungary, and deported to Auschwitz. Upon arrival, Weisel and his father are forced to work as slaves and to wallow in their own filth. Weisel's graphic and horrific description of life inside the camps is nothing short of grotesque and disturbing. I could not comprehend or even imagine the sense of both anguish and desperation that the prisoners must have felt. At times, feelings of nausea, shock and disgust would be so overwhelming that I could barely continue to read.

After closing the book, the feelings would be assuaged only then to be changed into an overwhelming sense of compunction. As a reader and human being, I owed to all those who perished and to those who suffered and survived, the sacrifice of my own comfort and read on. Near the close of the novel, Weisel, his father and multitudinous camp refugees are forced to seek asylum in a shed. Weisel meets an old friend, Juliek, who has with him his violin. Weisel recounts, "The sound of the violin, in the dark shed, where the bodies of the dead were heaped upon the living ... I could only hear the violin and it was as though Juliek's soul were the bow ... He played as he would never play again." Indeed, he did not. Weisel woke up the next morning

to see Julieck dead and “his violin smashed, trampled.” Weisel clung to every breath as Julieck played each note, he two united in their quest for survival.

Shared experiences often bring out an intangible and indestructible bond between human beings. Weisel’s incomprehensible strength was exhibited not only when things seemed at their bleakest, but when the everyday became intensely perplexing. “Yom Kippur ... to fast would mean a surer, swifter death. We fasted here the whole year round. The whole year was Yom Kippur.” Eli’s attempt to make light of this life or death conundrum exemplifies the perseverance of his sanity in the face of mass destruction. Throughout the novel, Elie, while concerned with his own survival, was primarily focused on the well-being of his father, always placing him out of harm’s way. Elie even remained with him for several hours on the eve of his death.

I now fully understand the precarious nature of life. I consume each day and attempt to live without regrets. A new awareness of the miniature holocausts plagues my mind. Ethnic cleansing in Bosnia, tribal warfare between the Hutus and the Tutsis, the dilapidated conditions of race relations in America, and the plight of the quality of inner city life for urban youth, prompt me to change various injustices around me. I am working to start an extension of Amnesty International at my high school. One day I hope to join an organization such as UNICEF or the Peace Corps. Perhaps my contributions toward ending violence and hatred by educating others will impact another to do the same.