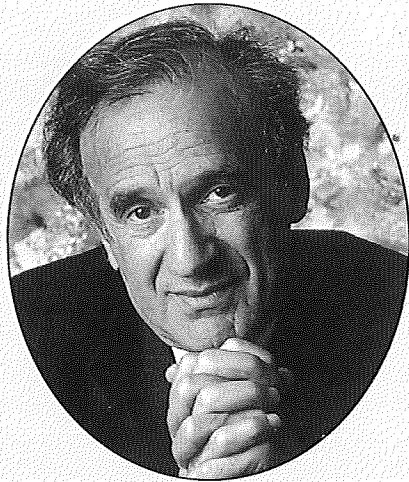


Meet Elie Wiesel



Look, it's important to bear witness. Important to tell your story. . . . You cannot imagine what it meant spending a night of death among death.

—Elie Wiesel

The obligation Elie Wiesel feels to justify his survival of a Nazi concentration camp has shaped his destiny. It has guided his work as a writer, teacher, and humanitarian activist; influenced his interaction with his Jewish faith; and affected his family and personal choices. Since World War II, Wiesel has borne witness to persecution past and present. He has sought to understand humankind's capacity for evil, halt its progress, and heal the wounds it has caused.

Wiesel did not expect to be a novelist and journalist when he grew up. His early writings focused on the Bible and spiritual issues. The studious and deeply religious only son of a Jewish family in the village of Sighet, Romania, Wiesel spent his childhood days of the 1930s and 1940s studying sacred Jewish texts. Wiesel's mother, an educated woman for her time, encouraged her son's intense interest in Judaism. Wiesel's early love of stories, especially those told by his grandfather, may explain why he became a storyteller himself.

In 1944 during World War II, Wiesel's life took a profoundly unexpected turn when

Germany's armies invaded Sighet. He and his family were sent to concentration camps at Auschwitz and at Buna, both in Poland. His imprisonment, which he describes in horrifying detail in *Night*, forever changed Wiesel as a man and as a Jew.

Wiesel was freed in April 1945, when he was sixteen years old. He went to a French orphanage and was later reunited with his older sisters. Wiesel completed his education, working as a tutor and translator to fund his schooling. Before long, Wiesel was writing for both French and Jewish publications. Still, he did not—and vowed he would not—write about the Holocaust, saying years later, “You must speak, but how can you, when the full story is beyond language.” He did not break this vow until he began writing *Night*, his own memoir.

Wiesel settled in the United States in 1956. He continued to write about the Holocaust. Wiesel's largely autobiographical novels, *Dawn* and *The Accident*, further explore his role as a survivor. His novels *The Town Beyond the Wall* and *The Gates of the Forest* focus on other aspects of the Holocaust. Wiesel's play, *The Trial of God*, challenges God to provide an explanation for allowing so much suffering to occur.

Wiesel, who married Holocaust survivor Marion Erster Rose in 1969, has worked against oppression and persecution around the world. He feels a special obligation to speak out against injustice. Toward that end, he teaches humanities at Boston University and contributes his energies to a range of humanitarian organizations. Wiesel helped organize and found the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. He hopes to broadcast his belief that persecution is an experience all people must recognize and protest. In accepting the Nobel Peace Prize in 1986 for his activism and courageous works, Wiesel summed up his call to action:

*Sometimes we must interfere . . .
Wherever men or women are persecuted
because of their race, religion, or political
views, that place must—at that moment—
become the center of the universe.*