

Elsewhere

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Elsewhere, by Gabrielle Zevin, tells the story of a deceased sixteen-year-old, Liz Hall. In the beginning of the book, Liz Hall is a carefree teenager who is preparing for her school's prom with her best friend. Unfortunately, her world crashes down when she dies in a bicycle crash, and she winds up in Elsewhere, the land of the afterlife. The dead live a backwards life in Elsewhere; they grow younger, not older. Once she discovers that she is dead, Liz find herself overwhelmed in her afterlife; she is rather depressed that she has to let go of everything that has happened in the past. She spends much of her time at Observation Decks, looking longingly down on her family and friends as they continue their lives on Earth.

Living in Elsewhere, she isolates herself from her grandmother Betty and the few friends that she made in order to find a way back to Earth. The following excerpt is from the middle of the book and takes place when Liz is heading back to Earth by carrying out the Sneaker Clause. The Sneaker Clause gives dead teenagers the option to return to Earth after staying in Elsewhere for one year, if they are not able to handle their death. Liz decided to follow through with the Sneaker Clause due to recent conflicts with her peers in Elsewhere, and she did not want to be around them anymore. “ But mainly she thinks of herself.

Continuing down the River will mean, for all practical purposes, the end of Liz. And when she looks at it that way, she suddenly wonders if she hadn't made a colossal mistake. And then she wonders if it's too late to correct it. Because it wouldn't be for Owen or for any of them that she would return to Elsewhere. With or without Owen, almost fifteen years was a long time. Almost fifteen years was a gift.

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Anything could happen here in Elsewhere, the place where Liz's life supposedly ended. If I interrupt this life, I will never know how my life was supposed to turn out. A life is a good story, Liz realizes, even a crazy, backward life like hers. To cling to her old forward life was pointless. She would never have her old forward life.

This backward life was her forward life when she really thought about it. It isn't her time, and her desire to know how the story will end is too strong.” (220) When I first read this passage, I felt that Liz had finally realized her mistake of holding on to her previous life. Before this event occurred, she had the belief that watching over Earth life would help her in the end. In reality, however, she wasted time by watching a never-ending movie called Life on Earth.

She previously had been thinking that she had a glimmer of hope for her future; that there was a small chance of returning to her old life. Liz later realizes that she will never be able to see her family and friends again, so what is the point of having false hopes? As I read this passage, I was able to relate to Liz's feelings. There have been numerous occasions in which I, like many people, have felt the need to hold on to my previous memories. It is as though people have the ability to travel back in time and change the past. An example of such an event is my disappointment in losing a math competition.

In the spring of my eighth grade year, I participated in a math contest called Mathcounts, which is only available to students who are in sixth through eighth grades. I first participated in sixth grade but did not do well. As it was

my last time competing, my main goal was to score well enough in the regional level to be eligible to participate in states. If I achieved this goal, I then wanted to score well enough in states to finish in the top ten, possibly being able to make the nationals. When Mathcounts season arrived, I worked hard to achieve one of my goals—I had scored high enough to win the regional competition and was eligible to participate in the statewide contest. However, I became overconfident and did not study much, believing that I would score high without much difficulty, since Arizona is known to be an “easy state” in terms of making the national round.

As a result, I performed poorly and did not place in the top ten. I became extremely upset by this, and regretted my previous arrogance. For the next few months, I could not stop thinking about state Mathcounts; I wanted to go back in time, study harder, and make nationals. It was too late, though. I eventually came to my senses, and told myself that my lack of studying was a lesson for the future.

Just like Liz, I knew that it was impossible to undo my mistakes, and my only option was to move forward. I feel that Zevin’s writing style shined throughout this passage. She relates Liz’s life to a story, and although this metaphor is often found in other authors’ works, Zevin incorporates it into a unique situation that few authors discuss within their novels. She does not make the metaphor appear dry, tedious, and overused, as sometimes shown in other books. Instead, she is able to liven the story up by connecting it with Liz’s thoughts about her afterlife, which is a topic that many teenagers ponder. Liz also proves that she is able to take control of her life, instead of going through the motions day by day.

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This reminded me of another novel that I have previously read, called *My Sister's Keeper*. This story features a thirteen-year-old girl named Anna who was born as a bone marrow match for her sister, Kate, who has leukemia. For the majority of her life, Anna has had no say in whether or not she participates in surgeries and tests that are required to help save Kate's life. After spending her life stuck by needles, she decides to become medically emancipated from her parents in order to gain her medical rights. Anna is similar to Liz in the sense that she took control of her life instead of continuing to live her daily monotone routine, while wishing she was able to not partake in the medical procedures.

This excerpt helps me understand the rest of *Elsewhere* because it describes the reason as to why Liz decided to return to *Elsewhere* after changing her mind about the Sneaker Clause. This passage depicts a turning point in Liz's attitude since her arrival in *Elsewhere*. Liz finally sees the mistake that she had made by refusing to adjust to her new life and for her to accept the fact that she will not be able to see her family and friends again. Returning to Earth would ultimately mean the end of Liz, and she would never know how her second chance at life would turn out. She sees that her life in *Elsewhere* is simply a continuation of her past life, only in another world.

Without this passage, the reader would not be able to know why Liz decided to return to *Elsewhere*. The book could have taken a different turn had Zevin chosen not to include the passage. Instead of changing her mind, Liz may have chosen to continue down the River, which could have caused the book to have another ending. Works Cited: Zevin, Gabrielle. "Elsewhere." New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005.

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