

Keeping hope alive:
comparing
perspectives in 'night'
and 'survivors club'



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Martin Luther King once said, " We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope," He is known for being a beacon of hope when times seemed hopeless. Survivors Club explores themes of keeping hope alive when it seemed like it was impossible, in a memoir about the Holocaust's best hidiers. What happens, however, when that hope is lost for good? Night contrasts that optimistic tone and exposes a boy's lost battle with hope. The tone of Survivors Club and Night is different because one author has a pessimistic perspective while the other has a more optimistic outlook, which is largely dependant on having hope or a lack thereof.

Family gives people a sense of strength to keep on living and being separated from them can take away from one's will to live. Having no desire to continue to live on makes for a very pessimistic tone, as Elie did when he thought his father had died from exhaustion when they were at the very end of their journey to a new camp in a convoy of cars in Night. Elie wonders what it would be like if he were actually dead as a lot of other people were, and he calls out to him but there is no response. Elie realizes in that moment that, without his father, " there was no longer any reason to live, any reason to fight," (Wiesel, 99). They had gone the whole way surviving with the bare minimum, little food, shelter, protection, and against all odds. Elie is infuriated with the thought of his father having died when it was so close to the war being over. It is especially infuriating because Elie had had thoughts of ending his life rather than enduring the painful torture of being a prisoner many times, but had thought against it, essentially, because of his family and the need to survive not for himself, but for them. Ending his life and leaving his family to fight alone would've been selfish. However now, that his

father was presumably gone, who had he had left to fight for? When there is no incentive to stay alive, he immediately gives up hope. It was not a rarity have suicidal thoughts in a concentration camp and separated from family, as Mamishu did in Survivors Club when she was ready to die upon receiving the news that her father and older son had been sent to be killed in a chamber. Her youngest son, Michael, concluded that “ if she’d had the energy in that instant, she might have leaped against the electric fence and ended her life, as many other prisoners had done.... But then Mamishu thought of me. She knew I might not last one week in Auschwitz without her protection.... she was determined to keep me safe,” (Bornstein, 154) This determination to keep her son alive forced her out of those thoughts because she knew she still had someone to protect, and her maternal instinct to protect is stronger than the tendency to just give up. Her remaining family was her only motivation to continue living because although she had already lost some family, she treasured Michael even more now because he was the only one she had left, unlike Elie who had lost everyone.

People use religion and faith as a way to explain why miracles happen, and when only tragedies happen, it is easy to lose that faith. For example, as the prisoners are being sorted into who will go to the labor units and who will go to the crematorium, Elie loses his faith on that long wait as he sees innocent children heading straight to the pit of fire, and he claims “ never shall I forget the small faces of the children whose bodies I saw transformed into smoke under a silent sky. Never shall I forget those flames that consumed my faith forever. Never shall I forget the nocturnal silence that deprived me for all

eternity of the desire to live," (Wiesel, 34). During that time of seeing who will get to live and who will have a terrible fate, Elie sees things as a child that corrupt him of his desire to live because they are so grotesque. They "consumed" his faith, he no longer believed in a God that would allow these things to happen, and witnessing senseless violence was the beginning of his journey with losing faith and the novel having a darker undertone. As for Mamishu, whose family had all assumed she died in a camp that burned down, but in reality, she was transferred to another camp and avoided the fire. When she just stumbles upon her son back in their hometown, she "never thought she would hold her child's hand in hers again. She had prayed [but she had barely believed in God anymore, until this second. She was still a mother. For the first time in a very long while, God had answered one of her prayers," (Bornstein, 238). For her, family was the only hope to cling onto, and despite the tragedies and losses, she was still united with her remaining family which was enough to reinforce her faith in God. Knowing that God answered her prayers was a sign that hope prevails, which is what makes the optimistic tone of the memoir.

Witnessing people's acts of kindness can make one hopeful for the future, however, when one sees how inhumanely people treat each other, it is easy to lose faith in humanity. When Elie sees the SS guards toss pieces of bread in the cars full of starved people and basically walking corpses, he ponders how one can be so cruel, and is reminded of an incident later on. The "ship's passengers amused themselves by throwing coins to the 'natives,' who dove to retrieve them. An elegant Parisian lady took great pleasure in this game.... [He] implored the lady: 'Please, don't throw any more coins!' 'Why not?'

said she. ' I like to give charity,'" (Wiesel, 100). Witnessing someone deliberately treating people like animals and finding amusement in putting desperate, weak people against each other changes something deep inside Elie that cannot be changed back. Once he is exposed to how horrible people can be, he is quick to become more cynical, and reasonably so. When all he sees are examples of people being horrible, it is easy to believe nothing better exists. In *Survivors Club*, however, it was easy to be a hopeful person because of all the examples of random acts of kindness and the communal efforts to make it as much of a tolerable place as their conditions allowed. From a kind Polish man being generous with his food for the starving Bornstein family (" " Can you get me three pounds of beef brisket in exchange for this link of gold?' ...The man had smiled at my father many times and made it clear that he did not mind working with a Jew. ' Of course, my friend. You look hungry. I'll make it four pounds,'" (Bornstein, 113)) to the convent of nuns that took in baby Ruth when her parents could no longer care for her as it was risky (" The Mother Superior was quickly alerted, and the two scooped Ruth right up off that bench and brought her inside the convent," (Bornstein, 89)). There are several examples of people doing good things simply out of the goodness of their heart and genuinely not expecting anything back. This sets up the tone of the memoir because it shows the positivity Michael had growing up and how people looked out for one another, rather than in *Night*, where there was a " every man for himself" mindset.

Overall, despite being about the same tragedy, the Holocaust, *Survivors Club* found a way to shed a positive light on it because it is, after all, a story of

survival, while *Night* is about a boy's innocence being lost as he witnesses terrible things around him, is separated from family, and loses his faith in God. They have different tones because the authors have a different way they choose to talk about the traumas that happened to them. This change in tone is because Elie only had reasons to lose hope, while Michael found a way to stay hopeful in a hopeless place.