

Historical Inquiry:

Anne Frank and Elie Wiesel Holocaust Experiences

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The Holocaust was the planned destruction of approximately 6 million Jews by the Nazis and their followers in Europe between 1933 and 1945. The German government basically decided that they were going to try to wipe out all the Jews in Europe, and they called this plan the “final solution.” Hitler, who was the German leader at the time, thought that law, justice, and rules of decent human behavior did not apply to everyone.<sup>1</sup> People who were different from them were seen as threatening and inferior. The Holocaust not only affected the survivors, but also those who lived in constant fear and hiding, in hopes of not being captured by the Nazis. Anne Frank and Elie Wiesel are two very famous examples. Anne Frank, who stayed in hiding from the Nazi’s for two years prior to being discovered and Elie Wiesel, who spent 2 years in a Nazi concentration camp before being set “free.” Both of their lives during those two years were extremely unfortunate and no human being should be exposed to that sort of ordeal, ever, not even in their dreams. Anne Frank kept a handwritten diary during that period which was later published, *The Diary of a Young Girl*, and Elie Wiesel survived his 2 year ordeal and lived to write a tell all book on the horror he faced in the Nazi death camp. Both of which are primary sources and the basis for which the answer to my question will come from. The question that was derived from these sources asks: How does Anne Frank's experiences during her two years in hiding during the Holocaust compare to the two years that Elie Wiesel spent in the concentration camp based on their autobiographical accounts. Although they both went through two totally different experiences during the two years in question, two commonalities were present, the fear and lack of freedom they both underwent.

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<sup>1</sup> Yeats, Tabatha. *The Holocaust Survivors*. Enslow Publishers, 1998.

### Historical context

Anne Frank was born on June 12<sup>th</sup>, 1929 in Frankfurt, Germany to Otto and Eddith Frank. For the first five years of her life, Anne lived with her parents and older sister, Margot on the outskirts of Frankfurt. After the Nazi seizure of power in 1933, Otto Frank fled to Amsterdam in the Netherlands. The rest of the Frank family later joined him, shortly after. From Anne's arrival to Amsterdam in 1934 up until 1942, Anne lived a relatively normal childhood. Anne's diary started on June 12<sup>th</sup> 1942, on her 13<sup>th</sup> birthday, and 1 month before her and her family went into hiding.<sup>2</sup> Her first entry was only three lines long, "I hope I will be able to confide everything to you, as I have never been able to confide in anyone, and I hope you will be a great source of comfort and support."<sup>3</sup>

The very beginning of Anne's diary talked about trivial things, such as her school life, boys, and relationships with her immediate family. There was no mention of Hitler or the anti-Jewish laws until her entry on Saturday June 12, 1942.<sup>4</sup> Here, Anne told the readers that "after May 1940 the good times were few and far between." There was first a war, then the capitulation and then the arrival of the Germans. She said that's when the

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<sup>2</sup> United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "http://www.ushmm.org." Last modified 2012. Accessed October 2, 2012. <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?>

<sup>3</sup> United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "http://www.ushmm.org." Last modified 2012. Accessed October 2, 2012. <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?>

<sup>4</sup> Frank, Anne. *The Diary Of A Young Girl*. Doubleday, 1995.

trouble really started and their freedom was severely restricted by anti-Jewish decrees. Some of the restrictions included: Jews were required to wear a yellow star; Jews were required to turn in their bicycles; Jews were forbidden to use street cars; Jews were forbidden to ride in cars; Jews were required to do their shopping between 3 and 5pm; Jews were required to use only Jewish owned barber shops and beauty salons; Jews were forbidden to go to theatres, movies or any other form of entertainment; Jews were forbidden to use swimming pools, tennis courts, hockey fields or any other athletic field; Jews were forbidden to go rowing, to visit Christians in their homes, and Jews were required to attend only Jewish schools.<sup>5</sup> The list went on and on. As you can see, Hitler was systematically segregating and ostracizing the Jewish people from their communities. Anne wrote, “ You couldn’t do this, and you couldn’t do that, but life went on.”

On July 8<sup>th</sup>, 1942 Anne wrote “... So much has happened it’s as if the world had suddenly turned upside down. But as you can see Kitty, I’m still alive, and that’s the main thing.”<sup>6</sup> Anne was referring to the call-up notice that her father received that day from the SS. A call up meant concentration camp, according to Anne. You either go willingly, or you’re forcefully pulled out of your home. The call up was for Anne’s sister Margot, but that was their signal that the family had to pack up all they could out of their home, and go into hiding. It was preplanned that the Frank family would go into hiding on July 16 , 1942, but because of the call for Margot, the date was moved up ten days.

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<sup>5</sup> Frank, Anne. *The Diary Of A Young Girl*. Doubleday, 1995.

<sup>6</sup> Frank, Anne. *The Diary Of A Young Girl*. Doubleday, 1995.

Their hiding place was located in Otto Frank's office building. The name of their hiding place was called The Secret Annex. A total of 8 people would be living in the Secret Annex throughout the 2 years Anne and her family lived there.

Elie Wiesel was born in 1928 in Sighet, Transylvania, which is now part of Romania. His father, Shimol, was an orthodox Jew. He grew up in a small village and his world revolved around family, religious study, community, and God. IN 1944, during World War II, Elie and his family were deported to the Germany concentration camps in Poland. Elie and his father were separated from his mother and sisters and taken to Auschwitz.<sup>7</sup> They were forced to work under appalling and inhumane conditions and shuffled between concentration camps. Elie survived the camps and was later reunited with his older sisters. Even 10 years after the war he refused to write about or discuss his experiences during the Holocaust. He studied in Paris and later became a journalist. The French writer Francois Mauriac was the one who persuaded him to write about his experiences in the death camps. As a result, Wiesel wrote the novella, *Night*, which has since been translated into more than 30 languages. *Night*, is narrated by a boy named Eliezer who represents Wiesel, although a few details differentiate the character from the

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United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "http://www.ushmm.org." Last modified 2012. Accessed October 2, 2012. <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?>

real-life Wiesel. It's almost impossibly painful for a survivor to write about his or her Holocaust experiences. By renaming the main character, and adjusting small details, he was able to distance himself somewhat from the experience. *Night* is an attempt to recreate the thoughts and experiences that Wiesel had as a young teenage concentration camp prisoner.

### Analysis

From reading all of Frank's diary entries and the entirety of Wiesel's novella, 2 inferences can be made about their experiences during those two dreadful years. The first inference is that their exposure to civilization and freedom was stripped away. Anne and her family spent two years in the Secret Annex. It was a very small, very dark, and damp place, wrote Anne in her Diary. Although hiding in this attic was nothing like being in a concentration camp, the lack of freedom and privacy was no different. Anne lived in the tiny annex with her immediate family, and two other families, totally 8 individuals at one point and time.<sup>8</sup> No one was allowed to leave the annex at any time because the risk of being caught was too high and dangerous. That was an infringement on Anne's freedom and adolescence. She had to stop attending school and socializing with her peers once her family moved into the annex. Aside from being restrained inside the Annex all day, Anne had to deal with the lack of space and freedom inside of the annex. It was an extremely

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<sup>8</sup> Frank, Anne. *The Diary Of A Young Girl*. Doubleday, 1995.

tight space and nobody had their own room or bed. They were living like animals in a tight cramped space.

Elie Wiesel, too, experienced a lack of freedom and no connection to civilization while confined to the concentration camp for 2 years. Freedom for him was stripped once he was deported by the Nazis. He, like all other Jews were no longer considered human, but were seen as waste. When he was initially deported, he was under the impression that he was simply being relocated to a less desirable neighborhood, but later he quickly realized that that was not the case. He was packed into a small cattle car with other Jews. There, they were threatened, and tormented by unbearable conditions. There was almost no air to breathe. The heat was intense and thick, and if they resisted anything that was happening to them, they were threatened at gun point by German officers.<sup>9</sup> That cattle ride was like a foreshadowing of what was to come. Life at the concentration camps were so unbearable, many would rather have been dead, then alive.

The second inference drawn from my sources is that Anne and Elie lived in constant fear. “Not being able to go outside upsets me more then I can say, and I’m terrified our hiding place will be discovered and that we’ll be shot.” Anne wrote that on September 28, 1942. Anne was deathly terrified of being discovered and sent to a concentration camp. Anne, and the others in the Secret Annex had to be extremely careful not to make noises, or do anything that would hinder suspicion. They had to take turns using the hot water for baths and when the plumber visited, Anne wrote that they had to stay extremely still, for hours. Every time the doorbell rang Anne was terrified because she thought it was the Gestapo coming to take them away to a camp.

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<sup>9</sup> Wiesel, Elie. *Night*. Bantam Books, 1982.

### Corroboration

From both of these sources you could tell that Frank and Wiesel had a lot more in common than you would think. Living in constant fear was definitely the biggest one. Both Anne and Elie both feared death. Neither one knew when their time would come, but it was something that haunted them both daily. A difference however, was that although Anne feared this, she still was able to stay hopeful and believed that although a group of people were doing bad things, that didn't mean that everyone was bad. She wrote in her diary: "It's difficult in times like these: ideals, dreams and cherished hopes rise within us, only to be crushed by grim reality. It's a wonder I haven't abandoned all my ideals; they seem so absurd and impractical. Yet I cling to them because I still believe, in spite of everything, that people are truly good at heart."<sup>10</sup> Elie, on the other hand let his fear deter him from being hopeful, and lost all faith in humanity and a higher being. He saw the inhumanity that was taking place around him everyday for those two years and believed that there couldn't be a God or higher being, if he would allow all of that to take place. He wrote in his book: "Where is God? Where is He?" someone behind me asked. .. For more than half an hour [the child in the noose] stayed there, struggling between life and death, dying in slow agony under our eyes. And we had to look him full in the face. He was still alive when I passed in front of him. His tongue was still red, his eyes were not yet glazed. Behind me, I heard the same man asking: "Where is God now?" And I heard a voice within me answer him: "Where is He? Here He is—He is

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<sup>10</sup> Frank, Anne. *The Diary Of A Young Girl*. Doubleday, 1995.



hanging here on this gallows. . . .” That was after he witnessed a young child brutally murdered, and then hung at his concentration camp.<sup>11</sup>

The main factor that accounts for these differences have to be the extent of their experiences. When Anne was writing her diary entries, although she feared death, she never witnessed it, unlike Elie who wrote his novel after experiencing death, and witnessing the death of his father.

### Conclusion

After carefully analyzing both of my primary sources I was able to infer two things: Anne Frank and Elie Wiesel lived in constant fear, and that their exposure to civilization was stripped away. Nobody should ever have to go through what these two courageous individuals underwent. Although Anne was never able to witness freedom after those two years of confinement, her diary lives on and will be “free” forever. Elie’s story is free as well and is proof of what happened, but more importantly, it is proof that there is hope and that bad doesn’t last always.

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<sup>11</sup> Wiesel, Elie. *Night*. Bantam Books, 1982.

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