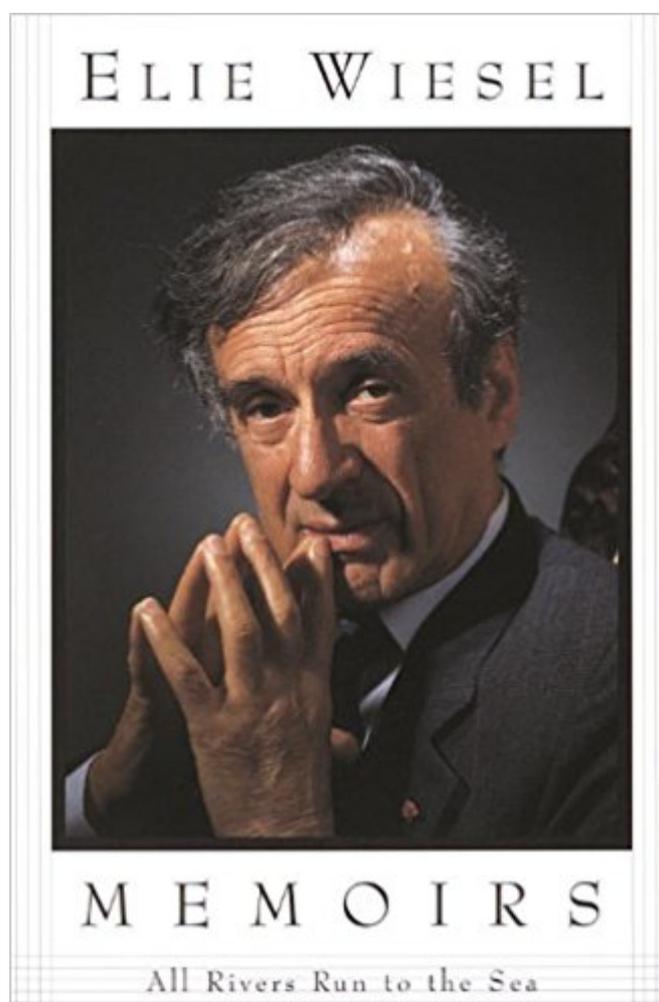


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All Rivers Run To The Sea: Memoirs



Synopsis

In this first volume of his two-volume autobiography, Wiesel takes us from his childhood memories of a traditional and loving Jewish family in the Romanian village of Sighet through the horrors of Auschwitz and Buchenwald and the years of spiritual struggle, to his emergence as a witness for the Holocaust's martyrs and survivors and for the State of Israel, and as a spokesman for humanity. With 16 pages of black-and-white photographs. "From the abyss of the death camps Wiesel has come as a messenger to mankind--not with a message of hate and revenge, but with one of brotherhood and atonement."--From the citation for the 1986 Nobel Peace Prize

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Customer Reviews

In Elie Wiesel's beautiful book, *Memoirs: All Rivers Run to the Sea*, he again accomplishes what he has accomplished most perfectly in all of his previous works--translating the personal into the universal. Wiesel is also a master storyteller and he does his job flawlessly in this poignant and unforgettable book, relating his memoirs in a frame, both beginning and ending *All Rivers Run to the Sea* with a dream. He begins with a dream about his father, and the haunting words, "Last night I saw my father in a dream." Of course, this is no ordinary dream, but a dream that reveals volumes about Wiesel's life and its ever-present themes. Imprisoned at both Buchenwald and Auschwitz, Wiesel, who shared the darkest moments of his life with his father, saw the man he never really knew die of starvation and dysentery, while his mother and youngest sister, the beautiful little Tzipora, were murdered in the ovens of Auschwitz. In the second dream, Wiesel brings his memoirs

to a close as he describes his joyous wedding day in the Old City of Jerusalem. Although a happy groom, Wiesel is by no means a traditional one. Retreating into a silent reverie, he tries somehow to include his parents and baby sister in the wedding festivities, thus rounding out the family circle he loved so much. Between these two sad and haunting dreams, Wiesel, who often employs frames in relating a tale, tells us the story of the early years of his life. Born in Sighet, Romania on 30 September 1928 to Shlomo and Sarah Feig Wiesel, Elie Wiesel lived the early years of his life happily, in the center of Jewish culture. Although his family was quite traditional, it was in Sighet that Wiesel began experimenting with more mystical lines of thought. Possessed with a passion for learning, he studied both Hebrew and Yiddish as well as delving into the ancient texts of the Jewish faith. It was on 19 March 1944 that this idyllic boyhood with an intensely spiritual family came to an abrupt end. An unspeakable darkness fell upon Sighet's entire Jewish community as all of the nearly 15,000 residents were arrested and deported to Auschwitz, Poland. Wiesel is chilling as he relates the horror and uncertainty of traveling in the cattle cars, of the painful separation of loving families and the violation and exploitation of human beings by...other human beings. It was only after the liberation of the camps in 1945, that Wiesel discovered that his two older sisters, Hilda and Batya had survived. Although overjoyed at their reunion, the loss of his younger sister is something so painful, so beyond Wiesel's imagination, that even today, he cannot speak of it. For a full ten years, Wiesel remained silent regarding his experiences in the death camps, wondering why he had survived while so many others had perished. He said, "In those years, it was very difficult to talk about the subject. I grew up in a mystical atmosphere, believing in silence, so I tried to use what I learned to purify the words, to purify language." Relocated to France, Wiesel studied at the Sorbonne where he learned French, philosophy, literature and psychology while working at a variety of odd jobs. Eventually, he chose journalism as his career and he tells of his travels to Jerusalem, New York and many other places. Although a dark and somber book, *All Rivers Run to the Sea* is not without its lighter moments. One of these occurs in New York after Wiesel was struck by a taxi, hospitalized and cornered by a somewhat overly-zealous attorney. As Wiesel lay in the hospital, immobilized, his French travel documents expired and he became a United States citizen. Although it is Wiesel's own father who haunts his sleeping dreams, it is another Being who troubles his waking thoughts, a Being Weisel, through the teachings of his faith, calls God. Evident in the quote taken from Ecclesiastes Wiesel chose as the subtitle of his memoirs, is the question that haunts his daily life: How could God, during the Holocaust, remain silent and watch the senseless death of six million human beings? Human beings, He, Himself, created? Although Wiesel's observations have been brilliant, he has, by his own admission, failed to reach an answer. Like the Hebrew sage who

wrote Ecclesiastes, Wiesel observes that, "All rivers run to the sea, yet the sea is never full; unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again." Like the author of Ecclesiastes, Wiesel, in this book, makes a wide investigation of life, leading the reader from the happiness of his boyhood to the misery of his youth to the honors of his mature life (including the 1986 Nobel Peace Prize). And, like the author of Ecclesiastes, Wiesel finds no satisfying answer. For him, the joys of life are forever tinged with sadness; the specter of death is never far away. In *All Rivers Run to the Sea*, Elie Wiesel makes full use of the piety and wisdom of Hasidism and his memoirs read like a novel of the highest order. Intended for those who have made, or want to make, their own investigation of life and its mysteries, most especially that of humanity's incomprehensible inhumanity, this is a superb tale of unvarnished truthfulness, humility and awareness. Wiesel, in beautiful language that mingles sadness and joy, horror and triumph, writes for those of us who dare to look into the darkest moments of life, searching for a little light, a ray of the faintest hope. He writes, not so we know, but that we may hunger for more. An incredible human being whose tragedy became the impetus for a life filled with the profoundest meaning, Wiesel, like Martin Buber before him, is ready to "hurtle down deep pathways, wander through invisible cemeteries, both seeking and fleeing solitude and receiving stories already told and those...yet to be told." *All Rivers Run to the Sea* is more than just a supremely important book; it is one of the most important books in the literature of humankind.

I liked this book, but not for most of the reasons I read in other people's reviews. I believe they have overvalued it because of what the author has undergone, because he's written other, more stunning books, and because Wiesel is almost a monument in himself. Having heard of his Holocaust speeches and read his famous early concentration camp account, *Night*, I was unprepared for the naivete and gentle self-mockery that pervade this book. Yes, it talks about his roots, his tussles with religion, his adventures and misadventures as a journalist and friend/antagonist of the great. But what a surprise to see his repeated references to all the pretty faces that caught his eye and how badly he usually fared in approaching them: "I indulged in some serious flirting, by which I mean that I talked to them of things too serious to achieve the desired result." "I thought about all the girls in Versailles and all the unknown women in trains who didn't know how much I loved them, and about all the sins I lacked the courage to commit." "I knew if I lowered my guard I would be hit by one of those thunderbolts I never knew how to handle. So of course I lowered my guard." "I spoke to her of destiny, and of Dante for good measure. She told me not to be a fool." It may strike some readers almost as monotonous, but I found Wiesel's willingness to speak of things all men experience, yet

never include in their autobiographies, refreshing. The other reviews stress the IMPORTANCE, almost PONDEROUSNESS, of this book, yet that's not what I'm left with at all. Wiesel is also amazingly open and childlike. For instance, recovering from injuries suffered in a massive car accident, he writes: "Confined to bed and condemned to immobility, one dreams, one thinks about and sees the world in a whole new way. A simple painkiller is worth more than a dozen wondrous poems. I was more grateful to the nurse who came to turn me onto my back or stomach than I would have been to the most ravishing of creatures granting me her all. The most astonishing world news affected me less than the doctor's smile." This book shows the very human side of a "mere" journalist who in his time has become almost an institution.

How many people in this world, as they go about living out their lives, will ever come to an understanding of the human cost that was exacted in the Holocaust? Sure, there will always be the auto-pilot responses in which people quote the six-million figure while shaking their heads, but often their knowledge does not go beyond this point. In the pages of "All Rivers Run to the Sea," Elie Wiesel is willing to lay bare his soul in order to create understanding as a living, yet still wounded, witness of the Holocaust. Without this premise, perhaps this would be just another autobiography of a globe-trotting journalist, and the intrigue of international diplomacy. But it is much, much more than that. Indirectly, Wiesel shows himself as a man who is never able to be completely happy, completely alive...completely whole. When the Jewish people in his village were rounded up, shipped off, imprisoned, starved, and killed, a part of himself dies as well. Thus, there are constant flashbacks in the book to his parents who did not survive. As Elie experiences the events of life, and the decades pass on, the reality of what occurred to his family and so many others haunts his dreams and his writings. By and by, the reader is able to see that the human cost of the Holocaust is as close as their own mother and father. This is the subtle power of these memoirs.

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