
How is It Like to Be Adolescent While War Time

Adolescence is a time when teenagers learn to become more independent, become more understanding, and, most importantly, discover themselves and who they are. But that's not always the case; when the adolescent's circumstances are abnormal, their experiences and their maturing processes become abnormal, too. With the examples of Elie Wiesel, Anne Frank, and Jeanne Wakatsuki, we can see that growing up in a wartime environment plays a definite role in the process of maturing and becoming an adult. These authors all at one point or another become self-centered, and this aids them with discovering themselves. They are also very forgiving in terms of their treatment and at times, they could even feel that they deserve this type of injustice. And lastly, they also distance themselves from the people that they used to adore and this causes them to become very independent and isolated from the outside world as if they weren't already. We can already clearly see the differences between growing up in a safe environment and growing up with constant gunfire going off outside the window, but we can see the difference even more clearly by asking ourselves, "How might have these individuals been different if they were to grow up without constantly fearing for their lives because of the hostility and bloodshed happening right in front of their eyes?" As shown by *Night* by Elie Wiesel, *Diary of a Young Girl* by Anne Frank, and *Farewell to Manzanar* by Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston and James D. Houston, growing up in a wartime environment can affect an adolescent by making that young person more prone to misunderstand others, more self-centered, and both more infuriated by and more accustomed to this type of harsh treatment.

During this time, all three teenagers (Anne Frank, Jeanne Wakatsuki, and Elie Wiesel) were self-centered, but not always selfish. An example that shows how an adolescent may be self-centered and eventually selfish is Elie, he cared for his father, despite knowing that he's not going to make it since he was so old and fragile. "I tightened my grip on my father's hand. The old, familiar fear: not to lose him," (page 104) Elie writes in his memoir. As they arrive at Auschwitz they were left for dead, but they stayed together despite the struggles that come along with it, but as the story progresses, Elie changes, but not for the good. He starts to resent having to take care of his old dying father and begins questioning why he should have to suffer just to save his father that was already dead inside, and in the end, he basically sends his very own father that he once loved, to his death, "I gave him what was left of my soup. But my heart was heavy. I was aware that I was doing it grudgingly... The officer wielded his club and dealt him a violent blow to the head. I didn't move. I was afraid, my body was afraid of another blow, this time to my head." (page 107 and page 111) He starts to think about himself more, and the reader can't blame him, he's been through hell and back, and in that journey, he learns the only way to save himself; to be selfish. The other two was fortunate enough to not be abused in such a way physically, yet mentally, they suffered almost as much, but quite differently. Jeanne

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probably suffered the least, but it doesn't mean she didn't at all. Being forced into an internment, Jeanne learns to be her own advice and her own guide because her parents no longer were that for her. "As his youngest child, I had grown up blessed with special attentions. Now, more and more I found myself cut off from him," (page 117) Jeanne writes, showing that not only does she feel like her relationship with her father had changed, but was now completely gone, they were nothing but mere roommates, living in the same house with the same last name, but they weren't actually a family. This took a toll on Jeanne trying to become an adult because she lacked the care she needed to feel wanted and to feel like even if the rest of the world was against her, she still had the love and support from her parents, but right when the world was against her and her family, her family just cut her off. And as with Anne, quite differently from the other two, she didn't become selfish or completely cut off from her family, and the reason is because she couldn't. She was forced into hiding, with no choice but to face her family for almost all her time, she didn't have the chance to distance away, unlike Jeanne who wanted to become closer to her family. As she writes in her diary on August 21, 1942, "Mummy sometimes treats me like a baby, which I can't bear," (page 24) and on November 7, 1942, "Daddy doesn't understand that I need to give vent to my feelings over Mummy sometimes. He doesn't want to talk about it; he simply avoids anything which might lead to remarks about Mummy's failings Just the same, mummy and her failing are something I find harder to bear than anything else." (page 45) Annie is constantly having problems with her family, and in most cases, it's her mother, but she doesn't have anyone to vent to not does she have the space to go away and give herself some private space. She's self-centered in the sense that she always feel as if others are wrong or they're always at fault for the way they treat her, and this affected her growing up. Instead of learning when to give yourself a break, she learned a way to vent out her feelings while being in the same room with her mother, although her mind was a million miles away; and this was her diary. For Elie, his father, in the beginning, was the only thing holding him back from being selfish and completely independent, whereas with Jeanne she had to become independent, because she had no one to depend on, and as for Anne, she had her diary; her Kitty. The three of them might have felt mistreated, less understood or even intimidated by their parents, but their shared mentality was all because of their circumstances. Normal adolescents don't live in fear that the Gestapo will get them and because of that, they get something that the three of them would've treasured; freedom. But even without freedom, they learned to discover themselves, both mentally and physically, but they weren't able to try new things or "live" their life since they were either stuck in a hiding place, an internment camp, or concentration camp.

Wartime life does not offer normal and secure opportunities for friendship and self-discovery, though makeshift options are possible. Anne seeks comfort and discovers herself by not only writing down her feelings in her journal but also by talking to Peter, as she writes on January 6, 1944, "My longing to talk to someone became so intense that somehow or other I took it into my head to choose Peter." (page 131) If Anne had a choice, she wouldn't have chosen Peter as a

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friend, but because she was confined, she had no other choice, as she says the day before, “If only I had a girlfriend!” (page 131) In other instances, Anne also discovers herself sexually by talking to Peter, but she discovers herself more emotionally and mentally by writing in her journal because as she said, “Paper is more patient than man.” But since she was confined to the Secret Annexe, she only had one friend, which was Peter, and unlike normal adolescents, she didn’t get to even choose that friend, which caused her to talk to the only other friend she had that she got to choose, which was her journal. Elie didn’t have the chance to meet new friends, when you’re standing on the brink of death, slowly tipping in and only barely clinging to the other side, making friends is not an option nor of any importance, the real importance is to stay alive and even though there were familiar faces here and there, he could barely remember them. Jeanne instead, could’ve made many friends, but instead in her entire memoir, she only really befriends one person, and that one person, wasn’t even really her friend. That friend was Radine, she was a pretty blonde with sparkling blue eyes, everything Jeanne isn’t, but wants to be. As she writes, “To this day I have a recurring dream, which fills me each time with a terrible sense of loss and desolation. I see a young, beautiful blond and blue-eyed high school girl moving through a room full of others her own age, much admired by everyone, men and women both, myself included, as I watch through a window.” (page 171-172) It shows how even though Jeanne was given the chance to choose a friend, she chose a friend that made her feel like absolute garbage and she was constantly jealous of her, yet she couldn’t admit it because she wanted to believe that she deserved this, and that’s where she’s wrong.

Growing up in a wartime environment made Jeanne, Anne, and Elie overly understanding of their living conditions making them more numb to the way others treated them and in some cases, believe that they deserved this type of judgment and religious segregation. Out of the three, Jeanne felt this the most; she repeatedly talks about how she wanted to be invisible or how she didn’t want to cause a burden on others, “But he was afraid to use me. He had to go speak to the board about it, and to some of the parents, to see if it was allowable for an Oriental to represent the high school in such a visible way. It had never happened before. I was told that this inquiry was being mad, and my reaction was the same as when I tried to think the Girl Scouts. I was apologetic for imposing such a burden on those who had to decide.” She was apologetic for something she couldn’t change, this was what internment camp had done to her. It made her believe that she was truly different and so different that she can’t be given the same opportunities, respect, or even attitude, but in her mind, this was all justified, she herself thinks that if she was in the other person’s shoes, she would do the same. Unlike Jeanne, Anne was infuriated about her situation, not understanding why just because of her religion that they had to go into hiding, but this doesn’t mean that she didn’t accept and understand her living conditions. Anne writes in her journal on November 19, 1942, “I get frightened myself when I think of close friends who are now at the mercy of the cruelest monsters ever to stalk the earth. And all because they’re Jews.” (page 54) This shows that she has understood the situation, and the cause of it, which was the fact that they were Jews, but she still wasn’t able to grasp why

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the fact that they were Jews meant so much and made them enemies to the Germans. Instead of becoming more understanding by listening to others or opposing opinions like most other adolescents do, these teenagers learned to be more understanding by accepting their dreadful living conditions. They also start believing that they deserve this type of treatment. Elie, on the other hand, gets infuriated not with the Nazis, himself, his father, the people around him, the bystanders, but God. God was Elie's everything, before being sent to the concentration camps, he trusted his life with God, but as time progresses, he bottles up anger and blames his situation on God, he wasn't understanding, which was what made him still have hope. He still believed that him being Jewish isn't an excuse for him having to be treated like slave workers that were abused both mentally and physically daily for months and years, so he put his blame on God. "Blessed be God's name? Why, but why would I bless Him? Every fiber in me rebelled. Because He caused thousands of children to burn in His mass graves? Because He kept six crematoria working day and night including Sabbath and the Holy Days? Because in His great might, He had created Auschwitz, Birkenau, Buna, and so many other factories of death?" (page 67) That night, he started questioning in God, he started questioning the only thing that he believed him, and this anger in him was caused by nothing by the fact that as an adolescent he had to be trapped in the middle of a tragic war. But what if he wasn't?

Maybe, just maybe, if these poor kids didn't have to suffer going through concentration camps, bearing the pain of discrimination in internment camps, and being forced into hiding, these individuals could have grown up much differently. For starters, Jeanne may have been more confident of herself instead of being how she was, insecure, unassertive, and extremely uncertain about herself. Even as she was elected as the essentially the prettiest girl in her grade, she still didn't and couldn't believe that she was good enough, but if she was brought up and taught that it's okay to be Japanese, then maybe on that day, she would be proud. She wouldn't be scared of judgment from other people and instead just accept the victory. Maybe then, Jeanne wouldn't have recurring dreams of being someone different, and maybe she wouldn't have had to make herself invisible. Maybe she could've dated the guys she liked, joined the sorority as she pleased, and most of all lived life as it is. And as for Anne, she could've become what she dreamed of being, a writer, but merely because she was a Jew, she wasn't given the opportunity to do just that. But what if, what if Anne was never caught or the Holocaust just never happened? Anne probably could've pursued her dreams and became a writer, she probably could've learned so much more that the world has to offer rather than studying just 5 irregular verbs a day due to the lack of resources in the secret annex. She could've made better friends, she wouldn't have to be confined with Peter. She wouldn't have to constantly deal with the abuse from her mother, instead, she would be able to learn to distance herself from others. And what about Elie? He wouldn't have to go through all that physical and mental abuse from the nazis and the SS, he could've been a normal kid living under normal conditions. He could've stayed with his parents and he wouldn't have to painfully watch his father crumble and slowly die in front of him. He could've been so much different, he

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could've loved and believed in God fully without having a string of doubt in his way. He could've pursued his religious dreams instead of being whipped for merely looking at something he should've to have saw. The Holocaust not only affected the people in Germany or the people in the camps, but people all around the world, and the victims were not only Jews (although they were targeted the most), other people were targeted in different ways. The Jews suffered, the Germans suffered, the Europeans suffered, the Japanese suffered, the Americans suffered, and most of all, the people suffered.

In the end, they are all just humans, people that wanted to live. They spent years and years trying to stay alive, but inside, they were already dead. Anne was unfortunate enough to see how bright her future could've been. How her writing impacted so many people. Anne had so much more to say, but because of nothing but pure hatred, she has wiped off this face of Earth. Anne, out of the three, was the most intelligent and the most capable of going far in life, yet she never made it, and nor will she ever. Elie after suffering years of abuse had to watch one final act that changed him forever; the death of his father. No single person being in the world should ever have to endure that pain. No single person in the world should have to march or better yet, run for mile after mile in the freezing winter with nothing, but a heavy jacket or blanket. He suffered physically from the labor he had to be put through, but he had to suffer mentally even more. After the concentration camp, his relationship with the person he used to trust most was tarnished beyond compare, and that person was God. Elie believed in God with all of his heart, but eventually, he lost that; he lost the ability to feel bad for others, to care for others, or to even be there for others. Elie, out of the three, he was the most broken and destroyed at the end of the war, he may have lived, but the memories he had, would haunt him for the rest of his life. Never would he ever be able to say a prayer the same way he did before. Never would be able to look in the face of someone the same way. Jeanne had to go through her most precious years in an internment camp for no real reason except for the fact that she was of Japanese descent. This was nothing, but another case of racism, which is present even in the world of today. She felt secluded, isolated, and abandoned by everyone else. Though the camps were filled to the brim with Japanese people, this only made Jeanne feel more alone. She felt different; she didn't feel like she belonged. And even when she got out of the internment camp, she couldn't help but to feel that because of her differences she couldn't be the same as others. She believed that because of her differences, she was inferior, she was less, and she deserved less. But in reality, none of the three deserved less. They were stripped of their rights because it was a wartime necessity or because it was only right, but was it really? Was a violation of basic human rights really necessary?

All of these books, ultimately, show how severely young lives can be unsettled by historical catastrophes. Jeanne didn't care or was numb against what others said about her because she believed all of it; she believed that she was a "dirty Jap" and that she should just go back to her country. Sadly, Anne didn't live to see the world after the war, but Elie did. But the memoir

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revolves around his experience inside the camp, and it was horrid. At the beginning of the book, you could see a hopeful Elie with a strong father, but as the memoir progresses, he becomes less hopeful; he starts to think that maybe death is not so bad and that death is the only solution, and his dad not simply dies but slowly deteriorates and becomes less and less of a person until, eventually, he no longer is. Elie, Anne, and Jeanne had no other choice than to grow up and mature into adulthood at a very young age due to the fact that they were living behind the backdrop of a bloody war.

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