

Massachusetts Letters About Literature 2016

Massachusetts Center for the Book

www.massbook.org

Level I Honors Award

Dear Mr. Wiesel,

When I finally put down your book, I was overwhelmed with a whole new world of thoughts and emotions. Your novel opened for me a window into the Holocaust. This book was even more powerful because the Holocaust took the lives of my own relatives. My grandfather and his mother were set to visit their family in Lithuania when the war broke out. They were able to stay at home in Russia; however, all the rest of my grandfather's family perished in the ghetto. In 1943 most of them were executed in a forest called Ponary near the city. Therefore, your book did not just touch me because of the extremely powerful images and ideas it contains but also because I feel a personal relation to what you write about.

I think that your book has been able to show very powerfully what the Holocaust was to people, which is the world of darkness that people had to experience. It amplifies the cries of those who were destroyed and killed in the nasty, mortal way of torture in front of the eternal. There were moments in the book where I could not stop myself from crying for the first time in my life, and this is something that I will never forget.

Your writing shows the suffering in the "factory" of human extermination so powerfully that at moments I saw the tired eyes that lost all hope, I saw the flames rising above crematories, I felt the stench and the smoke of human flesh and beyond all this, I myself saw the inscribed words "Work is Freedom" and wondered at their cynicism. The scene of the separation of the protagonist's family was probably one of the most touching in the whole masterpiece. I could feel the desperation and the horror in the eyes of people who have just realized that they would not see each other again. What they experienced at that moment made me cry and revealed to me the deepest world of human pain.

I do think, however, that the main reason why your book made such a strong impression on me is that it was not just about suffering. I think it is also very much about human strength, about ways that allow people to remain human and remain spiritually strong in spite of all horrors. Your book has taught me that hope is gathered to be kept not only in the times of Light but also in the times of Darkness. At the end of your book, the protagonist boy looks at himself in the mirror and sees a corpse. However, he is not dead. He was able to survive on the cattle train, to rise from the horrors of the ghetto and concentration camp, from death itself. He was able to pass through Auschwitz and remain both alive, human, and greatest of all, Jewish; and I think that this proves to us that the world of good people is stronger than that of the satanic Third Reich.

I also think that this book changed my own perspective as a person. Half-Russian, half-Jewish, I was able to feel my own belonging to the Jewish nation. I also was able to comprehend the fact that the Holocaust itself has changed the history of Judaism and Jews forever, that it related and connected one nation, soul to soul and heart to heart, and proved and celebrated the integrity of Jewish people. Your book has made me a stronger person and a better Jew. I thank you for doing that for me.

Sincerely yours,

Alexander

Alexander
Arlington
Grade 5