

Three scenes or dialogs, “*A Father and His Son*,” “*A Mother and Her Daughter*,” and “*A Man and His Little Sister*” from the book *A Jew Today* by Elie Wiesel are snapshots of moments between life and death—the precious words shared between loved ones before they depart. These three poignant conversations offer an intimate picture of love, reassurance, fear, and the pain of separation. They highlight the innocence of the victims and their powerlessness in the face of oppression.

In the first, a son talks to the spirit of his deceased father. Together they grapple with feelings of anger and sadness as a result of the inhumanity they suffered during the Holocaust. They both struggle to understand *why*. While the father wants his son never to forget the brutality they endured, the son wrestles with life as a survivor. The son’s memories have faded, diminishing his ability to speak for those who perished. Wanting to prove himself to his father, the son pleads that he has spent his life trying, but he has grown weary of mankind’s unwillingness to learn. They realize that survival is not a blessing, and those who have passed pity the ones left behind.

The second dialog “*A Mother and Her Daughter*” recounts the last conversation between a Jewish woman and her young daughter as they approach the gates of a concentration camp. Facing death, the mother attempts to assuage the fears of her little girl. The girl seeks answers from her mother as her mind opens to perceive an evil she has never before witnessed in her young life. In a panic, the girl tries to persuade her mother to flee. Knowing there’s no escape, however, the mother calms her daughter, and they pause before the gate. The girl takes in one more look at the world she knows, at the stars in the night sky. The girl realizes that each and every person in the line from the train will not see another day. Time has stopped for her and the thousands in the long procession toward the gate—everyone has ceased to age. Now reassuring her mother that she has seen enough of the world, the girl wishes for only one thing: that she and her mother are never separated. They hold each other tight.

In the final dialog “*A Man and His Little Sister*” a young girl facing death seeks solace in the words of her older brother. Knowing she has little time left, the girl’s wish is that he remembers her. She pleads with her brother not to forget her. His reassurance makes her happy. She knows she will soon rejoin those she loved and has missed—she will once again sit on her grandfather’s knees and he will sing to her. They talk of all the things her brother will say when she’s gone—her love of God, that she liked to sing, that she loved the Holy Days, how she sang the Shabbat songs at the table. In her final words to her brother, the girl wants him to know of her sadness at leaving him, and that her leaving wasn’t her fault. The brother reassures her of her innocence. “Then whose fault was it?” she asks.

Her brother replies, “I shall find out. And I shall tell. I swear it to you, little sister. I shall.”