

**Author Wiesel Goes Around
with “a very heavy heart”**

**By Judith Newmark
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Elie Wiesel, who surely had assumed that in the course of a single lifetime no one man would have to witness any more horrors than the nightmare visions he had already seen, has discovered that he was wrong.

On Sept. 11, 2001, he watched a plane fly into the second tower of the World Trade Center.

The Nobel laureate and his wife, Marion, found themselves in a taxi near Grand Central Station when the second catastrophe exploded across Manhattan’s downtown skyline.

By then, of course, everyone already knew that some unimaginable catastrophe was underway; their cabbie, like everyone else who couldn’t get to a television set, had his radio on. Wiesel listened to those early reports in confusion and agony; then, he saw it happen all over again.

Since those terrible moments when he watched the sky blaze with flame and cloud with smoke, “I go around with a very heavy heart,” sighed Wiesel, who will speak on Wednesday at McKendree College.

The entire freshman class there has read his first, most famous, book, “Night.” “Night” is his memoir of the teenage years he spent at Auschwitz, one of the concentration camps where the Nazis murdered most of his family, along with 6 million others whom they deemed inferior, including disabled people, Gypsies, homosexuals and political resisters.

What is left that can appall, or for that matter even touch, a man who has already endured such things?

The events of the past year can – along with shapeless fears of what may lie ahead.

“These are very dark days,” said Wiesel. “The terrorists don’t want to commit suicide. They want to kill.

“Look what they have done, though. Today, Jewish history and the history of the world are merging. This does not always happen. But now we all have the same enemies, for the same reasons. Everyone is affected.

“One thing is clear: Saddam Hussein should have been indicted for crimes against humanity after what he did to the Kurds. (In 1991, two towns in Mosul, a largely Kurdish province of Iraq, were attacked by Saddam’s regime with chemical weapons. Western experts estimate that these attacks killed more than 5,000 people.)

“We have enough evidence that he has weapons of mass destruction, weapons it is dangerous even to mention. Anthrax is the least of it.

“This man is dangerous to the whole world. I hope the UN will pass a resolution to insist on inspections, which he won’t accept, and then he must be disarmed.

“I am behind the president in this. It is a good fight, a proper fight, and I think that others will join in it, too.”

Even as he says these things, his own words seem to stun him; his perfect English stumbles into soft accents. Since the 1960 publication of “Night” (the only novel he wrote in his mother tongue, Yiddish; he usually writes in French, the language of his post-Holocaust education), Wiesel has emerged as a leading activist for human rights around the world. His nonfiction books often deal with issues of justice; his works of fiction, including his new novel, “The Judges” (Knopf, \$24), invariably do. “War is grotesque: war means the victory of death,” he said. “But we must remember history. When danger is concrete, we must not wait.”

Iraq, for that matter, is not the only thing on his mind. The rise of European anti-Semitism while Holocaust survivors – and perpetrators – are still alive horrifies him. He considers France’s release this month of an aged former Nazi “a disgrace.” He says he is “still waiting for a powerful protest” to emerge against a widely circulated petition that calls for the dismissal of Israeli scholars and researchers, virtually all Jews, from European universities. He isn’t holding his breath, though. And he doesn’t think we’ve heard the last of al-Qaida, either.

Wiesel, like everyone else, is in a holding pattern, waiting to see what will happen next, waiting to find out what new demands the future will make of him. He feels the sharp pinch of the other-shoe syndrome; how do you manage day-to-day until it drops?

Wiesel thinks he glimpses answers if he looks in two directions: one geographic, one chronological. He looks to Israel; a place where he has family and many friends, and to the past, the amber world of the Hasidic masters whom he still considers his wisest teachers.

“How do Israelis live?” he asks. “They celebrate Shabbat, they send their children to school. They live. Things happen every day, and yet they manage. ‘And yet.’ Those are my favorite words in the English language.

“There is too much in history, in the Jewish people’s history, to let go, not now, not even when a whole city is taken hostage. I am as sure of the future of Israel as I am of humanity remaining alive. Otherwise I could not go on.”

He checked the time; in a few hours, it would be Sukkot, the Jewish fall harvest festival. It is a happy celebration.

“We are coming to a holiday,” he said. “The Gaon of Vilna (Elijah Zalman, the most revered rabbi in 18th century Europe), a great teacher, said that our most difficult commandment is to rejoice on the holidays, always. The heart may be heavy. But we must have hope, which is the essential nature of joy.

“That is the message of ‘and yet.’ All the reasons are here to give up hope and live in fear – and yet we don’t. In the end, we must let life prevail.”

Can you put into your own words what Elie Wiesel means by **AND YET**?