December 9, 2012

Oprah and Elie Wiesel: *Living with an Open Heart*

FULL TRANSCRIPT

ACT ONE

OPRAH: So, may I say what an honor it is to have you here. My hero. My friend. After surviving open-heart surgery last year, how are you feeling?

PROF. WIESEL: Today? Much better.

OPRAH: Today. Today, much better.

PROF. WIESEL: First, because I'm with you. You know how much—how close I am to you.

OPRAH: Mm-hmm.

BEGIN VIDEO CLIP

OPRAH: "Friend" is not a word I use loosely. I'm proud to call Elie Wiesel a friend for the past decade. He was born in 1928 in Sighet, Transylvania, now a part of Romania. One of four children, he had two older sisters, Hilda and Beatrice, and one younger named Tzipora.

In 1944, Elie was 15 when the Nazis deported him and his family to Auschwitz.

By the time the camps were liberated by the Allied troops less than a year later, his mother, father and youngest sister had all perished.

After the war, Elie embarked on a new life in Paris and became a journalist. It wasn't until he turned 30 that he decided to break his silence about his experiences during the war in a book called *Night*.

Since its publication in 1958, *Night* has been translated into 30 languages and has been read by millions of people. In 2006, I chose it for my book club, and I had the privilege of visiting Auschwitz with Elie Wiesel as my guide.

In 1986, Elie Wiesel was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace. The Nobel committee called him "one of the most important spiritual leaders … a messenger to mankind." A prolific writer and globally renowned champion of human rights, Elie Wiesel has devoted his life to speaking out against global issues of indifference, intolerance and injustice.

In 2011, Elie Wiesel was rushed into emergency open-heart surgery. His long road to recovery required a great deal of soul-searching, which resulted in this latest book—a powerful work of art that ruminates on questions of life and death that we all have and what it really means to be human.

END VIDEO CLIP

OPRAH: Do you still feel that your body was ravaged by the opening of your heart?

PROF. WIESEL: It was because I get tired very...very quickly.

OPRAH: Mm-hmm.

PROF. WIESEL: I used to walk a lot, no problem. But now if I walk even five minutes, I get tired.

OPRAH: Really? In 2006, you and I walked the grounds of Auschwitz together. Actually, on my 52nd birthday that was.

PROF. WIESEL: I remember that. What a gift I gave you.

OPRAH: That was.

PROF. WIESEL: It was a gift.

OPRAH: Yeah. You had written 47 books at the time, and you said that you hadn't begun yet. Do you still feel that way now?

PROF. WIESEL: Always.

OPRAH: I remember hearing that and thinking—

PROF. WIESEL: Always. Absolutely.

OPRAH: Really.

PROF. WIESEL: Every day I ask myself the same question: What have I done? Is it enough? Does it justify all that I wanted to accomplish and to do? But I am not sure of anything.

OPRAH: Wow. I'm going to get to that, more of that, in a moment. Because when I read this—this powerful little book, *Open Heart*—I couldn't believe that you were still questioning that. But when we were in Poland, I remember you said that the souls who perished at Auschwitz were still there. That they listen.

BEGIN 2006 AUSCHWITZ VIDEO CLIP

OPRAH: Do you think the grounds speak? It carries its own energy here. It has the voices of the dead, do you think?

PROF. WIESEL: I think the souls are here. I think that they listen, they cry, they warn. Look, this is the largest cemetery in recorded history. And what do you see? Nothing.

OPRAH: Nothing.

PROF. WIESEL: But the cemetery is in our heart.

END 2006 AUSCHWITZ VIDEO CLIP

PROF. WIESEL: You know, I have in my pocket the picture of my little sister, which I've never spoken about, not even with you. The only time I cry—it's not when I speak about my parents, but when I speak about my little sister.

OPRAH: Mm-hmm.

PROF. WIESEL: There—she makes me cry.

OPRAH: How old was she?

PROF. WIESEL: Seven.

OPRAH: She was 7. She was 7 when you went to the camp. I know; I remember walking the grounds with you and us standing there, the two of us standing there, and looking at the way your sister had gone.

BEGIN 2006 AUSCHWITZ VIDEO CLIP

OPRAH: Where were you separated from your little sister and your mother?

PROF. WIESEL: There. There. And my sisters, with the two older sisters, my grandmother and my little sister. I remember her because she had a red coat that she got for holiday.

OPRAH: A little red coat.

PROF. WIESEL: Yeah.

OPRAH: Oh.

PROF. WIESEL: And that's when I saw them—I saw them disappear all of a sudden. We went left; they went right. They went to the crematorium. That was the crematorium.

END 2006 AUSCHWITZ VIDEO CLIP

OPRAH: Why do you think it is speaking of her that still brings the tears? Because of a life unfulfilled? Unlived?

PROF. WIESEL: Oh.

OPRAH: Why—

PROF. WIESEL: Why the children? My God, why the children? You know, that the million and a half children were killed. Then...like that. Straight from the train. Do you know what they have done to humanity? How many among them could have grown up to become scientists?

OPRAH: Mm-hmm.

PROF. WIESEL: Physicians. Poets. Scholars. Friends of humanity. Saviors of the world. What they have done to the world.

OPRAH: You've witnessed and written about the depths of both human cruelty and also of what we call human grace. How do you make sense of the two extremes even now at 84?

PROF. WIESEL: That everything is possible.

OPRAH: Everything is possible.

PROF. WIESEL: Both evil, the power of evil, which on one level I cannot understand.

OPRAH: Mm-hmm.

PROF. WIESEL: Why evil? Even worse, why the seduction of evil? What is there in evil that becomes so seductive to some people?

OPRAH: You write on page 66, "Could it be that for God, Evil represents just another path leading to Good?"

PROF. WIESEL: Yeah.

OPRAH: You say, "For me, it is as impossible to accept Auschwitz with God as without God. But then how is one to understand His silence?"

PROF. WIESEL: I don't.

OPRAH: You don't still.

PROF. WIESEL: I don't.

OPRAH: God's silence and the world's silence.

PROF. WIESEL: God's silence. At least God can say, "Who are you to understand me?"

OPRAH: Yes.

PROF. WIESEL: But the world's silence is different. I don't understand it.

OPRAH: To this day.

PROF. WIESEL: To this day.

OPRAH: It's so interesting, though, because you also write that if Auschwitz did not teach the world not to be racist, then what would?

PROF. WIESEL: Yeah.

OPRAH: Rwanda didn't. Cambodia didn't. Bosnia didn't. Are we evolving as a species from racism and those kinds of atrocities?

PROF. WIESEL: I suppose about that. I was invited a few years ago to address the General Assembly of the United Nations. And I called my lecture "Will the World Ever Learn?"

OPRAH: "Will the World Ever Learn?"

PROF. WIESEL: And I answered, actually, no. It will not because it hasn't. Otherwise, how is one to explain Rwanda? How is one to explain that racists are still on the planet? How is one to explain the violence? How is one to explain all that? Which means they haven't learned.

OPRAH: So do you think we will ever learn? Do you think we will as a species?

PROF. WIESEL: As a species, I don't know. We are dealing with hundreds and thousands of years. But at least the person—the individual—will the individual learn?

OPRAH: Will the individual learn?

PROF. WIESEL: Those who—

OPRAH: That's what matters.

PROF. WIESEL: Every single human being is a unique human being. And, therefore, it's...it's so criminal to do something to that human being, because he or she represents humanity. But that they change at least.

OPRAH: Yes. As you're speaking, I was thinking the better question is not, Will we as a species evolve? The better question for everybody watching is, Will you?

PROF. WIESEL: Exactly.

OPRAH: Is, Will you?

PROF. WIESEL: That's exactly it.

OPRAH: Yes. How will you open your heart?

ACT TWO

OPRAH: In June 2011, Elie Wiesel underwent emergency open-heart surgery at the age of 82. He chronicles his journey in his candid and poetic new memoir called *Open Heart*.

OPRAH: Open-heart surgery. How did that act, that physical act, change you?

PROF. WIESEL: Oh, listen, first of all, I wasn't so sure I would make it another three hours. I don't think I would have been here.

OPRAH: Really?

PROF. WIESEL: Yeah.

OPRAH: It was that serious.

PROF. WIESEL: That serious. Five arteries were blocked. Five. All the five arteries were blocked.

OPRAH: Wow. Wow. I love—I'm going to read from page 21, page 21 here, where you say, "Suddenly I realize that I'm in the hands of the surgeon and must face the truth: When I fall asleep, it may well be forever. Am I afraid to die? In the past, whenever I thought of death, I was not frightened. Hadn't I lived with death, even *in* death?" I love that sentence: "Hadn't I lived with death, even *in* death?" Because that's what Auschwitz was.

PROF. WIESEL: Absolutely.

OPRAH: That was my biggest realization. I remember standing there on the snowy grounds and thinking this was a death machine. It was a factory that produced death. Like it was a—that death was a business.

PROF. WIESEL: Absolutely.

OPRAH: Death was a business. So you had lived in death. "Why should I be afraid now?" Were you afraid?

PROF. WIESEL: Yes. Curious and afraid at the same time.

OPRAH: Curious?

PROF. WIESEL: Yes. That means what is—

OPRAH: Curious about what would happen next. What the transition would be.

PROF. WIESEL: What will happen if I die? And if I die, what will it be then? All that I have read about death and studied.

OPRAH: But you must have thought about it, but not in that way.

PROF. WIESEL: Not in that way.

OPRAH: Not until you're faced with possibly that this is the moment.

PROF. WIESEL: I'd never come so close.

OPRAH: So close.

PROF. WIESEL: Except during the war.

OPRAH: Yeah.

PROF. WIESEL: In Auschwitz, every day I was like that.

OPRAH: Yeah, but when you're living with that kind of—living in that kind of constant state of fear, I wonder, and we've talked about this before, does a part of you go numb to it? You have to go—does a part of you go numb to it in the death camp?

PROF. WIESEL: You mean then?

OPRAH: Then.

PROF. WIESEL: It was acceptance.

OPRAH: It was accepting that at any moment, I can—

PROF. WIESEL: Any moment, I can die.

OPRAH: Any moment.

PROF. WIESEL: Any moment. All I wanted, really, is my father. For me, it was my father.

OPRAH: Yes.

PROF. WIESEL: My father, my father, my father.

OPRAH: And the two of you arguing over who should have the piece of bread.

PROF. WIESEL: Exactly. Exactly.

OPRAH: He wanting you to have it and you wanting him to have it.

PROF. WIESEL: Trying to convince each other that "I'm not hungry. I'm not hungry."

OPRAH: Yeah.

PROF. WIESEL: We were so hungry.

OPRAH: That makes me want to...that makes me...every time I see that story or read that story it makes me want to cry because both of you are starving and each saying: "I'm not hungry. You take it." So let's get back to the hospital bed. You're lying there on the hospital bed and suddenly realized that it's a different kind of fear than when you were in the death camps.

PROF. WIESEL: Especially since, in the meantime, they have called—they have called already Marion, my wife, and my son. And I saw them, and I realized, ah, that it's more serious than I thought.

OPRAH: Yes.

PROF. WIESEL: If they called them, that means it is very serious.

PROF. WIESEL: And, in truth, I was not sure that I would see them again.

OPRAH: Wow. And that realization did what to you?

PROF. WIESEL: Oh, I had tears in my eyes as I have now.

OPRAH: Mm-hmm.

PROF. WIESEL: After all, it's true I was 82, but I still had so many things to tell them. And so many things to do. So many words to write. So many books to read. So many people to see. So many friends to embrace. I still have...I wasn't ready.

OPRAH: You weren't ready.

PROF. WIESEL: I wasn't ready. My life wasn't finished. I can't—I couldn't accept it would happen.

OPRAH: Well, you say on page 34, "Many texts describe the beyond. Few take place in paradise; most unfold in hell. ... Am I, in fact, already on the other side? If not, would I have been permitted a glimpse into the beyond? I'm lying on my hospital bed, but it is hell. My skin is ripping apart; my entire body is aflame. I see myself in hell, ruled by cruel, pitiless angels. My head filled with medieval descriptions of unimaginable punishments. I think I know—I do know—what takes place in these dreadful abysses." Now I read this, and I think if Elie Wiesel ends up in hell, then I don't have a chance. I've got to say.

PROF. WIESEL: You never know why one is in hell.

OPRAH: Oh my goodness. This thing you were describing—lying on the hospital bed, skin ripping apart, body aflame, "see myself in hell"—what was that? Was that your imagination? Were you having an out-of-body experience? What was that?

PROF. WIESEL: Imagination but based on knowledge.

OPRAH: Based upon knowledge.

PROF. WIESEL: Because I have read these texts earlier, years earlier. I've read them.

OPRAH: Mm-hmm.

PROF. WIESEL: So they came back to me. And because they came back while I was lying there, I thought, well, maybe that's it.

OPRAH: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm

PROF. WIESEL: I only had ideas about death. Images from death.

OPRAH: You say on page 61, "What does being resuscitated mean if not rediscovering one's future?"

PROF. WIESEL: Sure. All of a sudden, sure. Oh, I write about my grandchildren there, for instance, of course.

OPRAH: Yes.

OPRAH: I loved when you awakened and your grandson said: "Grandpa, I see you're in pain. If I loved you more, would you have less pain?" Yes.

PROF. WIESEL: He said—"I know," he said, "that you have great pain. But you know that I have great love for you. Tell me, if I love you more, will you have less pain?"

OPRAH: Oh.

PROF. WIESEL: Extraordinary. It's extraordinary.

OPRAH: Extraordinary.

ACT THREE

OPRAH: Did open-heart surgery make you fall in love more deeply with life?

PROF. WIESEL: With the living, first of all, of course. Much more, let's say, with Marion, my wife. We have been married for so many decades.

OPRAH: Yeah, I was just going to say, in many ways I think this book is like a love poem written for—

PROF. WIESEL: Absolutely.

OPRAH: —for Marion and also for your son. And grandchildren.

PROF. WIESEL: Absolutely.

OPRAH: It's a love poem for Marion and your grandchildren.

PROF. WIESEL: You are absolutely right. It's a love song.

OPRAH: It's a love song.

PROF. WIESEL: It's a love song, yeah.

OPRAH: Yeah. So you came back loving them more intensely.

PROF. WIESEL: More. Yes. Because every moment—every moment was essential. When you're in the hospital, you cannot move without pain. You cannot think without fear. Every moment counts. Every second matters. Every gesture is essential to you.

OPRAH: But you knew that.

PROF. WIESEL: I never felt it. I knew it.

OPRAH: You never felt it. You knew it.

PROF. WIESEL: Theoretically I knew it.

OPRAH: Theoretically you knew it.

PROF. WIESEL: All the ideas I had.

OPRAH: Yeah, yeah. So let me read from page 72: "I belong to a generation that has often felt abandoned by God and betrayed by mankind. And yet, I believe that we must not give up on either. … We must choose between the violence of adults and the smiles of children."

PROF. WIESEL: Mm-hmm.

OPRAH: "Between the ugliness of hate and the will to oppose it. Between inflicting suffering and humiliation on our fellow man and offering him the solidarity and hope he deserves. Or not. I know—I speak from experience—that even in darkness it is possible to create light and encourage compassion. … There it is. I still believe in man in spite of man." That is so beautiful.

PROF. WIESEL: You write—you read so beautifully.

OPRAH: No, you write so beautifully.

PROF. WIESEL: Not really.

OPRAH: Oh my goodness. That is so beautiful.

PROF. WIESEL: We have known one another for so many years, and finally you discovered I write beautifully.

OPRAH: Oh, then you say, "Illness may diminish me, but it will not destroy me. The body is not eternal, but the idea of the soul is. The brain will be buried, but memory will survive it." What do you think now happens? Now that you've had all this time to think about it, what do you now think happens when we die?

PROF. WIESEL: Somehow, I—we become a child. I always—childhood, for me, is a theme in all my work. We become a child. Will I meet my parents again? I...I want to know that. Will I meet them again?

OPRAH: Did you see your father when you were on that hospital bed?

PROF. WIESEL: Yes. Absolutely.

OPRAH: You saw him.

PROF. WIESEL: Absolutely I saw him.

OPRAH: Saw him, as in coming to visit you?

PROF. WIESEL: Oh, absolutely. Yes.

OPRAH: Absolutely.

PROF. WIESEL: I saw my father.

OPRAH: Did you see your sister?

PROF. WIESEL: My little sister—I cannot talk about her. I'm sorry. I start crying. But my father I saw. I'm—I saw—my father and I were so close. And because of the way he died, that he had never left me. On a different level. Totally different level. When I got the Nobel Prize, huge ceremony, of course. Once in a lifetime. And you are at the center of the world. The whole world looks. And I remember it was great. I had my son with me, Elisha, and Marion with me; my older sister was there. Then came my turn. And all of a sudden, I looked up, and I saw my father in the hall.

OPRAH: When you were getting the Nobel Prize.

PROF. WIESEL: I couldn't speak. I couldn't open my mouth. It took me, I think, one or two or three long, endless minutes for me...to start talking. I couldn't talk. So therefore, again, on the hospital bed, again, I saw my father.

OPRAH: Did he speak?

PROF. WIESEL: No, he was just there looking.

OPRAH: Mm-hmm.

OPRAH: When you saw your father, did you think, "Maybe I've gone to the other side"?

PROF. WIESEL: Exactly.

OPRAH: I would think so.

PROF. WIESEL: No, I said, "Maybe he came to take me." Not only he, but all those who left before me.

OPRAH: Yes. Yeah.

PROF. WIESEL: I thought my mother and my little sister—maybe they came to take me with them.

OPRAH: Mm-hmm.

PROF. WIESEL: So I was very close. And in the hospital bed, it was almost reassuring. I would not be alone. They are there with me. And that is the danger usually, I think, in being so sick. That's the danger. That you feel it's so good being with the dead, why not join them? It will be a liberation.

OPRAH: Well, yes, I've heard people speak of going to the other side—

PROF. WIESEL: Yeah.

OPRAH: —and feeling that it's so comfortable and welcoming there that they don't want to come back.

PROF. WIESEL: What for? Really.

OPRAH: But you did because you had more loving to do.

PROF. WIESEL: I had more and more things to do.

OPRAH: More things to do.

PROF. WIESEL: You know, I always have that feeling.

OPRAH: Yes.

PROF. WIESEL: That I haven't even begun.

OPRAH: One of the things that I know you love as much as I do is teaching.

PROF. WIESEL: Oh yes.

OPRAH: Because at your heart, that's who you are. A teacher.

PROF. WIESEL: Absolutely.

OPRAH: What do you think is—if you had to summarize the greatest offering that you've been able to give your students, what would that be?

PROF. WIESEL: You know, sometimes they ask me, "What should we take away from your classes?"

OPRAH: Mm-hmm.

PROF. WIESEL: And a few times, I came up with a formula, which I'm not sure is always good. I said simply: "Look, whatever you do in life, remember, think higher and feel deeper. It cannot be bad if you do that."

OPRAH: Think higher.

PROF. WIESEL: Always think higher and feel deeper.

OPRAH: And feel deeper.

PROF. WIESEL: Life is not a fist. Life is an open hand waiting for some other hand to enter it.

OPRAH: Yes.

PROF. WIESEL: Into friendship.

OPRAH: Yes.

PROF. WIESEL: Ultimately, the answers are so simple. Not simplistic, but so simple.

OPRAH: So simple.

PROF. WIESEL: It's so simple to do something with our life. But do it.

OPRAH: Mm-hmm. So that will be with me for the rest of my life. Think higher.

PROF. WIESEL: Sure. Feel deeper.

OPRAH: Feel deeper.

PROF. WIESEL: Yeah.

OPRAH: That will be with me for the rest of my life. And I know so many of you, too, really got that on the level that you've offered it.

ACT FOUR

OPRAH: One of the other great lessons I felt inside myself when we were together at Auschwitz is how passiveness and indifference—

PROF. WIESEL: Oh, sure.

OPRAH: —is actually worse than hatred.

PROF. WIESEL: Absolutely. Absolutely.

OPRAH: Can you speak to that for a moment? How being passive and indifferent is actually worse than—

PROF. WIESEL: I have dedicated my life not only to fight evil—it's too difficult—

OPRAH: Yes.

PROF. WIESEL: —but to fight indifference.

OPRAH: Indifference, yes.

PROF. WIESEL: I came out—I came out with some formula. I began saying that the opposite of love is not hate, but indifference. The opposite of knowledge is not ignorance, but indifference.

OPRAH: Indifference.

PROF. WIESEL: The opposite of beauty is not ugliness, but indifference to beauty and to ugliness. Indifference enables everything which is bad in life. And, therefore, fight indifference. The idea that the victim should say that nobody cares, that hurts me.

OPRAH: Mm-hmm.

PROF. WIESEL: Because we had that feeling: Nobody cares.

OPRAH: Yes. And I am sure that every victim of war feels the same. When you read the stories of Rwandans…

PROF. WIESEL: True. Absolutely.

OPRAH: Yes.

PROF. WIESEL: Absolutely.

OPRAH: Yes.

PROF. WIESEL: Sure.

OPRAH: Eight hundred thousand people in a hundred days.

PROF. WIESEL: Like that. Like that.

OPRAH: Like that.

PROF. WIESEL: Like that.

OPRAH: Nobody cared.

OPRAH: But the memory…as you write so beautifully in *Open Heart*, that what remains when the brain is buried, when all is gone, is the memory—

PROF. WIESEL: Absolutely.

OPRAH: Yeah.

PROF. WIESEL: The memory is stronger than anything else, strangely enough. The memory has power and ultimately, at the end, is what remains—the memory of a prayer if not a prayer. The memory of a friendly smile if it's not a friend. But something…that memory. We work for that memory. We live with that memory.

OPRAH: In some way when I was reading…reading…yeah, your beautiful words. I've now discovered you're such a beautiful writer. When I was reading *Open Heart*, I was thinking in some ways, the way you describe it, memory feels like spirit. It feels like the spirit of the person.

PROF. WIESEL: It is.

OPRAH: Yes.

PROF. WIESEL: It is.

OPRAH: The spirit of the person.

PROF. WIESEL: But the memory combines many things.

OPRAH: Yes.

PROF. WIESEL: Sadness and joy. Hope and despair. And ultimately, I think, what is life? Surely it is a sum of memories. But memory is more than the total sum.

OPRAH: Mm-hmm.

PROF. WIESEL: It's more than one plus one plus one.

OPRAH: Yes.

PROF. WIESEL: There's something about memory.

OPRAH: Yes.

PROF. WIESEL: Which is always with a capital M. Almost.

OPRAH: That is why Alzheimer's is such a devastating disease.

PROF. WIESEL: My God.

OPRAH: And why, lying on the hospital bed, the thing you were most worried about—

PROF. WIESEL: Mind.

OPRAH: —is your mind. Is your mind.

PROF. WIESEL: Oprah, years ago I published a novel, the saddest novel I have written, called *The Forgotten*. It's about Alzheimer's. And I compared the Alzheimer's patient to a book. Every day you tear out a page.

OPRAH: A page, yes.

PROF. WIESEL: And another page. And another page. At the end, there is nothing but the cover.

OPRAH: But the covers, yes.

PROF. WIESEL: That's the Alzheimer's patient.

OPRAH: Yes.

PROF. WIESEL: And I was also wondering then, and what happens if a whole period is forgotten?

OPRAH: Yes.

PROF. WIESEL: If the whole world would have Alzheimer's?

OPRAH: Then who are you?

PROF. WIESEL: Who are we?

OPRAH: Then who are you?

PROF. WIESEL: Who are we? That is what.

OPRAH: You asked that question lying on the hospital bed. Who am I?

PROF. WIESEL: Sure. Naturally.

OPRAH: And what was the answer?

PROF. WIESEL: I don't know yet. That's exactly it.

OPRAH: Really.

PROF. WIESEL: Only at the last moment, I think. Really, with the last breath, the last question would be, And who am I? And then if I have the answer, I won't even know how to transmit it. Because God alone will know the answer.

OPRAH: Mm-hmm. I thought it was so stunning as I was reading this—and all of the producers around here, all of us when we got together—first of all, Elie Wiesel, that you on the hospital bed, number one, would sense fear and would also have those questions still about your life.

PROF. WIESEL: Oprah, I define myself more by my questions than by my answers. Because answers come and go.

OPRAH: Mm-hmm.

PROF. WIESEL: But questions remain.

ACT FIVE

OPRAH: You've said that Holocaust survivors are becoming an endangered species. Indeed, you all are. Yet you don't fear the memory of the Holocaust will ever be lost.

PROF. WIESEL: Why?

OPRAH: Why?

PROF. WIESEL: I'll tell you why. Because, you know, all of us who went through that experience considered ourselves as witnesses. When the last witness will be gone, I don't want to be that one. It's too tragic. What will happen? So on one hand, you could become pessimistic that the last witness—all the knowledge, all the experience, all the memories will be buried. Then what? So I came up with a theory which I think is valid.

OPRAH: Mm-hmm.

PROF. WIESEL: To listen to a witness is to become one.

OPRAH: To listen to a witness—

PROF. WIESEL: Is to become a witness.

OPRAH: To become a witness.

PROF. WIESEL: So ,therefore, those who have listened to us, who have read my books and other survivors' memoirs—we have a lot of witnesses now. And they will protect not only our past but also their future.

OPRAH: You know, there's a picture of us that was taken at Auschwitz where we're—I think we're facing one of the graves. Remember that picture? And I remember, for days and days and weeks and weeks afterwards, and even still now, feeling like I bore witness to something that was—

PROF. WIESEL: Oh, you were, absolutely, Oprah. Oprah, yeah.

OPRAH: That I was able to bear witness, in a way, that we could then allow the world to see and experience. People that hadn't seen or known it in that way before.

PROF. WIESEL: Therefore I believe that that event with a capital E was of such grandeur, of such magnitude, of such depths that it will not be forgotten.

OPRAH: Will not be forgotten.

PROF. WIESEL: It will hound our society and many generations to come with this fear, with this trembling, but also with this impossible hope.

OPRAH: I have to ask you this because we spoke a couple of years ago and you had just been through a stunning experience—of all the stunning things that had happened to you—but when you got the call that you had lost your entire life savings as well as $15 million of the foundation that you and Marion had worked your whole lives for because of Bernie Madoff, what was the first thing you did? I mean, I just—that's an unbelievable call to get.

PROF. WIESEL: I remember we were out, and we came home, and it was almost near midnight.

OPRAH: Mm-hmm.

PROF. WIESEL: The telephone rang. And we were frightened. Midnight.

OPRAH: Midnight.

PROF. WIESEL: It was Elisha. Elisha said: "First of all, don't worry. Everybody's good in the family. Nothing happened. Nothing. But now sit down."

OPRAH: Sit down. This is your son.

PROF. WIESEL: My son. And our son, then he was a member of our board. And he actually didn't like the idea that we had placed so much money with Madoff.

OPRAH: Because you'd placed all the money with Madoff.

PROF. WIESEL: Yes. He said too much. And so that was a few months earlier before that. And we told him,

come on, we know people who did that. If I told you the names, you would be surprised. The most prestigious names in the financial world—

OPRAH: Yes.

PROF. WIESEL: —have given him money. So why shouldn't we? He said, "He's in jail." We looked at each other, and our reaction was, we have seen worse.

OPRAH: Mm. You and Marion.

PROF. WIESEL: Oprah, both she and I have seen worse.

OPRAH: Yes. You've lived through death camps.

PROF. WIESEL: It has touched us, but not deeply really. So, it's true, we lost everything. But for the foundation, something very beautiful happened. All of a sudden we began receiving hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of letters and donations. Small donations. From all over America. Jews and non-Jews. Young and younger. Pocket monies. Christmas money. Hanukkah money. That was so uplifting. You know, the American people are so generous. We are a generous people. No other nation has given so much to charity, to philanthropy.

OPRAH: Right.

PROF. WIESEL: As the American people.

OPRAH: Yes. We rise up in a crisis. We do.

PROF. WIESEL: Automatically, yes.

OPRAH: We do.

PROF. WIESEL: So we received hundreds of them every week. And that helped us.

OPRAH: But you—you didn't have to change the way you lived, because there were people who had given him money and lost their homes. So you didn't lose your home.

PROF. WIESEL: The homes we did not.

OPRAH: Yeah.

PROF. WIESEL: But, look, we had to change our lifestyle right away. Immediately.

OPRAH: Really.

PROF. WIESEL: But not much. Look, I teach.

OPRAH: Mm-hmm.

PROF. WIESEL: I have a good salary. And I give lectures, and I write books. So it didn't change our life in any way. It didn't make me more pessimistic. It didn't make me more desperate. And even not more skeptical about the otherness of the other.

OPRAH: The otherness of the other.

PROF. WIESEL: Yeah.

OPRAH: Meaning other people?

PROF. WIESEL: Meaning—meaning Madoff.

OPRAH: Yeah.

PROF. WIESEL: There was some otherness in him, of course, which I don't want to accept as part of human nature. That he could do that.

OPRAH: That he could do that.

PROF. WIESEL: That he could do that.

OPRAH: We're going to take a break. We'll be right back. That's powerful.

ACT SIX

OPRAH: You say at the end of the book *Open Heart*, "It might seem that I am not the man I was before June 16, 2011, but on a level close to the absolutes that are life and death, I have remained the same. What is different is that I now know that every moment is a new beginning, every handshake a promise. I know that every quest implicates the *other*, just as every word can become prayer. If life is not a celebration, why remember it? If life—mine or that of my fellow man—is not an offering to the *other*, what are we doing on this earth?"

PROF. WIESEL: True.

OPRAH: That's just the most beautiful.

PROF. WIESEL: True.

OPRAH: True.

PROF. WIESEL: It is true what I said at that moment, sure.

OPRAH: Because ultimately—I mean, I see that too. I see this show—I see this network—as an offering. I see—that's why I asked the question, What is the offering you've given to your students? I see that our role in humanity as each individual is to give an offering.

PROF. WIESEL: True.

OPRAH: To each other.

PROF. WIESEL: It's also to create a world with friends. Friendship.

OPRAH: Mm-hmm.

PROF. WIESEL: To me, friendship is like a religion.

OPRAH: Mm-hmm.

PROF. WIESEL: We couldn't live without it. Perhaps we could live for a while without love, but not without friendship.

OPRAH: You could not.

PROF. WIESEL: No.

OPRAH: Because isn't friendship a form of love?

PROF. WIESEL: Yes. But a different kind.

OPRAH: A different kind, yeah. A different kind.

PROF. WIESEL: Love is demanding in the best sense of the word. Friendship is not.

OPRAH: Mm-hmm...what is it you most want the world to know?

PROF. WIESEL: That if there is one person on the planet who still is suffering from loneliness and from pain or despair, and we don't know about it, or we don't want to know about it, then something is wrong with the world.

OPRAH: And each of us, through our wanting to know and wanting the other person, whomever that is, to not feel alone.

PROF. WIESEL: That's exactly it. I cannot cure everybody. I cannot help everybody. But to tell the lonely person that I am not far or different from that lonely person, that I am with him or her, that's all I think we can do and we should do.

OPRAH: That's the great spiritual path.

PROF. WIESEL: It is.

OPRAH: I love you, Elie Wiesel.

PROF. WIESEL: And I love you more than that.

OPRAH: No, I love you more.

PROF. WIESEL: Okay. Let's—

OPRAH: Okay, okay. That's beautiful. Thank you. That was a prayer. This is a love poem, and that interview was a prayer. Thank you.

OPRAH: What better way to end today's show than to take you to the very place where Elie Wiesel finds his breathing space, here among the beauty and books of the New York Public Library. So many books...

That's Schubert playing. Also one of the professor's favorites.

See you next Sunday.