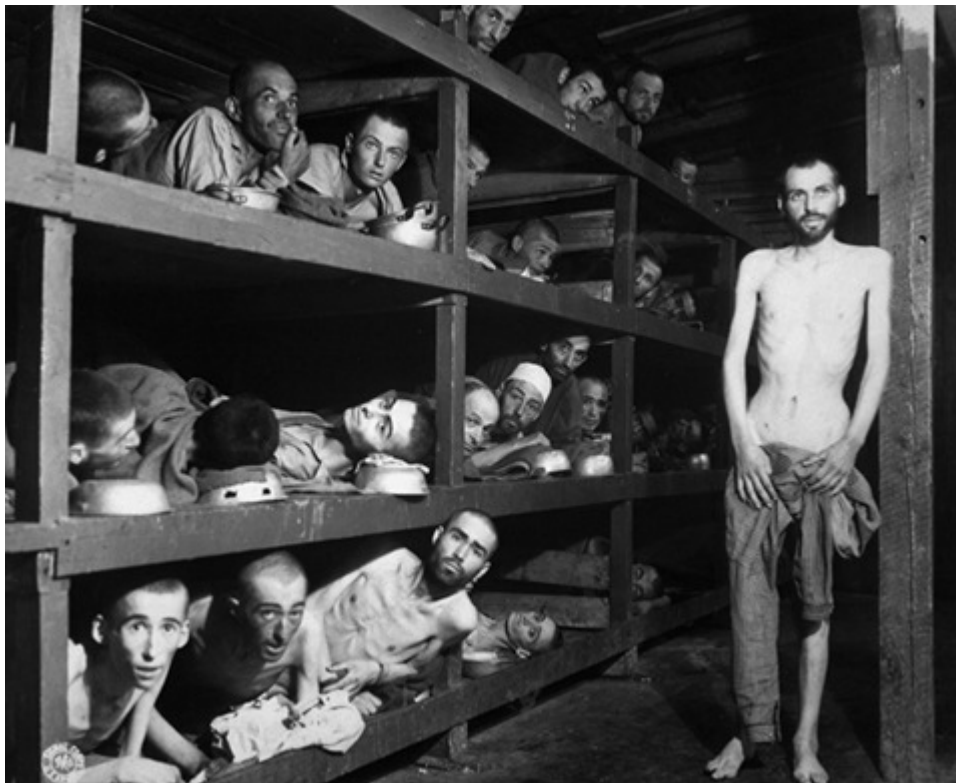


Famous Photo of Buchenwald Survivors

The following photo analysis is greatly indebted to the two blogs that appeared on Scrapbookpages Blog on March 2nd and March 25, 2010. They can be found at: [Scrapbookpages Blog / Famous Photo of Buchenwald survivors](#) and [Scrapbookpages Blog / Famous Photo of Buchenwald survivors revisited](#)

This famous photo of the Buchenwald survivors was first published in the New York Times on May 6, 1945 with the caption "Crowded Bunks in the Prison Camp at Buchenwald".



It was taken inside Block #56 by Private H. Miller of the Civil Affairs Branch of the U.S. Army Signal Corps on April 16, 1945, *five days after* the Buchenwald camp was liberated (1) by a division of the US Third Army on April 11, 1945. None of the men were identified.



Here you see a traveling exhibit of huge, larger than life size photographs from the Nazi concentration camps, including Buchenwald, being shown in St. Louis, MO in summer 1945; it was then taken to Washington, DC. The names of the liberated prisoners in the picture were still unknown.



At some later date (we don't know exactly when), Elie Wiesel, who was 16 years old on April 16, 1945, said that he was the face shown inside the red circle.(2) In October 1983, this picture was published in the high circulation Sunday New York Times Magazine in an article titled "Bearing Witness: The Life and Work of Elie Wiesel," with this caption:

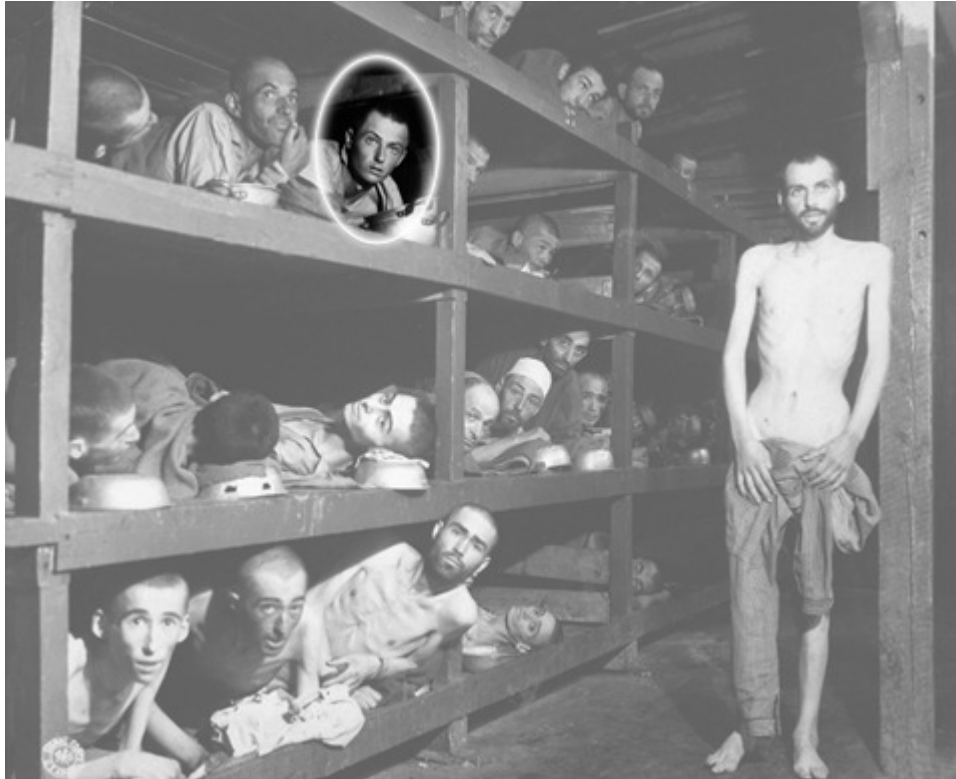
"On April 11, 1945, American troops liberated the concentration camp's survivors, including Elie, who later identified himself as the man circled in the photo."(3)

Once Elie Wiesel identified himself in the famous picture, other decided they were in it too. Mel Mermelstein recalled how the picture was taken (4) in his book *By Bread Alone*, his biographical account of a legal battle with the Institute for Historical Review. He claims to be the face with eyes-only showing in the far upper right corner.

Miklos Grüner has identified himself as the 16-year-old prisoner in the lower left corner. He is the only one of the four who actually looks his age in that picture and he also resembles the man he is today, as seen here in 2009 holding a Swedish newspaper.



According to [Scrapbookpages](#) , an October 2008 news article published on the [Sun Times news Group website](#) , since removed, reported that Paul Argiewicz identified himself as the man whose face is shown in the circle in the photo below. He was not quite 15 years old when the photo was taken and had been in Nazi concentrations camps for 5 years.



Argiewicz says he lied about his age during the selection for the gas chamber at Birkenau, claiming that he was 18 years old and experienced as an electrician so that he would be selected for work, when he was actually only 11 years old and believed he would have been sent to the gas chamber. Argiewicz says he could speak fluent German because his mother was from Bavaria.

The photo below shows Pawel Argiewicz as he looked in 1946 when his picture was taken for a German driver's license. He is obviously not the same man as the older one in the famous photo.



The two faces compared side by side.

Below is Paul Argiewicz in a photo taken March 2009. There is a clear resemblance between him and the face in the driver's license photo. However, the man in these two photos looks nothing like the man in the photo taken in Block #56 at Buchenwald.



The orphans of Buchenwald

The identification of some of the others will be noted at the end of this page. We look now at a photo taken on April 27, 1945—eleven days after the famous photo was taken—of Buchenwald orphans marching out of the camp with their caretakers, in preparation for their transport to France. Both Elie Wiesel and Paul Argiewicz were listed as being among the 904 orphan boys that were housed in Barrack #66 in Buchenwald. (Elie’s father Schlomo allegedly died shortly after arriving at Buchenwald.) Both Block 56 (for adults) and 66 (for orphans) were in the “Small Camp” at Buchenwald. The Small Camp was a special quarantine section for prisoners, mostly Jews, who had recently arrived from other camps, such as Auschwitz-Birkenau.



In the photo above, the boy in front of the tall boy in the left column of boys, fourth from the front (the third boy in line is hidden from view), has been identified as Elie Wiesel by Prof. Kenneth Waltzer on his Michigan State University [website](#). Waltzer teaches German History and directs the Jewish Studies Program at MSU. He is writing a book about the orphan boys at Buchenwald. Do these faces look like the same person, 11 days apart? No way. Plus, could the man in the barracks be 16-years old?



Here is a picture of Elie Wiesel at age 15, taken before his deportation.

In addition to all these problems, Elie wrote in his book "Night" that he became sick three days after the Buchenwald camp was liberated on April 11, 1945 and was in the hospital for two weeks. That means that he could be in the photo of the orphans above, but if he was in the hospital when the photo of Block 56 at the top of this page was taken, then he can't be in that photo.

In the book "The Children of Buchenwald" by Judith Hemmendinger and Robert Krell, there are the stories of 31 of the 904 orphan boys at Buchenwald, including the story of Elie Wiesel in Chapter 11. On page 113 of this book, it is mentioned that Block 66 was the barrack for the orphan boys at Buchenwald.

Jewish professor Ken Walzer wrote, regarding the orphans at Buchenwald: "Among the older boys was Eliezer Wiesel from Sighet, Rumania, who was protected in block 66 with hundreds of others." Walzer also wrote in [Harper's Magazine, Dec. 31, 2008](#), that "Margaret Bourke White photographed [the 904 orphan boys] as did hundreds of visiting American soldiers." Why, then, do we not see more photographs of these boys, and especially Elie Wiesel among them? Or anyone who resembles Elie Wiesel?

Miklos Grüner and Elie Wiesel were both orphans (although there is no record of Elie's father at either Auschwitz or Buchenwald) who should have been in Block 66, the orphan's barracks, so how did they get in a photo taken in the adult barracks, Block 56?
(5)

Grüner, even though his father died at Auschwitz leaving him orphaned (6), was not sent to France with the others, but to a clinic in Switzerland because he was found to be suffering from tuberculosis. Many of the inmates in the famous photo appear to be sick, while others look healthy and of normal weight.

This suggests strongly that the photo was staged. As already mentioned, this picture was not taken on the day of liberation, but 5 days later. The photographers were setting up pictures that complemented the propaganda that was being prepared for the world.

Possibly some sick prisoners were brought in to Barracks 56 to give the appearance that the general population of the camp was starving.

Below is another Buchenwald liberation photo taken on April 14, 1945, just two days after the famous photo.



It shows a barracks full of Buchenwald survivors who appear to be in very good health and are warmly dressed, too. They are fully dressed while in the famous photo the sick men are shirtless to expose their bony frames. The photographer has packed the men above into this barracks to give an impression of overcrowding. Or maybe just to get as many in one picture as possible for souvenir purposes? At any rate, this is a strange comparison with Barracks 56.

Other prisoners identified

Other former prisoners who have been identified can be seen [here](#). Simon Toncman (standing), Helman Leefsma, and Max Hamburger were all from The Netherlands, and

had been sent to Buchenwald after they had been captured while fighting with the French resistance. Simon Toncman is the skinny guy who is standing up. Strangely, he never talked about being in this picture, according to the photo caption on Flickr. Notice that Toncman and several men in the photo have nicely trimmed beards, but the others are clean shaven. Now look at the man in the center of the photo below. Is this Simon Toncman posing with a group of Communist prisoners at Buchenwald?



This photo of the Communist prisoners at Buchenwald was taken on April 15, 1945 by Margaret Bourke-White. This was a group of privileged prisoners who actually ran the Buchenwald camp, according to the Buchenwald report. (It looks like a scene in a movie but it isn't.)



Summing up

It is clear from this analysis that

- A. It is unlikely that Elie Wiesel has correctly identified himself in the famous photograph.
- B. It is unlikely that Elie Wiesel is the boy in the picture of the marching orphans.
- C. It is unlikely that Elie Wiesel and his father arrived at Buchenwald in the same transport as Miklos Grüner, as he claims.
- D. It is questionable that the Elie Wiesel we know, or his father, was ever interned at either Auschwitz-Birkenau-Monowitz or Buchenwald concentration camps.
- E. Elie Wiesel needs to back up his careless and contradictory statements with proof, just like any other public figure is required to do when challenged.

Footnotes:

1. Actually, it was ready and waiting to be turned over to the United States military authorities whenever they arrived.
2. The highly regarded British 'historian' Martin Gilbert doesn't mention Wiesel or Mermelstein as being in the picture in *The Macmillan Atlas of the Holocaust*, published by him in 1982. He writes of it, "The photograph, taken on the day of the liberation of Dachau, shows some of the survivors of death marches and evacuation trains ..."
3. Samuel G. Freedman, "Bearing Witness: The Life and Work of Elie Wiesel," NYT, October 23, 1983.
4. The July 26, 1985 Billings Gazette published an Associated Press photo showing Mermelstein holding the famous photo with the caption: "Mermelstein poses with a photograph showing himself on a bunk in the Auschwitz concentration camp."
5. In his book *Stolen Identity*, Grüner gives an explanation on page 28. He writes that as the inmates of Block 66 were being marched toward the gate (before liberation), he faked an emergency need to relieve himself and ran to the first barrack he could reach, which turned out to be #56. There he laid down in a bunk where he remained. No way to verify this, but Elie Wiesel gives no explanation at all for why he was there. Of course, since he says he was gravely ill in the hospital at the time the picture was taken, he could not be in two places at once.
6. He had an older brother and a sister who survived the camps, with whom he was put in contact after liberation. Both moved to Malmo , Sweden . (*Stolen Identity*, p. 29.)