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Humanities

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### Vladek Spiegelman's Successes and Failures Through His Struggles to Survive

During the horrors of the Holocaust, Vladek Spiegelman's resistance against the Nazis was extremely apparent, but at times, he was psychologically defeated. Spiegelman was a confident, resourceful, and optimistic person through challenging times who proved his strong-willed character to the Nazis and his family. Vladek did, indeed, have to experience painful events during the Holocaust which led to his physical survival, but there are events in *Maus I and Maus II* that demonstrated how Vladek was damaged emotionally.

Vladek survived in the sense that he was alive after the Holocaust and he was able to resist the Nazis both physically and emotionally. When Hitler came to power in 1933 in Europe, the swastika became known as a sign of hatred toward Jews. The swastika rising over the town (*Maus I* page 33) is reminiscent of a sun rising over the world, similar to Hitler, whose power was rising. Vladek and Anja embraced soon after Vladek returned home from the labor camp with the same background in which the swastika was shown. (*Maus I* page 66) This shows their resistance to the Nazis because they were able to still love each other and be joyfully reunited despite Hitler's intentions to separate and destroy Jewish families. In addition, Vladek succeeded by being resourceful and having a strong character. Vladek worked at the shoe repair shop in Auschwitz and, when he had a extremely ruined boot to repair, he traded his day's ration of bread to get the boot fixed professionally from a specialist. (*Maus II* page 61.) Vladek got a sausage for "his" work from the Gestapo. Later in the book, (*Maus II* page 85) when Vladek was

on a train for many weeks full of sick passengers, he tied a blanket to hooks on top of the ceiling and sat in it as if it were a hammock. Vladek later claimed that the hammock saved his life because he could breathe and rest his legs. Similarly, Vladek traded food for a clean shirt to get daily soup when his own was infested with lice (*Maus II* page 94). All of Vladek's clever actions led to physical survival, but not surprisingly, his experiences during the Holocaust left him mentally damaged for the rest of his life.

Vladek Spiegelman did not survive emotionally because he was incapable of leaving his Holocaust life behind him; he shared this very limiting lifestyle with other friends and family, who became annoyed. Vladek was very close-fisted; he never wasted a penny and was always resourceful. Vladek learned to be economical and careful about trading valuables in the ghetto and in Auschwitz. Before Vladek and his first wife Anja were separated in Auschwitz, Anja was longing for comfort, but Vladek was mainly concerned about finding food and money. (*Maus I* page 140.) All Anja wanted was for Vladek to stay in the barn with her. However, Vladek was very determined to find another home for the winter; he left Anja anxious and concerned about him. Although food and shelter were necessary to survive, Anja depended on Vladek emotionally and did not want him to leave her. Vladek was a compassionate character, but he did not succeed when tending to Anja's needs and strengthening her. After the War, Mala, his second wife after Anja's death, constantly complained that Vladek never allowed her to buy items that were not completely necessary, such as a pair of stockings. Her fury in the drawing, where she is grasping paper towels from the bathroom to show that he refuses to buy more napkins, (*Maus I* page 132) demonstrated that she was very frustrated with Vladek's stubbornness. Her strong grasp on the paper towels and slanted eyebrows revealed her rage. In *Maus II*, she left Vladek and lived on her own. Vladek focused on physical survival so much that

he sometimes did not tend to Anja's fits of desperation and was also too parsimonious after the War, which damaged family relationships.

In conclusion, Vladek both survived and was defeated during the Holocaust. He resisted against the Nazis in ways that many other characters were too frightened to resist. Vladek's ingenious actions saved his life, and he was compassionate when helping others survive.

However, Vladek failed, when he damaged himself by being stingy with his money and damaged Anja by not supporting her stability when she was mentally broken. Vladek was an extremely good-hearted, independent character who fought for his family and himself in every way

possible; he made

difficult times that

lives of others.



clever choices in

saved his life and the