

AUTHOR'S SPOTLIGHT:

— SIMONE ARNOLD-LIEBSTER —



Simone along with her late husband Max.

When reflecting upon her childhood trauma as a survivor of Nazi persecution during the Holocaust, author Simone Arnold-Liebster knew that her unwavering faith and strong conscience played a vital role in her resiliency to overcome this dark period in her life.

“My battle to keep a good conscience started when I was 11, brought me into threatening situations, arrest, and hardships, but at the same time great satisfaction in my heart because the voice of my conscience provided help that never failed! God’s words sustained me,” said the 91-year-old author of *Facing the Lion: Memoirs of a Young Girl in Nazi Europe*.

Liebster was born in August of 1930 and grew up during World War II. These experiences are chronicled in the autobiographical account, which shows her strong will while facing intense pressure to conform to the propaganda common in Nazi Europe. It was published in the spring of 2000 and Liebster is now an inspirational speaker.

While the Nazis were taking over many other countries around her home country of France, Liebster’s mother had chosen to become one of Jehovah’s Witnesses, formerly known as the Bible Students. Her father forbade Liebster’s mother to talk about her beliefs with their daughter, but in time all three became Bible Students.

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As the Nazis started to close in on her home region of Alsace and France all together, Liebster was learning valuable lessons from her parents. Without a radio or any form of entertainment in those times, family conversations were faith based and Liebster learned crucial reasoning, reading and critical thinking skills at an early age.

"My parents taught me from the Bible but also helped me understand that I would need to make my own decisions and take personal responsibility for them. They also helped me understand the costs of opposing the forces coming to our home country—which the Nazis wanted to make German," she stated.

It was a mission of the Nazis to bring their strong political influences to schools and mostly, the people. The Arnolds' refusal to shout political slogans and sing national songs brought them hardships like arrest and being put into concentration camps.

Similarly, Liebster faced being expelled from school for not singing national songs and greeting people with a political slogan. She also had to fear everyday that one day her mother would be taken away by the Gestapo (the Nazi secret police) like her father had been. Simone's faith in God helped her to keep a clean conscience for herself.

"Keeping God as the supreme authority in our lives, obeying his law, meant that we might face consequences if a human dictatorship tried to force us to break God's law," she said. "But my family decided to put God first."

Along with her late husband, Max, Liebster founded the Arnold-Liebster Foundation. Liebster was inspired by other fellow Holocaust survivors like the famed author of *Night*, Elie Wiesel, who encourages each survivor to chronicle his or her experiences.

Many books about the Holocaust have graced book shelves including *Night* or *The Diary Of A Young Girl* by Anne Frank.

"Biographies are important. They preserve lessons that can help the reader to understand history," said Liebster. "They also give the victim a voice, which he or she never had while in camp! These stories may also raise interest in history and why it happened."

A piece of advice from Liebster for students today is to be fact seekers, admirers of wisdom and history buffs for the lessons it tells our society.

"It is most important to understand the source of a situation, ponder over it, and act only when your conscience is at peace. I believe that if one's personal conviction is based on Bible teachings, these won't lead one astray. But the same is not automatically true for human leadership. Everything has roots...not only plants or animals. I believe humans also have a common ancestor, this makes up the 'human race' because of that common origin," she said.

Liebster understands that her beliefs contradict the Nazis' cruel ranking based on race.

"A responsive conscience has to learn to respect mankind's origin, which reminds us that we

are all of the same background," Liebster said. "Compromise may seem the easy way out, but it weakens a conscience and brings more problems than making decisions based on truth and facts"

Simone says, "When very young, I knew that God's eyes were upon me, and my behavior could either please him or disappoint him. I learned very early that my disobedience led to disappointment and guilt. I also learned that obedience made my parents happy, and I believed the same for God. And even if it was hard, doing the right thing brought contentment and developed self-respect!"

Armed with self-respect and strong values, Liebster was very firm and determined not to compromise with her conscience and she was always prepared to suffer the consequences for her faith. She continues to visit students all over the world through video-conferencing relating her experiences as a child.

Liebster personally asks that if readers have any questions, they may feel free to email them to me at 24nikhil.lakshman@vistaoaks.net, so that she may answer them personally. The website to her foundation can be found at www.alst.org.

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