

A Child Called It: One Child's Courage to Survive Study Guide

**A Child Called It: One Child's Courage to Survive by
Dave Pelzer**

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

A Child Called It: One Child's Courage to Survive Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Chapter 1, The Rescue.....	5
Chapter 2, Good Times.....	7
Chapter 3, Bad Boy.....	9
Chapter 4, The Fight for Food.....	11
Chapter 5, The Accident.....	14
Chapter 6, While Father is Away.....	16
Chapter 7, The Lord's Prayer.....	18
Epilogue, Sonoma County, California.....	20
Characters.....	21
Objects/Places.....	22
Themes.....	24
Style.....	27
Quotes.....	29
Topics for Discussion.....	30



Plot Summary

A Child Called It is a heart wrenching true story about one child's survival of one of the worst child abuse cases ever reported in California history. Dave Pelzer lived in a world of starvation, cruelty, and torture from the age of four until his rescue by courageous school officials at the age of twelve. This autobiography will both horrify and inspire all who read Dave's incredible journey through the dark insanity of his mother's rage.

Dave was washing the dishes, hoping he could get done quick enough to avoid his mother's rage and to have the opportunity to eat some breakfast. Although he does not do the former, Dave was allowed the leftovers of his brother's cereal. Mother drove Dave to school today, although she normally forced him to run. At school, Dave was called to the nurse's office so she could inventory his injuries, a routine they have carried on for quite some time. This time was different, however. This time, the nurse called in the principal. Very soon, Dave found himself being rescued.

Dave was part of a typical family, a good family. Dave felt love from both his parents, especially on holidays and special trips into town while his father, a fireman, was working a twenty-four hour shift. However, things began to change. Dave's mother began to drink and was depressed. During these drinking binges, Mother would take out her negative feelings on Dave. It began with long stints in the corner and quickly progressed to beatings, one such beating that caused Dave a broken arm.

Mother's rage seemed focused on Dave only, excluding his two brothers. Soon, the abuse also included such mental punishments as starvation and long stints in cold baths. When mother gave birth to two more sons, the punishments only became harsher, as the privileges of the other boys became more luxurious. Dave would often spend time lying in the cold bath while listening to Mother sharing fun times with the other boys, like telling scary stories on Halloween and opening presents on Christmas. Dave was excluded from all family events, Christmas especially. In fact, Dave was not even allowed to sleep in the house, relegated instead to the garage.

Mother never tried to hide her abuse of her son, forcing him to go to school in clothes he had been wearing for months at a time and filling him with stories to tell anyone who should ask about his bruises. When officials would become suspicious, Mother would charm her way out of interviews or con Dave into believing the worst was over, and she would no longer torture him. Father was Dave's only protection. When Father was home, Mother's punishments were never as severe. However, Father failed to protect Dave on most occasions. The night Mother accidentally stabbed Dave while threatening his life, Father refused to intercede, instead more afraid for his own sanity, when Mother learned Dave has told on her.

Soon, Father stops spending much time at home, eventually moving out of the house. Dave now realized that his hopes of being rescued are a fantasy that will never come true. Dave no longer cared about avoiding his mother's rage. Now, Dave sought out her rage, hoping that she would kill him and give him refuge from the pain. However,

months after Dave once again found the strength to pray, he was rescued by courageous officials at his elementary school. Dave grew up, became a father, and made peace with the horrible abuse he suffered as a child.



Chapter 1, The Rescue

Chapter 1, The Rescue Summary and Analysis

A Child Called It is a heart wrenching true story about one child's survival of one of the worst child abuse cases ever reported in California history. Dave Pelzer lived in a world of starvation, cruelty, and torture from the age of four until his rescue by courageous school officials at the age of twelve. This autobiography will both horrify and inspire all who read Dave's incredible journey through the dark insanity of his mother's rage.

March 5, 1973 began like most days in Dave Pelzer's life. Dave was attempting to finish the dishes as quickly as he could in order to be allowed to have the scraps left from his brothers' breakfast. When Mother came into the room and slammed his face against the counter for not having his hands in the water, Dave was sure that this would be one of the days when he was not allowed to eat. However, Mother surprised him by allowing him the milk and few pieces of leftover cereal in his brother's bowl.

Since he was so late, Mother had to drive Dave to school that day, something she rarely ever did. Mother liked to make Dave run to school. Dave did not mind, because he could often arrive early enough to steal food from other kids' lunch bags. It was too late to scrounge for food this day. Dave had to go to the office since he was so late and was sent to the nurse's office, another routine in Dave's life. The nurse located each injury visible on Dave's body and made notes about them, along with his version of how each injury occurred. Dave always tried to remember the story his mother told him to tell if asked. However, as usual, Dave faltered under the nurse's concerned gaze and told the truth.

The nurse left the office while Dave dressed and returned with Mr. Hansen, the school principal, as well as two of Dave's teachers, Mr. Zeigler and Miss Woods. When Mr. Hansen looked at Dave's newest bruises, he cried out in frustration. Afraid he would call his mother, Dave became frightened and begged him not to. Mr. Hansen assured Dave he would not call his mother and sent him to class. Dave had barely sat down in the classroom when he was summoned back to the office, where a police officer had joined the principal, the nurse, and the two teachers.

At first, Dave was frightened that the police officer was there to arrest him for stealing. When the police officer told Dave he was really there about his mother, Dave was reluctant to talk. With support from the adults, however, Dave did begin to tell his story. The nurse also made Dave show the scar on his chest from a stab his mother inflicted on him, an event Dave made sure everyone understood was an accident. Dave was then sent from the room, while the adults talked.

Mr. Hansen brought Dave a tray of food from the cafeteria, and Dave wolfed it down. Then, Mr. Hansen gave Dave a package of cookies. The police officer took Dave out of the school then, and Dave was convinced again that he was being arrested. At the



police station, Dave waited while the police officer completed several pages of paperwork. Then, the police officer wanted Dave's phone number. Again afraid of what would happen when his mother found out what was going on, Dave tried to refuse. However, the police officer assured him it would be okay. The police officer only spoke to Dave's mother for a minute, telling her that Dave had been taken into custody of the juvenile department. Then, the police officer put Dave in his car. When they drove past the city limits sign, the police officer told Dave he was free. His mother would not hurt him again.

This chapter is told in a flashback, the author using italics throughout the chapter to denote this technique. The author's purpose is immediately made clear to the reader as the first paragraph opens, telling the reader how afraid the child is that he will not finish the dishes in time to be allowed to eat breakfast. The purpose comes even more into focus when his mother smacks the child, because she caught him without his hands in the water. This introduction alerts the reader to the fact that this is not a normal child living a normal existence. The theme of abuse jumps out at the reader in this chapter as well, not only through the actions of the mother as reported by the child, but through the description of the child's need to steal food and the attentions of the nurse, when the child first arrives at school.

The theme of abuse also enters the picture, as the adults at Dave's school attempt to help him. In the year that this rescue took place, outside intervention in child abuse cases was rare. Dave's school nurse had been documenting his abuse for a long time, if the reader remembers Dave commenting in the narration on how this procedure was routine. This intervention touches on a minor theme of heroism. The principal and the other school officials were very brave to stick their necks out for this child, not to mention putting their careers and reputations on the line.

The tone of this chapter is one of fear that slowly turns into something almost like hope. At first, the reader can feel the child's anxiousness, his need to get the dishes done quickly enough. Then there is fear first when Dave believes the principal is going to call his mother and again when Dave finds the police officer waiting for him, and he is compelled to tell the truth about him and his mother. Finally, hope enters the text when the police officer tells Dave he is free. Dave's reaction to this, a mix of confusion and hope, sets a tone that shows the reader how difficult his life must have been up to this point and opens the door on a mix of emotions that will be interlaced through the remainder chapters.



Chapter 2, Good Times

Chapter 2, Good Times Summary and Analysis

Before the abuse began, Dave believed his family was the 'Brady Bunch' of the 1960s. The family lived in a modest, two bedroom home in Daly City, a small community outside San Francisco, where Dave's father was a fireman. Dave could never remember what his mother looked like, but he could remember her glow of love for her children. Dave also remembered when he was four or five, and his mother told her children she was sick. Then, Mother went and painted the garage steps red and covered them in a rubber mat before the paint was dry. Dave never understood why she did that.

Dave remembered his mother was a clean fiend. Mother always cleaned the house extremely well, making the boys help by keeping their rooms clean. Mother was also a wonderful gardener. Dave also remembered his mother as a fantastic cook, often making exotic meals and playing exotic music to match, while the family ate.

The house was always full of pets back then. Dave could remember a gopher tortoise, named Thor, because it was an animal he had been allowed to name. Dave recalled that every room was filled with large aquariums, when times were good. His mother took every opportunity to teach the children lessons about life, like the time the cat had kittens, and Mother explained the miracle of birth.

Holidays were always a major event in their home during the early years. The celebrating would always begin at Halloween and continue until after Christmas. Dave could remember his mother allowing each child to carve pumpkins. When the Christmas holidays began, Mother would decorate every inch of the house, and there would always be dozens of presents for each child under the tree. Christmas Eve was always an event all to itself. There would be a wonderful dinner, and each child was allowed to open a single present. Then, the next morning after the presents were opened, Mother would take the children out into the backyard to see the tree through the window.

Since father often worked twenty-four hour shifts, Mother would take the boys on outings to San Francisco. They would go to the Gold Gate Park and tour the Steinhart Aquarium. Dave would often become frightened by the alligators, and Mother knew his fear, showing him with a squeeze on his hand. Spring would mean picnics with many homemade treats. Summer vacations were always planned by Mother. They would often camp out or rent a cabin on the Russian River. Dave's favorite trip was there. Mother picked him up early from school that year. The family spent their days playing on an old tree stump or swimming. One night, the whole family watched the sunset, holding hands. Dave could remember his mother holding him around the shoulders, as the sun sank into the lake.

The writer's purpose in this chapter is to show the reader that his mother once loved him or at least appeared to love him. From birth until four or five, Dave was loved by a loving



mother. It is often the habit of an abused child to make excuses for his abuser. It is also possible that the abused child might be holding on to a thread of love that he once knew, attempting to understand the mechanics behind the madness that made his life so miserable.

The tone of this chapter is one of happiness and normality. The child in this chapter is describing a normal childhood, if a little on the 'Leave it to Beaver' fantasy realm. There is a sense of impending doom here as well, since the reader is already aware that this is not a autobiography of a perfect childhood.

Mother is introduced here in detail. Dave remembers her as a loving mother, who worked hard to make her children happy. Their lives were filled with picnics and outings, holidays with great fanfare and general happiness. There are a few hints within this chapter that all is not well with Mother, however. Mother's decision to paint the steps while ill and then cover them with plastic mats before they were dry does not seem like a sane thing to do, even in the eyes of a four or five year old child, who questioned her actions. Again, the writer appears to be searching for a reason that even he does not have, an excuse that explains why the mother did the awful things she did later in the child's life.



Chapter 3, Bad Boy

Chapter 3, Bad Boy Summary and Analysis

Dave had a voice that carried further than most children's when he was a small child and had the unfortunate luck of getting caught every time he chose to do something wrong. Mother began by disciplining Dave in ways other mothers might, by putting him in a corner of his bedroom. This began to change, however, as Mother's behavior began to change. Mother began spending the majority of her day on the couch watching television when Father was not home, neither bothering with her clothing or makeup. Mother also spent a great deal of time drinking. When putting Dave in the corner no longer appeared to work, Mother started the mirror treatment. Mother would force Dave to stare at himself in the mirror and say over and over, I'm a bad boy! Then, Dave would have to stand facing the mirror, his arms locked at his side, swaying back and forth until Mother returned to tell Dave what a terrible child he was.

While Father was at work, Mother would often have the boys search the house for things she had lost. Over time, it became Dave's job to do the searching. Dave could never find what Mother had lost, and he would take verbal abuse from Mother over this failure. When Father was home, Mother was much nicer to Dave. Dave would often spend his time as close to his father as possible when he was home in order to stay out of his mother's way. One day, when Father was preparing to go to work, he took Dave aside and told him to be a good boy. Dave took from this that what Mother said was true, that he was a bad boy. Things improved for a while after this.

A month or two later, however, things took a turn for the worse. Mother called the children, and Stan and Ron ran for cover. Dave did not and became the target of his mother's drunken rage. Mother beat him repeatedly. When she began to lose her balance, Mother grabbed Dave's arm to stop her fall. Dave's arm broke. Mother ignored what was obvious and sent Dave to eat his dinner. After dinner, Mother told Dave to sleep in the upper bunk, although it was his habit to sleep in the lower bunk. Early the next morning, Mother woke Dave and told him he had fallen from the top bunk during the night. The doctor at the hospital did not seem to believe this story any more than Dave did. Mother did, however, the story becoming more fantastic every time she told it.

School was a haven for Dave. One day in the spring of Dave's first grade year, his mother took him into her bedroom and told him he had failed the first grade, even though Dave knew he did well in the class. Mother beat him and told him he had shamed the family. Then, Dave was told he would no longer be allowed to watch television, and he had to do every chore his mother could dream up. Dave was then sent to the garage to await his orders. That summer, Dave was not allowed to go on summer vacation with the family. He was left with an aunt, instead. Dave tried to run away to be with his mother and his mother beat him when she learned of the attempt.



The following Christmas, Mother told Dave that she had gotten a letter from the South Pole that said Dave would not be getting any gifts that year because of his bad behavior. Dave was beaten again for shaming the family. At Christmas, all he got were a couple of paint-by-number sets his father snuck under the tree for him. Father paid for these gifts later, when Mother became angry with him for going behind her back. A few months later, Mother became a Cub Scout den mother, acting like the perfect mother to all the other children. Mother quit after just a few months. One Wednesday after this, Mother made Dave tell his new den mother that he could not attend the meeting that day. Then, Mother took Dave home and forced him to undress in front of the kitchen stove. Mother turned the stove on, telling Dave he had ruined her life, and she wanted to see him burn. Mother held Dave's arm over the burner. Then, Mother told Dave to climb up onto the stove and cook himself. Dave refused, until his brother returned home. Mother allowed Dave to escape then, sending him to garage to wait until it was time to do his chores.

The writer's purpose in this chapter is to show the escalating violence against him by his mother. The mother at first appears to be taking her rage out on each one of the children for whatever reason, but then her rage becomes focused on Dave. Perhaps, it is because he does not show fear and hide like the other two boys. There is also the idea that Dave just had the bad luck of being the one had a more rebellious streak in him, the one who got caught more often. Whatever the reason, the mother clearly becomes focused on Dave toward the end of this chapter.

The tone of the chapter is one of fear mixed with bewilderment. Dave does not understand why his mother is treating him this way, or why she behaves the way she does. No child could possibly understand depression or alcoholism, two diseases that clearly have the mother in their grip. The only thing Dave understands is his mother's growing rage toward him. The theme of abuse is clear within this chapter, not only in the physical abuse the mother is perpetrating on this innocent child, but the verbal abuse as well. There is also something of the theme of abandonment in this chapter when the father tells Dave to try to be a good boy and leaves him alone with his mother. Again this theme appears when the father gives Dave some presents for Christmas even though the mother forbade it. The reader sees this and must wonder why the father did not do more since he is so clearly aware of what is happening here.



Chapter 4, The Fight for Food

Chapter 4, The Fight for Food Summary and Analysis

School became the only hope Dave had in his life. The fall after the burn incident, Mother sent Dave to school with new clothes and a new lunch pail. However Mother forced Dave to wear the same clothes week after week and they soon became soiled and torn. Mother never tried to cover Dave's bruises either; instead she forced Dave to memorize ready-made excuses for the marks.

Dave would be allowed his brother's leftover cereal for breakfast if he finished his chores on time, but he rarely was allowed dinner. Dave would be so hungry that he would fantasize about food at night. Dave began to steal food from school, at first stealing Twinkies and other desserts from the other children's lunch bags. When the children began to catch on, Dave would go to other classrooms to steal. When Dave would get caught and his mother would learn about the thefts, Mother would punish him with beatings. Dave had ceased to be a member of the family by this point and was simply referred to as 'The Boy.' Every day after school Dave was expected to do chores his mother assigned and then wait in the garage until the family had finished dinner so he could come up and wash the dishes.

Father would often try to sneak food to Dave, but this would lead to fights between Father and Mother. Soon, Father stopped attempting to help Dave. The fights between Father and Mother became more frequent. At first, Mother would leave the house after one of these fights, but soon Father would be the one to leave. When that would happen, Mother would take out her frustrations by beating Dave.

In the second grade, Dave's teacher took special notice of him. Finally, the teacher reported her fears of abuse to the school principal, who in turn called Dave's mother. Mother had just given birth to her fourth child, a boy named Russell. Mother went to the meeting with the principal with Russell in her arms and charmed her way out of the accusations, blaming most of Dave's bruises on his own jealousy of the new baby. This meeting gave Mother new confidence. Dave sensed that this confidence would only lead to more pain for him.

That summer, the family took another vacation to Russian River. One day, Father took the boys, all except Dave and Russell, to play on the new super slide. While they were gone, Mother shoved a dirty diaper into Dave's face, covering it with the baby's defecation. Mother then told Dave to eat it. Dave fought her, until the baby began to cry. Mother left the room, and Dave told himself that if he kept fighting her, Father and the boys would return, and she would have to stop. However, when mother came back, she had another fresh diaper. Mother again told Dave to eat it. When he refused, Mother forced the diaper into his face, causing his nose to bleed. However, the boys then returned. Mother allowed Dave to clean his face with a rag and sent him to sit in a corner for the rest of the night.



That fall, Dave returned to school in the same ruined clothes from the year before. Mother no longer allowed Dave to ride to school in the family station wagon but forced him to run on his own. Mother would fix him a lunch every morning, but it was only two peanut butter sandwiches and a couple of limp carrot sticks. Dave would struggle to find new ways to feed himself every day. Once, he came up with an idea of running to the local store during recess to steal food. It took him over a week to figure out the logistics of the plan and longer to get up the courage. The first time he made the trip, Dave stole a box of graham crackers. Dave hid the crackers in a trashcan in the boy's room. However, when Dave returned to eat his prize, the trash had been emptied. Dave returned to the store several more times after that and found new ways to hide his prizes, sometimes able to find ways to eat it and sometimes not. Eventually, Dave got caught, and Mother punished him.

Dave would scheme to find better ways to get food. Mother would scrape the dinner leftovers into the trash can, and it was Dave's job to take the trash out. At first, Dave would scrounge through the trash and take out the edible pieces. However, Mother found out, and Dave tried to stop. Dave's growling stomach would not allow it, though. One day, Dave ate some pork chops out of the trash and became very ill. Mother told him she had allowed the pork chops to spoil before putting them in the trash, hoping Dave would eat them. Then, Dave would hide food in the bottom of the trashcan when Mother began to inspect the trash for food. Mother caught on to this, too, and began putting ammonia in the trashcans. Dave stopped getting food from the trash at home and began stealing frozen meals from the cafeteria at school.

One day, Mother dragged Dave into the bathroom and forced him to throw up. When hotdogs from a frozen meal appeared in the toilet, Mother took them and placed them in a bowl to show Father. That night, after Mother showed Father that Dave had indeed been stealing food, Mother forced Dave to eat the regurgitated hot dogs. Dave looked to his father for help, but found none. Father told Dave he had to do what she said, changing Dave's opinion of Father as his personal hero. That night, Mother began to force Dave to sleep under the breakfast table with newspapers as his only cover. This lasted for many months, until Mother forced Dave to begin sleeping in the garage on an old army cot.

Dave continued to fantasize about ways to get food. In one of his fantasies, Dave decided to try begging for food. Dave would stop at houses on his way to school and tell whoever opened the door that he had lost his lunch and ask if they would give him a new one. This worked, until one day, when Dave went to the house of a woman who knew his mother. The woman called Dave's mother. Dave spent the entire day in fear of the punishment his mother would come up with this time. When he returned home, Dave went right to work on his chores. Mother did not appear at first. When Mother did find Dave, she only watched him do the dishes and then clean the bathroom. The fear took its toll on Dave, leaving him exhausted. Dave fell asleep on his feet while waiting. Finally, Mother called him upstairs after the other children had gone to bed.

Mother had a bottle of ammonia and a spoon in her hand. Dave knew what she wanted and was too exhausted to fight her, therefore he opened his mouth and allowed her to



pour the ammonia down his throat. Suddenly, Dave could not breathe. Dave fell to the floor and began to pound his fists, fighting for breath. Finally, mother beat his back and allowed Dave to burp to clear his throat and allow him to draw breath. Mother repeated this the following evening in front of Father, swearing Dave would never steal food again. The next morning, Dave found that layers of flesh had been scraped from his tongue, leaving it raw and red. Mother never forced Dave to swallow ammonia again, but she did force Clorox on him and dish soap. Once, Mother poured dish soap down Dave's throat, and he became so thirsty that he drank gallons of water, resulting in horrible diarrhea that Dave was forced to deposit in a large bucket in the garage. Another time when mother forced the soap on Dave, he held it in his mouth while he did the dishes, finally spitting it out in the bushes when he took the trash out. Mother did not always win. Those rare moments helped Dave continue fighting and imagining a better day.

The major theme of this novel, abuse, is explored in detail in this chapter. The main type of abuse explored here is the withholding of food. Dave was refused food at home, so like anyone in that situation, he used every opportunity he had to get food in other places. Stealing it at school or begging for it seemed like perfectly acceptable things to this poor child. Eating out of the trash was also an acceptable form of nourishment for this child who could find no other way to rid himself of the harsh hunger pains that ruled his every waking moment. The tone of this chapter, in relation to these events, is almost nonchalant, like it is normal for a child to have to search out alternative ways of gaining food. The author's purpose here seems to be one of normalcy, that this was normal for him.

The physical abuse is also a major part of this chapter, again touching on the theme of abuse. The mother came up with some very insane types of punishment in this chapter, from forcing the child to eat excrement to making him eat regurgitated food. The mother's cruelty has no bounds. The tone changes during these moments of abuse, showing the child's fear of his mother's touch, of her imagination, and of her cruelty. The author's thesis here seems to be a clear one, allowing the reader into his world and into the awesome cruelty that the boy had to live through. There are no longer any excuses in these pages, no longer a search for answers. These pages show the clear facts of Dave's abuse and the torture he suffered.

The theme of abandonment enters the pages of the autobiography again in this chapter. The mother has already abandoned her child, when she began to beat him and left Dave with only his father. Dave believes his father to be a man of integrity, the only one left who can save him. Like any child, Dave's father is his hero, his superman, and he expects his father to stand up for him. Father lets Dave down when he refuses to keep the mother from forcing Dave to eat the regurgitated hotdogs. Not only this, but the father must know about Dave sleeping on the floor under the breakfast table. Yet, he does nothing to stop it. Not only this, but the father gives up trying to feed his son when the mother stops allowing Dave to eat in her house. The father would clearly prefer to have peace in the house rather than allow his son to have nourishment, either from food or from the love all children deserve from their parents. This is abandonment in the most basic form.



Chapter 5, The Accident

Chapter 5, The Accident Summary and Analysis

In the summer of 1971, Dave was not quite eleven. He had finally learned pretty much what to expect when he did not meet one of his mother's deadlines on his chores, or if he were caught stealing. During the summer, Dave rarely got food, since he did not leave the house to attend school. Dave was subject to his mother's whims in that regard, often going three days or more without food. One night, Dave was on his third day without food and was summoned to the kitchen to do the dishes. Mother told him he had twenty minutes. Especially angry this night, Mother had a knife in her hand as she screamed at Dave, threatening to kill him if he did not finish in the time allowed.

Dave was used to his mother threats. Since he was exhausted from lack of food, he did not pay much attention to his mother's threat. However, this night was different. Mother had a wild look in her eye. Russell, who was four or five by this time, was wrapped around Mother's leg. While screaming at Dave, Mother lost her balance and, before Dave realized what had happened, the knife flew out of Mother's hand and landed in his chest just above his stomach. Dave blacked out.

When Dave woke, he was in the bathroom, and Mother was bandaging his chest. When Mother finished, she ordered Dave to do the dishes. Dave went instead to tell his father what had happened. Father told Dave he had better do the dishes and not tell Mother he had told him. Dave, who still thought of his father as Superman, expected him to rush him out of the house to safety. Instead, Father did nothing.

Dave washed the dishes conscious of little movements that brought him pain. Father came to help when Dave attempted to put the dishes away, but Dave pushed him away. Father insisted he would put the dishes away and sent Dave to change his shirt. In the basement garage, Mother came and helped Dave put on another T-shirt. Then, Mother sent Dave out to play with the other children. The boys were playing with sparklers, and Mother allowed Dave one, too. Mother held him in her arms, while Dave watched the sparkler, giving him hope that everything would change now. During the night, Mother came to Dave when he had a fever and soothed his forehead with a wet rag. However, the next morning everything was back to the old ways.

Three days after the accident, Dave realized that his wound was infected. Rather than ask his mother for help, now thinking of her as 'The Bitch,' Dave decided he could take care of it himself. Despite the horrible pain, Dave squeezed all the pus out of the wound and cleaned it up himself. Dave was proud of himself for his strength, thinking of himself as Superman, as he waited on the stairs for his mother's next set of orders.

The author's purpose here is to show the escalation of his mother's abuse. Mother is not happy with simply hitting or torturing Dave, now she threatens to kill him. Although the stabbing is an accident, at least that is how it appears, it still works as an example of



how quickly this type of abuse can get out of control. Mother attempts to make up to her son by allowing him to play with the other children and by showing concern when Dave begins to run a fever that night. However, her concern quickly disappears, and everything goes back to normal, with Dave doing all the chores, and Mother refusing to acknowledge his needs as her child.

The theme of abandonment is strong in this chapter with examples from both the father and the mother. The first example is the father's refusal to help his son, when Dave tells him that she has stabbed him. In fact, the father appears to be more concerned about his wife's wrath than he is about his son's mortality. Dave feels let down by this reaction, as though his hero has suddenly exposed himself for the wimp he really is. The father then comes and offers to help with the dishes, offering too little too late. Then, the mother abandons her child not only by stabbing him in the first place, but also by refusing to take him to the hospital. The mother appears to care about her son, showing some concern after the fact by treating the child's fever and allowing him to play with his brothers. However, when it is clear the child will survive, she goes back to the way things have been, abandoning all hope for the child.

The theme of survival also begins to show itself in this chapter. Dave is a strong child, who has found ways to survive all this time by stealing food and doing what ever he has to do to survive. However, his strength becomes abundantly clear in this chapter. This small child, ten years old, has the sense enough to clear the puss out of his own wound despite the horrible pain it must have caused him. Dave has been abandoned by both parents. The abandonment of his father is the toughest of all, because this man was his final hope. Now, he knows he must depend on himself and shows that he can by doing what must be done to keep him from growing even sicker and possibly dying. This child's sense of survival is very strong.



Chapter 6, While Father is Away

Chapter 6, While Father is Away Summary and Analysis

Father began spending less time at home after the stabbing, taking away Dave's last hope of protection. When Father was home, it became his habit to do the dishes with Dave, taking the time to speak to him. During these talks, Dave would often promise to be better and to do his work better. Father always assured him it was not his fault. Eventually, though, Mother told Father not to help Dave with the dishes. Father did not even put up an argument.

Father soon stopped spending any time at home, even on his days off. Father would come home for a few minutes to spend a minute talking to each child. Once, he told Dave how sorry he was, sending Dave into a terrible depressed fit. When Father was away once, Mother refused to feed Dave for ten days. During these days, Dave would become weaker and weaker and have no strength to meet his mother's time limits on his chores. Mother would play a game with him in the final days of Dave's fast, where she would give him a plate of food and a time limit to eat it. Then, Mother would snatch it away before he could eat anything. On the tenth day, Dave knew the trick and grabbed the plate before Mother could. Mother called him a pig.

Mother began another game during Father's absences. Mother would send Dave in to clean the bathroom. Then, Mother would mix a bucket of ammonia and Clorox, set it in the room, and shut the door. The fumes from the fatal mixture would quickly fill the room, choking Dave. Dave learned to wet his rag and lay it over his face, sucking fresh air from a heating vent on the floor. Mother left Dave in the bathroom for thirty minutes. Dave coughed up blood for over an hour afterward.

That summer, Mother sent Dave to mow lawns in the neighborhood, setting a quota on how much money he should bring home. However, not many neighbors wanted a smelly, dirty little boy to do their lawns. One woman took pity on Dave and fixed him a lunch. Dave found a lawn to mow after that house and did not eat the lunch. When Dave began walking home, he ran into his mother driving through the neighborhood. Mother saw the lunch and thought Dave had stole it. Mother beat Dave and then sent him to sit out in the backyard, while she took the other boys to the zoo. Dave had to sit on his hands with his head back, his POW position. When Mother returned that night, she forced Dave to lay in a bath of cold water for hours. When the family sat down to dinner, Mother forced Dave to redress without drying off and sit back out in the shade of the backyard.

When school started that fall, Dave had a substitute, who took a special interest in him. The teacher reported her suspicions of abuse to the school nurse, who began documenting Dave's injuries the following October. That Halloween, Mother forced Dave into the cold bath again, as it had become a routine, and Dave lay there for hours



listening to Mother tell the other boys scary stories, while they carved their pumpkins and ate popcorn. During this time, Mother had begun allowing Dave to sleep in his father's bed at night.

At Christmas, Dave received a pair of skates. Mother forced Dave to play with the skates in the cold without benefit of a jacket for hours at a time. In March, Mother gave birth to a fifth child, Kevin. While Mother was in the hospital, Father allowed Dave to become a part of the family again. Dave played with his brothers and spent time at a neighbor's house. When Mother came home from the hospital, everything went back to the old ways, except that Mother made friends with the woman across the street. The friendship did not last long, however.

Shortly after Mother's relationship with the neighbor woman ended, Mother came to Dave and told him she wanted things to change between them, that she wanted to start over. Mother allowed Dave to be a part of the family that night, watching television, eating dinner, and playing with the other children. Everything changed for the one night, except that Dave continued to sleep in his father's bed. The next day, a social worker came and asked Dave if his mother beat him. Dave told her that Mother punished him when he was bad, an answer that led Dave to another beating when the social worker left. Mother had only pretended that things were going to change because of the social worker. Dave was not upset, though, because at least he had gotten that one night. The only thing that made Dave sad anymore was when his father would leave for work, since Dave was never sure when he would see him again.

Again, the theme of abandonment is primary in this chapter. When Mother goes into the hospital to give birth, Father makes Dave a part of the family again, treating him like a child should be treated, with love and understanding. When Mother comes home, she pretends to do the same thing. However, it is only to convince a social worker that she is a good mother. Mother abandons Dave again by turning on him the second the social worker is out of the house. Father does the same thing by not standing up to Mother. Not only this, but it is clear to both the reader and this poor little boy that Father is getting ready to abandon the entire family, not just Dave. Father is not spending time at home, does not seem to care about Dave anymore, and clearly has one foot out the door. This is again a clear case of the father being more afraid of the mother than concerned for the child.

The tone of this chapter has shifted slightly from previous chapters, as the theme of survival makes a stronger appearance in the text. There has always been hope in Dave's narration, although only a weak spark. Hope becomes stronger in the tone of this chapter, despite the desperation that is coming into the tone, as well. Dave knows his situation is bad, that his father is getting ready to leave and with him his last hope at any form of protection. However, Dave has learned to count on himself, has learned that he is a strong person, who can withstand almost anything. Through this strength, this sense of survival, Dave derives hope and stays strong even during the worst moments of cruelty.



Chapter 7, The Lord's Prayer

Chapter 7, The Lord's Prayer Summary and Analysis

In the fifth grade, Dave began to believe there was no God for him. Dave began to hate everyone around him, his mother, his brothers who had begun to bully him, and his father for leaving him. The only person Dave truly loved was his baby brother, Kevin, whose baby charms had him under his spell. Imagination was something Dave no longer indulged in. Desperation for food led Dave to eat out of the dog dishes after the dogs had finished, another act that took away any self respect he might have had left. The person Dave hated the most was himself.

School had stopped being a refuge to Dave. Since Mother forced him to go to school in dirty, smelly clothing, the other kids would tease and torture Dave. One boy constantly beat him up, and a girl in his grade often abused him verbally. A bright light in Dave's life was his homeroom teacher, Mr. Ziegler. As the sponsor of the school paper, Mr. Ziegler ran a contest to name the paper. When Dave's suggestion won, Mr. Ziegler told Dave how happy he was for him. Mr. Ziegler sent home a note to Mother about the contest. Mother tore the letter up, telling Dave he was nothing more than an 'It,' and none of this mattered.

Dave began to hope his mother would kill him. Dave began purposely baiting her by not doing his chores well and by fighting her every chance he got. Once in the store, Dave refused to follow Mother's rules and talked back to his brothers. Mother beat him in the parking lot and then forced him to lay on the floor of the backseat so his brothers could kick him all the way home. While she was pregnant with Kevin, Mother attempted to choke Dave. Dave kicked her to stop her. Later, she told him that the baby would be deformed because of him.

Mother began alienating herself from everyone, her husband and her friends and relatives alike. Mother had never been close to her mother and siblings. When she began to drink and stopped caring for her own needs, Mother's mother tried to help, but Mother would not let her. Soon, no one in Mother's family would come around. Mother also banned Father from the house, and the kids would only see him when they went to get his paycheck. For a short time, Mother changed her mind and tried to make things better. Mother made a special dinner for Father and dressed up nice. Father came home late and, when he did, he was drunk. Father packed a bag and left that night. Mother and Father tried to be nice to each other for a while, but it was a strain. After the holidays, Mother packed the rest of his things and took them to him at a hotel near his fire station.

Father gave Dave a package of research he had asked for for a school report. Then, Mother drove to a McDonald's for a treat for Dave's brothers. Dave waited in the car for their return, holding the package close to him and trying to smell his father on it. When



Mother and the boys came back, Dave prayed all the way home, while the boys ate their hamburgers.

The author's purpose here is to show the climactic end his life was quickly reaching. Dave stopped feeling hope by the time he began the fifth grade, stopped caring about anything. Dave hated the world for the abuse he suffered, stopped believing in God, and hated himself above all else. The theme of survival seems to be on its last legs here. There is no longer an overwhelming sense of survival or even hope. The very tone has changed to one of surrender. At the end of the chapter when Dave begins to pray, the reader must sense a sudden surge of hope, since the reader knows what will soon happen.

The theme of abandonment is again a major theme in this chapter, as well. The father has finally gone for good, leaving his family in a permanent separation from his wife. However, the main theme of abandonment in this chapter does not come from the parents abandoning the child, but from the child abandoning himself, of abandoning hope. Dave has given up in this chapter, deciding he hates everything. He wants his mother to kill him, so that he will not longer have to suffer. However, this abandonment is not complete. The first thing Dave says in this chapter is that he no longer believes in God, at least a God for him. At the end of the chapter, however, Dave is praying the Lord's Prayer.

Epilogue, Sonoma County, California

Epilogue, Sonoma County, California Summary and Analysis

Dave is an adult now, standing by the ocean watching the sun began to set. There is a piece of weather wood in the water that reminds him of his past. Dave thinks of how lucky he is to have survived such a dark past, to leave it behind him and make something good out of his life. Dave knows that his past made him very strong and that now he can look at life in a more positive light. His past has also made it possible for him to help others.

Dave gets into his truck, picks up his son, and drives out to Russian River and the cabin where his family once vacationed. The cabin has changed, people have remodeled it over the years. However, this is not why he has come. Dave takes his son and walks past the cabin to the same spot where he and his family once stood and watched the sunset. Dave watches it now with his son, so overcome with emotion that he begins to cry. Dave's son, Stephen, tells his father that this is his favorite place. Dave agrees. Stephen sees the tears on his father's face and smiles, telling his father he loves him. Dave responds in kind. Dave is truly free now.

The author's purpose here is clear. Written in italics like the first chapter in order to let the reader know that the chapter is a flash-forward of sorts, this chapter is to show the reader that Dave survived what happened to him. Not only did he survive, he flourished. The theme of surviving flows like rain through the narration here, as Dave reflects on what has happened in his life since he left his mother's house. Dave has taken his experiences and turned them into something positive, a way to help other people. Not only this, but Dave has a child he loves and cherishes the way he longed to be himself. This is the greatest accomplishment a man with Dave's childhood could possibly achieve.



Characters

David Pelzer

Mother, Catherine Roerva

Father, Stephen Joseph

Brothers - Stan and Ronald

Brothers - Russell and Kevin

The School Nurse

Mr. Zeigler

Mr. Hansen and Miss Woods

The Bullies

Neighbors



Objects/Places

Russian River

The Russian River is a place in California, where Dave and his family vacationed, when Dave was a child. This is also where Dave takes his son many years later to see the sunset.

School

School was Dave's refuge away from his mother, and the only place where he could find food, when his mother refused to feed him.

Grocery Store

For a short time, Dave would leave school during lunch recess to steal food from a local grocery store.

Lunch Bags

Dave would often steal food from other children's lunch bags.

Frozen Food Trays

Dave would also steal frozen food trays from the school cafeteria, while his mother was starving him.

Basement/ Garage

Dave's mother's house had a garage that was under the house. It was a sort of basement, as well. Dave was forced to sleep in the garage and was to wait in the garage to receive his chore assignments.

Bathroom/ Clorox-ammonia Pail

Dave's mother would often force Dave to lay in freezing cold baths for long periods of time in the bathroom. Dave's mother would also lock Dave in the bathroom with a pail of Clorox and ammonia mixed together, in order to release a toxic fume.



Kitchen

The kitchen was often the scene of the worst moments in Dave's life, including the times his mother forced him to sleep under the breakfast table, and the day Dave was stabbed.

Golden Gate Park

Before Dave's mother became sick and angry, she would often take Dave and his brothers on outings to Golden Gate Park.

Daly City

Daly City is the community where Dave and his family lived.

San Francisco

San Francisco is where Dave's father worked, and where he moved during the separation.



Themes

Abuse

The theme of abuse is an obvious and important theme of this autobiography. Child abuse was the theme of Dave Pelzer's life between the ages of four and twelve, the time period over which this book covers. There are many types of abuse that can damage a child's delicate psyche and most of them are covered in this book. The first is verbal abuse. Many people do not realize how deeply words can wound a child. However, language can be as damaging to a child as a fist. The very title of this book, *A Child Called It*, is a perfect example of verbal abuse. Dave's mother reduced her child, a son she gave birth to, down to nothing. Dave's mother refused to acknowledge Dave as a member of the family for many years and refused to call him anything but 'The Boy.' As the abuse escalated, Dave's mother reduced even this down to 'it.' Dave's mother told him he was not even worthy of being called a boy, that he was nothing, only an 'it.' To reduce a child to such a nonentity is to take away his humanity. Other forms of constant verbal abuse, including telling the boy he was bad, a loser, and could do nothing right worked to destroy his self-esteem and ability to care about himself.

Another form of abuse that is portrayed in this book is physical abuse. The mother in this book spent a lot of time and effort thinking up ways to beat and torture this poor child. The mother would beat him with her fists, would slam his face against tile counters, and would force his arm into a burning stovetop. Another part of the mother's physical abuse was to torture the child. The mother would force the child to stay in a closed bathroom with a pail of toxic fumes or feed him harmful chemicals. The mother would also play mental games on the child by starving him, offering him food, and then stealing it away. The mother would also prolong her abuse, following the child around the house when he knew something bad was going to happen, but then she would do nothing, forcing him to wait and worry over her choice of punishments. Some of the things she did were similar to the abuse prisoners of war experienced in prison camps during Vietnam and World War II.

Abandonment

Abandonment is another theme of this book. To be abandoned is to be left to take care of one's self. Dave is abandoned first by his mother. The mother was a good mother to Dave in his early years, giving him hugs freely, allowing him to be a part of the family, and showing concern for him. However, when the mother's mental health began to slide due to her alcoholism, she began to move away from these motherly instincts. Somehow, Dave became the enemy to this woman, the one child in the family whom she could take out all her rage against, the one person she could exclude from the family and pour her hate on. Dave became the object of her rage.



Dave was then abandoned by his father. The father saw what his wife was doing to his child and did nothing. Since the father worked a twenty-four hour shift at the firehouse, he more than likely did not realize the extent of the abuse in the beginning. However, when his wife began making Dave sleep in the basement, when Dave was excluded from family events, when he was forced to eat regurgitated food in front of his father, surely the father began to realize the depth of the abuse. The father refused to do anything about his abuse. The father sat there and watched his son eat regurgitated hot dogs, watched his child sleep in the basement, watched his child be excluded from family meals and from Christmas celebrations, and he did nothing. When Dave was stabbed by his mother, not only did the father refuse to do anything to help, he worried about his own peace of mind. The father sent his son to do the dishes, even though he was bleeding from an open knife wound. Finally, the father left his wife and abandoned the entire family, leaving Dave to surrender to his mother's evil.

Finally, Dave was abandoned by his brothers. Dave's brothers originally stayed out of their mother's reach in order to protect themselves. However, when the abuse escalated, the boys not only did nothing to stop it, they joined in. Dave's brothers would bring their friends to the house on days when his mother would force him to lay naked in a freezing bathtub for hours at a time, so the friends could laugh at Dave. The boys would beat on Dave at their mother's prodding, at one point kicking Dave on the floor of the car for daring to talk back to them in the store.

In the end, Dave abandoned himself, as well. In the last chapter, Dave began to lose hope. Dave no longer believed in God and allowed himself to hate everyone in his family, except for baby Kevin. Dave also began to hate himself, the last step to giving up. Dave was beaten down, no longer strong enough to fight on his own. With his father gone for good, Dave knew his last hope of protection was also gone. Dave began to anger his mother on purpose, hoping for a quick death. Instead, Dave found the strength to turn to God one last time. Finally, his rescue came.

Survival

Survival is as big a theme in this book as abuse, perhaps even bigger. The will to survive is interlaced in every word of this book, beginning with the flashback of Dave's rescue and ending with the epilogue in which the reader is allowed to meet Dave the adult with his small son. All through the chapters in which Dave describes the abuse he suffered at his mother's hands, there are always a few words of strength. Dave calls his mother 'The Bitch' and refuses to ask for her help in clearing out puss from a stab wound she inflicted. This is strength beyond words for a child of ten. There are also times when Dave decides he will take anything his mother can dish out, telling the reader that the beatings his mother gives him no longer hurt, because he has moved his mind into a shell that she cannot penetrate.

Dave imagines himself a superhero, dreams of hamburgers, and imagines himself flying through the air with his dad. All children imagine such things, but to Dave these imaginings have a much deeper meaning. Dave should have given up on hope in the



early days of his mother's beatings, and surely later when the beatings and the torture became more than an adult could handle. However, Dave does not stop hoping and imagining a better day. This is a strength that keeps Dave going and builds inside him a character that cannot give up, that cannot lose hope. In the final chapter it seems that Dave has done just that. Until the end, when Dave begins to pray, the reader senses that this is the end for this poor child. However, that strength makes itself known again, popping up just when Dave needs strength the most. Dave Pelzer is a survivor, and there is no doubt that this theme is more important to his own story than the abuse his mother offered.



Style

Perspective

Dave Pelzer has written an autobiography of his childhood. This childhood was filled with cruel events perpetrated on Dave by his mother in a fog of alcoholism and mental instability. Dave's perspective is that of the child who actually went through the events portrayed in this autobiography. These events include horrible beatings, starvation, and forced feedings of chemicals, such as ammonia. Dave was only four or five when these episodes of abuse began with time standing in a corner and escalating to time forced to stare at himself in a mirror. In short time, Dave became the victim of beatings, once resulting in the breaking of his arm. Soon after, Dave's mother began starving him intentionally and singling him out for cruel and unusual punishments, such as locking him in a room full of Clorox and ammonia fumes. All this abuse soon culminated in Dave's mother stabbing, an incident that the young victim continued to the day of his rescue was an accident.

This autobiography is the first of a trilogy that will follow Dave's life from the time the abuse began until he reached adulthood. This first book covers Dave's life from the age of four until twelve. The intended audience is children of abuse for whom Dave hopes this book will serve as a book of hope, to show these people that he survived and so can they. The book is also intended for people who have not suffered abuse, but may some day be in a position to rescue a child who is suffering this type of pain. The book is intended to be inspiring, to offer hope. However, the book deals with a very heavy, deep subject that at times can be very difficult to read. This book is honest to a fault, letting the reader into a world that either cannot be imagined by those who have never been the victims of such a cruel mind or sharing experiences with a person who has or might still be going through something similar. It is a difficult read, but well worth the effort for the message that Dave offers in the end. Hope.

Tone

This book is of a subject that could not possibly be written in an objective tone. As it is written from the first person point of view of a child between the ages of four and twelve, there is an intimacy within this book that is overwhelming at times. The mood of the book tends to fluctuate between chapters, sometimes changing from paragraph to paragraph. The mood begins with fear, moving quickly to hope, within the first chapter. In the subsequent chapters, there is always a sense of fear underlying the words, but most of the chapters are filled with a fighting spirit, an optimism, that seems to blunt the impact of the abuse being described. There is always this optimism in the narration until the final chapter when hope begins to wane for the small child. Hatred fills many of the passages here, hatred and a sense of despair until the final few sentences when the child reveals that he has been praying the Lord's Prayer, beseeching God, a God he no longer believed existed for him, to help him one final time. This once again fills the



reader with hope, since the reader is already aware that it is soon after this time that the child is rescued by the brave school officials who appeared in the first chapter.

This fluctuating tone fills the book with an emotion that the reader cannot help but become wrapped up in. It is a roller coaster ride that always seems to come back to the same sense of hope, the same belief that everything will turn out okay eventually. Beginning the book the way he did, Dave Pelzer allows the reader to know from the first words that this child is suffering, but he will survive. This child is a survivor. Despite this knowledge, when the reader reaches the final chapter, the reader still feels the child's despair and still fears for this child's survival. The child has given up and the reader can only pray that something changes. Soon, something does change. The child, who no longer believes in God for good reason, begins to pray again. This offers a hope that nothing else on earth could possibly offer at that moment in the child's life. With the epilogue quickly following this prayer, and beginning with the words, 'I'm so alive,' (pg. 155), the reader cannot stop the bubble of excitement in their chest that wants to explode with joy. Yes, the child made it. The emotion of this moment is overwhelming, adding to the incredible emotion expressed all through the novel, from the very first words to the very last.

Structure

This book is divided into seven moderately long chapters. Each chapter deals with a separate aspect of the abuse Dave experienced in his childhood with chapter titles that reflect this separation. The novel is told in a linear fashion except for the flashback of the first chapter that deals with the day Dave was rescued from his abuse by school officials. There is an author's note at the beginning of the book in which the writer explains his choice to write his story in a trilogy, with this book as the first installment, covering his childhood from the ages of four to twelve. Dave then tells the reader that the second installment will cover the ages of twelve to eighteen. The end of the book offers several essays on child abuse by the author, a teacher, a social worker, and an activist against child abuse.

The plot is fairly straightforward, written in a simple language that aids the sense of child telling the story, an effect the author consciously tried to create. As far as language is concerned, it is an easy book to read with no large or cumbersome words or phrases. The subject matter, however, is difficult to read at times as the writer presents horrible acts of child abuse without in any way warning the reader of what is about to happen. The entire book is told in exposition with only occasionally bits of dialogue added, in order to give depth to a scene that is being described. Overall, the structure of the book is simple, well organized and easy to read.



Quotes

"Mr. Hansen barks he's had enough of this. I almost leap out of my skin with fear."

Chapter 1, The Rescue, pg. 8

"I gobble down the food so fast I can hardly taste it. I finish the tray in record time."

Chapter 1, The Rescue, pg. 11

"David Pelzer,' he says, 'you're free.'" Chapter 1, The Rescue, pg. 14

"In the years before I was abused, my family was the 'Brady Bunch' of the 1960s."

Chapter 2, Good Times, pg. 17

"My relationship with mom drastically changed from discipline to punishment that grew out of control. It became so bad at times, I had no strength to crawl away--even if it meant saving my life." Chapter 3, Bad Boy, pg. 29

"As she jerked violently to regain her stability I felt something pop, and felt an intense pain in my arm and shoulder. The startled look on Mother's face told me that she had heard it, too, but she released her grip on my arm, and turned and walked away, as if nothing had happened."

Chapter 3, Bad Boy, pg. 35

"I could hear Mother talking to Ron upstairs, telling him how proud she was of him, how she didn't have to worry about Ron becoming like David--a bad boy."

Chapter 3, Bad Boy, pg. 43

"Mother was as solid as a rock. If anything, her drunkenness made it worse. Mother became more like a monster." Chapter 4, The Fight for Food, pg. 51

"That day at school I prayed for the world to end." Chapter 4, The Fight for Food, pg. 69

"Out of the corner of my eye I saw a blurred object fly from her hand. A sharp pain erupted from just above my stomach. I tried to remain standing, but my legs gave out, and my world turned black." Chapter 5, The Accident, pg. 87

"About a month before I entered the fifth grade, I came to believe that for me, there was no God." Chapter 7, The Lord's Prayer, pg. 131

"Before I opened the car door, I bowed my head and with peace in my heart, I whispered, '...and deliver me from evil.'

'Amen.'" Chapter 7, The Lord's Prayer, pg. 153



Topics for Discussion

Discuss child abuse. What is the definition of abuse? Are there different types of abuse? How many types of abuse did David suffer?

Discuss mental instability. Why do you think Dave's mother abused him? Do you think there is an excuse for what she did? Why do you think Dave's mother abused only him and not his siblings?

Discuss abandonment. Why do you think Dave's father behaved as he did? Should he have done something? Was Dave's father's inaction worse than the abuse the mother perpetrated? Why did the father leave the family? Should he have stayed? Should he have taken Dave? Would Dave have been better off with his father?

Discuss survival. Do you think Dave should have given up hope after all those years? Why do you think Dave continued to fight? What is the significance of Dave saying the Lord's Prayer at the end of Chapter 7? What is the significance of Dave watching the sunset with his child at the end of the epilogue?

What is the author's purpose in writing this book? Do you think he is trying to help others? What about his feelings toward his mother? Does the book seem to hold an excuse for his mother? Why would Dave excuse what his mother did? Do you think this book will help other kids? Do you think this book will help Dave? How?

Discuss the point of view of the book. How would the book be different if it had been written in Dave's adult voice rather than the child's voice? Why do you think Dave chose only to discuss these eight years of his life in this book? Why write a trilogy?

Discuss child abuse prevention then and now. What are the differences between then and now? Why do you think there is a difference? Did adults intervene often in the past? Do they intervene too often now? What would have happened to Dave if the school officials did not help him?