

**DAVID'S STRUGGLE TO SURVIVE HIS MOTHER'S  
ABUSE IN DAVID PELZER'S *A CHILD CALLED IT***

**THESIS**

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirement for Sarjana Degree in English  
Department Faculty of Humanities UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya

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**2014**

## DECLARATION

This thesis contains materials that have been accepted for the award of Sarjana Degree of English Department Faculty of Humanities UIN Sunan ampel Surabaya. And to the best of my belief and knowledge, it contains no material previously published or written by other person except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Surabaya, June 9<sup>th</sup> 2014



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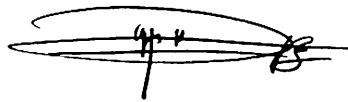


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## ABSTRACT

**Supandi, MayCherlita. 2014. *DAVID'S STRUGGLE TO SURVIVE HIS MOTHER'S ABUSE IN DAVID PELZER'S A CHILD CALLED IT*. Thesis. English Department of Adab Faculty, State Islamic University Sunan Ampel Surabaya.**

This thesis attempts to analyze the struggle of child abuse victim named David who is abused by his own mother in *A child Called It*, novel by David Pelzer. There are two main concerns in this thesis which are the kinds of abuse that David experiences and the struggle that he does to survive the abuse. This thesis aims to give evidence that even a mother can do such cruel things to her own child considering the story is based on the author's childhood experience that means it really happens. Eventually, this aim is expected to create awareness about children's welfare. This thesis uses descriptive qualitative method for it describes the kinds of abuse depicted in the novel and the struggle that the victim does. Existentialism theory by Kierkegaard is proper theory to analyze the story for it focuses on the boy's struggle from the perspective of existentialism.

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**Key words:** struggle, survive, abuse, dehumanization

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter will introduce this analysis by discussing the background of study which includes the reason of why the writer chooses such topic and the literary work, the statement of the problems which state the main problems as the focus in this analysis, objectives of the study which explain the purposes of this analysis, the scope and limitation of the study, the significance of conducting the study, and the method of the study.

The detailed information about all discussions mentioned above follow the explanations below.

#### 1.1 Background of Study

There have been many discussions, lately, that are carried out under the term of struggle. Indeed, the term is very universal and broadly used all over the world to depict the condition of human kind. In fact, not a single life exists without struggle and it usually takes form of struggle for freedom. This is evidenced by some historical records that record some past events regarding the term. Shuler stated in his book *Calling Out Liberty: The Stono Slave Rebellion and the Universal Struggle for Human Rights*, around 1700s in South Carolina, there was a rising uproar done by twenty Kongolese slaves led by a man named Jemmy to seek their liberty (Shuler 70).



In the progress, several other Negroes joined, they called out liberty, and killed every white people they met. What they did is due to their hatred towards white people following the oppressions that they continuously passed through. This is as Jean Bethke Elshtein stated in Frederick. M. Shepherd's Book *Christianity and Human Rights: Christians and the Struggle for Global Justice* that the resistance to oppression will tend to take the form of struggle for the establishment of liberty in its rights forms (Shepherd 92). They, obviously, struggled for their freedom.

Besides the given example above, there are also many literary works which record men's struggle in life: men's struggle for freedom. This statement is further explained as J. Long states, behind every book is a man; behind the man is the race; and behind the race are the natural and social environments whose influence is unconsciously reflected (J. Long 7). Bates also states that good art is not only sincere; it is human, and wholesome, and sounds (Bates 22). The other opinion states that writing which embodied the values and 'tastes' of a particular social class is qualified as literature (Eagleton 15). Thus, information about men's struggle can be obtained through analysis of some literary works.

One example which is also the literary work that the writer is interested in is a novel entitled *A Child Called It* by David Pelzer which also depicts struggle in it. Focus on a boy who at first lives perfectly in his little family—a devoted father, a perfect mother, and two brothers—but later he finds out that his life turns out to be in hell. He starts experiencing physical and mental abuse and what makes it worse and also makes this story unique, the one who abuses him is his own mother while the

rest of his family just watch and do nothing when his mother humiliates him.

Swallowing ammoniac, stabbed on the belly, locked in gas chamber, are his everyday 'game'. He starts learning that life is cruel at the very young age and is forced to survive while most children at his age are enjoying the warmth of family, especially mother. One thing to note is the boy's will to survive. The boy will do anything in order to survive.

*A Child Called It* by David Pelzer is indeed one of the most thrilling abuses ever that is taken into pages. Pelzer was born in San Francisco, California and as a small child Pelzer faced abuse for several years which Pelzer wrote about in his books. His book *A Child called "It"* describes from his viewpoint about the severe abuse he suffered as a child. He wrote how his mother was physically and emotionally abusive towards him from age four to twelve. In his book he describes how his mom starved him, forced him to drink ammonia, stabbed him in the stomach, burned his arm on a gas stove, and forced him to eat his own vomit. He mentioned that his father was not active in resolving or stopping the conflicts between him and his mother, who was an alcoholic. In 1973, at age twelve he was sent to a foster family and at the age of eighteen, prior to becoming an author of his own childhood story, he joined U. S Air Force ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dave\\_Pelzer](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dave_Pelzer)).

The writer intends to make a study related to child abuse from the victim's point of view. It tries to find out the victim's struggle in surviving the abuse in Pelzer novel. Also, when it comes to the question of why Pelzer's novel is chosen, it is because the novel *A Child Called It* is like the author's own diary telling his

childhood abuse experiences and this novel exposes fact about child abuse that happens in society. Also because this novel is based on the author's own experience, it offers not merely an imagination but rather real story.

## 1.2 Statement of The Problems

1.2.1 What kind of abuse that David experiences in *A Child Called It* by David Pelzer?

1.2.2 How is David's struggle to survive the abuse?

## 1.3 Objectives of the Study

This study has two purposes. The first purpose is to find out what kinds of abuse that David experiences in *A Child Called It* by David Pelzer. The second purpose is to find out the way how David struggles to survive his mother's cruelty and abuse.

## 1.4 Scope and Limitation of the Study

There are many aspects that can be analyzed within one literary work. Literary works, especially prose, offer not merely one specific angle that is worth analyzing. In fact, there are still many angles inside the work that are often left untouched and unexplored. *A Child Called It* by David Pelzer is not an exception.

Regarding the statements above, in order to avoid too wide analysis, the focus of this analysis will be limited only on the kinds of abuse experienced by David and also David's struggle in surviving his mother's abuse.

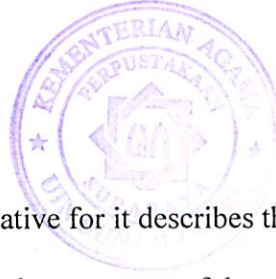
### **1.5 Significance of Conducting the Study**

One important thing from a study or an analysis is that, the study has to contain purpose that is beneficial. There is a stereotype in society, any society and the writer also believes that this also includes American society where this story takes place, that no mother will do such cruel things to her own child. This study intends to give evidence that breaks the stereotype; that sort of thing really happens considering the story is inspired by the author's childhood experience which means this really happens. By knowing the struggle that the victim does, this study is also expected to make the reader of this analysis more aware about children's welfare. Thus, it is expected to encourage them to take action if such case happens in their environment.

This study also intends to enrich the knowledge of English Literature students or anyone who reads this analysis regarding child abuse from the victim's perspective.

### **1.6 Method of the Study**

This part discusses the research method used by writer in this thesis. This chapter includes research design, research object, research data which includes main and supporting data used in this thesis, data collection, and data analysis.



### 1.6.1 Research Design

This analysis belongs to descriptive qualitative for it describes the struggle of David in surviving the abuse as it is mentioned in the statement of the problems. Strauss and Corbin wrote that the term qualitative is meant for kind of research in which the results are not obtained through the process of any statistics procedure or another form of calculation (Putra and Dwilestari 66). The other opinion about qualitative research is that words, sentences, images and symbols which are synonymously called soft data determine qualitative research strategy rather than quantitative research strategy which depends on hard data which are in the forms of numerical calculation (Neuman 186). If that so, the best method in this analysis is indeed qualitative method of research for it describes the depiction of struggle and it does not result in numerical calculation.

The writer applies qualitative method in order to answer the statements of the problem which questions about how the main character in the chosen literary work struggles for his life.

### 1.6.2 Research Data

In conducting this research, there are two kinds of data that the writer uses. They are main data and supporting data. It will be explained in details below.

#### 1.6.2.1 Main Data

The novel *A Child Called It* written by David Pelzer is used as the main source of data in this analysis. As the main source of data, this novel gives

information about David's struggle and the kinds of abuse that David experiences in the forms of narration and also in the forms of dialogue.

#### **1.6.2.2 Supporting Data**

Besides the main data which were taken from the novel *A Child Called It*, the writer also used supporting data in conducting this analysis. Thus, to find the additional data, the writer utilized the usage of books, articles, critics and some online resources.

#### **1.6.3 Data Collection**

Both main and supporting data were collected through the process of intensive reading and library research. The writer read the novel intensively to gather data from the novel as the main source of data and also collected additional necessary data from other sources, such as articles, critics and online resources.

#### **1.6.4 Data Analysis**

After all necessary data were gathered up; the next step was to analyze the gathered data. The writer then sorted out all those gathered data and classified them into two groups; the first group was the group of data which show the kinds of abuse that David passes through and the second group was the group of data which state his struggle to survive the abuse. Then, the writer began to analyze them using the theories related to this analysis.



**1.7 Definition of Key Terms**

Some terms that are used in this analysis along with their definitions follow the explanation below:

1.7.1 Struggle: a violent effort or exertion/ an act of strongly motivated striving/ to make strenuous or violent effort against opposition

1.7.2 Survive: to remain alive or in existence/ to continue to live or exist/ to remain alive

1.7.3 Abuse: a corrupt practice or custom/ improper use or treatment/ to use so as to injure or damage

1.7.4 Dehumanization: an act to deprive human qualities, personality, or spirit

## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

According to J. Long, there are always two aspects as people begin studying about literature, one of simple enjoyment and appreciation, the other of analysis and exact description. Analyzing literary work is indeed something important to dig up some messages that the authors put in the works that cannot be understood by merely reading for enjoyment and appreciation like what J. Long states, to analyze and explain the literary works is less joyous but still important matter (J. Long 7).

In order to do so, some theories which are related to the topic of this analysis are needed. Thus, this chapter will discuss the theories that the writer uses to make this study which include child abuse and Kierkegaard's existentialism.

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#### **2.1 Child Abuse**

According to Child Welfare Information Gateway published in 2011, child abuse is defined as any recent act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker, which results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse, or exploitation, or an act or failure to act which presents an imminent risk of serious harm. Child abuse can also be defined as betrayal of trust by someone that the child trusts, and it may or may not include touching (White 6).

Still according to Child Welfare Information Gateway published in 2011, there are several kinds of child abuse. They are physical abuse, neglect, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, parental substance abuse and abandonment.

### **2.1.1 Physical Abuse**

Physical abuse is generally defined as “any non-accidental physical injury to the child” and can include striking, kicking, burning, or biting the child, or any action that results in a physical impairment of the child. The definition of physical abuse also includes acts or circumstances that threaten the child with harm or creating a substantial risk of harm to the child’s health or welfare.

### **2.1.2 Neglect**

Neglect is frequently defined as the failure of a parent or other person with responsibility for the child to provide needed food, clothing, shelter, medical care, or supervision to the degree that the child’s health, safety, and well-being are threatened with harm. It includes failure to educate the child as required by law in their definition of neglect.

### **2.1.3 Sexual Abuse or Exploitation**

According to The B. C. Handbook for Action on Child Abuse and Neglect published by British Columbia, sexual abuse means when a child is used (or likely to be used) for the sexual gratification of another person. it includes

touching or invitation to touch for sexual purposes, intercourse (vaginal, oral or anal), menacing or threatening sexual acts, obscene gestures, obscene communications or stalking, sexual references to the child's body or behavior by words or gestures, requests that the child expose their body for sexual purposes, deliberate exposure of the child to sexual activity or material, and sexual aspects of organized or ritual abuse. Sexual exploitation includes allowing the child to engage in prostitution or in the production of child pornography.

#### **2.1.4 Emotional Abuse**

Emotional abuse is maltreatment as part of definitions of abuse or neglect that causes mental injury to a child. Typical language used in these definitions is "injury to the psychological capacity or emotional stability of the child as evidenced by an observable or substantial change in behavior, emotional response, or cognition" and injury as evidenced by "anxiety, depression, withdrawal, or aggressive behavior."

#### **2.1.5 Parental Substance Abuse**

Parental substance abuse is an element of the definition of child abuse or neglect in circumstances that include:

2.1.5.1 Prenatal exposure of a child to harm due to the mother's use of an illegal drug or other substance.

2.1.5.2 Allowing a child to be present where the chemicals or equipment for the manufacture of controlled substances are used or stored.

2.1.5.3 Selling, distributing, or giving drugs or alcohol to a child.

2.1.5.4 Use of a controlled substance by a caregiver that impairs the caregiver's ability to adequately care for the child.

#### **2.1.6 Abandonment**

It is considered abandonment of the child when the parent's identity or whereabouts are unknown, the child has been left by the parent in circumstances in which the child suffers serious harm, or the parent has failed to maintain contact with the child or to provide reasonable support for a specified period of time.

#### **2.2 Existentialism**

Analyzing *A Child Called It* novel from the perspective of the victim of the abuse indeed needs a tool. Because the subject being discussed in this analysis as well as the main concern of this analysis is about the struggle of child abuse victim to survive, thus existentialism theory will be proper theory to analyze this novel by the main subject for existentialism speaks eloquently about human's effort to exist.

Existentialism has originally appeared before the twentieth century but emerged and spread widely during the twentieth century following Second World War. In the time of its peak, this philosophy thought had gained wider response than

any other philosophy thoughts and even became major current of thought in Germany. It even has greater impact on literature and art than any other thoughts (Flynn 1).

What becomes main concern of the existentialism is dehumanization; how men are losing their peculiar human qualities and being converted from 'person' into 'pronoun' (Stumpf 454). This means human is losing their qualities as well as identity which synonymously also means existence. This problem of losing existence has actually been the main problem of humanity since the beginning of time and existentialism provides thoughts and solving regarding the problem.

### 2.2.1 Kierkegaard's Existentialism

Speaking of existentialism also means speaking of some names that are known as father figures of existentialism thought or the thinker of such philosophy. Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Jaspers, and Sartre have been considered the leaders or the philosophers that proposed the idea of existentialism. Those philosophers' thoughts have its own characteristics and can be said, different in some ways. The only thing that they have in common is only the idea about the human existence and the condition and quality of the existing human individual (Stumpf 453).

It is generally acknowledged that if existentialism is a "movement" at all, Kierkegaard is its prime mover (Solomon 1). Born in Copenhagen in 1813, he spent his short life in a brilliant literary career, producing an extraordinary number of books before his death in 1855 at the age of forty two. Although his books were soon



forgotten after his death, they made a great impact when they were rediscovered by some German scholars in the early of the twentieth century (Stumpf 455). His works are today translated into all major world language and his impact is strongly felt in Asia and Latin America as well as in Europe and North America (Evans 1)

Kierkegaard stated that the term existence was reserved for the human beings. He also said that to exist implies being a certain kind of individual, an individual who strives, who considers alternatives, who chooses, who decides, and who, above all, commits himself (Stumpf 455).

Kierkegaard sees the human self is not simply as finished product, a kind of entity, but as developing process. A self is not simply I am but something I must become (Evans 20). That is why one is expected to be engaged with choice of who I must become. Thus, to 'think in existence' meant to recognize that one is faced with personal choices. Men find themselves constantly in 'existential situation' and for this reason; their thinking ought to deal with their own personal situation with a view to coming to terms with the problem of alternatives and choices (Stumpf 456). To make it clear, he also drew distinction between the spectator and the actor, arguing that only the actor is involved in the term existence. Although the spectator can also be said to exist, but the term existence does not properly belong to them. It simply does not belong to inert or inactive things (Stumpf 1966:456). He illustrated this distinction by comparing two kinds of men in a wagon, one who holds reins on his hands but is asleep and the other who is fully awake. In the first case, the horse goes along familiar roads without any direction from the sleeping man, whereas in the other case

the man is truly the driver. Surely, in one sense, it can be said that both men exist, but Kierkegaard insisted that existence must refer to a quality in the individual, namely, his conscious participation in an act. Only the conscious driver exists. Thus, while both the spectator and actor exist in a sense, only a person who is truly engaged in conscious acts of will and choice can be truly said to exist (Stumpf 456).

In describing men's existential situation, Kierkegaard also distinguished between man's present estate, that is, what he now is, and what he ought to be or what he is essentially. There is a movement in the life of a man from his essential to his existential condition, a movement from essence to existence. In the process, sensing his insecurity and finitude, a person tries 'to do' something to overcome his finitude (Stumpf 457-458).

Kierkegaard's existentialism, in brief, can be summed up in the statement that every human being must be assumed in essential possession of what essentially belongs to being a man. The task of subjective thinker is to transform himself into an instrument that clearly and definitely expresses existence whatever is essentially human. Kierkegaard's central point is that each person possesses an essential self, which he ought to actualize (Stumpf 461).

### 2.3 Review of Related Studies

In writing this thesis, the writer was based on the study that has been done previously. The previous study that inspired the writer in making this thesis is a study about child abuse victim's defense mechanism entitles *Child Abuse and Defense*

*Mechanism Experienced by Clare in Constance Briscoe's Ugly*. This study was written by Kartika Nugrahaini of State University of Surabaya in 2011.

This *Child Abuse and Defense Mechanism Experienced by Clare in Constance Briscoe's Ugly* focuses on two statements of problem. The first statement of problem is how child abuse experienced by Clare depicted in Constance Briscoe's *Ugly* is. The second statement of problem is how Clare's defense mechanism in response to child abuse she experiences is. The writer of *Child Abuse and Defense Mechanism Experienced by Clare in Constance Briscoe's Ugly* used psychological theory regarding self defense mechanism proposed by Sigmund Freud as theory to analyze the subject.

The main topic of *Child Abuse and Defense Mechanism Experienced by Clare in Constance Briscoe's Ugly* is about the abuse victim's struggle using defense mechanism in response to child abuse that the victim experiences. Based on this previous study, an analysis entitles *David's Struggle to Survive His Mother's Abuse in David Pelzer's A Child Called It* is made.

It is not to say that both previous study and this analysis are exactly the same except the literary work used; they are different in some ways. In *Child Abuse and Defense Mechanism Experienced by Clare in Constance Briscoe's Ugly*, the writer focused on defense mechanism psychological theory in explaining how the victim struggles to defend herself in response to the abuse. However, in *David's Struggle to Survive His Mother's Abuse in David Pelzer's A Child Called It*, the writer focuses on existentialism theory by Kierkegaard which states that to exist implies being a

certain kind of individual, an individual who strives, who considers alternatives, who chooses, who decides, and who, above all, commits himself in explaining how the victim struggles.

The fact that the research subjects in both studies fill the same position, which is as victim of child abuse, does not make both studies similar. In fact, both studies indeed describe how the victims struggle. However, if it is seen with deeper glance, it is clear that in *Child Abuse and Defense Mechanism Experienced by Clare in Constance Briscoe's Ugly*, the victim of the abuse struggles mentally; she tries to block her mental from anxious feelings emerging from the abuse she experiences, but in *David's Struggle to Survive His Mother's Abuse in David Pelzer's A Child Called It*, the victim of the abuse struggles physically; he tries to survive and save himself by taking actions.

## CHAPTER III

### ANALYSIS

Related to the statements of the problem of this analysis, this chapter will be divided into two subchapters which include the kinds of abuse that David experiences and the struggle that he does in surviving the abuse. The detailed information about both subchapters follows the details below.

#### **3.1 Kinds of Abuse that David Experiences in *A Child Called It*: Dehumanization**

##### **Leads to Severe Abuse**

A small child is supposed to enjoy his childhood without being worry about anything, especially about how to put so much effort to defend himself from any kinds of threat. When it comes to the question of why so, then the answer is because that child has family who can protect him, especially mother. Some children are so lucky to have such family as a defense who can defend them from any threats. However, some children are not that lucky.

David Pelzer is one of those unlucky ones. When another kid of his age are playing around and having fun, he is busy to stay alive. When another kid has family who can protect them from any danger, David, alone, has to face the danger from within his family instead.

David's abuse starts when his mother singles him out as a stranger in his own family, when he is no longer a member and when his existence is no longer admitted by the other member of his family. In brief, what he has passed through a lot in his family is dehumanization.

By this time, for all practical purposes, I was no longer a member of the family. I existed, but there was little or no recognition. Mother had even stopped using my name; referring to me only as The Boy. I was not allowed to eat meals with the family, play with my brothers, or watch television. (page 31)

His fade existence which is no longer admitted means harsh treatments that he often gets especially from his mother, in this case, fierce abuse. In fact, David's mother treats him a worthless slave that she can hit, slap, kick or hurt every time she wants because she dehumanizes him; she does not consider David as human and his son anymore. Even, the punishment without reasonable reason that he gets as the result of his dehumanization is much painful leading to the abuse he gets.

If I looked at her or one of her sons without her permission, I received a slap in the face. (page 50)

At first, as a small boy, he does not even understand what his mother has done to him. He has no idea what dehumanization is and he does not even get it that his mother treats him as non-human. He only knows that his mother treats him poorly. However, as time goes by, his consciousness about his life grows and starts to realize that his mother does not consider him a human anymore.



A child tends to compare his own family with other people and David is not an exception. When he gets better treatment from other people, he starts to compare it to his own family. Only then he realizes that he is not a son for his mother but merely an object. It hurts him a lot when his mother deliberately calls him 'it'.

The substitute teacher had been so nice to me. She treated me like a real person, not like some piece of filth lying in the gutter. (page 68)

"Get one thing straight, you little son of a bitch! There is nothing you can do to impress me! Do you understand me? You are a nobody! An It! You are nonexistent! You are a bastard child! I hate you and I wish you were dead! Dead! Do you hear me? Dead!" (page 82)

David Pelzer, as what the boy is called, has undergone a quite hard life at the very young age. From age four until eleven years old, the time when he is supposed to feel the warmth of mother, he has to face the cruelty of his mother instead. Nobody digilib.uinsa.ac.id digilib.uinsa.ac.id digilib.uinsa.ac.id digilib.uinsa.ac.id digilib.uinsa.ac.id could exactly explain how much he suffered because of the abuse he experienced in his childhood.

My pants are just as bad, and my shoes have holes in the toes. I can wiggle my big toe out of one of them. While I stand clothed only in my underwear, the nurse records my various marks and bruises on the clipboard. (page 9)

Judging from the depiction of David in the narration above which is not well-taken care of, dirty, smelly, and full of bruises all over his body, it is known that the abuses he mostly faces are in the kind of physical abuse and neglect. However, those

are not the only abuses that happen to David. There is also emotional abuse that he experiences.

But, I never found any of Mother's lost things, and she never let me forget that I was an incompetent loser. (page 23)

Then, we shall begin this discussion by discussing the abuse in David's childhood.

### **3.1.1 Physical abuse**

As a young boy, there is one thing that he barely remembers. It is a touch of mother which is full of warmth and affection. He does not even understand why his family which is perfect in the beginning has to change; a reason that a young boy could not understand. His pain does not stop right there. It quite hurts when his mentally unstable mother severely and repeatedly beats him mercilessly in order to satisfy her cruel desire. At first, his mother starts to beat him in the name of punishment that David deserves to get because of his 'naughty' behavior.

In the beginning, it was a notice form of punishment. Mother would simply grab me and smash my face against the mirror, smearing my tear streaked face on the slick, reflective glass. Then she would order me to say over and over again, "I'm a bad boy! I'm a bad boy! I'm a bad boy!" (page 21-22)

However, David's mother cruelty gets more insane every day and it is getting out of the way of proper punishment. Every time she is in the mood to punish David, she will think of anything that can satisfy her thirst of cruelty. David does not even need a mistake to be beaten severely. And so it happens.

He even has to restrain a great pain when his mother breaks his arm when he tries to prevent himself from his mother's beating. And he has to restrain it all night long because his mother does not even seem to care about it.

As she jerked violently to regain her stability, I heard something pop, and felt an intense pain in my shoulder and arm. The startled look on Mother's face told me that she had heard the sound too, but she released her grip on my arm, and turned and walked away as if nothing had happened.  
(page 24)

The abuse that David experiences is way too scary to be taken. There are many kinds of physical abuse that David passes through. In fact, it is the most frequent kind of abuse that contributes pain in his painful childhood life. It is not only about beating, hitting, slapping or pinching. It is far more than those. What his mother has done to him is something too far to imagine for average people while in fact nobody especially a child deserves to be treated like that irrespective of how bad he could be.

Generally, all those physical abuses that have been done to David by his mother can be classified into three categories. They are 'hurting by hands',

‘hurting with poisonous object’ and ‘hurting with dangerous object’. Those are indeed a mother would not do. However, it really happens.

Slapping and hitting which are under the term of ‘hurting by hands’ are often done by David’s mother to him every time she relapses and without any reasonable reasons as if it were David’s daily meals that has to be faced every day. She will find any excuses to torture his son although the reason does not even make sense.

Mother threw me into her bedroom, yelling about a letter she had received from the North Pole. She claimed the letter said that I was a “bad boy” and Santa would not bring me any gifts for Christmas. Mother raged on and on, saying that I had embarrassed the family again. (page 26)

The reason above indeed does not make sense. However as a child,

David can do nothing but keep silent, listen to his mother’s painful words, and eventually receive hand beatings which he cannot avoid. Once he tries to avoid it or defends himself, his mother will consider it as an act of fighting back and it is not something that his mother could just take. Thus, another worse hand beating waits for him.

SMACK! Mother hits me in the face, and I topple to the floor. I know better than to stand there and take the hit. I learned the hard way that she takes that as an act of defiance, which means more hits, or worst of all, no food. (page 7)

It is already mentioned that David does not have to make mistake to be beaten by his mother. Thus, it feels like timed-bomb which can explode anytime without him knowing what he has done that triggers the bomb. Neither has he known what he has to do to stop him triggering the bomb. In fact, the bomb can explode at anytime. One thing that he knows is that once the bomb explodes, he has nowhere to save himself.

By the end of the session, my nose bled twice and I was missing a tooth. (page 33)

His mother seems to always find ways to torment David or simply find excuse to do so. Besides all the unreasonable reasons she has made up as excuse to torment his son, there are times when she actually has reasonable reason to do it. One thing to note, no matter how reasonable a reason is, it is never reasonable enough to torture a child, especially a mother. However, it is different case that happens to David. No matter how hard he tries to make not beat him, he always ends up being beaten.

She had set a quota on my earnings and ordered me return the money to her. The quota was impossible for me to meet, so, in desperation, I once stole nine dollars from the piggy bank of a small girl who lived in our neighborhood. Within hours, the girl's father was knocking on the front door. Of course, Mother returned the money and blamed me. After the man left, she beat me until I was black and blue. I only stole the money to try to meet her quota. (page 66)

What makes it even worse is that David's mother considers the act of torturing his son as a game. As if it were never enough, David gets worse treatment than hand beatings. When his mother gets no longer satisfaction from hitting and slapping that David often gets, she starts to think of another 'game'. At this point, physically, David is extremely injured when he starts to get another form of physical abuse which is done with the help of dangerous object, in this case, stove-flame and meat-knife.

Gripping my arm, Mother held it in the orange-blue flame. My skin seemed to explode from the heat. I could smell the scorched hairs from my burnt arm. As hard as I fought, I could not force Mother to let go of my arm. (page 28)

That is such a brutal thing that a child could ever experience; getting his hand burnt on the flame by his own mother who is supposed to give warm touch not a painful one. Just like the physical abuse in the form of hand-beating, for this kind of abuse, David also does not have to have mistake as an excuse for his mother to burn his hand. In fact, he never understands why his mother could do such cruel things to him.

Mother told me that she had often driven to school to watch my brothers and I play during our lunch period recess. Mother claimed that she had seen me that very day playing on the grass, which was absolutely forbidden by her rules. (page 27)



The quotation above is actually the reason of why David gets such treatment; getting his hand burnt on the flame. However, that is only another unreasonable reason that his mother makes up as an excuse to torment him. Soon, David starts to develop fear for his own mother. He mentions his fear and explicitly writes about it throughout the whole story; from nurturing and warm mother with perfect affection to a monster which is ready to torment him at anytime.

His fear grows stronger along with the severe abuses he gets from her as time goes by. David knows it is only the matter of time until his mother will do another harsh thing to him. Not even his suffering can stop his mother from torturing him. Only this time, it is getting worse. He almost dies in the hand of his own mother when she stabs him right on his stomach with a meat knife.

I focused all of my attention on Mother's face. 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. (page 52)

However, his condition does not allow him to pity himself. After almost killing his son, his mother, still a scary, emotionless, regretless and heartless woman, asks him to finish his chores instead of taking him to hospital.

There was no remorse in her eyes. I thought that, at the very least, she would try to comfort me with her soothing voice. Looking at me with no emotion, Mother stood up, washed her hands and told me I now had 30 minutes to finish the dishes. (page 53)

David, still a small boy then, is forced to believe in no one but himself. For a moment he thought that everything was over. He thought that his mother had regretted everything that she has done to him and in a short moment, David believes that everything between him and his mother will start to get better henceforth. But then he realizes he makes mistake by believing in his mother. Instead of giving him proper care after injuring his son, she asks him to finish his chore which is too callous for a mother. Thus, he knows he cannot trust his mother anymore.

It seems that David's mother never runs out of cruel ideas how to torment David. She will grab anything within her hand reach and use it to strike David. Besides the stove-flame and the meat-knife, his mother also uses another thing to torture him, things that are within her reach. This time, his mother uses dog's chain and broom handle.

A few times she whipped me with the dog's chain. It was very painful, but I just gritted my teeth and took it. The worst pain was a blow to the backs of my legs with the broom handle. Sometimes blows from the broom handle would leave me on the floor, barely able to move. (page 69)

Along with fear that David develops for his mother and also his incredulity towards his mother, one feeling that he also feels. That feeling is

hatred, a strong one. Hatred that he feels is extremely strong that sometimes he wishes death for her mother.

I hated Mother most and wished that she were dead. But before she died, I wanted her to feel the magnitude of my pain and my loneliness for all these years. (page 78)

A child is not supposed to wish death for his or her parents. It is simply not right. However, David does wishes death for his mother. One thing that triggers this feeling is still related to the physical abuse that David gets from his mother, a relentless game that is invented by her using poisonous liquids that often almost choke him to death. Getting hit, slapped, stabbed and burnt, those are extremely cruel for a small boy like David. However, those are not enough to satisfy his mentally unstable mother's sadistic desire.

Willing or not, David has to pass through it.

Father stood lifeless as Mother fed me another dose of ammonia. (page 47)

There is no mother who will force her child to drink poisonous liquid that can endanger the child's life and put him in painful situation. However, David and his mother are an exception. It seems that David's mother does not even care whether David is in dreadfully ill or not. She just ignores David's

feeling and focus on her satisfaction only. David also has to swallow the other kinds of poisonous liquid that leaves him having trouble in his stomach.

Although Mother never made me swallow ammonia again, she did make me drink spoonfuls of Clorox a few times. But Mother's favorite game seemed to be dishwashing soap. (page 47)

Swallowing ammonia is not the only poisonous 'game' that David has to play. The other 'game' using poisonous liquid that hurts him physically is a 'game' called 'gas chamber game'. It is also his mother's one of many ways to torment David.

A fine gray mist swirled towards the ceiling. As I breathed in the fumes, I collapsed and began spitting up. My throat felt like it was on fire. Within minutes it was raw. The gas from the reaction of the ammonia and Clorox mixture made my eyes water. (page 64)

Since the abuse starts to happen in his life, David begins to feel like he is not a human that is worth respect and begins to feel that he is unworthy rubbish instead. He knows, if his mother still considered him as a son she would not do such things to him. Thus, hatred that he feels towards his mother grows stronger.

### 3.1.2 Neglect

At night I lay awake concentrating on food. "Maybe tomorrow I'll get dinner," I said to myself. Hours later, I would drift off to sleep, fantasizing about food. (page 30)

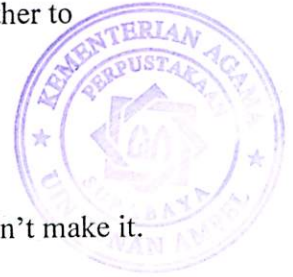
As it was mentioned in the beginning of this analysis, David experiences not only physical abuse but also in the form of neglect which leaves him not well taken care of and starving. The quotation above shows when one of the times when David's mother starves him and makes him suffering because of hunger.

The quotation above proves that as mother, David's mother has failed to provide proper food for her son. He even has to starve for ten days long when his mother does not give him any food to eat, only few pieces of food that he gets if he is lucky enough.

During one period of time when Father was away, Mother starved me for about ten consecutive days. No matter how hard I tried to meet her time limits, I couldn't make it. (page 61)

Speaking of the starving that David has to pass through also means speaking of the reason of why his mother does it. Just like the reason that lies behind every physical abuse that David gets from his mother, for this kind of abuse, his mother also does not have any reasonable reason to do so.

However, there is always something as an excuse for David's mother to neglect him.



No matter how hard I tried to meet her time limits, I couldn't make it.  
(page 61)

It is not something common for a mother to set many chores that has to be finished by her child in a very short time. But David's mother does so and what is worse is that he will get no food if he exceeds the time limit that his mother has set. David's mother deliberately gives a very short moment for David to finish his chores as an excuse not to give him anything to eat. She just simply does not want him to eat anything but makes up excuse for that which is exceeding the time limit in finishing his chores.

At home, his mother starves him mercilessly. At school, however, the place where he is supposed to feel less pain than at home, he still has to feel the effect of his mother's neglect.

At school I was a total outcast. No other kid would have anything to do with me. During the lunch recesses, I stuffed the sandwiches down my throat as I listened to my former friends make up songs about me. "David the Food Thief" and "Pelzer- Smellzer" were two of the playground favorites. I had no one to talk to or play with. I felt all alone. (page 36)

Besides failing to provide proper food for David, his mother also fails to provide proper clothes for him. All years, David has to wear the same

ripped, worn-out and smelly uniform that makes his friends at school mock him. Not only the uniform that he wears, but also shoes, lunch box, and even he is not allowed to go by his family's car to go to school.

In September, I returned to school with last year's clothes and my old, rusted, green lunch pail. I was a walking disgrace. Mother packed the same lunch for me every day: two peanut butter sandwiches and a few limp carrot sticks. Since I was no longer a member of the family, I was not allowed to ride to school in the family station wagon. (page 36)

His mother's neglect on clothes also happens at home. Every day, David has to work to finish household chores wearing worn-out clothes. His mother also does not allow him to wear new clothes that he gets as Christmas gift. She only allows him to wear the clothes when she has to be nice to him only when someone visits her house. David feels totally cut off from the whole family while his mother does not consider him as member of her family.

After making up, Mom let me take a warm bath and put on the new clothes I had received last Christmas. I had not been allowed to wear them before. Mom then took my brothers and I bowling while Father stayed home with Kevin. (page 73)

Neglect that David experiences is indeed bad, especially when his mother no longer considers him as a member of family. It is not the only bad things that happen to him. This kind of abuse leads to greater abuse which

directly strikes his mental. This kind of abuse is in the form of emotional abuse.

### 3.1.3 Emotional Abuse

David's mother's games do not stop in the form of physical abuse only. In the very beginning phase of all the abuse in David's childhood life, his mother actually has already invented a 'game' which leaves David buried in deep failure feeling.

David's mother always asks him to find some lost things that belong to her as an excuse not to take care of him but in fact, none of the things are ever found. So long the game goes; sometimes it makes him forget what he is looking for. Once he comes back to tell his mother what her lost thing is, loud and painful words wait for him and undoubtedly bury him in a deep failure feeling and surround him in depression.

My fantasy included the family living happily ever after. But, I never found any of Mother's lost things, and she never let me forget that I was an incompetent loser. (page 23)

The depression and the failure feeling do not just leave him once the game is finished. It still continues and becomes some kind of David's habitual way of thinking. Because of the poor treatments to him by his mother, he start to develop pessimistic way of thinking; no matter what happen, he seems to



think that it is all his fault. Thus, it leaves him more in depression and failure feeling.

I knew father hated living at home, and I felt that it was all my fault. I told him that I would be good and that I wouldn't steal food anymore. I told Father I would try harder and do a better job on my chores. (page 60)

From the quotation above, it is known how David start to develop mindset that everything is his fault. However, also from that quotation, it is known that it is actually not his fault. There is time when David's father starts to feel uncomfortable living in that house anymore and David thinks that it is because of him; he thinks that it is his fault that his father does not feel comfortable living in that house. However, if it is seen deeper, cause and effect plays a lot of part in it.

From the quotation we know that David thinks that it is his fault because he is not a good boy and always steals food. He also thinks that it is his fault because he does not do the chores that his mother sets properly. However, there is a reason why David always steals food; his mother never provides him proper meal so that he tends to find it with his own way (see subchapter 3.2.1). He will never steal anything if only his mother provides him what he needs. There is also reason why he never does the chores properly; it is simply too difficult to handle, finishing many chores in an unreasonably short time. In brief, the root of David's failure feeling and his

pessimistic way of thinking comes from his mother who always torments him emotionally.

His pessimistic way of thinking grows stronger along with the depression and the failure feeling that he feels. Hope starts to leave his heart and not even his father can make him feel it again.

When Father talked to me, he'd tell me that he was making plans for the two of us to leave. This always made me smile, but deep inside I knew it was a fantasy. (page 61)

All that he wants is only a confession from his mother that he is not merely a boy of failure; that he is not rubbish in his family; that he is something precious for his mother.

I wanted my father. But more than anything, I wanted just an ounce of respect; one little bit of dignity. (page 63)

However, his mother's painful words pointed at him often make him drown deeper in the feeling of failure, unwanted and unworthy. The depression because of those feelings that he feels is extremely great until one small compliment is able to make him fly to the highest sky.

Later that day the voting took place, and Mr Ziegler took me aside and told me how proud he was that my title had won. I soaked it up like a sponge. I hadn't been told anything positive for so long that I nearly cried. (page 82)

Although that compliment is the one that he gets from his teacher, it is enough to make him happy and feel that he is precious. However, none of the words alike he hears from his mother. Instead, David's mother gives him another harsh word that can drop his mental to the lowest level.

Suddenly, her voice turned ice cold and she jabbed her finger at my face and hissed, "Get one thing straight, you little son of a bitch! There is nothing you can do to impress me! Do you understand me? You are a nobody! An It! You are nonexistent! You are a bastard child! I hate you and I wish you were dead! Dead! Do you hear me? Dead!" (page 82)

It leaves him in greater depression when his mother calls him 'it' as if he were never a human and never exist. David tries anything to make his mother proud of him but what he gets as the result is something too fierce to handle by a small child like him. Once again, he feels nothing but a boy of failure.

Pessimistic way of thinking grows even bigger. At this point, David starts to hate everything in his painful life. He hates the fact that his mother treats him improperly; he hates the fact that he is *the one* that has to face his mother's cruelty while his other brothers can enjoy themselves, he even hates himself.

Sitting there on my hands, I could hear my brothers opening the refrigerator to get their desserts, and I hated it. I looked at myself. My skin had a yellowish tint, and my muscles were thin and stringy. Whenever I heard one of my brothers laugh at a television show, I cursed their names. "*Lucky*

*bastards! Why doesn't she take turns and beat up on one of them for a change?"* I cried to myself as I vented my feelings of hatred. (Page 63)

Greater depression feeling often results in the change of behavior along with the definition of neglect. The same thing happens to David who changes his behavior because of the repeated and continuous pressure resulting in depression that he feels. When his mother calls him an 'it' which means he is never a human for his mother, it hurts him to the deepest side of his existence. This fact, combined with immature and unstable thought of a young boy, results in the expectation of death. Thus, his behavior towards his mother changes drastically into more aggressive and rebellious behavior in order to trigger his mother's anger so that she will end his life soon. Put simply, David wants his mother to kill him.

So I began to purposefully irritate her, hoping I could provoke her enough that she would end my misery. I began doing my chores in a careless manner. I made sure that I forgot to wipe the bathroom floor, hoping that Mother or one of her royal subjects might slip and fall, hurting themselves on the hard tile floor. (page 83)

He no longer feels afraid of his mother. There is only one thing in his mind: rebellion. As if he got new source of power, he starts to do his plans and rebels. His hatred towards his mother and expectation of sooner death seem to be his new source of power.

However, his act of rebellion does not grant him death as he wishes. In fact, it even makes David's mother treats him much worse than before. Once again, he has to face his mother's 'game' which brings him from the short rebellious moment back to his fragile personality. Feeling despair for a moment after knowing that his plan does not work out, however, deep in his heart, he still has not lost his passion and spirit.

After the longer "gas chamber" incident, I returned to my wimpy self, but deep inside I could still feel the pressure building like a volcano, waiting to erupt from deep inside my soul. (page 84)

Throughout the whole story, along with the main theme of the novel, many kinds of abuse that David has to face in his childhood adorn page by page. At a very young age, he is forced to learn that life is cruel and forced to struggle in order to survive. Thus, the analysis of the kinds of abuse that

David faces leads to another analysis which is about David's struggle in surviving the abuse.

### 3.2 David's Struggle in Surviving the Abuse

Having harsh treatments because of his lost existence in his family, he has to try anything to survive. One important thing to note from David is his strong will to survive in the middle of fierce situation that surrounds him. Although his mother will not stop dehumanizing him or treating him like trash, although he already realizes

that he is not a human for his mother, nothing seems to be able to defeat his strong will to survive, not even his mother beatings, while most children in average will just give it up once they know that they are not considered a human by their family.

Mother can beat me all she wants, but I haven't let her take away my will to somehow survive. (page 7)

Even though sometimes he thinks that whatever he does to survive is in vain; even though sometimes spirit of survive starts to leave his heart; even though sometimes all that he wants is death, but soon the passion and spirit comes back to him and makes him strong.

After the longer "gas chamber" incident, I returned to my wimpy self, but deep inside I could still feel the pressure building like a volcano, waiting to erupt from deep inside my soul. (page 84)

According to Kierkegaard's statement which stated that to exist implies being a certain kind of individual, an individual who strives, who considers alternatives, who chooses, who decides, and who, above all, commits himself (Stumpf 1966:455), the following explanation deals with David's existentialism how he can manage to survive the abuse. David, who is depicted as singled-out member in his own family has to strive, consider alternative, choose, decide, and commit himself in order to achieve what he is essentially; to proceed what he must become; to be alive and stand as essential human being he must become; to be free from dehumanization and be

fully essential human. Thus, the latter analysis deals with David's action of striving, considering alternatives, choosing, deciding, and committing him to survive.

### 3.2.1 David's Struggle to Eat

I knew that to be in the possession of food was the ultimate crime.  
(page 65)

David knows exactly the number one rule to survive; he has to eat something. From the quotation above, it is known that it is something difficult for him to eat. Thus, he will sincerely accept his mother beatings, suffer from great deal of pain because of it, and listen to his mother's harsh words in one condition; he will do it all in order to give his mother satisfaction so that his mother will give him a piece of food to eat.

"Please," I say to myself, "just let me eat. Hit me again, but I have to have food." (page 7)

In order to get something to eat, David is forced to accept any kinds of torment that are done by his mother. However, sometimes, his mother beatings are not merely something that a small boy could handle. Sometimes, it is too painful to be felt and too far to be done by a mother to her child and David often calls his effort to survive as a self-rescue.

It became so bad at times, I had no strength to crawl away – even if it meant saving my life. (page 21)

According to the fact that sometimes what his mother does is too much to handle, there are times when his mother goes too far in starving him. In a time, David's mother starves him for ten days long and David is forced to fill his stomach with tap water only. The tap water works out for awhile, but not forever. So, David thinks of the way how to get food in order to stay alive. Here, David tries to consider the alternatives that are available around him; he starts to show his existential part.

When I filled the metal ice cube tray from the refrigerator, I would tip the corner of the tray to my mouth. Downstairs I would creep to the wash basin and crack the faucet tap open. Praying that the pipe would not vibrate and alert Mother, I would carefully suck on the cold metal until my stomach was so full I thought it would burst. (page 62)

It is something common if a child does not get something that he really needs at home, he will try to find it outside the house. In David's case, it is food to eat. And so he starts his plans to get food. He starts his plan by stealing food to eat at school. Indirectly, one lesson that he has learnt in a very young age is the lesson of survival in the middle of harsh life. Even though stealing is not something good to do, but he is forced to do so. One reason that lies behind his act is that he has to survive.



He does not even understand the feeling of guilt after stealing his friends' lunch because indeed he is way too young to understand things like that. All that is in his mind is only food to eat.

I would sneak to the wall, right outside my homeroom, drop my lunch pail by another pail and kneel down so nobody could see me hunting through their lunches. (page 31)

Things get worse when all his victims start to suspect him. And soon, all of his friends hate him and call him food-thief. It is only the matter of time until his mother finds out what he has done at school and once she does more starving waits for him at home.

The first few times were easy, but after several days, some students began to discover Twinkies and other desserts missing from their lunches. Within a short time, my classmates began to hate me. (page 31)

Even though David knows exactly that his mother will starve and beat him more, he still cannot stop his urge to steal food because it is the only way to get food and to stay alive. Regardless of more severe beatings as the result of his act of stealing food at school, however, David does not give up stealing but change his strategy instead. The new strategy is stealing food from other class. Actually he knows that it is also only the matter of time before they start suspecting him again, but at least he still has time to supply his body with food.

On Monday mornings I would dash from Mother's car to a new firstgrade classroom to pick through lunch boxes. I got away with it for a short time, but it didn't take long for the principal to trace the thefts back to me. (page 31)

As what he expects, this strategy to get food does not last long just like the first struggle to get food. When his mother finds out again that David does the same theft again, she has no mercy for him this time.

The teacher told the principal, who in turn informed Mother. The fight for food became a cycle. The principal's report to Mother led to more beatings and less food for me at the house. (page 31)

No matter how painful his punishment is, he still needs to eat. The more David's mother starves him, the bigger urge to eat that he feels. Thus, another safe way is extremely needed. When he thinks that stealing at school is no longer safe, he then thinks about somewhere else. This time, his target is a food stall nearby.

He just cannot stop stealing because it is the only way to get food and survive. Everything will be different case for him if only his mother is willing to give him something to eat. If she did, David would not be e food thief.

My idea was to sneak away from the playground and run to the local grocery store, and steal cookies, bread, chips or whatever I could. In my mind, I planned every step of my scheme. (page 37)

Because of the starving that he passes through a lot, David's mind is filled with varied ways to get food. Only when he goes to school then he gets to steal food from his friends' lunch boxes or food stalls. However, things will be different when he is at home. He does not get to steal any food from anywhere because he does not have reason to go out. Then, leftovers are his only hope.

Standing there with my hands in the scalding water, I could smell the scraps from dinner in the small garbage can. At first my idea was nauseating, but the more I thought about it, the better it seemed. It was my only hope for food. (page 39)

That is truly not something he usually does. However, the situation forces him to do so. He does not care about it. The most important point is that he is able to eat. He keeps struggling no matter what in order to survive.

Nevertheless, obstacles seem to always adorn his steps in his effort to get something to eat. The biggest obstacle comes from his own mother who seems to prevent him from eating anything and let him starve. When his mother finds out his trick of scratching leftovers in trash bin, she purposely put spoiled beef in the trash bin which leaves David suffering from diarrhea for a week. Indeed such an uncivilized mother.

I had diarrhea for a week. While I was sick, Mother informed me she had purposefully left the meat in the refrigerator for two weeks, to spoil before she threw it away. She knew I couldn't resist stealing it. (page 39)

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It seems that his mother really does not want him to eat anything.

David's mother is depicted as a careful, thorough and cautious woman.

Unfortunately she uses her good talents in wrong way. Her good talents are David's biggest obstacles in surviving. David's mother uses them to know David's ways of scratching food and it can be said that she knows almost all his tricks.

However, fortunately the more someone is oppressed, the cleverer that someone will be to overcome the oppression. This fact also happens in David's life. The more David's mother prevents him from all possible ways of getting something to eat, the smarter David will be. He always has a way to sneak food out of his mother's sight.

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She never knew that I wrapped food between paper towels and hid them in the bottom of the can. I knew she wouldn't want to get her fingers dirty, digging in the bottom of the trash can, so my scheme worked for a while. (page 39)

Here, the only thing that can help David is his creativity in inventing ways to get food. Put simply, in order to survive, he has to depend on his own mind. Fortunately, his will to survive can be considered a strong one. Thus in his life there is no term 'give up' to think of another way if one way fails to help him.

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His creativity grows stronger. At the time he goes back to school, he expands his target from nearly food stalls to his school canteen. The method is still the same old method which brings him to more starving if he is caught. However, he knows no fear this time. The only thing on his mind is only food and how to get it.

I crept into the cafeteria and snatched a few frozen trays, then I scurried to the restroom. Alone in the restroom, I swallowed the frozen hot dogs and later tots in huge chunks so fast I almost choked myself in the process. After filling my stomach I returned to the classroom, feeling proud so I fed myself. (page 40)

The method of stealing food that David uses in order to fulfill his needs of something to eat has been his ordinary method which he uses when he cannot think of another way to eat. However, clever ideas often come up the last minutes. When hunger strikes him and makes him weak while the situation does not allow him to steal any food or scratch anything from the trash bin, then he starts using another method.

This time, he makes the best use of his neighbor's hospitality. Then, he also learns a little bit of acting skills which enriches his survival ways. He pretends to lose his lunch box and asks his neighbors for some food.

My timetested story, "I lost my lunch. Could you make me one?"  
(page 43)

He succeeds for awhile but not forever, just like the other methods he uses. Once again, his mother who has unstable personality finds out and bad treatment waits for him again and again.

For weeks my plan worked, until one day when I came to the house of a lady who knew Mother. (page 43)

It has been a life circle for him; struggling for food, getting caught, being severely beaten and struggling again. Fortunately, David will not just stop. If he decides to stop all his struggles, this story will never be in the reader's hands, be read, and this painful story will never be revealed.

### **3.2.2 David's Struggle in Facing His Mother's Torture**

It has been mentioned that how unlucky David is to have such an ill mother who instead of giving care, love, and affection, she gives him so much pain to bear. Fortunately, David is such a boy of will to survive. Nothing seems to be able to defeat his will to survive and his struggle in his childhood is indeed one great thing to note.

Along with his great will to survive, many obstacles are there and ready to thwart his steps in trying to survive. These obstacles mostly come from his mother who is mentally unstable. In a long period, day by day, he has to face his mother's cruelty and what makes his condition worse is that nobody even tries to stop it. Thus, David has no choice but enduring his life as

much as possible even though he really wants everything to change. He has no choice but obeying his mother and following what she wants him to do.

I'm late. I've got to finish the dishes on time, otherwise no breakfast; and since I didn't have dinner last night, I have to make sure I get something to eat. (page 7)

As it was mentioned above, David has no choice but obeying his mother. From the quotation above, David has to follow what his mother has set up for him; all the chores that he has to finish in a very unreasonably short period and all the strict rules that he has to follow. He simply does not have another choice but to follow and obey what his mother has asked him to do. This is what at first prevents him from gaining his existence, when all choices that an essential human must have are banned from him.

However, there are many times when his mother goes further beyond what is imaginable. Her brain does not seem to stop thinking of the ways how to torture his son and how to satisfy her cruel obsession. She gives David plenty of works in household and asks him to finish them all within the time limit that she already sets up. Once David exceeds the limit, harsh punishments are the only things that he can expect. Once again, he has no choice but to follow and do it.

The worst thing of all is that David has no other place to go every time she is in the mood to play torturous games. These games include burning him

on flame, having him swallow poisonous liquid and locking him in a room full of poisonous gas. These are simply too much to handle and obviously, those games can eventually endanger his life.

Although Mother never made me swallow ammonia again, she did make me drink spoonfuls of Clorox a few times. But Mother's favorite game seemed to be dishwashing soap. (page 47)

Along with his knowledge of survival, David knows exactly that those games can endanger his life. Thus, he is conscious that he cannot be always obedient and follow all the crazy games invented by his mother to torture him because sometimes, his mother's game is too difficult to handle. This is the point when he starts to question about his essence. Although at first he realizes that he has no choice but following all his mother's games, there is also one thing that he is aware of. If his mother's mistreatment has gone too far, it eventually endangers his life.

Human automatically thinks of the way to survive and David is not an exception. Thus, he starts to think of another way to survive instead of just obediently following his mother's games. In doing so, he starts to decline doing all kinds of the crazy games which he thinks can endanger his life. This time, he starts trying to make his own action towards his mother, an action of declining to follow his mother's dangerous games.



Suddenly I began to realize the longer I could keep myself off the top of the stove, the better my chances were for staying alive. I knew my brother Ron would soon be coming home from his scout meeting, and I knew Mother never acted this bizarre when anyone else was in the house. In order to survive, I had to buy time. (page 28)

And he does it well. Soon, joy overfills his head and he is so proud of himself. He realizes one thing that he can always choose to decline doing something that endangers his life instead of obediently obeying his mother; he can say no to her; he can determine his own action. Since that first successful experiment with his actions, he promises to himself that he will always do something in facing his mother and not to let her and her wild and cruel obsession win.

I stood against the wall and began to whimper until I realized that I had beaten her. I had bought a few precious minutes. I used my head to survive. For the first time, I had won! (page 29)

This is a turning point in David's painful childhood life when he realizes that he actually has power from within himself to survive; a power of action. He chooses to survive then he will act to struggle. Thus henceforth, his childhood life starts to be filled with actions day by day in order to stay alive.

At this point, David's thought starts to be filled with consciousness that he can trust no one but himself to survive. He has to step on his own feet and depend on his own power rather than anyone else. His way of thinking grows wiser, especially in trying to survive. He promises not to cry like a

small kid, although he is only a small boy then; he must do something. He also promises not to give his mother more satisfaction of enjoying his sufferings. This is the way of life that he chooses despite the way that his mother has made for him; he prefers to make his own way of life by not letting his mother enjoy his suffering. Thus, he chooses to struggle.

I knew if I wanted to live, I would have to think ahead. I could no longer cry like a helpless baby. In order to survive, I could never give in to her. That day I vowed to myself that I would never, ever again give that bitch the satisfaction of hearing me beg her to stop beating me. (page 29)

His consciousness of his own power of action is like a fresh new air in his dark times. He knows he can do something by declining to do something, by taking firm action or even by staying quiet; the most important of all is that he must do something. Those are his actions in trying to survive. If at first, he cannot do anything and just accept what his mother does to him, for the next, he is no longer bound to his mother's rule that prevents him from doing something. He knows that he has to do something to stay alive.

However, after realizing that actually he has power to act, the problems do not just stop. It even gets bigger and sometimes makes him buried in great despair. Once again, his mother becomes the main barrier in his steps. After the incident when David succeeds in declining doing the burning game, his mother gets more brutal towards him. Worse mistreatments are something common then.

After he left, Mother would yank me out of bed and drag me to the kitchen. While I stood shivering in my pyjamas, she'd smack me from one side of the kitchen to the other. (page 32)

Luckily, David has already realized the presence of his new power. Then, he chooses to try to stop the brutal beatings he is facing. Of course trying to stop the beatings does not mean fighting back because he knows exactly the risk of fighting his mother back. He uses smooth action this time to stop the beating which eventually leaves him survive. One surprising fact that David finds is that acting defenselessly surprisingly increases the chance to survive. He acts by dropping himself to the floor so that his mother will stop the beatings after seeing him getting weaker.

One of my resistance techniques was to lay on the floor acting as though I didn't have the strength to stand. (page 32)

The same smooth method he uses in different case. This time, his mother starts again with her crazy idea of tormenting her son. Luckily, David knows more how to respond this time.

As soon as they left, she brought out one of Russell's soiled diapers. She smeared the diaper on my face. I tried to sit perfectly still. I knew if I moved, it would only be worse. I didn't look up. (page 34)

Having action does not always mean fighting physically, David already proves it. Doing nothing is actually also an action. In facing that disgusting torture, he chooses to stay stiff and quiet because he knows if he moves or tries to protect himself, his mother will do something further that maybe can endanger his life.

However, there are times when he has to take firm action in order to stay alive rather than staying quiet or merely declining to do something. When his mother locks him in a room full of poisonous gas and wants him to inhale the gas, he knows he cannot just decline to do it or stay silent and do nothing. So, to stay alive, David chooses to take action of self-protection.

To survive her new game, I had to use my head. Laying on the tiled floor I stretched my body, and using my foot, I slide the bucket to the door. I did this for two reasons: I wanted the bucket as far away from me as possible, and in case Mother opened the door, I wanted her to get a snoot full of her own medicine. (page 64)

He takes action rather than merely behaves defenselessly by trying to cover his face with wet cloth to prevent him from inhaling the poisonous gas. Fighting his mother back is also one possible action that he can do, however, David's full-of-consideration thought does not allow him to do so because he knows he will definitely be defeated. His action succeeds in making him stay alive.

It will be different case if instead of behaving full of action, he behaves defenselessly. As he promises that he will never give his mother any more satisfaction, then he chooses to take action.

His action of declining to do something once again saves him when his mother asks him to do something that he does not want to do. As if it were not enough making him inhale poisonous gas, David's mother also forces him to swallow poisonous liquid. However, David chooses to refuse.

Father stood lifeless as Mother fed me another dose of ammonia. But this time, I fought back. She had to pry my mouth open, and by thrashing my head from side to side, I was able to make her spill most of the cleaner onto the floor. (page 47)

In other cases, David declines doing something that can hurt him by merely saying no without any physical contact with his mother. However, there are also times when wordless declining is not enough. The quotation above is the evidence. When his mother forces him to swallow the liquid, saying no will not save him. Thus, he needs to fight back this time.

His full of action behavior is effective in making him survive. Once again, his choice succeeds in helping his survival struggle and makes him realize the great power of his. At a very young age, he starts to learn the lesson of cruel life. He could have stayed quiet and taken no action when his mother wants him to do any dangerous things. However, he chooses to

struggle. Thus, his struggle will not be successful without determining his own actions.

In the end, David is finally able to achieve his existence; to be free from what cages him; to be free to actualize himself; to be what he is now, an essential human being. This is according to Kierkegaard's central point which states that a self is not simply I am but something I must become (Evans 20). An essential self is something that David has achieved after long years of pain that prevents him from being essential self who is free from dehumanization. In the end, he is free and alive.

I am so alive. (page 91)

I am free. (page 94)

The fact that he is finally able to actualize himself by writing the novel entitled *A Child Called It* is the evidence that he has finally achieved his existence. That is one of many ways to actualize him in order to get his full essence in his life. Later, David is devoted to actualize his existential part of him. This statement is evidenced with his existential narration written in the end of the story; he finally gets his existence.

I knew even back then, in the final analysis, my way of life would be up to me. I made a promise to myself that if I came out of my situation alive, I had to make something of myself. (page 91-92)

The quotation '...my way of life would be up to me...' shows the existential part of him in determining his own life as Alfred states in Abi Morgan's *The Iron Lady* (10), '...Never run with the crowd, go your own

way...'. It is later supported by Kierkegaard's statement saying that, to 'think in existence' meant to recognize that one is faced with personal choices (Stumpf 456). He determines that his life will be his choice not other's.

He also made a promise to make something out of himself as part of way to get his full existence. This promise is achieved by sharing his story to readers which is also the implementation of the quotation that his life would be up to him. In brief, his past experience makes him a total different person.

Those achievements would never be achieved without being so brave to struggle. His existence would never be achieved without surviving first. Thus, all his struggles are important in the process of his life. Those struggles include his struggle to eat and his struggle to survive his mother's torture. In doing so, David has done all the prerequisites that Kierkegaard states in which

to exist implies being a certain kind of individual, an individual who strives, digilib.uinsa.ac.id digilib.uinsa.ac.id digilib.uinsa.ac.id digilib.uinsa.ac.id digilib.uinsa.ac.id who considers alternatives, who chooses, who decides, and who, above all, commits himself (Stumpf 455).

## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSION

This chapter discusses the final conclusion that the writer makes after analyzing all the data. There are two noteworthy problems that the writer chooses as the focus in this study. They are kinds of abuse that happens in David's childhood and also the depiction of his struggle in surviving the abuse. Those problems become the main point in this analysis.

There are six kinds of child abuse as stated in the Review of Related Literature. They are physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, parental abuse, abandonment and neglect. This analysis, however, finds out that there are three kinds of abuse that he passes through. They are abuse in the form of physical abuse which leaves bruises all over his body, emotional abuse which leaves him mentally hurt and neglect which leaves him not well taken care of.

This analysis also finds out the struggle that David does in surviving the abuse. His struggles include his efforts to earn some food which is the result of neglect by his mother who does not provide him proper daily meals and also his efforts to face his mother's brutal behavior in order to stay alive by taking actions. The actions that he does include declining to do something dangerous that his mother asks him to do, taking firm action when soft declining is not enough to save his life



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and by staying quiet based on the fact that behaving defenselessly surprisingly increases the chance to survive.

This is the existential part of him; he deals with personal choices to survive. By doing so, he does not merely follow what his mother wants him to be but determine his own path and determine who he must become. He does not want to follow the stream that his mother has set up for him but he prefers to create his own which finally leads him to survive. Thus in the end, David is finally able to achieve his existence. He is free and alive.

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