

Prepared by Renee Penn – Yeshiva Bnei Akiva – Modiin. – **THE WAVE** by Todd Strasser aka Morton Rhue – 1981

PLOT:

CHAPTER 1

- Starts with Laurie in the Grapevine office. No one is there. The period is almost over, so she decides to leave. On the way, she sees her friend, Amy, in Mr. Gabondi's class. The bell rings and they leave.
- View changes to Ben Ross, who is trying to thread film. He is appalled with the grades his students have been getting, mostly low B's and C's, and the lack of completed homework assignments. Didn't like students to arrive late and not turn in homework.

CHAPTER 2

- Ben Ross shows a movie of the Holocaust to his students, it shows emaciated Jews, and inhumane cruelty of the Nazis
- Mr. Ross explains how the Nazi started their administration, how the "Final Solution of the Jews" worked, and the crematoriums,
- Amy Smith asks why the Germans killed the Jews. However, Mr. Ross cannot give an answer that will satisfy the students.

Notes

Robert's lack of response to Mr. Ross' warning is an interesting contrast to his later - and quite sudden - adherence to the discipline of The Wave. Ross threatens Robert with failure, but he already considers himself a failure; in contrast, The Wave assures Robert power and success, more carrot than stick. In a sense, Robert is clearly saved by The Wave and the sense of empowerment it bestows him.

CHAPTER 3 • View changes to David Collins, Laurie, and Amy who are eating lunch. They see Robert Billings eat at a table and other girls walk away. Amy and Brian come; Amy and Laurie leave to work on The Grapevine Newspaper.

- Amy and Laurie talk about David in the newspaper room, Laurie becomes aware of how much Amy and Laurie compete with each other, Carl Block and Alex Cooper barge in and jokingly reprimand them for locking the door and for Amy smoking a cigarette. They don't have their article for the next edition done.

Notes

The Spider-Man comic is used as shorthand to indicate Robert Billings' arrested development. While the novel begins with Laurie resisting smoking, Amy smokes in this chapter - this contrasts the self-control

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each girl has, which in turn is reflected in their ability to resist The Wave. The humor of Carl and Alex is anti-authoritarian, as seen by their pretense as Principal Owens. However, they ironically reinforce the rule of authority, as their charade stops Amy from breaking the rule against smoking.

CHAPTER 4

- View changes to Ben Ross. Ben Ross goes home and reads books about Nazis that he got from the library. He is disappointed by the fact that he could not give adequate answers to his students. He decides on starting an experiment that would re-create the experience of Nazism in his class.
- Christy Ross comes home at eleven o'clock and sees Mr. Ross still up.

Notes

The monomania displayed by Ben is academic in nature, but it crosses over into the political realm by the topic he chooses to study. The question of how the German people allowed the Third Reich and then the Holocaust to happen is a weighty one, and not answered in a satisfactory manner in this book

CHAPTER 5

- Ben Ross starts his experiment, he writes "STRENGTH THROUGH DISCIPLINE" on the board, which is the first thing the students see when they enter the room. Mr. Ross first starts by improving the students' posture. There is already a difference in behavior as they start to stop making jokes and reacting to them.
- Next, he has the students race into their seats after they run out of them. He times them, and they get successively faster each time. During this, Robert Billings gradually assumes a leadership role as he helps the students get faster, and is used as a model for proper posture and appropriate behavior.
- Mr. Ross lastly teaches the students to answer question properly. "Mr. Ross, (answer)"and the class goes on to answer questions about the Holocaust until the bell rings. Laurie Saunders is the first and only person to answer in the improper form
- On their way out of class, Brad, David, Brian, Laurie, and Amy talk about how the class was. At first, several kids do not take this very seriously. However, David, who wants to help his football team, and Robert, who finally broke free of his loser ship, do.

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- View changes to Ben Ross at home. Ben Ross talks to his wife about how changed his students were, and how his students stayed after the bell.

Notes

Ben Ross begins his experiment with a slogan and three rules, supposedly derived from the slogan's premise. However, the broadness of the slogan makes these rules arbitrary under closer analysis. Any rule that imposes more control over the students and their behavior could just as easily have been applied, and other slogans could be used as easily to justify the rules chosen. Also note that Ben tells Christy he's ready to move on with new lessons the next day - his experiment had run its initial course, supposedly. However, this is contradicted by the fact that his students haven't truly learned the point of his exercise in discipline: that it shows how easily people can be indoctrinated, as they supposedly were in pre-World War II Germany. Whether or not he is lying to just her or to himself as well is unclear.

CHAPTER 6

- Ben Ross is late to class the next day. He finds all the students in proper posture. Ben Ross decides to continue with the experiment. He adds "COMMUNITY" to the motto. The new motto becomes "Strength through discipline, strength through community" Mr. Ross has the students recite this. Laurie at first does not but succumbs to peer pressure.
- He calls the movement The Wave; he makes the symbol and the salute. He forces the students to do the salute.
- View changes to David and Eric in football practice. David spreads The Wave to the football team, thinking that it will unite them and make them better at football. They steadfastly agree.

Notes

The Wave already begins to take on its own power, as Ben Ross finds the first slogan still on the board and the students still showing rigorous discipline. As leader, he did not ask for this - however, seeing these things in effect, he decides to feed The Wave further with a new slogan and rules. Also, observe how Eric and David switch roles in this scene as skeptic and believer in The Wave. David first wants to introduce The Wave to the football team, with Eric doubting; but when it's time to do exactly that, David is unsure and must be prodded by Eric to do so. This shows David's ambivalence towards The Wave, as well as Eric's desire for a straightforward solution to the knotty problem of team disunity.

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CHAPTER 7

- View changes to Laurie and her parents. Laurie describes The Wave to them. Mrs. Saunders disapproves it stating that it was too militaristic. However, Mr. Saunders feels that it is okay, because it helps the kids pay attention.
- View changes to Ben Ross and his wife. They have a conversation on The Wave; Christy Ross is generally incredulous and opposed to The Wave, while Ben constantly tries to defend it.

Notes

Laurie's parents play out the arguments for and against The Wave, casually expanding it to the larger issues of individualism versus community values. Because they are older, they also bring a wider range of experience and knowledge to the debate, as seen by the references to the workplace and Founding Fathers, as well as Midge Saunders' later comparison to cults. The sharing of chores in the Ross household shows how progressive they are as a couple, as this was not as common at that time as it is today. Christy's warning to Ben shows her awareness of the negative impact that Ben's monomania can have, especially in this particular case.

CHAPTER 8

- David Collins and Laurie Saunders have a tradition of running into each other in the morning. This morning they got into a minor argument regarding whether The Wave was a good thing. David thought it would help the football team, but Laurie was not so sure. Laurie changes the subject.
- When they get to Mr. Ross's class, he is passing out Wave membership cards. He has the people with "x's" on the back be monitors. He then adds another sentence to their motto. It now reads, "Strength through discipline, strength through community, strength through action." He states that discipline and community is useless without action. He encourages them to recruit new members.
- At the lunchroom, Laurie nervously speaks against The Wave. When Robert Billings counters, however, she takes it back.

CHAPTER 9

- The next day, Ben Ross notices that his class size is noticeably larger. He also notes that they are able to perform faster, and they cover more material; however, there is not much analysis, as if The Wave was getting rid of their sense of reasoning. Ross's stream of consciousness continues as he notes how Coach Schiller talked to him today and tries to figure out the cause of the spread of The Wave.

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- View changes to Laurie inside the school publications office. Laurie and The Grapevine's reporters are in an editorial meeting. They decide to write an article on The Wave.
- Laurie goes home. Mrs. Saunders talks to Laurie about The Wave. She talked to Robert's mom and described the Laurie the change she saw in him. Laurie's mom tells her not to be so affected by The Wave. Laurie starts to have second thoughts on whether The Wave is a fad or not.

Notes

The reference to *Time* magazine in this chapter is important, as it indicates two things: Ben Ross' desire for wider recognition for his teaching abilities, as well as the belief that the problem of disaffected, undisciplined students is a national concern. The humor of the *Grapevine* staff is again distinctly anti-authoritarian in nature, though now it seems more pointed than before.

CHAPTER 10

- Principal Owens and Ben Ross discuss The Wave. Principal Owen does not want the movement to go too far, while Ben Ross tries to defend it. The principal reminds Ben Ross that the experiment is dealing with young, impressionable kids and should not be done to the extreme.

CHAPTER 11

- Laurie goes to the publications office and finds a letter from an anonymous junior who was almost forced to join The Wave.
- View changes back to Ben as he leaves his meeting with Principal Owens. He sees students putting up posters and banners. Robert then asks Mr. Ross if he could be his bodyguard, to which Mr. Ross tentatively agrees.

Notes

There is a minor point of confusion in this chapter: Laurie is said to have found the anonymous article "the next day" but the second half of the chapter starts with Ben Ross leaving Principal Owens' office. Either "the next day" refers to the last time Laurie appeared, in Chapter Nine talking with her mother - in which case, it is the same day that Principal Owens spoke with Ben Ross in Chapter Ten - or that Ben Ross had seen Owens for a second time, the day after Chapter Ten's discussion. Also note the irony that Ben Ross observes how orders are being given in his name which he never issued, and yet is willing to accept a bodyguard to help maintain his presence as a leader. He has become a figurehead for The Wave at this point, as the true motivating force - the group mentality and the maintenance of said group - asserts its will with Ross' complicity.

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CHAPTER 12

- Laurie spots a fight between Brian Ammon and another person later to be identified as Deutsch. She bumps into David, who argues over The Wave. Laurie believes it is getting rid of the individuality of the people, while David states The Wave helps the school unify. Laurie states that David is too idealistic, while David counters that Laurie just does not like not being on top anymore. Laurie calls David stupid, and David breaks up with her.
- Alex, Carl, and Laurie decide to publish a special edition of The Grapevine, which is going to be about The Wave.
- View changes to Laurie at home. Mr. Saunders comes into her room and comments a fight after school. A Jew said something critical of The Wave and he was beaten up.

CHAPTER 13

- Laurie goes to the game on Saturday, and she wants to sit with Amy. However, she is stopped by Brad, who commands her to do The Wave salute before entering the bleachers. Brad actually does not want to make people salute, but the rest of The Wave forces him.
- Sunday afternoon, The Grapevine staff meets at Laurie's house and makes the newspaper, which includes the letter from the anonymous junior and a report on the Jewish sophomore who was beaten up.
- Laurie states that it runs against everything the country was founded on, getting rid of our Freedom of Speech and thought.

CHAPTER 14

- Laurie meets Amy in the library the next day to discuss the newspaper. Amy believes that Laurie is doing this just because of her fight with David. She states that the only reason Laurie is against it is that she was dethroned.
- Copies began to circulate throughout the school. Ben Ross reads it and goes into the teacher's lounge where he overhears Coach Schiller disparaging The Wave, stating it wasn't worth a damn.
- View changes to David in the lunchroom. He cannot believe Laurie publishes this. Robert states that she must be stopped, but David says that he can take care of her.

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CHAPTER 15

- View changes to Ben Ross in his home. Christy finds him reading Nazi and tries to convince him to stop The Wave once and for all. She states that Principal Owens wants to see him tomorrow.
- View changes to the publications office where Laurie is cleaning up after the success party. After she left, she felt someone following her. Laurie ran out of the school, away from the footsteps.
- View changes to David, who spots Laurie walking. He tries to convince Laurie to stop destroying The Wave, but Laurie stated that it is harming people. David then throws Laurie to the ground. They then go to Ben Ross's house.
- Christy again tells Ross to end The Wave. She states that it is putting both their careers in danger. He then sees David and Laurie at his front door, again convincing him to stop.

CHAPTER 16

- The next day Ben meets with Principal Owens, who met with the Jew's father, who turned out to be a rabbi who lived in Auschwitz for two years. Overall, he is infuriated. Ben Ross tells his plan to end the Wave and teach the students of its evils, and the Principal reluctantly agrees.
- Ben Ross goes back to his history class and tells them that there will be an assembly after-school for Wave members. He stated that The Wave would meet their leader, the leader of the whole National Wave Youth Movement in the United States of America. David and Laurie try to stop him, but Ben Ross takes them to the principal's office. On the way, he tells them that everything is going to be all right.
- The principal lets them go after the day is over. David and Laurie get their books and decide to see this leader.

CHAPTER 17

- View changes to the auditorium where the assembly is to be held. It is packed and all the doors are locked. Ben rolls out the T.V. and flips it to a blank channel. All around kids are confused. Laurie and David manage to get inside, and see the rest of the assembly. Ben Ross takes down the curtain, showing a video of Hitler.
- That is your leader, he states. He stated that they would be good fascists, but the fault is more on him as a leader than themselves. Nevertheless, he hopes the students learn from their mistake. The students

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leave one by one sadly. However, no one is affected as much as Robert Billings is. The book ends with Ben Ross starting to talk to him.