

THE LEGACY OF ANNE FRANK

Seventy years after its publication, one young girl's diary can still teach us so much.
By **Andréa Childs**



in a child's voice, embodies all the hideousness of fascism, more so than all the evidence at Nuremberg put together,' said Dutch historian Jan Romein, who helped bring the diary to the attention of the world when he wrote a newspaper article after being given the manuscript by Anne's father in 1946.

LIFE IN HIDING

Anne, her parents Otto and Edith, and sister Margot were German Jews who moved from Frankfurt to Amsterdam in 1933 to escape antisemitism. A year after World War II broke out in 1939, Germany invaded the Netherlands, putting the family in danger again. Having to wear yellow stars to identify themselves as Jews, they were forbidden to go to the cinema or swimming pool, or use public transport. Margot, three years older than Anne, was called up to work in a German labour camp; the next day, 6 July 1942, the family went into hiding. They were joined by Hermann and Auguste van Pels and their son, Peter; and four months later, by Fritz Pfeffer.

The annex had already been prepared – a warren of rooms in a disused section of a building owned by Otto Frank's food company, with the entrance concealed behind a bookcase. To avoid detection, the inhabitants kept the curtains drawn and stayed silent during the day, when the warehouses next door were occupied by workers. Living in close quarters was

challenging, and Anne used her diary as a friend and confidante. And when she heard an illegal radio broadcast from the Dutch Government in exile, asking for eyewitness accounts of living under German occupation, she began rewriting and editing her diary, with the aim of publishing it as a novel after the war.

But on 4 August 1944, the annex was discovered. For years, it was thought that the occupants were betrayed, but new research from the Anne Frank House museum in Amsterdam suggests they may have been found by chance, when the building was raided by the German Security Service looking for illegal workers

Anne's diary has been translated into more than 60 languages and is studied in schools worldwide

‘I don't want to have lived in vain like most people. I want to be useful or bring enjoyment to all people, even those I've never met. I want to go on living even after my death!’

These are the prophetic words of Anne Frank, the Jewish girl whose diary of her two years hiding from the Nazis in an Amsterdam annex during World War II became a worldwide phenomenon. It's 70 years since *The Secret Annex*, often known as *Anne Frank's Diary*, was first published in the Netherlands; and 65 years since the book became available in the UK. Anne didn't survive the war. The hideaway was discovered and its inhabitants deported to the German death camps. Anne died of typhus in Bergen-Belsen, two months before it was liberated by the British Army on 15 April 1945. She was just 15 years old.

Her death was tragic but, as Anne hoped, her words live on, conveying the persecution of a people through the prism of a young girl's hopes and fears, humour and heartbreak. ‘This apparently inconsequential diary by a child... stammered out



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and fraudulent ration coupons. Following the arrest, Miep Gies, an employee of Otto's who had helped bring the families provisions, picked up the pages of Anne's diary and hid them.

SHARING ANNE'S STORY

After the war, Otto returned to Amsterdam, the only survivor of the Frank family. Miep gave him the diary, saying, ‘This is your daughter Anne's legacy.’

Otto was initially unsure about publishing Anne's private words, but the book was finally printed in the Netherlands in 1947. In 1952, it was published in the UK and US, after Otto begged and borrowed his way across Europe to bring his daughter's story to the world. That struggle will be told in a new film, *Keeper of the Diary*, which is currently in production. It's just the latest in a series of productions that have brought Anne's story to life. The play *The Diary of Anne Frank* won a Pulitzer prize in 1956 and

was made into a film three years later. And in 1987, teacher Sue Saunders wrote her play *In Holland Stands a House*, which has now been performed by students all over the world.

‘Otto was responsible for pushing Anne's diary forward; he said it helped people to find beauty in a world of hate,’ says Sue. ‘I felt it was important to continue telling this story.’



Above: The Frank family in 1941
Right: Otto Frank (centre) in 1945 with those who helped his family hide from the Nazis



It's important we know how events led to the persecution of Jews and the Holocaust. Today, many of the people suffering are Muslim. We have to bring it home that this could happen again.’

A LASTING IMPRESSION

Anne's diary has been translated into more than 60 languages and is studied in schools worldwide. Nelson Mandela said that it helped to keep his spirits high when he was imprisoned on Robben Island. A 12-line poem she wrote in hiding was recently auctioned in two minutes for £119,000; and the Anne Frank House museum, where you can tour the annex, received record visitor numbers in 2016. ‘People from all over the world come to visit her hiding place and view her diaries. It's often an emotional visit,’ says Annemarie Bekker from the museum.

People young and old respond to the writing and wisdom of this young girl, who hoped so much, even in the hardest of times. ‘Reading Anne's diary really changed the core of who I was. She is such a great role model,’ writes Katie, 12, from Canada, in the Anne Frank House museum guestbook. And Margaret, 77, from the US, writes, ‘My aunt escaped Austria, but both her parents were killed. My father escaped Germany before the war broke out. My heart breaks for Anne Frank.’

And Anne herself? She said: ‘How lovely to think that no one need wait a moment, we can start now, start slowly changing the world... And you can always, always give something, even if it is only kindness.’

Five famous diaries

- 1 *The Diary of Samuel Pepys* – first-hand accounts from Restoration England.
- 2 *Journals: Captain Scott's Last Expedition* – a harrowing account of the tragic South Pole expedition.
- 3 *Conversations with Myself* – diary entries and letters by Nelson Mandela.
- 4 *The Diary of Virginia Woolf* – multiple volumes revealing her life as part of the Bloomsbury set.
- 5 *The Alan Bennett Diaries: 1980-1990* – Alan Bennett adds to his biographical works with these diary extracts.



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