

63 The Diary of a Young Girl

Anne Frank

Anne Frank's beloved diary was first published in 1947 and has become a classic; it has been read in schools and performed on the stage all over the world. This story humanized the Nazis' chokehold on Jewish life in Europe for millions of people worldwide. *The Diary of a Young Girl: The Definitive Edition* first appeared in 1995 and includes previously unpublished passages from Anne's original diary.

In actuality, Anne kept two diaries; one she began in June of 1942; the other diary was her own edited and expanded version of the original—a diary she thought she would turn into a book after the war. This new, definitive edition—a combination of writings—shows Anne as an even brighter, more mature adolescent, whose maturity is quickened through her circumstances. It includes about thirty percent more writings than the earlier version, passages Anne's father, Otto Frank, had hitherto left out, including those concerning Anne's tumultuous relationship with her mother and her own feelings about her budding sexuality.

The reader comes to know Anne, a popular, quick-witted girl just turning thirteen. She and her family left Germany during Hitler's early years. She is full of quick insights into classmates and family members—many of which aren't particularly complimentary. Anne's concerns are those of any ordinary adolescent, with a few references about the inconveniences of being Jewish woven in. More troubled times are something she suggests, but clearly not something she ponders deeply on a regular basis. That her initial concerns are so ordinary is what makes the diary so striking: Anne's voice represents the universal voice of millions of children who were never heard.

Soon after she begins her diary, which she has named "Kitty,"

the family goes into hiding. Anne reports on the intimate details of leaving home, the absurd layers of clothes, and her amazement upon entering their now famous secret annex above her father's office building/warehouse in Amsterdam, behind a bookcase that swings open.

The annex consists of five rooms, and houses eight people: Anne's parents; her older sister Margot; Mr. & Mrs. Van Daan and their son, Peter; and soon after the Franks' arrival, a dentist named Dussel with whom Anne shares a room. Anne reports on the daily lives of the annex's inhabitants. There are also five devoted family friends without whose help the family would not have been able to hide, most of whom work in the building: Mr. Kugler, Mr. Kleiman, Miep Gies (and her husband, Jan), and Bep Voskuijl. These heroic Dutch people risked their lives to help the family.

This particularly poignant diary isn't just about being a Jew during the war, but about the maturation of a young girl coming to terms with her changing body, trapped in an environment that forces her to grow more quickly than she would have chosen. We're also taken on her emotional ride, accompanying her in her adolescent obsession with Peter Van Daan, and the reckoning of her own needs and desires. She also details, with a reporter's eye, the limited foods to which they have access, as well as the tensions of hiding, and the constant fear of being discovered.

But there is also the resiliency of the young in her tone and in her outlook: she knows this experience will strengthen her and has already changed her into a better person. There are celebrations in the annex, too: birthdays, particularly, seem cozy and indulgent, and although there is general tension among its inhabitants, there's also a sense of camaraderie in their small world. She describes the importance of obeying the annex's rules, and the way that the imposed order provides a sense of security and routine—as it does in all our daily lives.

Her writing is often eloquent, startlingly wise for a girl of her age. It is Anne's innate optimism and her keen eye that has kept this diary alive for so many years, loved by millions of readers. Although the diary is most famous for her lines, "I still believe, in spite of everything, that people are truly good at heart," there are numerous other passages that touch the reader, either by their kernels of wisdom or their purity of heart.

Anne Frank comes to a similar conclusion about responsibility

and anti-Semitism that scholar Daniel Jonah Goldhagen arrived at in *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, which takes an academic, objective approach to the Holocaust. Each book demonstrates how anti-Semitism helped fuel the war and acknowledges that ordinary Germans carried out the crimes. Frank writes: "I don't believe the war is simply the work of politicians and capitalists. Oh no, the common man is every bit as guilty; otherwise, people and nations would have rebelled long ago! There's a destructive urge in people, the urge to rage, murder and kill. And until all of humanity, without exception, undergoes a metamorphosis, wars will continue to be waged, and everything that has been carefully built up, cultivated and grown will be cut down and destroyed, only to start all over again!"

Although there are other subjects in which Anne reveals this more mature side of herself, she never loses her humor for long, and works at her optimistic nature, constantly putting her hiding in perspective (considering the alternative). She writes more than once that she would just like to be a normal teenager, and wants more than anything time alone—and time outside.

We also have the sad benefit of hindsight: Anne questions whether she can write anything of lasting value. On August 1, 1944, Anne wrote her last entry; the annex was raided on August 4. The Frank family had been in hiding for over two years. In 1945, both Margot and Anne died in Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. The only member of her family to survive was her father, Otto Frank.

Miep Gies and Bep Voskuijl, the two secretaries working in the building, found Anne's diaries strewn all over the floor; Miep Gies tucked them away in a desk drawer for safekeeping. After the war, when it became clear that Anne was dead, she gave the diaries, unread, to Anne's father, Otto Frank. Anne Frank's diary is one of the most moving works to emerge from the Holocaust and will continue to enlighten and inspire millions of readers for generations to come.