

Painfully shy, awesomely brave, the unknown heroine behind Anne Frank's diary

By Glenys Roberts

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Without The Diary Of Anne Frank, the world might never have known the everyday horror of life under the Nazis.

The little book by a talented teenager who died in Bergen-Belsen concentration camp has become one of the world's best-sellers since it made its first appearance in 1947.

The diary describes in haunting detail the terror experienced by Anne's Jewish family hiding from jack-booted Germans in an attic in occupied Amsterdam.



Courageous: Miep Gies, the woman who hid Jewish youngster Anne Frank from the Nazis and guarded her diary that became one of the world's most-read books.

The book has become so familiar that it is hard to remember that without the humanity and bravery of one woman, it would never have been published.

Miep Gies, who has died just a month short of her 101st birthday, saved the diary pages from destruction by the Germans and gave them to Anne's father, Otto - the only member of the Frank family to survive their unimaginable ordeal.

Miep was Anne's confidante and the last of the handful of 'helpers' who enabled the Franks to hide for nearly two years before their capture. Her death is the final chapter in a tragic, but inspirational story.



Anne Frank, whom Gies protected.

In July 1942, the Frank family went into hiding in a secret annexe in a factory attic, its entrance concealed by a bookcase, leaving a false trail indicating that they'd fled to Switzerland.

Soon afterwards, they were joined by other Jews - the Van Pels family and Miep Gies's family dentist. Eight people in all.

Miep was just 33, newly married and with everything to lose. Yet she and a group of three others at the factory set about the life-threatening task of smuggling in food and provisions for the Franks while they were in hiding.

Since food was rationed, they begged, borrowed and bartered from farmers and shopkeepers. 'I had to buy food on the black market,' she said. 'My husband

Jan also helped by providing me with so-called ration cards he had obtained illegally.

She made many visits a day to the attic, concealing supplies under her coat. And it was Miep who brought in the paper on which Anne would write her diary.



Miep Gies in 1931

As Anne Frank recorded: 'They come upstairs every day and talk to the men about business and politics, to the women about food and wartime difficulties, and to the children about books and newspapers.'

'They put on their most cheerful expressions, bring flowers and gifts for birthdays and holidays, and are always ready to do what they can.'

For two years, they were the only people the Jewish families saw. The families couldn't leave their hiding place and, as we know from Anne, it was easy enough under these conditions for everyone to get on each others' nerves.

One night, Miep stayed in the attic with her husband.

'It opened my eyes for the awful position of my friends,' she said. 'To live with eight people in such a small place, never being allowed to go out, never being

able to talk to friends and always fearing the coming of the police.'

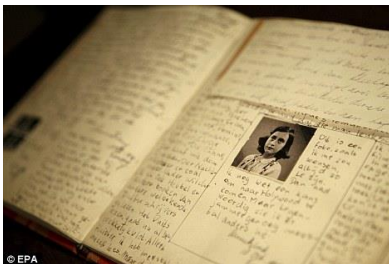
During the day, when the offices were full of workers, the Franks had to speak in whispers. And as the bathroom waste pipes ran right through the factory, they could not flush the waste in case it was heard.

Throughout it all, Anne confided everything to paper, saying: 'The nicest part is being able to write down all my thoughts and feelings, otherwise I'd absolutely suffocate.'

At first, Miep did not tell the family the true horror of what was happening to other Jews in Amsterdam.

But in 1943, she broke the news that many of the Franks' friends had been rounded up and transported in cattle cars to Westerbork, the big holding camp on the German border from where Jews were transported to the death camps.

At 10.30am on August 4, the Gestapo arrived. Upstairs in the attic, Anne was helping Peter with his homework. Downstairs in the office, Miep was sitting at her desk. She recognised from the voice of one of the arresting officers that he was Viennese and, as a fellow Austrian, she managed to charm him. That probably saved her life.



Anne Frank's diary.

Within seconds, the soldiers had gone into the attic. Anne looked

up and saw an SS officer pointing a gun at her head. They had been betrayed.

The Frank family and their friends were herded out. Miep never saw Anne again.

Miep risked her life by going to the Gestapo headquarters and pleading for her friends. When they refused to listen, she returned to the attic with a friend called Bep.

'I went upstairs to the Franks' bedroom and there we saw Anne's diary lying on the ground,' she recalled later.

'I said: "Let's pick it up." Bep stood there looking around in a daze.

'So I said: "Pick it up, pick it up - let's get out of here!" We did the best we could to collect it; we were so frightened!

'We went downstairs and there we were, Bep and I. "What now Bep?" I asked.

'Then she said: "You're the oldest. You should keep it." '

So Miep put the pages away in her office desk drawer.

The Frank family were first incarcerated in Westerbork's grim punishment block. Then, on September 3, 1944, they were put on the infamous train to Auschwitz.

The men were separated from the women. A month later, Anne and her sister were transported to Belsen, leaving behind their mother, who died in January 1945.

By a cruel irony, Auschwitz was liberated by the Russians just

days afterwards and Otto was released. He returned to Miep in Amsterdam, hoping he would see his daughters again.

Two months later, he received a letter telling him that 18-year-old Margot and 15-year-old Anne had died of typhoid in Belsen, just weeks before the camp was liberated by the British.

Miep was with him when Otto received the news, and couldn't find the words to comfort him. Then she remembered Anne's diary, took it out of the desk and gave it to him, saying: 'Here is your daughter Anne's legacy to you.'