Bio4Kids: Anne Frank
(1929-1945)

Brief Outline

Born on June 12, 1929, in Frankfurt am Main, Germany, Anne Frank was a young Jewish girl caught in the middle of a terrible situation. In 1933, a man named Adolf Hitler became the leader of Germany. He and his government—known as the Nazis—were prejudiced against people who were Jewish. They told people to not shop in stores owned by Jews and passed laws that made life very difficult for the Jews. Around this time, Anne and her family moved to Amsterdam, Holland, to avoid being harassed because of their religion. Unfortunately, they were not safe for too long because the Germans invaded Holland in 1940 and began persecuting the Jews. Anne and her sister Margot were forced to go to a separate school for Jewish children. Anne’s father was not allowed to own his business because of the new rules the Nazis made. For other Jews, the situation was much worse. Many were killed by the Nazis and others were sent to concentration camps. These camps were really prisons where some Jews and others were forced to work under horrible conditions. Millions of people died at the camps.

Despite the fear and anxiety about what the Nazis would do next, Anne seemed like a normal teenage girl. She has been described as talkative and playful. In June 1942, Anne received a diary as a birthday present and what she wrote in it showed another side of her personality. The diary became a place where Anne could express her hopes, dreams, and fears.

Otto Frank, Anne’s father, had many fears too. He was afraid that something terrible would happen so he decided to build a secret room in the attic of his business warehouse. Anne and her and her family were forced into hide there in the summer of 1942 after Margot was ordered to go Germany. Her family knew that this order meant Margot was to be sent to a concentration camp. To save the family, Otto Frank, Anne’s father, had an attic in the warehouse of his business turned into a livable space. Anne, her family, and four others stayed in this place for two years. Several people helped them by providing food and news of the outside world.

All the while, Anne wrote in her diary. She captured the details of her days in hiding and studied those around her. A part of her diary included short stories and part of a novel. Anne explored her feelings and thoughts in the pages of her diary. As she wrote, she realized that she wanted to be an author when she grew up and that her experiences in hiding would make a great novel.

Tragically, she did not live to see this dream come true. Someone let the authorities know about their hiding place and they were all arrested in August 1945. Anne and her sister Margot were sent to a concentration camp called Bergen-Belsen where they both died.

A friend of the family had been able to save Anne’s writings and gave them to her
father when he returned to Amsterdam after the war ended. Her father later edited her diary, which was first published in Holland in 1947. American readers first got a chance to read about Anne Frank’s life when the diary was published in the United States in 1950.
Although she was only fifteen years old when she died, Anne Frank has been able to touch the lives of millions of people with her powerful writing. Her diary has been translated into more than 30 different languages and sold millions of copies since it was first published. Students often read The Diary of Anne Frank in school as a way to better understanding what it was like to growing up during the Holocaust. Anne’s story continues to live on through her many readers.
Anne Frank was one of over one million Jewish children who died in the Holocaust. She was born Annelies Marie Frank on June 12, 1929, in Frankfurt, Germany, to Otto and Edith Frank.

For the first 5 years of her life, Anne lived with her parents and older sister, Margot, in an apartment on the outskirts of Frankfurt. After the Nazi seizure of power in 1933, Otto Frank fled to Amsterdam in the Netherlands,
where he had business connections. The rest of the Frank family followed Otto, with Anne being the last of the family to arrive in February 1934 after staying with her grandparents in Aachen.

The Germans occupied Amsterdam in May 1940. In July 1942, German authorities and their Dutch collaborators began to concentrate Jews from throughout the Netherlands at Westerbork, a transit camp near the Dutch town of Assen, not far from the German border. From Westerbork, German officials deported the Jews to Auschwitz-Birkenau and Sobibor killing centers in German-occupied Poland.

During the first half of July, Anne and her family went into hiding in an apartment which would eventually hide four Dutch Jews as well -- Hermann, Auguste, and Peter van Pels, and Fritz Pfeffer. For two years, they lived in a secret attic apartment behind the office of the family-owned business at 263 Prinsengracht Street, which Anne referred to in her diary as the Secret Annex. Otto Frank's friends and colleagues, Johannes Kleiman, Victor Kugler, Jan Gies, and Miep Gies, had previously helped to prepare the hiding place and smuggled food and clothing to the Franks at great risk to their own lives. On August 4, 1944, the Gestapo (German Secret State Police) discovered the hiding place after being tipped off by an anonymous Dutch caller.

That same day, Gestapo official SS Sergeant Karl Silberbauer and two Dutch police collaborators arrested the Franks; the Gestapo sent them to Westerbork on August 8. One month later, in September 1944, SS and police authorities placed the Franks, and the four others hiding with the Franks, on a train transport from Westerbork to Auschwitz, a concentration camp complex in German-occupied Poland. Selected for labor due to their youth, Anne and her sister, Margot were transferred to the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp near Celle, in northern Germany in late October 1944.

Both sisters died of typhus in March 1945, just a few weeks before British troops liberated Bergen-Belsen on April 15, 1945. SS officials also selected Anne's parents for labor. Anne's mother, Edith died in Auschwitz in early January 1945. Only Anne's father, Otto, survived the war. Soviet forces liberated Otto at Auschwitz on January 27, 1945.

While in hiding, Anne kept a diary in which she recorded her fears, hopes, and experiences. Found in the secret apartment after the family was arrested, the diary was kept for Anne by Miep Gies, one of the people who had helped hide the Franks. It was published after the war in many languages and is used in thousands of middle school and high school curricula in Europe and the Americas. Anne Frank has become a symbol for the lost promise of the children who died in the Holocaust.
Anne Frank

1929 - 1945

Statue Anne Frank in Utrecht, made by Pieter d'Hont in 1959 and placed in 1960 at the Janskerkhof. Photo by Wikipedia user Brbbl
Anne Frank was born to Otto Frank and his wife Edith on June 12, 1929. They named her Annelies Marie. She had a sister Margot who was three years older. They were a Jewish family living in Germany. Their families had lived in Germany for centuries.

By 1932 Adolph Hitler had risen to power in Germany and instead of enjoying a democracy, the German people now suffered under the rule of a dictator. Hitler blamed the Jews for all the problems in the country. Otto realized it was becoming unsafe for his family in Germany and moved them to the Netherlands. He set up a company in Amsterdam making a product that the women used to make homemade jam. It was called Opekta. (Pectin is derived from fruits and will cause jelly and jam to jell. In America you can buy a pectin product called Sure Jell.)

The family was safe for a while, but then in 1940 the Germans invaded the Netherlands and began to arrest and persecute the Jews there. They put restrictions on the Jews and made them wear an identifying yellow star on their clothes. They could not own a business. They could not ride a bicycle. Life became very hard, and the Jews feared for their lives.
Margot, Anne's sister was called to report to a work camp in Germany. The family had been planning a hiding place, but with Margot's call-up they knew they had to hide immediately. And so they did. The date was July 6, 1942.

The hiding place became known as the Secret Annex. It was located at 263 Prinsengracht. The Frank family would occupy two rooms on the first floor. Later Mr. and Mrs. Van Pels and their son would move into the two rooms on the second floor. From Peter's tiny room they could access the attic where food was stored. There was a small bathroom on the first floor.

The first thing they did was make curtains to prevent anyone from seeing in. An eighth person, Fritz Pfeffer, an older man, a dentist, arrived and would share a room with Anne.

Father Voskuijl made a movable bookcase to hide the door through which they entered their quarters.

This picture shows the streetside view of the building. Otto Frank’s offices were at the front of the building and the hiding place was at the rear.
There were four people who helped them during the two years and 30 days they were in hiding. Miep Gies, Victor Kugler, Johannes Kleiman and Bep Voskuijl provided food for them, and at great personal risk to their own lives visited daily and brought news from the outside world.

The people in hiding must be very quiet when the warehouse workers are at work downstairs. They can move around when the men are gone for lunch, and at 5:30 in the afternoon when the workers leave the building Anne and the others are free to go downstairs into the office area. Anne calls it their "nightly freedom".

The Franks had brought school books for an extended stay and library books are brought to the group weekly. They spend a lot of time reading, studying, and working correspondence courses.

Anne writes in her diary*. She creates an imaginary friend "Kitty" with whom she shares her innermost thoughts in her writings. Sometimes she writes short stories. After hearing on a radio broadcast that there would be a collection of the diaries and writings made during the war, Anne begins to think about making her writings into a book. After a lot of thought she decides she will call it "Achterhuis" (Secret Annex).
She begins rewriting her entries, leaving out some very personal items she would rather not share. For over two months she works rewriting her diaries.

On August 4, 1944 the people in hiding were discovered. Someone, they never found out who, betrayed them and a Secret Service officer and three men of the Dutch police force came up the stairs, entered with guns, and herded them away to jail. The two men who had been helping them were also arrested and taken to the city prison. The two women helpers, Miep and Bep, were left behind. They went into Anne's small room. Her diaries were scattered all over the floor. They collected them and Miep kept them.

The eight people are taken to a transit camp, Westerbork. From that camp people are taken to extermination and concentration camps*. During the month they are there they have to break up old batteries. On September 2, 1944 their names appear on the list of people to be moved. They are put on freight cars and three days later they arrive at the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp. The people in the freight cars were divided. Men and women were separated and then they were divided into groups; one group would go to labor camps, and those who could not work would be killed in the gas chamber.

By the end of October Anne and her sister Margot are transferred to another camp, Bergen-Belsen. They both become ill there and died of typhus in March of 1945. They died just a few weeks before the British Army arrived and freed the prisoners.

The four helpers survived the war and so did Anne's father Otto Frank. He searched desperately for word of the fate of his family. Finally in July he met two sisters who witnessed the death of Anne and Margot.

After Otto learned of the death of his daughters, Miep gave him the pages of the diary she had been saving. He was surprised at the depth of her writings. This was an Anne he never knew. He honored her wish to have her writings published as a book. First the book was published in the Dutch* language, then German, French, and English. The book was made into a stage play, then into a film.
Today when you see the word "Holocaust" it usually refers to this time in which the German Army systematically killed nearly 6 million Jews. People need to learn about the Holocaust and the reasons why it happened, lest periods of hatred and discrimination cause a similar genocide. Some say it never happened at all, but we know it did because there are too many witnesses and survivors who lived to tell the world about those darkest of times.

Today if you visit the site of the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp you can see a memorial to Anne Frank and her sister Margot.

This biography by Patsy Stevens, a retired teacher, was written in 2007.