

# ANNE FRANK



**Ronald Wilfred Jansen**

# **Anne Frank**

SILENT WITNESSES

Reminders of a Jewish girl's life



RWJ-PUBLISHING

**‘ I WANT TO GO ON LIVING EVEN AFTER MY DEATH ! ’**  
**(Anne Frank)**

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# PROLOGUE

Annelies Marie ‘Anne’ Frank (hereafter referred to as Anne) has come to symbolise the Holocaust, and her diary has conquered the world. A plethora of biographies and books containing historical photos have been published on her life. The travelling exhibition *Anne Frank—A History for Today*<sup>1</sup> is the most visited Dutch exhibition outside of the Netherlands. The exhibition *Anne Frank: Her Life in Letters* (2006)<sup>2</sup> depicts her life in hiding with an impressive, panoramic video presentation of excerpts from her diary. Less well known to the public is the physical trail of Silent Witnesses, which serves to remind us of Anne in the (urban) landscape.

My interest in the persecution of Jews in general and of Anne in particular came about gradually. From 1994 to 1996, I participated in international voluntary projects through the Dutch volunteer foundation SIW—projects in the former concentration camps Sachsenhausen and Dachau<sup>3</sup> located in Germany. I wanted to enter into a dialogue with young adults from different countries. I was edging towards the second half of my thirties, whilst most of the others were in their early-twenties. Fortunately, one is never too old to learn.

We discussed Nazism and the dangers of neo-Nazism, with all of us horrified by the stories told by former camp prisoners and members of the resistance. A number of historians led discussions in the presence of local residents. Fortunately, some of them had the courage to face up to this black page in German history. Many (elderly) Germans, however, remain unwilling to face their past. We also participated in excavations and other activities; such activities were intended to foster mutual understanding, but with the secondary aim of facilitating fun together.

What struck me during these activities was the contrast between the current silence in the former concentration camps, combined with the hardships of the prisoners, on the one hand, and the harsh shouts of the camp guards during the war, on the other. I was struck by the

cruelty of the Nazi regime. Especially shocking were the lampshades made of human skin. Some of the younger participants were unable to deal with the horrors of the Nazi regime. American army videos displayed shocking images of the corpses of former prisoners in Buchenwald and other camps.

I visited the Achterhuis (the Secret Annex) for the first time in 2001. Visitors tend to be deeply impressed when they visit the Secret Annex, and I was no exception. I could feel the tension of the people in hiding, and I quickly realised Anne had become caught in the Nazi web: she had been snatched away from her usual environment. Anne had a keen interest in culture, religion, science and social matters, and was always concerned with the welfare of others. As a German refugee, she felt at home in Amsterdam and was eager to reach maturity. Her murder just because she was Jewish leaves a very bitter taste in my mouth. Her life was nipped in the bud.

I felt the urge to record Anne's life, not by means of a biography or a book containing old photographs—after all, so many of those have already been published—but in a different manner.

In 2008 and 2009, I went on a memorial tour, visiting Anne's various places of residence (hereafter referred to as main locations): her addresses in Frankfurt am Main and Aachen, the Merwedeplein in Amsterdam, the Secret Annex in Amsterdam where she went into hiding, and the Westerbork, Auschwitz-Birkenau and Bergen-Belsen concentration camps where she was imprisoned.<sup>4</sup> I converted this historical journey into a (photo) book.<sup>5</sup>

The publication of the photo book proceeded with difficulty. The Anne Frank Fonds in Basel only permitted the use of five of Anne's quotes.<sup>6</sup> I wanted to publish the photo book in 2009, the year Anne would have celebrated her 80<sup>th</sup> birthday. Since I was unable to find a regular publisher for the book, I decided to publish it myself. I quickly made a selection of photographs and edited them with the use of Photoshop; I purchased historical photographs from a stock agency; I did the layout myself and published the book in 2009 through a POD<sup>7</sup> publisher. For the English version of the book, I had to pay Random House<sup>8</sup> a (modest) amount of money because I had used a few



quotations from Anne's diaries. Unfortunately, however, my attempts at obtaining subsidies were fruitless.

Nevertheless, I was not put off. I positioned several historical photographs next to current ones taken from the same perspective, which painfully revealed the void left behind by Anne. Many people thought this approach was challenging, and consequently wanted to bring my photo book to the attention of the general public.<sup>9</sup> Hanna 'Hanneli' Elisabeth Goslar (born in 1928, hereafter referred to as Hanneli) was a friend of Anne's and liked my photo book.

The Anne Frank Stichting (The Anne Frank House) noted my original approach<sup>10</sup>, and the Anne Frank Fonds in Basel remarked that my photographs bridge the gap between past and present.<sup>11</sup> In spite of this, however, neither organisation was prepared to publish my book<sup>12</sup>, which was a great pity. I decided, however, that I would not be deterred by any of this, and would add a final sequel to the photo book and booklet.

This book will be my last work on Anne, and it will be a supplement to the existing historiography of Anne. I wrote this book as a result of getting to know more about the main locations and the surrounding environment of Anne's residences, her hiding place, and various locations she liked to visit.

Another reason for writing this book is that time is running out for people who knew Anne to tell their story. In a similar vein, the book pays specific attention to the reasons behind why the places that remind us of Anne are disappearing.

The major monuments erected after the war, which commemorate Anne, the war and the persecution of the Jews, are mentioned in this book but not elaborated upon since its central theme is Anne's residential environment. These monuments serve to illustrate how Anne, along with other war victims, is being commemorated.

Various sources were consulted during the course of writing this book. Since the book is being financed by private funds, it does not include any photographs of Anne purchased from stock agencies or elsewhere.<sup>13</sup> Ad Tiggeler<sup>14</sup> allowed me to use his collection of old postcards to illustrate this book. It contains excellent images, some

less well-known, including photographs of De Wolkenkrabber ('The Skyscraper', a block of flats looking out on Merwedeplein, Amsterdam). My gratitude also goes out to Jos Wiersema, who allowed me to use historical photographs from his collection<sup>15</sup>; images that go beyond the usual pictures.

Some materials from the photo book have been reused in this publication, supplemented by current photos of a number of places Anne visited, which I learnt of in 2010 and 2011 and had overlooked when making the photo book.

Anne maintained a scrapbook with photographs. Some of the places depicted in these photographs have not been identified exactly, even if they show Anne in front of a clearly recognisable background. Following the war, so much attention went to publishing *The Diaries* that not all old pictures were researched adequately with regard to their origin. The bitter fruits of this are now being harvested: the location of some of the buildings can no longer be established with certainty. Fortunately, however, I was able to recognise some of the places in these photographs when I was physically tracing Anne's footsteps.

For other photographs, however, I have not been able to establish location. One black-and-white photograph<sup>16</sup> shows an informal yet slightly uneasy gathering of three teenagers looking into the camera. Both boys are wearing neat suits that are in sharp contrast with their decrepit environment of bare vegetable gardens and unpainted sheds. The youngest boy is wearing clogs. A girl in a light dress gives the photographer a rather surly look whilst pulling one of the cords on her cardigan. This girl is Anne. The two boys standing next to Anne are Herbert Wilp (1928-2002, hereafter referred to as Herbert) and Hermann Wilp (1925-1945, hereafter referred to as Hermann), who came from Neuwied near Koblenz. Following the Kristallnacht<sup>17</sup>, Herbert and Hermann fled to Amsterdam. It is unknown where this picture was taken or what relationship existed between Anne and these boys.

Prior to travelling across Anne's locations, I studied the relevant literature in order to garner insight into what has been written about