

Reading the diary

Anne Frank lives on through an international exhibit

by Roslyn Angel

Anne Frank was a typical Holland teenager with a mother, father, sister and a cat. This ordinary family image is exactly what the Ontario Place exhibit, *Anne Frank In The World: 1925-1945*, attempts to portray.

The Frank sisters were no different from you and I; they went to the beach and to school and they played with hula hoops and roller-skates. However, what happened to their family is not typical, at least by today's standards.

What made them different was the world that they lived in, that they were Jewish during a time when bigotry ran rampant. Like many other Jews in Europe from 1939-45, the majority of the Frank family suffered death at the hands of the Nazis. Otto Frank, Anne's father and the last surviving member of the Frank family, died in 1980 at the age of 91. But the memory of the Franks will never be lost because of Anne's now famous diary.

The international exhibition is on display until November 30. Although there are four similar exhibits going on simultaneously throughout Europe and the United States, this show is significantly different. What makes this show unique, said exhibit coordinator Judy Gwartz, is that "it is the first bilingual exhibition," displaying information in both English and French.

It does not concentrate solely on the Frank family. Instead, it describes their struggle during the Nazi occupation of Holland, and intertwines it with the history of that time. From the rise of Nazism to the invasion of Holland; from Hitler's master plan to Hitler's suicide; from Anne Frank's birth to her death, this exhibit attempts to educate and enlighten viewers about the mentality of Germany, Holland, Hitler and people like the Frank family, who remained in hiding for two years during World War II.

The exhibit consists of a guided tour of the various displays. To begin, our guide took us to a theatre where we viewed a 20-minute video, summarizing Anne Frank's life. We saw her elementary school as well as the secret annex, where her family and several others hid for over two years. Although the film was informative, it did little to explain why the events happened. Like the video, the exhibit does not attempt to give reasons. It just offers the facts about what occurred.

Following the video, we were led through the 77 panels of the exhibit, which consist of photographs and historical information.

The first panel showed us the family life of the Franks. Anne was born on June 12, 1929, in Frankfurt, Germany. The family had lived in Frankfurt for 300 years, until 1933, when Hitler came to power. It was then that Otto Frank took his family and fled to Holland, thinking he would find safety.

We then learned the history of the National Socialist Movement which accompanied Hitler's rise to power. Hitler had promised to abolish the economic hardships in Germany. Yet, with his power in tow, Hitler abolished democracy, destroyed the labour movement and sent any political opponents to their death.

He then had the position and authority to mold his ideal, pure 'Aryan' race. Nazi ideals were drilled into the heads of children, and the Nazi ideology gained the loyalty of the justice system and the church.

Hitler also instituted the 'Euthanasia Project' which resulted in the deaths of 72,000 disabled people. Concentration camps were built with crematoriums and gas chambers for the prospective target of 11 million Jews; however, Hitler succeeded in killing 'only' six million.

"It is scary to think about the power that Hitler had," said one guest. Indeed, it is scary. Hitler wanted a pure

race, with no Jews, no blacks, no homosexuals and no handicapped people. They did not fit his 'ideal.'

In May 1940, the Nazi's occupied Holland. From that moment on, the Jews lost all of their rights. They had to wear yellow stars, were not allowed to ride bicycles, had a curfew of 8 p.m., and their synagogues and businesses were burned to the ground.

When Anne's sister Margot got her summons to go to a labour camp on July 5, 1942, the Frank family vanished from their home in Amsterdam. They hid in the secret annex. It was here that the Frank family, their friends the Van Daans, and a certain Mr. Dussel

lived for over two years in fear of being caught. It is here that Anne Frank and her diary blossomed.

On June 12, 1942, Anne turned 13 and one of her presents was a diary. On that day she wrote, "I hope I shall be able to confide in you completely, as I have never been able to do in anyone before, and I hope that you will be a great support and comfort to me." The diary, which she promptly named Kitty, was just that, Anne's confidant. She expressed her fears, her hopes and her dreams to Kitty during that entire period in hiding.

On April 4, 1944, Anne wrote, "I want to go on living even after my death! And therefore I am grateful to God for giving me this gift, this possibility of developing myself and of writing, of expressing all that is in me.

"I can shake off everything if I write," she wrote, "... my sorrows disappear, my courage is reborn. But, and that is the great question, will I ever be able to write anything great, will I ever become a journalist or a writer? I hope so, oh, I hope so very much, for I can recapture everything when I write, my thoughts, my ideals and my fantasies." She certainly got her wish, in a way. She is still 'living,' even after her death.

On August 4, 1944 the secret annex was discovered and its occupants were sent to concentration camps. Both Anne and Margot died in March, 1945, of typhus in the concentration camp Bergen-Belsen. The only survivor of the annex was Otto Frank. He gave the world the diary and made her dream a reality.

The diary was first published in 1947 under the name *Het Achterhuis*, (*The Annex*). Since that time, more than 20 million copies have been bought and read. Anne's diary is the second most translated book in the world, with only the bible surpassing it.

But what makes Anne's story and her book so significant? There were so many other families who went through the exact same ordeal. Gwartz said that "[Anne's] diary became a record of what happened."

Anne Frank let the world see the plight of the Jews, through a mature child's eyes. She not only wrote "a sensitive accurate account of what happened," explained Gwartz, but she also became "a symbol representing the one and a half million other Jewish children who were killed." Anne's story is their story.

This exhibit helps people remember what happened in those years. Gwartz described it as "the most marvellous way, we know, of educating the next generation." Approximately 12,000 students will be guided through the exhibit during November, said Gwartz. It "will help them understand what happened and [hopefully] prevent future racism and discrimination."

The exhibit begins and ends with a most significant panel. It states, "Had Anne Frank, an ordinary young Jewish girl lived next door, could she have counted on us for help during the Nazi occupation?" This is the question the exhibit forces us to ask again and again.

During World War II, people were faced with choices; to help Jews, to hide them or to kill them. Because of certain people's choices, six million Jews were killed. The Anne Frank Foundation, which was founded in 1957, attempts to stray people away from making those choices again, by fighting anti-semitism and racism through educational and informational projects.

Frank wrote, "In spite of everything... I still believe that people are really good at heart." This is the quote that every visitor to the exhibit is showered with, as it is on the publicity poster.

"We wanted to convey a note of optimism," said Gwartz. With that thought in mind, we should all realize that education can bring an end to racism and anti-semitism. It was Anne Frank's wish and it should be our goal.

