

WORLD WAR II AND ITS AFTERMATH

Primary Source

When she turned 13, Anne Frank received a diary as a birthday present. For the first few weeks, she wrote mostly about her life in Holland. Then, on July 6, 1942, Anne and her family were forced to go into hiding because they were Jewish. If the Germans found them, the Franks would be killed or taken to a concentration camp. The excerpts below are taken from Anne's diary. Tragically, the Germans did find the Franks in August 1944. Later, family friends discovered Anne's diary, which she had kept throughout her years in hiding. Anne died in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in March 1945. ♦ *As you read these diary entries, think about what it would be like to have to go into hiding. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, answer the questions that follow.*

From *The Diary of a Young Girl* by Anne Frank

Saturday, June 20, 1942

Writing in a diary is a really strange experience. . . . [I]t seems to me that later on neither I nor anyone else will be interested in the musings of a thirteen-year-old schoolgirl. . . .

I'd better provide a brief sketch of my life. . . . I was born on June 12, 1929. I lived in Frankfurt [in Germany] until I was four. Because we're Jewish, my father immigrated to Holland in 1933. . . .

After May 1940 . . . the trouble started for the Jews. Our freedom was severely restricted by a series of anti-Jewish decrees. . . . You couldn't do this and you couldn't do that, but life went on. . . .

Sunday, July 5, 1942

. . . A few days ago, . . . Father began to talk about going into hiding. He said it would be very hard for us to live cut off from the rest of the world. I asked him why he was bringing it up now.

" . . . We don't want our belongings to be seized by the Germans. Nor do we want to fall into their clutches ourselves. So we'll leave of our own accord and not wait to be hauled away."

"But when, Father?" He sounded so serious that I felt scared.

"Don't you worry. We'll take care of everything. Just enjoy your carefree life while you can."

That was it. Oh, may these somber words not come true. . . .

Wednesday, July 8, 1942

It seems like years since Sunday morning. So much has happened it's as if the whole world had suddenly turned upside down. . . .

Margot [Anne's sister] and I started packing our most important belongings. . . . The first thing I stuck in was this diary. . . .



Anne Frank

Thursday, July 9, 1942

The hiding place was located in Father's office building. . . . At the top of the stairs is a landing, with doors on either side. . . . The door to the right of the landing leads to the "Secret Annex" at the back of the house. No one would ever suspect there were so many rooms behind that plain gray door. . . .

Source: *The Diary of a Young Girl: The Definitive Edition*, by Anne Frank, eds. Otto Frank and Mirjam Pressler, trans. Susan Massotty (Anchor Books, Doubleday 1991, 1995).

Questions to Think About

1. Why were Anne and her family forced into hiding?
2. **Demonstrate Reasoned Judgment** What do you think it was like for Anne and her family to be hidden for such a long time?
3. **Activity** Do additional research and write a biographical sketch of Anne Frank. Include information about her life in the "Secret Annex" and after the Franks were discovered by the Germans.

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Link to Literature

Elie Wiesel and his family were Jews living in Hungary when the Germans invaded in 1944. The Wiesels were sent to the concentration camp at Auschwitz when Wiesel was 15. After the war, Wiesel waited ten years before writing about his experiences in *Night*. In the excerpt, Wiesel recalls his first night in the camp. ♦ *As you read, notice how people reacted to the horrors of the concentration camp. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, answer the questions that follow.*

From *Night* by Elie Wiesel

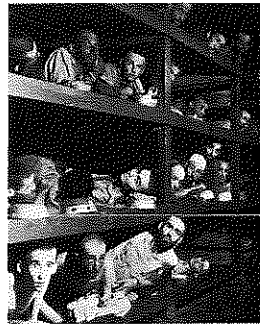
The barrack we had been assigned to was very long. On the roof, a few bluish skylights. I thought: This is what the antechamber of hell must look like. So many crazed men, so much shouting, so much brutality.

Dozens of inmates were there to receive us, sticks in hand, striking anywhere, anyone, without reason. The orders came:

“Strip! Hurry up! *Raus!* Hold on only to your belt and your shoes . . .”

Our clothes were to be thrown on the floor at the back of the barrack. There was a pile there already. New suits, old ones, torn overcoats, rags. For us it meant true equality; nakedness. We trembled in the cold.

A few SS officers wandered through the room, looking for strong men. If vigor was that appreciated, perhaps one should try to appear sturdy? My father thought the opposite. Better not to draw attention. (We later found out that he had been right. Those who were selected that day were incorporated into the Sonder-Kommando, the Kommando working in the crematoria. Bela Katz, the son of an important merchant in my town, had arrived in Birkenau with the first transport, one week ahead of us. When he found out that we were there, he succeeded in slipping us a note. He told us that having been chosen because of his strength, he had been forced to place his father’s own body into the furnace.)



Wiesel in Auschwitz
(second row up, far right)

The blows continued to rain on us:

“To the barber!”

Belt and shoes in hand. I let myself be dragged along to the barbers. Their clippers tore out our hair, shaved every hair on our bodies. My head was buzzing; the same thought surfacing over and over: not to be separated from my father.

Freed from the barbers’ clutches, we began to wander about the crowd, finding friends, acquaintances. Every encounter filled us with joy—yes, joy: Thank God! You are still alive!

Some were crying. They used whatever strength they had left to cry. Why had they let themselves be brought here? Why didn’t they die in their beds? Their words were interspersed with sobs.

Suddenly someone threw his arms around me in a hug: Yehiel, the Sigheter rebbe’s brother. He was weeping bitterly. I thought he was crying with joy at still being alive.

“Don’t cry, Yehiel.” I said. “Don’t waste your tears . . .”

“Not cry? We’re on the threshold of death. Soon, we shall be inside . . . Do you understand? Inside. How could I not cry?”

I watched darkness fade through the bluish skylights in the roof. I no longer was afraid. I was overcome by fatigue.

Questions to Think About

1. What are the first things that happened to the men in camp?
2. **Identify Central Issues** What evidence can you find that Wiesel and the others still retained their humanity in the face of brutal treatment?
3. **Determine Relevance** Why is it important for people today to read books like *Night*?