

## Remembering

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As I write, the death has just been announced of Miep Gies, the woman who did more than any other to preserve the memory of Anne Frank. In fact, she did far more than that, as she was the first person Anne's father Otto asked to help hide them in the secret annexe behind his office in Amsterdam.

For more than two years she smuggled food and other essentials to the Frank family and others hiding in the back attic. Then after they were betrayed, it was she who gathered up the notebooks and loose pages of Anne's diary - thrown out of her satchel by the Nazi commandant so he could use it to remove more valuable loot - and kept them, unread out of respect for Anne's privacy, in the hope of returning them to her after the war.

As we all know, that was not to be. The family were deported with most of Holland's Jews to Auschwitz, and then to Bergen-Belsen, where she died tragically only two weeks before the camp was liberated. Ironically, but for that, she and her sister might well have survived, ill with typhus as they were, since by then Auschwitz had already been liberated.

It is that liberation that much of the world now marks each year on Holocaust Memorial Day. BUT it can be little more than a token remembrance of the almost countless victims of the Nazis - more than ten million people, men, women, and more than a million and a half children; more than six million Jews; Roma, homosexuals, political dissidents; and of course the innocent bystanders. As the film "Paperclips" so dramatically showed, those numbers are almost beyond comprehension: reading one name every two seconds, it would take more than a year to read the names of all the victims - if they were even known.

Because so many are not, because so many whole families and even whole communities were lost, we have all the more obligation to remember those who have no-one else to remember them. That is why Holocaust denial is so especially abhorrent; not because it is an affront to the simple truth or common sense, but because it seeks to eradicate the memories of the victims utterly and completely.

That too must be why Otto Frank and Miep Gies devoted themselves to answering every letter they received after Anne's diary made her into an icon of her lost generation. Interviewed for the Oscar-winning documentary about Anne, Miep spoke of the German teenagers who wrote to her, "They say to me it is the past, but that is not true," and added, with a nod to her own ghosts, "the past goes always with us."