The Lost Voices: Children in the Holocaust and the Dangers of the ‘Anne Frank Myth’

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When most people think of the Holocaust and of the children who lived through it, they often think of Anne Frank. Due to the popularity of Frank’s diary many assume that her experiences during World War II were typical for her time. This perception is inaccurate. While Anne Frank experienced tragedy, she was comparatively lucky, particularly while she was still able to record her diary. Every person experienced World War II in his or her own unique way. Historians must not let one experience be the basis for all knowledge of childhood experiences during the Holocaust. While there may be some similarities that can be seen in multiple experiences, no one child experienced World War II the same way.

This paper will first examine Frank’s diary, as it is so widely read, and will then move on to show the other ways children experienced the war, using other diaries written during the war and memoirs written after. Unfortunately, many children were unable to keep diaries during this time. Therefore, we will never have a full picture of their wartime experiences. The few accounts that survived and were published give a great deal of insight into the minds of children during the war and how they perceived their circumstances. While there are similarities across many of the diaries, each child went through his or her own individual suffering and internal conflicts, and each account should be examined and understood within its own context.

It should be noted that there is a significant difference between Holocaust diaries and Holocaust memoirs. Diaries were written “in the terror and suffering of the camp, ghetto, or hiding place at the risk of the author’s life,” whereas memoirs tended to be written “in relative comfort and security in the reflection upon one’s life.”¹ Using memoirs and diaries as sources can be problematic primarily due to the fallibility of memory. While diaries were written as the events took place, memoirs could be written years later, thus leaving a significant amount of time to forget details or to misconstrue events. Diaries are also subject to the problem of memory for many of the same reasons, especially when diarists have tried to include current events or other secondhand

¹ David Patterson, “Through the Eyes of Those Who Were There,” Holocaust and Genocide Studies 18, no. 2 (Fall 2004): 274.
information. Nevertheless, memoirs and diaries are often all that remains of these people’s lives for historical study and can be very useful.

There are many motivations behind writing diaries and memoirs. In her book *Numbered Days: Diaries and the Holocaust*, Alexandra Garbarini primarily uses unpublished diaries “in an effort to make audible new voices from the past,” and explores “the function and meaning of diary writing within individual Jews’ struggles to make meaning of events that seemed incomprehensible.”2 Her book focuses mostly on adult diaries, but many of the same motivations and themes can be seen in child and adolescent diaries as well. According to Garbarini, Holocaust diarists “attempted to make sense both of the unimaginable genocide as it unfolded around them and of the meaning of their own lives in this radically altered world.”3 They wrote as a way to create some semblance of privacy for themselves in an environment where privacy was not an option. They also attempted to, “write themselves into a future from whom they had been physically and categorically separated.”4

In *Writing the Holocaust: Identity, Testimony, Representation*, Zoe Waxman also looks at diaries and memoirs to understand the motivations that inclined victims to write these accounts. Like Garbarini, Waxman also looks primarily at adult diaries and memoirs. Despite this, Waxman’s methods can be expanded to examine child diaries as well. Waxman puts the motivations of the authors into three categories. The first is writing as a form of resistance.5 This correlates primarily to those who wrote in the ghettos. As a form of resistance against their German oppressors and the fear of being forgotten, many Jews wrote down everything they could in the hope that someone someday would find their accounts.

The second motivation was writing as a form of survival, which relates to writing in the concentration camps. Writing diaries in concentration camps was almost impossible due to the nature of these camps—and if more diaries were written they did not survive the war. According to Waxman, “[f]ew prisoners had the mental or physical energy to consider recording their experiences as they happened,” because their main focus was daily survival.6 Those who did write diaries had a strong enough conviction in what they were doing to overcome these obstacles. The importance of writing for these people allowed them to continue the fight to survive and often they found that their commitment to writing diaries provided a reason to continue living.

The third of Waxman’s categories is writing to remember, which pertains specifically to survivor memoirs. According to Waxman, “Many survivors felt a moral duty to testify, as well as the need to somehow account for

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3 Ibid., 1.
4 Ibid., 21.
6 Ibid., 50.
The uniqueness of the Holocaust is stressed in today’s society, leading many survivors to feel obligated to write and share their stories. They do this not out of a sense of release, but out of a sense of duty to those unable to tell their stories. This duty to testify was sometimes felt as a burden, not a relief, which Waxman points out by stating:

Apart from paying homage to the dead or leaving a document for their children, the most prominent reason motivating survivors to write their testimonies is to ensure that we never forget; the view being that such a momentous crime against humanity must always be remembered.\(^7\)

The most prominent quote taken from Frank’s diary is the best example of why other children’s experiences need to be explored and understood. While in hiding with her family Frank wrote, “In spite of everything, I still believe that people are truly good at heart.”\(^9\) The importance placed on this quote has helped paint an inaccurate picture of children’s experiences during the Holocaust. Frank was eventually betrayed and died in a concentration camp, which is not included in her diary, so we will never know how she felt about humanity after she was captured. If one only reads Frank’s diary and focuses on this optimistic quote, one can never fully understand the horrors that most children endured during the Holocaust.

Anne Frank has been referred to as the “Holocaust’s most famous victim” and “the most famous child of the twentieth century.”\(^10\) What is often referred to as the “Anne Frank myth” is not an attempt to falsify Frank’s diary or the Holocaust. Rather, it refers to a commonly held notion that Frank’s experience in hiding was typical of all the children of the Holocaust. While her diary is an important source in Holocaust studies, “[i]n the text of the diary, the implementation of the ‘Final Solution of the Jewish Question’ plays” a contextual rather than central role.\(^11\) The Holocaust—a term coined after the war—was merely the setting in which the diary was written. The atrocities the Germans committed against the Jews were rarely directly mentioned or acknowledged. As Alvin Rosenfeld has said, “To limit one’s understanding of the Holocaust to such a book as Anne Frank’s diary is to grasp only the most preliminary outline of the coming war against the Jews.”\(^12\)

It was in America, not Europe, that the “myth of Anne Frank” was created. One of the leaders in perpetuating this myth was Meyer Levin, a journalist who wrote a review of Frank’s diary in the New York Times on June 15, 1952. Levin felt that through her diary Frank would be the one to “testify to

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\(^7\) Waxman, 88.
\(^8\) Ibid., 153
\(^11\) Ibid., 23.
\(^12\) Ibid., 24.
the events of the Holocaust for the millions who had not left records, who had not been able to speak.” Levin turned Frank into the heroine of the Holocaust. He found hope in her writing and turned Frank into the “poster child” for children of the Holocaust. Levin also helped popularize the perception of Frank’s optimism. Levin’s interpretation was typical of the early responses to Frank’s account in the United States. Such responses were characterized by a tendency to idealize her story and reduce it to little more than a message of hope. This perception of Frank and her diary has left an imprint on all Holocaust child diaries and creates misconceptions for many people reading them. These misconceptions often leave these readers feeling bewildered when other diaries do not match.

Though Anne Frank’s diary is the best known child’s account of the Holocaust, she had the rare experience of going directly into hiding. Her family was financially well off and her father was able to secure them a hiding space before the Nazis had a chance to deport them to ghettos. On July 5, 1942, Anne Frank’s family—herself, her sister Margot, and her mother and father—went into hiding with Mr. and Mrs. van Daan and their son Peter. An uncommon experience, Frank had yet to see the brutality of the Nazis toward the Jews. Anne did not fully understand the grave situation she was in; she repeatedly expressed an attitude that hiding was an inconvenience rather than a necessity. Someone who fully grasped the fact that their lives were on the line might have complained less about the discomforts of relative safety.

Frank’s situation was also unique because the Franks were lucky enough to have non-Jewish friends who were willing to put their own lives at risk. These friends helped them by bringing them food and other items they requested. For much of the time that they lived in the “Secret Annexe,” as Anne called it, they ate three meals a day. The only times they suffered hunger were when their helpers were unable to bring them anything, which only lasted a few days at a time. This was not the common Holocaust experience.

Frank was thirteen years old when her family went into hiding and during the two years that she kept her diary she went through puberty. She still had the same problems any girl her age would have, from being lonely to fighting with her parents. Frank fought especially with her mother and sister, once stating, “Just had a big bust-up with Mummy for the umpteenth time; we simply don’t get on together these days and Margot and I don’t hit it off too well either.” Because of her strained relationship with her mother and her sister, she had no confidant with which to discuss everything she was feeling and going through, so she wrote it all down in her diary. Writing as an emotional release is not one of the motivating factors included in Waxman’s list, which makes Frank’s diary somewhat more unusual than other diaries.

14 Frank, 14.
15 Frank, 30.
16 Ibid., 130-131.
Along with puberty came boy troubles. Boys had been interested in Frank long before she went into hiding, but she had always been independent and had never really taken a liking to any of them. In the Secret Annexe, however, there was Peter van Daan. In the beginning, she found van Daan very quiet and uninteresting. She often left him alone, wanting nothing to do with him. Nevertheless, as time went on she found herself desperately wanting companionship with another person and began approaching van Daan to try to get him to talk to her. Eventually van Daan opened up and they developed a very close friendship. In her diary, she was often adamant that their relationship was purely platonic. For weeks, she refused to acknowledge any sort of romantic feelings toward van Daan until one day she realized how much time she had spent with him and how often she thought about him. Finally, she admitted to herself and her diary, “I believe I’m pretty near to being in love with him.” Over time they both recognized that they mostly felt friendship for one another. Further, Frank often considered van Daan unworthy of dating, commenting that “there’s a lot about him that disappoints me.” Frank’s relationship with van Daan put further strain on her relationship with her parents, who disapproved of how much time the two of them spent alone together.

The experiences Frank recorded in her diary were quite uncommon. She did not have to go through the horror of a Jewish ghetto and her family remained intact through most of the war. Though problems occurred while she was in hiding, she was somewhat safe, had food, and was able to continue writing and learning. After her family was betrayed, her life would change dramatically and she would know what it was to be hungry, cold, and truly alone.

Like Frank, other children were placed in hiding during the war, but most went into hiding alone without their families. It was much easier to find someone who would take pity and hide a child rather than an adult. Children were also easier to hide since they took up less space, ate less, and were easier to explain to authorities. Girls were easier to find homes for and were easier to conceal. An easy way to tell if a boy was Jewish was to force him to drop his pants, since Jewish boys were circumcised. Though some children went into hiding, not all of them had the comfortable experience that Frank had. One example is Ephraim Shtenkler. Shtenkler’s account is a memoir he wrote at the age of eleven. Many of the children in the orphanages he lived in after the war convinced him to write down his story.

Shtenkler was two years old when his family was forced into a ghetto in Poland. He and his father escaped through a hole in the wall surrounding the ghetto. His father gave him to a gentile Polish woman with the understanding

\[\text{\textsuperscript{17}}\text{Ibid., 155.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{18}}\text{Frank, 165.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{19}}\text{Ibid., 249.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{20}}\text{Doris Bergen, War and Genocide: A Concise History of the Holocaust (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2009), 194.}\]
that she would hide him in exchange for food and money. Shtenkler went into hiding, but unlike Anne Frank his experience was horrific. The Polish woman was extremely anti-Semitic and locked Shtenkler in a cupboard. His father tried to come once a day to bring him food and give the woman money, until he was killed. Because she was no longer receiving payment, the Polish woman wanted to get rid of young Shtenkler. In a fit of rage, she beat him severely and threatened to drown him. Nevertheless, the Polish woman was afraid that if she let him go, he would tell someone that she had been hiding him—the punishment for hiding a Jewish person was death—so she kept him locked in the cupboard, hoping he would die on his own and she would be rid of him.

Five years later, Shtenkler was seven years old and did not know how to walk. Because he was locked in a cupboard his feet had begun to grow backwards. Finally, a Jewish man looking to sell some goods came to the woman's house and saw Shtenkler peeking out of the cupboard. He immediately recognized the young boy as the son of his old friend and rescued him from the Polish woman. Eventually Shtenkler learned how to walk and was passed from orphanage to orphanage. Finally at the age of eleven, his uncle in Canada found his name listed in the Jewish Emigration Department and contacted him. As with Frank, Shtenkler had gone into hiding, but his story is clearly not the same optimistic picture we get from Frank's diary.

Other children were introduced to Nazi brutality through town occupations, deportations, and the ghettos. Millions of Jewish children were deported to Jewish ghettos in the East before being taken to concentration camps. After being rounded up, Jewish people were often left in transit camps—temporary holding places—waiting for deportation. Disease was rampant in these camps, leading to "epidemics that decimated especially the children who were forced to live in such horrible conditions." During deportation many children died while en route to their destinations. So many people died during these long trips that "the Germans stopped the trains along railroad sidings to dispose of frozen corpses, a large number of which were children." One young woman, referred to only as Riva Z. in her memoir, was encouraged after liberation to write down her experience of occupation and deportation. Her family moved to a small village in the countryside when the war started, but it did not take long for the Germans to arrive. Upon arrival, the Germans dragged the Jews from their houses and forced to assemble in the village center. The men and the women were then separated and executed. The Nazis then chose Riva and twenty other teenagers to dig and fill the mass grave

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22 Ibid., 24.
23 Ibid., 25-26.
24 Shtenkler, 32-33.
26 Ibid., 19.
for all those who had just been executed, including her own family. She remembered, “We covered the holes with lime, which turned red from the blood...For three days and three nights the blood still came through the layers of lime and dust.”27 This kind of brutality was often the first experience that Jewish children had with Nazis.

The next step after deportation was often confinement in ghettos. While in the ghettos, Jewish people were forced to live in deplorable conditions with little or no food and in constant fear of the regular roundups that would transport them to the labor or concentration camps. Children were not granted any leniency and were often overworked in these ghettos:

Investigations have proved that the Germans completely sapped the strength of children between eight and ten years of age, by forcing them to do the same heavy work they gave to the adults. Toil beyond their strength, beatings and torture soon exhausted the children—then they were killed.28

Many children became food smugglers, sneaking out of the ghettos to bring back food for their families. This job fell to children because they were small enough to sneak out of the ghetto undetected. The child would have nowhere to run or hide outside the ghetto walls, and so they returned to the ghetto and their families. Children were also less likely to be questioned by authorities if found outside the ghetto than an adult. If these child smugglers were caught, they were usually beaten and had their food taken away, but some guards simply shot and killed these children on sight.

Wladyslaw Szpilman recounted one particular instance of horror in the ghettos in the beginning of his memoir The Pianist. Szpilman witnessed a child getting stuck in a hole in the ghetto wall as he tried to get back into the ghetto with his parcel of food. As he tried to pull the boy back into the ghetto, Szpilman helplessly watched as the boy was beaten from the waist down on the other side of the wall. “When I finally managed to pull the child through, he died. His spine had been shattered.”29

An anonymous thirteen-year-old boy from the Warsaw Ghetto also took on the task of sneaking out of the ghetto and smuggling food to his family. When reflecting on why he decided to become a smuggler he said, “We simply had to run the risk of being caught and shot or dying of starvation.”30 He was caught several times in his attempt to sneak back in, but was “luckily” only beaten severely and had the food taken away.

Another account from the ghettos is from Werner Galnik, who was eight years old when he and his family were forced into Latvia's Riga Ghetto on December 12, 1941. In the ghetto, Galnik’s father was allowed to continue working and the children were allowed to attend school, but Galnik was warned by the Latvian Jews about the roundups. His family lived through two years of fear and starvation in the ghetto before they faced their first roundup. First the old, the weak, and the children were rounded up for deportation. Galnik’s family managed to avoid this first roundup and subsequent deportation, but a few weeks later the Riga Ghetto was liquidated and they were all sent to the Obea work camp.

While ghettos introduced many Jewish children to the horrific experience of living under Nazi rule, the true horror of Nazi brutality was in the concentration camps. Children rarely survived when sent to the camps. For instance, five months after the Galniks arrived at Obea, all the children under the age of ten—included Galnik’s little sister—were sent to Auschwitz to be gassed and burned. Over the next six months, Galnik and his brother were sent from one death camp to another, narrowly escaping the gas chamber and surviving illnesses. By March 23, 1945, he was barely alive due to the horrendous conditions to which he was subjected when he got his first glimpse of the Russian army coming to liberate them.

In the camps the very young and the elderly often were the first to be executed. They were considered unproductive and were unable to work, but children were specifically targeted because they were the future of the Jewish “race.” Some children were selected as subjects for medical and scientific experiments, most notably those done by Dr. Josef Mengele. The Nazis exterminated Jewish children in a variety of ways: “Jewish children were thrown into ditches full of lime and then sprayed with water, driven into overcrowded railway wagons spread with chloride, forcibly pushed into gas chambers, or burnt alive, etc.” Another common method for exterminating children was “that particular SS men or policemen would seize them by the legs and then smash the heads of these children against the trunks of trees.” Millions of children experienced these horrific acts while Frank and her family were hidden away in the Secret Annexe.

In his manuscript, Leib Langfuss described Nazi guards preparing young boys to go in the gas chambers from the perspective of a Sonderkommando—a Jewish prisoner chosen to run the crematoriums in the death camps. In October 1944, 600 boys were forced to strip down in the enclosed yard in front of the chambers. Immediately realizing what was happening, the boys began to scream and panic while running around looking

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32 Ibid., 59.
33 Galnik, 60.
34 Ibid., 65.
35 Sosnowski, 71.
36 Ibid., 83.

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for a way out. The head officers began to beat the boys to try to subdue them. One guard attacked a boy so viciously that his club broke as he beat the boy over the head.\textsuperscript{37} Eventually the children resumed undressing and doing what they were told. When it came time to go down the stairs into the chamber, many of the boys refused and began to fight back again, but “with satisfied smirks, without a trace of compassion, the SS men triumphantly hailed savage blows on the children and drove them into the gas chamber.”\textsuperscript{38}

Because children were often separated from their parents, the care of young children during deportation to concentration camps was beyond primitive. One group of children was deported from a transit camp in Drancy, France, to the Auschwitz concentration camp in Poland. This group included four thousand Jewish children. Once they reached Auschwitz, they were brought into a house with no furniture or working toilets. The entire house contained only a few straw mats that were filled with bed bugs.\textsuperscript{39} The children arrived in very poor health, covered in sores and suffering from diarrhea. One hundred and twenty children were assigned to one room and were given something resembling soup in thin, metal containers which were often too hot to hold. If children were skipped over during meal time, they were often too timid to speak up and went hungry.\textsuperscript{40} No adults were allowed near the children after nine o’clock at night. Many of the children would wake in the middle of the night screaming and wailing, feeling confused and scared. Due to these conditions, mortality rates in these camps were extremely high for children.

In the Terezin Transport Camp near Prague in Czechoslovakia lived two girls named Helga Weissova-Hoskova and Helga Kinsky-Pollack. Though this camp was somewhat more humane than other camps, these two girls were still uprooted from their lives and suffered from hunger, cold, and disease. The diaries of Weissova-Hoskova and Kinsky-Pollack are interesting to compare. Despite being relatively short accounts, both girls discussed some of the same events from different perspectives. Though they were both in the same camp and in the children's area, there is no evidence that they were staying together in the same building or had any contact with one another.

In particular, both diaries discussed the issue of illness in the children’s ward. Weissova-Hoskova claimed that over half of the camp’s children were sick in bed suffering from a typhoid epidemic, which she had luckily managed to avoid.\textsuperscript{41} Kinsky-Pollack also discussed illness, but with specific numbers. She claimed that of the twenty-seven children in her area, nineteen of them had diarrhea and eight were sick in bed. There were only two toilets for every one

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 142.
\textsuperscript{40} Wellers, 128.
hundred children. Both girls mentioned the arrival of a transport full of Polish children. Weissova-Hoskova's diary discussed how she wanted to make contact with them for news, but was unable to do so due to their isolation and the difference in language. Kinsky-Pollack only mentioned that 1,500 Polish children arrived, all infested with lice.

Another girl, Macha Rolnikas, started writing her diary at the age of fourteen when the Nazis occupied her town of Vilna, Lithuania. Her family was targeted not only because they were Jewish, but also because her father was a liberal lawyer who often defended Communists. Rolnikas's collection is unique because it is both a diary and a memoir. It spans from the German occupation, through her experience in the Stutthof concentration camp, and continues through liberation. Rolnikas was able to write the diary portion of her recollection during the occupation, her time in the ghetto, and partially while in the camp itself. She added her accounts of the march from the camp and subsequent liberation after the war.

When Rolnikas was taken to Stutthof, she had already been separated from her family and felt completely alone. The area to which she was assigned suffered not only from the guards' brutality, but also that of another inmate named Max, who would take out his own frustrations and fears on his fellow inmates and beat them ruthlessly. Rolnikas was one of eight prisoners chosen to be an undertaker. People died so rapidly and in such large numbers that the bodies were often left in the barracks for days or weeks at a time. Rolnikas wrote about one particular night huddling up to her bunkmate for warmth, only to wake up next to a corpse. As an undertaker, "[she] was obliged to undress them at once, pull out their gold teeth and put them in front of the barracks door." The first time she was told her task she refused, and was beaten over the head with a club by her supervisor.

Eventually, the Nazis forced Rolnikas and her fellow prisoners to leave the camp because the Russian army was closing in. Rolnikas recalled being forced to march for days in the snow with no food. During this march, she became so sick and weak that she stumbled in the snow and could not get back up. Most of the other inmates assumed she was dead and chose to step over her, but one woman stopped, helped her stand up, and gave her a walking stick. Her body began to swell, but she continued to write her diary in her mind, stating that, "In order to feel my powerlessness a bit less and not to think of the torture that is caused by each step, I go on mentally writing my journal."

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43 Hoskova, 78.
44 Pollack, 96.
47 Rolnikas, 195.
48 Ibid., 196.
49 Ibid., 197.

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this, the guards forced her and the others into a barn. While they waited to see if the guards were going to set the barn on fire, the Russian army closed in and rescued everyone, including Rolnikas.50

Another young woman, Bess Freilich, was the only survivor with memories of the Budee camp, a small camp twenty minutes away from Auschwitz. She was sent there as an adolescent, although she does not provide her exact age in the memoir. Girls were sent to this camp and forced to build artificial mountains. The guards were far less lenient here than at Terezin. A girl in this camp could be shot without warning for any misstep whatsoever. As entertainment for the guards, some of the girls were forced to undress and dance before finally being shot.51 Another form of entertainment was to enclose forty girls in electrified fencing with forty hungry dogs and watch the girls be torn apart.52

Eventually, Freilich became extremely ill and collapsed while working. In response, she was beaten mercilessly and left to die in a puddle of mud and her own blood.53 When she regained consciousness, the guards thought she was dead and were looking for her, so she hid in the toilets. She was promptly found and beaten again, and as punishment for hiding she was forced to empty the big vats that the girls used for toilets. While doing so she dumped their contents all over herself after tripping on uneven ground.54

The guards then locked Freilich in the morgue on top of a pile of bodies, some of which were still alive. Freilich was taken with the bodies back to Auschwitz, where she was eventually pulled out and sent to the hospital. She had typhus and was given no treatment, but was allowed to lie in the hospital. In her memoir Freilich commented that the walls in the hospital were crawling with lice and that her body, “filled with open sores, moved too, because the sores were also filled with lice.”55 By the time Freilich had recovered, the work at Budee had been completed and she was never sent back. The camp was completely liquidated, leaving her as the only survivor.

Sexual abuse and exploitation were also rampant in the camps. At the Janowska death camp, one inmate remembered “how Germans rounded up young girls, had sex with them and then killed them.”56 Lithuanian soldiers would also “go peel potatoes,” which was code for picking young Jewish girls, raping them, and then shooting them.57 Girls were not the only ones to be sexually abused. As one teenage survivor recalled, “Homosexuality was an open secret.”58 Some boys were chosen by guards and other officials as their lovers and errand boys in exchange for better treatment. This included better food and

50 Ibid., 198-199.
52 Ibid., 168.
53 Ibid., 169.
54 Ibid., 170.
55 Ibid.
56 Lukas, 95.
57 Ibid.
58 Ibid.
any number of other special privileges. These boys were called piepels. The piepels exercised a substantial amount of power over the other inmates, often trying to match their lovers in their cruelty. One boy in particular was chosen out of the gas chamber line, along with his parents. While the parents encouraged their son to go with the guard, believing that they would be saved, the guard forced the son to place nooses around his parents’ necks and spring the trap to hang them. After this the boy became known as the “chief degenerate” of the camp, and many regarded him as truly evil.59 Not all piepels were “truly evil,” but they did receive better treatment, food, and privileges in exchange for sexual slavery.

After reading many diaries and memoirs, two common threads emerge. First, many of the children often found themselves doubting the existence of God. In almost all of the diaries the children contemplated their situation and the situation of the Jewish people as a whole. Because of the sheer horror of the events that occurred, their minds could not fully understand how, if God existed, he would allow such atrocities to take place. One example is Charlotte Veresova, who was sent to the Terezin Ghetto in Czechoslovakia. As she was gradually exposed to the atrocities being committed against the Jewish people, she slowly began to lose her faith. At one point, after hearing rumors of the construction of gas chambers, she wrote, “I have stopped believing in God, so is this punishment for that?”60

Another example is Sarah Fishkin, who lived in Rubewitz, a small town in Poland. She wrote her diary during the Nazis occupation of her town, before she was deported to Camp Dwartz. She began to question how God could watch all the suffering and do nothing to help her people: “and G-d looks on and sees it all, sees how innocent people are cut down who never did any harm, not even to a fly, for they understood that it, too, has a desire for life.”61

Finally, an unknown boy from Poland wrote, “God seems to have abandoned us totally and left us entirely to the mercy of the heartless fiends.”62 The horrors that these children witnessed daily during the war were enough to drive many to question the existence of a god. In comparison, Frank never mentions in her diary the possibility of losing her faith in spite of all she was forced to go through. Her continued optimism and faith in humanity can attest to the fact that she still held onto her faith during her years in hiding.

The second common thread was the children’s desire to write their stories. Many of them felt the need to write everything down and were often encouraged by their parents and others. For example, Tamarah Lazerson, a thirteen-year-old girl living in Lithuania, was persuaded to “begin keeping a

diary of historic events she was witnessing" by her father.\textsuperscript{63}

Many of the children also kept a diary out of loneliness and the need for a companion. Eva Heyman, a thirteen-year-old girl from Hungary, called her diary her “best friend” and found the courage to fight for her life by writing in her diary, which allowed her to express all that she felt and experienced.\textsuperscript{64} Even those children who were able to stay with their families for most of the war could feel extremely isolated and lonely, and would turn to their diaries for companionship and understanding. While Frank also used her diary as a companion, none of the other children’s diaries show the optimism apparent in Frank’s.

The “Anne Frank myth” deflates once the last seven months of her life are studied. Frank’s fate was nothing like how she imagined it—her family, as well as everyone else in the Secret Annexe, was betrayed by a Dutch informer and arrested on August 4, 1944. They were locked in a local jail until August 8, when they were sent to the Westerbork transit camp for a month. On September 3, they were put on the last transport to Auschwitz, where they arrived on September 5. Upon arrival, the women were immediately separated from the men; this was the last time Frank ever saw her father. At the end of October 1944, Anne and her sister were separated from their mother and sent to Bergen-Belsen.\textsuperscript{65}

Life in these camps was the first taste of direct Nazi brutality for young Anne Frank. During her time in hiding, she often thought of her friend Lies Goosen. Frank felt guilty knowing that she was relatively safe while not knowing where her friend had been sent.\textsuperscript{66} Oddly enough, Frank was reunited with Goosen in Bergen-Belsen. Goosen recounted in an interview after the war the first time she saw Frank again, her first impression was, “It wasn’t the same Anne. She was a broken girl.”\textsuperscript{67} They were able to talk through the barbed wire fence until Goosen was moved to another part of the camp and never saw Frank again.

Goosen survived the war and was able to provide information about Frank’s last few months of life, as did other women who remembered meeting her in the camp. Goosen said when she saw Frank in the camp, “[Anne] immediately began to cry and she told me ‘I don’t have any parents anymore.’”\textsuperscript{68} Clearly Frank’s priorities had changed from her time in hiding. The trivial fights that once seemed so important to her now paled in comparison to the loss of her parents. Another woman, Brandes-Brilleslijper, said, “She told me she had such a horror of the lice and fleas in her clothes and that she had


\textsuperscript{64} Eva Heyman, diary entry, in *Children in the Holocaust and World War II: Their Secret Diaries*, ed. Laurel Holliday (New York: Pocket Books, 1995), 100-125.


\textsuperscript{66} Frank, 177.

\textsuperscript{67} Willy Lindwer, *The Last Seven Months of Anne Frank* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1991), 27.

\textsuperscript{68} Verhoeven, 100.
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thrown all of her clothes away. It was the middle of winter and she was wrapped in one blanket."\(^{69}\) Frank had been so sheltered hiding in the Secret Annexe that once she arrived in the concentration camp she did not fully understand the gravity of her situation. While other inmates were collecting any scrap of cloth they could find in an effort to keep warm, Frank had thrown all her clothes away because she was disgusted by the lice and fleas. Finally another woman, Mrs. Van Amerongen-Frankfrooder, commented on Frank and her sister right before they died, saying, "The Frank girls were so emaciated. They looked terrible...it was clear that they had typhus. You could really see both of them dying."\(^{70}\) Frank died a few days after her sister in March 1945, just a few weeks before Bergen-Belsen was liberated in April.\(^{71}\)

Considering Frank’s final seven months of life, one is led to wonder if she still believed in her now-famous quote, "In spite of everything, I still believe that people are truly good at heart.” This is the danger of the Anne Frank myth that leads popular audiences to the assumption that every child’s experiences were similar, or that every child was capable of such innocence.

Diaries and memoirs can be great primary sources used to understand a wide variety of peoples’ feelings, emotions, and experiences. Only reading Anne Frank’s diary greatly limits one’s perception of children’s experiences during this time. By reading multiple diaries, memoirs, and firsthand accounts from throughout Europe one can explore, understand, and appreciate the differences between each child and their lives, as well as recognize the common themes that are deeper and more profound than simple optimism about humanity.

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\(^{69}\) Ibid., 100-101.
\(^{70}\) Verhoeven, 101.
\(^{71}\) Ibid., 101.