

# Miep Gies, Protector of Anne Frank, Dies at 100

By RICHARD GOLDSTEIN -- Published: January 11, 2010

Miep Gies, the last survivor among Anne Frank's protectors and the woman who preserved the diary that endures as a testament to the human spirit in the face of unfathomable evil, died Monday night, the Anne Frank Museum in Amsterdam said. She was 100.

The British Broadcasting Corporation said Mrs. Gies suffered a fall late last month and died at a nursing home.

"I am not a hero," Mrs. Gies wrote in her memoir, "Anne Frank Remembered," published in 1987. "I stand at the end of the long, long line of good Dutch people who did what I did and more — much more — during those dark and terrible times years ago, but always like yesterday in the heart of those of us who bear witness."

Mrs. Gies sought no accolades for joining with her husband and three others in hiding Anne Frank, her father, mother and older sister and four other Dutch Jews for 25 months in Nazi-occupied Amsterdam. But she came to be viewed as a courageous figure when her role in sheltering Anne Frank was revealed with the publication of her memoir. She then traveled the world while in her 80s, speaking against intolerance. The West German government presented her with its highest civilian medal in 1989, and Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands knighted her in 1996.

When the Gestapo raided the hiding place in the annex to Otto Frank's business office on Aug. 4, 1944, and arrested its eight occupants, it left behind his daughter Anne's diary and her writings on loose sheets of papers. The journals recounted life in those rooms behind a movable bookcase and the hopes of a girl on the brink of womanhood. Mrs. Gies gathered up those writings and hid them, unread, hoping that Anne would someday return to claim them. But when Anne's father, Otto Frank, returned to Amsterdam at the end of World War II, having been liberated from Auschwitz, he was the lone survivor of the family. Anne Frank had died at the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp three months before her 16th birthday. Her sister, Margot, died there at age 19 and their mother, Edith Frank, died at Auschwitz. Mrs. Gies gave Anne's writings to Mr. Frank, and they were first published in the Netherlands in 1947 in an abridged version. "Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl" has since been translated into dozens of languages in several editions, read by millions and adapted for the stage and screen, a voice representing the six million Jews killed by the Nazis.

But Mrs. Gies remained largely anonymous until an American writer, Alison Leslie Gold, persuaded her to tell her story and worked with her on "Anne Frank Remembered."

Miep Gies was born Feb. 15, 1909, as Hermine Santrouschitz, a member of a Roman Catholic family in Vienna. When she was 11, she was sent to Leiden to be cared for by a Dutch family, being among the many Austrian children suffering from food shortages in the wake of World War I. She was given the Dutch nickname Miep and later adopted by the family.

When she was 13, the family moved to Amsterdam, and in 1933 she became a secretary to Otto Frank, who was overseeing the Dutch branch of a German company selling an ingredient for manufacturing jam. Mr. Frank had fled Hitler's Germany, and he was soon joined by his wife and daughters. Miep became a trusted employee and friend of the Frank family and joined in its alarm over the persecution of German Jews. In May 1940, the Netherlands fell in Germany's invasion of the Low Countries. In July 1942, when thousands of Dutch Jews were being deported to concentration camps, the Frank family went into hiding in unused rooms above Mr. Frank's office. He asked Mrs. Gies if she would help shelter them, and she unhesitatingly agreed.

The annex became a hiding place not only for the Franks but for three members of a family named van Pels — the father a business colleague of Mr. Frank's — and Mrs. Gies's dentist, Fritz Pfeffer.

Having married a Dutch social worker, Jan Gies, in 1941, Miep Gies joined with him and three other employees of Mr. Frank's business in sheltering the eight Jews and caring for their daily needs. The protectors risked death if caught by the Nazis. Mrs. Gies, while continuing to work for Mr. Frank's business, which remained open under figurehead Christian management, played a central role in caring for the hidden. She found food for them, brought books and news of the outside world and provided emotional support, bringing Anne her first pair of high-heeled shoes and baking a holiday cake. On one occasion, Miep and Jan Gies (he is referred to in the diary as Henk, one of many pseudonyms Anne used) spent a night in the annex to experience the terror there for themselves.

At their apartment a short bicycle ride away, Mrs. Gies and her husband, a member of the Dutch resistance, hid an anti-Nazi university student. When the Gestapo raided the hiding place — tipped off by someone unknown to this day — Mrs. Gies was working in the building. But one of the Nazi agents spared her from arrest, probably in light of their common Austrian heritage. Mrs. Gies later went to Gestapo headquarters in Amsterdam in a futile attempt to offer a bribe for the lives of the eight arrested Jews. Mrs. Gies endured the "Hunger Winter" in the Netherlands during the war's final months, then lived quietly in Amsterdam, a homemaker. But upon publication of her memoir, she began to travel widely as a living link to Anne Frank and spoke on the lessons of the Holocaust, often talking to schoolchildren who were reading Anne's diary. A small woman — just a shade over 5 feet tall — whose hair had turned white, she bore a single remembrance of those days in the hiding place, a black onyx ring with a diamond in the center, worn on her left hand. It was a gift from Auguste von Pels, one of the doomed Jews she had sheltered. Every Aug. 4, the anniversary of the raid on the annex, Miep and Jan Gies remained at their Amsterdam home. They withdrew from the world and reflected on the lost. Mrs. Gies is survived by her son, Paul, and three grandchildren. Her husband died in 1993. The other three people who helped shelter the Frank family — Johannes Kleiman, Victor Kugler and Elisabeth Voskuil — died earlier. Otto Frank, who lived with Miep and Jan Gies for a time after the war, died in Basel, Switzerland, in 1980. The building housing the secret annex, at Prinsengracht 263, has become a museum. In her diary entry on May 8, 1944, Anne Frank wrote how "we are never far from Miep's thoughts."

In her memoir, Mrs. Gies told of her emotions when she finally read the diary. She wrote: "The emptiness in my heart was eased. So much had been lost, but now Anne's voice would never be lost. My young friend had left a remarkable legacy to the world. "But always, every day of my life, I've wished that things had been different. That even had Anne's diary been lost to the world, Anne and the others might somehow have been saved. "Not a day goes by that I do not grieve for them."

Miep Gies displayed a copy of her book "Anne Frank Remembered" at her apartment in Amsterdam in 1998. (Steve North/Associated Press)



Miep Gies, front left, and Otto Frank, center, in a 1945 photograph. With them are those who helped hide the Franks: Johannes Kleiman, back left, Victor Kugler and Elisabeth Voskuil. (Anne Frank House, via Associated Press)