

Anne Frank is Here in the World

'We're all alive, but we don't know why or what for; we're all searching for happiness; we're all leading lives that are different and yet the same'. Anne Frank, Thursday, 6 July 1944

Some time in the late winter or early spring of 1945, a 15-year-old girl lay on a cold and bare wooden bunk in Bergen-Belsen, the near-abandoned Nazi death camp situated on the icy and windswept Luneberg Heath in Northern Germany. Beside the girl lay her older sister, trying to find the physical strength to continue breathing. But the older girl was so fragile, she toppled from the bunk on to the hard concrete floor and not having the strength to withstand the shock, died immediately. A few hours later, the younger sister also gave up her struggle to stay alive. Their emaciated bodies, already looking like skeletons from the hunger these young girls had endured, were carried out of the barrack and thrown into a pit serving as a mass grave. Eventually the pile of bodies was set alight.

The physical Anne Frank was no more.

Annelies Marie Frank was gone, but her spirit and her story is still echoing all around the world through a little red-checked notebook that she had used as a diary, a personal journal which she had kept while in hiding from the Nazis in rooms above her father's business in Amsterdam. Her diary was published as a book in June 1947 and became one of the world's most widely read and most admired chronicles of the Second World War. Even people who cannot quite recall who she was, and what happened to her, are familiar with the name Anne Frank.

But what is not so well-known is the story of a thread Anne Frank has woven around the world over the past thirty years. Not just through her diary, but through the world's most popular and enduring travelling exhibition and the educational programmes carried out in her name. These were not for commercial success nor for glorification or sanctification of her name, but purely for the noble cause of trying to make this fractured world a bit better.

This is a story of people from radically different places and circumstances who share a commonality. All their lives have been affected by Anne Frank. They are remarkable educators who have travelled to the far reaches of the globe or challenged the establishment for the betterment of their own community, they are young people brought up in deprivation or violence, they are brave human rights defenders who have risked their lives, or those who will become our next generation of influencers and change-makers.

This thread travels through the past three decades of some of the most seismic events in recent world history and into post-conflict arenas. It brings with it a platform for open and honest discussion between former enemies, or those from opposing cultures and communities who had never before had an opportunity to spend time together.

By bringing about productive and fruitful partnerships with local human rights organizations, social welfare groups, cultural associations, youth agencies, embassies and diplomatic missions, the Anne Frank exhibition and education programmes have left behind strong legacies that have been seized and built upon.

Most importantly, through implementing a peer-to-peer method of educating in some of the most challenging areas, it has empowered a generation of young people to consider themselves as our future leaders and influencers. Many of these young people live in the world's toughest societies, where violence, poverty and persecution are taken for granted.

This remarkable story is one of hope, inspiration and aspiration. It is an enactment of Anne Frank's dreams of making a better world and the embodiment of her father Otto Frank's vision of a force for good in his daughter's memory.

What follows is a collection of stories of people who found themselves living through turbulent times. The Anne Frank connecting thread over the past three decades has linked children in the townships of the newly post-apartheid South Africa, to those in post-civil war Sri Lanka, to those in gang-ridden cities in Guatemala and Brazil, to the follower of a murdered Russian priest, to the daughter of a young woman thrown from a plane during the Argentinian dictatorship, to a terrified little Jewish boy pushed forward by a hero-worshipping crowd towards Hitler, to a teenage girl who testified against the soldiers who murdered her family in Kosovo, to a boy killed on a London street whose family went on to challenge racism in the police.

The thread links leaders of countries going through great changes, such as Nelson Mandela, stars such as Audrey Hepburn, Luciano Pavarotti and Angelina Jolie who have offered their celebrity for the benefit of the less

fortunate, or those who have found themselves in the wrong place at the wrong time, such as the idealistic American journalist Daniel Pearl. They are those who have survived the near impossible, such as Malala Yousafzai and Zlata Filipović, and inspirational Holocaust and genocide survivors. This story links world statesmen and presidents, British prime ministers, leaders of all the world's major religions, with those who knew Anne Frank and hold memories of the real person and things she said and did.

So how did this thread come about? How and why did the world's most popular, enduring and effective travelling exhibition start? An exhibition that has so far been staged over 5,000 times in 95 different countries, and has to date been visited by over nine million people.