



Mind Matters

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MATTERS OF THE MIND

World Loss

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January 11, 2010 marked a significant loss for the world. On this day, only one month shy of her 101st birthday, Miep Gies passed away quietly in the Netherlands, also the country of her birth. Although she was a humble person in life, her unwilling entrance into world-wide public awareness occurred with the publishing of *The Secret Annex* in 1947. That book, later to be called *The Diary of Anne Frank*, represented one of the first human faces given to the Jewish people, the most highly represented victims of the Holocaust during World War II. Since its publication, more than 60 years ago, millions of people have empathised, laughed, cried, grown, and mourned with Anne Frank as she wrote about the two years she spent in hiding from the Nazi authorities. Yet, the famous *Diary* would not be in existence today were it not for the courage of Miep Gies who, along with family members and friends, harbored and sustained Anne and seven others in a secret attic hideaway.

On August 4, 1944, the eight occupants sheltered by Miep were arrested and sent to concentration camps, where all but one – Anne’s father Otto – perished. When Otto and Miep were reunited at the end of the war, Miep revealed that she had been harboring Anne’s personal writings, later to be published as her *Diary*, ever since the siege on the Frank’s hiding place. This time, however, the undertaking was one hundred percent successful, and Anne’s words were liberated to live on after her, touching people across generations, nationalities, and experiences.

Miep Gies risked her life, and those of her loved ones, on a daily basis during the time she sheltered eight Jewish occupants and subsequently, the writings of an adolescent girl. Amazingly, in her grief and sense

of immense failure after the hiding place that she had guarded was raided, she never read Anne's diary. Miep protected the privacy of the young author until she delivered the pages into the hands of her father. Years later, in fact, she explained that she would have been forced to burn Anne's diary if she had read its contents. The writings unintentionally inculcated those directly involved in the protection of eight Jews, a crime carrying severe subsequent punishment (often involving imprisonment at the concentration camps).

Despite actions that many consider heroic, Miep denied adamantly and repeatedly that she should be seen as a hero. She continued to deny her hero status after being Knighted by Queen Beatrix, and receiving the Yad Vashem medal (a recognition of those who resisted Nazi rule during the Holocaust, awarded by the Israeli and German governments).

As someone who sees the value of advocating for today's youth, especially those who are further marginalized due to their circumstances, I admire Miep for preserving the incredible voice of a young girl, and inspiring kids all over the world who face difficulty in multiple forms. In 1994, she visited a group of high school students in Los Angeles County, California. Those students, much like Anne Frank herself, had come to public attention through what they wrote about their authentic experiences (documented in the book *The Freedom Writer's Diary*, by Erin Gruwell & students (1999); and the movie *Freedom Writers* based on that book (2007)).

In her visits to America over the years, Miep went out of her way to speak primarily to kids. She knew that the young people of the world are capable of impacting their own lives and the lives of others through their words. With the knowledge that today's youth are the last generation having the ability to meet and learn from Holocaust survivors, Miep also knew that kids have the ability to preserve history across generations with their words. Miep Gies knew that young people could find liberation, justice, and catharsis through the power of their words, touching many others along the way. Because she knew

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these things about the potential of our younger generation, many more of us the world over, know this as well..

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About Arapahoe/Douglas Mental Health Network (ADMHN)

ADMHN is a private, nonprofit 501 © (3) corporation providing professional, comprehensive behavioral health care and substance abuse treatment primarily, but not exclusively, in Arapahoe and Douglas counties. We offer programs for adults, seniors, families, couples and children. These services include counseling, psychiatry, crisis services, case management, substance abuse treatment, victim services, an adult acute treatment unit, adult supported and residential housing, services to the criminal justice system, vocational and social rehabilitation, a day treatment therapeutic school and school-based services. Arapahoe/Douglas Mental Health Network has an on-site pharmacy. We offer community education, wellness programs and a Speakers Bureau. Learn more at admhn.org.

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