Book Review


Reviewed by Sherri Waas Shunfenthal

As a teen, I had so many emotions swirling around. I felt caged in by my own feelings, unable to escape them. Then my mother gave me *Anne Frank's Diary* to read. Anne was physically "caged" into a small space writing her yearnings, fears, and thoughts. Reading her diary made me feel as if I had suddenly acquired a best friend.

Since adolescence, I have had a lifelong desire to know more about Anne Frank. I have read as much about her as I could find even visiting the Anne Frank house on my honeymoon. It was with joyful expectation that I opened *Anne Frank in the World.* The Anne Frank House in Amsterdam compiled the book. The first several pages of the book are a treasure. The book begins with photos of Otto Frank (Anne's father) family who resided in Frankfurt since the 17th century. Then there are photographs of Anne straight from the family album, mostly taken by Otto Frank. There is Anne at one day old with her mother; a picture of her adoring older sister, Margot smiling at one month old Anne; a picture of Margot diapering Anne; Margot, Anne and Edith, their mom, walking down the street together. There is a feeling of a typical family expressing joy in being together.

After these family photos of young Anne, the book jumps to a historical account of the Nazi rise to power. It is a very dry, factual accounting that lacks feeling. However, it does give a very clear, succinct description of the rise of fascism in Germany, including the political and economic crisis in Germany, the change in laws allowing Hitler's government to obtain absolute power and how the propaganda machine influenced every sphere of German society. Photographs on each page illustrate the events or places discussed.

Some of the historical photographs of the time period 1929 to 1945 are fascinating: like the banned book burning in Berlin; a Jewish shopkeeper in Cologne wearing his decorated WWI military awards; factory workers making swastika flags "for every household." The photographs vary in size and clarity and there seems to be no explanation for the disparity. Photographs are placed randomly following the paragraph description of what was happening during the time period described.

The next section with photographs of the Frank family describes the Netherlands and events that led to the Nazi invasion and takeover. It begins with photographs of the Frank family in Amsterdam. This is followed by a page by page account of events in the Netherlands accompanied by photographs of the time period.

I was very disappointed that the book is titled *Anne Frank in the World* but it separates world events from what was happening specifically with Anne and her family. It is left to the reader to
pair the photographs of Anne with world events. There was a lack of personal information given about the Frank family. For instance there are what appear to be yearly school photographs from 1935 to 1942 of Anne and Margot but none of the school or classrooms. There might have been more about Otto Frank. It seems he had foresight and courage every step of the way to do his best to protect his family. They moved out of Germany, and then he began a new business and planned a place to hide his family in Amsterdam. I would have liked to know more about him, how he planned the Annex, photographs of his business development in the Netherlands, or photographs of those he trusted who aided the family. There was no information on any extended family of the Franks left in Germany or how they were receiving news of world events while in hiding or what they did for entertainment as a family before they went into hiding.

Considering that the Anne Frank house compiled the book, there were only two pages of photographs of the Anne Frank house. There were no details about the location of the house and surrounding area or what was happening in that neighborhood while the Franks were in hiding. When I visited the house in Amsterdam, I was stunned by how tiny the rooms were and how narrow the hallways. Dimensions of the room were not listed in the book. I wished they had told more about who was bringing the families food, how creaky was the floor, how little sunlight came into the space.

It almost seemed as if this was meant to be two books- one a historical account of the time period from 1929-1945 and another book with photographs of the Frank family. In all fairness, the book succinctly tells of the gradual progression of Nazism into German culture and then its' infiltration into Dutch society. It clearly illustrates the way the Dutch people initially accepted the new rules and regulations of the Nazis without protest but by the time they chose to protest, the Nazis had infiltrated every sector of society. They do a good job of explaining and showing photographs of how propaganda was used. There is even a small section at the end of the book on postwar Nazism and extreme nationalism today.

For those wanting more details about Anne Frank's personal life, this is not the book. However, the family photographs alone make the book worthwhile. The historical narration with photographs of Germany and Holland from 1929 to 1945 is without emotion but is very precise and straightforward. I would recommend this book to those who have read Anne Frank's diary and already learned about her life. It might be a powerful accompaniment for teens whose read the diary but have limited knowledge and understanding of that time period. The photographs alone would give rise to thought provoking discussion.

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