



Changing life stories

# Dutch Diaries – chapter 7

## **Anne Frank House, Amsterdam**

*Monday 17<sup>th</sup> July 2017*

It felt weird going into your house. Visiting the place where you had hidden and written your amazing diary was something I had wanted to do for ages. But, when we walked in through the glass doors, it didn't feel right. It felt wrong.

How could anyone make a museum out of a place that a child had to hide in and was taken from and killed? I felt embarrassed. I'm not sure why. Maybe it was watching the line of people trailing in through the entrance and stumbling out of the exit. I don't know.

You come in from the street past a desk, then they give you some headphones. You put the headphones on and touch your player against small panels as you go from room to room. Then you hear the story. Your story, Anne. And nobody says a word round the whole museum.

The first room was white. Almost empty apart from a few photographs of you. I felt immediately sad. Photographs of you smiling into the camera. A girl the same age as me.

Mo was next to me. He kept giving me tiny sad smiles. And I gave him tiny sad smiles back. Like I said, it was weird. Because normally you go round a museum and think 'Wow' if it's exciting. Or you feel bored because it's not exciting. Here in your museum, Anne, it was just uncomfortable.

In the next room there were pictures of Amsterdam when the Nazis had taken over. I caught Anya's eye in that room. She was on her own ahead of me. She looked away as soon as I

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looked at her. I had no idea if she was laughing at me or grateful to me for saving her from Mrs Mahal. And I didn't care.

When we reached the upstairs, I stopped being sad. Because I saw two things:

1. The yellow cloth star that you – and the other Jewish people – were made to wear to show you were Jewish. It was displayed on the wall in a frame.
2. Your school register that said your name and the names of all your classmates, with an extra column for you to say that you were 'of Jewish blood'.

No longer sad. Angry now. Angry because it just didn't make sense to me. How could those people make you wear that yellow star and write that you had different blood in your school register? What does it matter?

My head was spinning. I just didn't get it. I wanted my mum. I wanted to ask her about it. I wanted her arm around me. And that made me feel another feeling. I didn't know if your dad or mum went with you when you were found and taken away. As you went, did one of them have an arm round you?

Up another staircase. Long queues as people shuffled round room to room. It was frustrating. I wanted to see more now that I was angry and sad. It was too slow. I wished that people would hurry up. I felt cross.

Then the bookcase. The bookcase that was pulled over the door up to where you hid from the Germans. You were there for months. The only thing between you and being caught was the bookcase. I touched it on the way past. I don't know why. I remember it and the steep wooden steps from the film of *The Fault in Our Stars*. It's a famous film now. In the film, a girl visits your house with her boyfriend. She's ill. But that's another story.

When I got to the stop of the steep flight of steps I was surprised to see Anya was there.

'Have you seen *The Fault in Our Stars*?' she asked. I nodded, paused, then pushed on. I wished I'd spoken to her properly then. But I didn't know what to say. Then Mo was next to me and Anya moved off.

More photos of you and your family. More rooms. More silence from everybody. Then some film of people queuing at concentration camps. And people in camps looking so thin they were like skeletons with skin. It was horrible. I felt sick.

And I understood. That's what happened to you, isn't it? After you were found. After the Germans pulled back the bookcase and took you and your family away, they made you queue and starved you all.

In the next room there was a quote on the wall. From your diary. It said: 'The English radio says they are being gassed. I feel terrible.'

That shocked me. It meant you knew. You knew what they were going to do to you. I can't imagine how that felt. How did you carry on writing your diary all that time, knowing that could happen to you any day? How were you so strong?

My eyes filled up with tears. I felt faint. It was too much now. I wished I was out on the street in the fresh air. I walked into the next room determined to get out of your house. I had had enough. I hated it. And then I saw it and my heart leapt.

It was there. Your diary was there. In a glass case. That red and white tartan pattern. I staggered up to it. I put my hands on the glass case and stared at it. Now I was smiling.

Now I got it. This museum. I understood that there was a point to it. All those photos and quotes and films and objects that showed what terrible things had been done by the Nazis; then your diary, on its own, like a... I don't know... like a ray of light... a beacon of hope... I can't find the words.

Your diary. Against all that.

And I swear, Anne. I swear to you now as I write my diary that every day when I hear about bad things happening to people in the world – like the people in the Mediterranean Sea – I'll try to do something about it.

Because your diary lit up that room, Anne.

I knew I should move away and give someone else a chance to look at your diary. There was someone else stood staring at it opposite me. She had red eyes. Anya.

## Later

We took a canal boat away from your house. I was one of the last ones onto the boat because I'd spent ages in the shop wondering what to buy. Mo was wedged in between Danny and Bella on one bench on the boat. No room for me.

I looked around the deck. Straight into Anya's eyes. There was a seat next to her. She beckoned me to come and sit with her. So I did.

'It's hard to believe all that,' Anya said to me in a low voice.

'I know,' I said. 'You're right.'

'Listen, I'm sorry,' she said. Her voice wobbled. 'About taking your book. It was bad.'

'It's okay,' I said.

We sat in silence as the boat went under a bridge and – for a few seconds – I felt cool out of the sun. Then, as the boat moved back into the sunlight, Mrs Mahal was stood over us.

‘I’d like you two to do something for me,’ she said. ‘Come and find me after the EURO 2017 matches on TV tonight. Then we’ll talk.’

## Even later

I didn’t sit with Anya to watch Netherlands beat Norway 1-0, or Denmark beat Belgium game 1-0. But, at half time in the second game, Denmark one up, we both went to find Mrs Mahal. To see if we *were* in trouble. We weren’t.

‘Tomorrow, before we head off to watch the England match we’re going to do a Skype back to assembly at school,’ Mrs Mahal explained. ‘And I’d like you two to plan it and deliver it. What do you think?’

Anya and I looked at each other, unsure.

‘Collaboration is the last of the FA’s four values,’ Mahal said. ‘If you two can collaborate on telling the rest of the school about Anne Frank’s House, then I think there’s hope for us all. Don’t you?’

**You can visit the Anne Frank House online here: <http://www.annefrank.org>.**

