



The
Holocaust

Thursday, 15th June, 1944

Dear Kitty,

I wonder if it's because I haven't been able to poke my nose outdoors for so long that I've grown so crazy about everything to do with nature? I can perfectly well remember that there was a time when a deep blue sky, the song of the birds, moonlight and flowers would have never kept me spellbound. That's changed since I've been here.

At Whitsun, for instance, when it was so warm, I stayed awake on purpose until half-past eleven one evening in order to have a good look at the moon for once by myself. Alas, the sacrifice was all in vain, as the moon gave far too much light and I didn't dare risk opening a window. Another time, some months ago now, I happened to be upstairs one evening when the window was open. I didn't go downstairs until the window had to be shut. The dark, rainy evening, the gale, the scudding clouds held me entirely in their power; it was the first time in a year and a half that I'd seen the night face to face. After that evening my longing to see it again was greater than my fear of burglars, rats and raids on the house. I went downstairs all by myself and looked outside through the windows in the kitchen and the private office. A lot of people are fond of nature, many sleep outdoors occasionally, and people in prisons and hospitals long for the day when they will be free to enjoy the beauties of nature, but few are so shut away and isolated from that which can be shared alike by rich and poor. It's not imagination on my part when I say that to look up at the sky, the clouds, the moon and the stars makes me calm and patient. It's a better medicine than either valerian or bromine; Mother Nature makes me humble and prepared to face every blow courageously.

Alas, it has had to be that I am only able – except on a few rare occasions – to look at nature through dirty net curtains hanging before very dusty windows. And it's no pleasure looking through these any longer, because nature is just the one thing that really must be unadulterated.

YOURS, ANNE

Friday, 16th June, 1944

Dear Kitty,

New problems: Mrs. Van Daan is desperate, talks about a bullet through her head, prison, hanging, and suicide. She's jealous that Peter confides in me and not her. She's offended that Dussel doesn't enter into her flirtations with him, as she'd hoped, afraid that her husband is smoking all the fur-coat money away, she quarrels, uses abusive language, cries, pities herself, laughs and then starts a fresh quarrel again. What on earth can one do with such a foolish, blubbering specimen? No one takes her seriously, she hasn't any character and she grumbles to everyone. The worst of it is that it makes Peter rude, Mr Van Daan irritable and Mummy cynical. Yes, it's a frightening situation! There's one golden rule to keep before you: laugh about everything and don't bother yourself about the others! It sounds selfish, but it's honestly the only cure for anyone who has to seek consolation in himself.

Kraler has received another call-up to go digging for four weeks. He's trying to get out of it with a doctor's certificate and a letter from the business. Koophuis wants to have an operation on his stomach. All private telephones were cut off at 11 o'clock yesterday.

YOURS, ANNE

Friday, 23^d June, 1944

Dear Kitty,

Nothing special going on here. The British have begun their big attack on Cherbourg; according to Pim and Van daan we're sure to be free by 10th October. The Russians are taking part in the campaign, and yesterday began their offensive near Vitebsk; it's exactly three years to a day since the Germans attacked. We've hardly got any potatoes; from now on we're going to count them out for each person, then everyone knows what he's getting.

YOURS, ANNE

Extract from The Diary of Anne Frank



“Today I can say it: ‘Gassed’”

Ruth Wallage-Binheim

“After arriving in Auschwitz, my sister Hanna and I survived the selection. Our heads were shaved and numbers were tattooed on our arms. Then we asked the other prisoners about our mother, Frieda Binheim, who we knew had been taken to Auschwitz. They looked at us: didn’t we understand? Then they looked up, at the sky.

“Later we did the same thing. When newcomers asked us about their family members we just looked up. It’s a word that you couldn’t utter. It’s still hard, even now. Today I can say it: ‘Gassed.’ Because that’s what happened!”

In 1939 Ruth Binheim is thirteen years old, the same age as Margot Frank. She flees from Germany to the Netherlands with her brother and sister. Her parents are not given a visa. In 1942 the deportations in the Netherlands begin and Ruth and her sister are deported to Auschwitz.

“I got very sick one time. I had jaundice and I couldn’t stand up. Thanks to Hanna, who supported me, I was able to stand during the roll call. If you were sick you were not included in the count. You were sent to the infirmary. That was the end of you – we knew that.

“At one point a small group of us women were brought to another camp. The stench there was awful, terrible! The next morning I said, “I had such a dreadful dream! I heard people screaming, so penetrating, so frightening, a whole bunch of people at the same time. The screams became fewer and fewer until I could only hear one or two...” But it had really happened: Right near us, in the woods, people had been burned alive in a big pit...Then we immediately knew where the stench had come from.

“We had to open the luggage belonging to the people who had been gassed and sort out their belongings – the dresses, the jackets and so forth. These things were sent to the German population as “Liebesgaben” (gifts).

“If Hanna and I got a chunk of bread we always shared it. If I divided it I gave her the bigger piece, and vice versa. I think that had to do with our will to survive. If Hanna and I had not had each other, we would not have survived.”

Ruth and Hanna survived the death march from Auschwitz to Ravensbrück and were liberated at Camp Retzov by the Russians. Their parents and their brother did not survive the camps.

Holocaust

*Four decades ago,
The nations stooped so low.
The judgement was passed,
Whoever is a Jew must be gassed.*

*We were thrown out of every country,
Our suffering had no boundary.
We hid in every corner,
But there was always one informer.*

*Every mother's heart was torn,
To see her children so weak and worn.
They did not see their children laugh or play,
They tried to hide them or give them away.*

*It was not because they did not love them.
Only because they tried to save them.
No one wanted these children either,
They were considered less than a spider.*

*What pain and suffering your mothers felt,
When they so brutally with your children dealt.
You raised them with so much love and care,
Yet nobody tried their life to spare.*

*They fought and fought, but could not win
They took my mother, and the rest of our kin,
It was a day with the sun so high,
With your grandson in your arms, they forced you to die.*

*I lost my faith on that day,
And find it very hard to pray.
Mother dear, you were a saint,
Of your deeds and courage only the memories remained.*

