AUDACIOUS WOMEN FESTIVAL

AUDACIART WEEKLY

Wait Not A Single Moment

24 July 2020

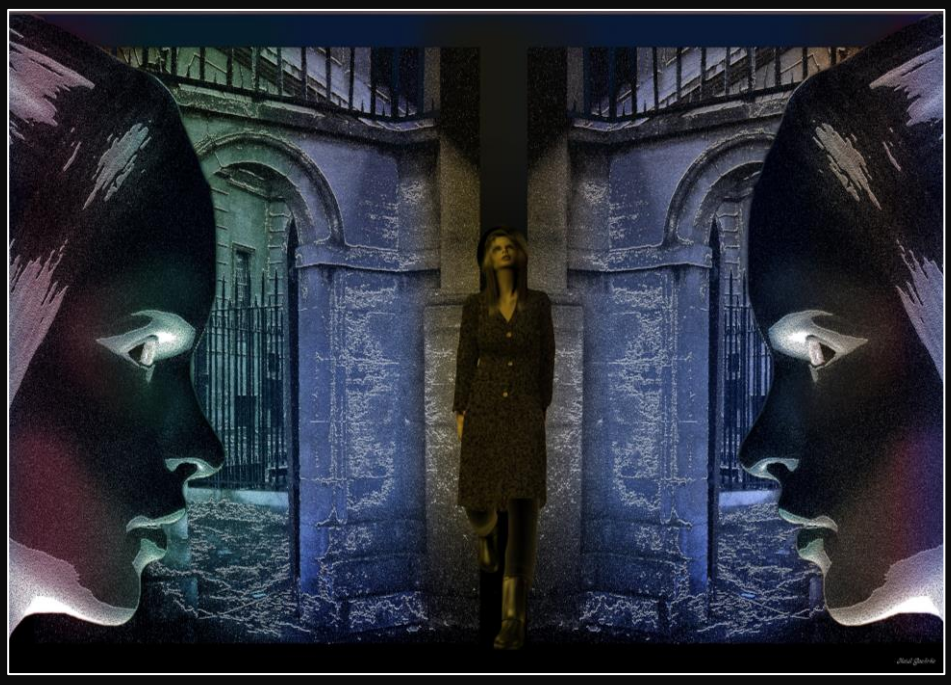


Image: You Are Always Now © Heidi Goehrke

An Audacious Women Publication

AudaciArt – Wait Not A Single Moment

This week's theme, *Wait Not A Single Moment,* is inspired by a quotation from Anne Frank

How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world.

AudaciArt

Hello Everybody

Here is the 16th – and penultimate – AudaciArt publication: an exciting collection of words and pictures inspired by a quotation by an audacious woman. As lockdown is coming to an end, so must we.

Many thanks to all today's contributors.

But of course there's still time to take today's theme to heart. So wait not a single moment longer and let us have your ideas for next week's final edition. It will be on the theme:

The Most Difficult Thing Deadline Friday 31 July @ Noon.

Women are invited to create and submit any type of work, using any medium or genre, inspired by the theme.

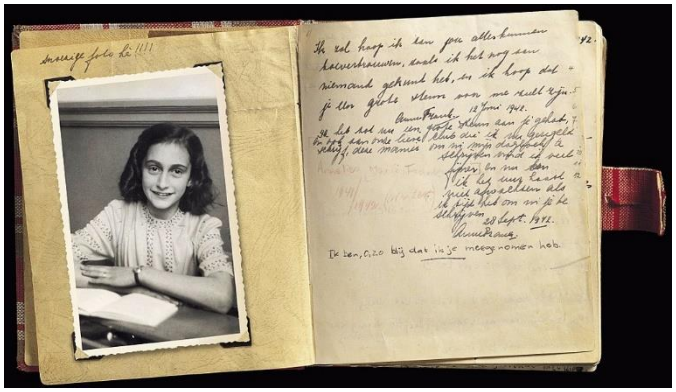
Contents

The Secret Annex

Sally Wainwright

As with the Covid lockdown here in the UK the start of total isolation from the outside world for the Frank family, whilst much anticipated, was sudden when it came. Otto Frank had been planning for some time to move the family to hiding in the annex of his company's warehouse, but around 10 days before the intended date his eldest daughter Margot received a call-up from the German occupiers to report for labour camp. The Franks, realising her life was at risk, decided to move immediately.

A few days later they were joined – as planned – by Hermann and Auguste van Pels and their 16 year old son Peter. After some months Fritz Pfeffer was invited to join them as well. His wife was Catholic so able to continue to live in Amsterdam, and he had sent his young son from his first marriage to the safety of Britain on the kindertransport. (The kindertransport brought some 10,000 children, my father amongst them, out of Nazi Europe to the UK in 1938-9. It began after Kristalnacht and continued right up to the outbreak of war. Sadly the British attitude to unaccompanied minors is very different today. Hundreds of children, even those with a legal right to be here, are languishing in Europe while the UK government procrastinates and refuses to meet its legal obligations. In contrast to the amount of paperwork and administrative barriers facing today's unaccompanied minors, in 1938 the government agreed to waive all the visa requirements that the children could not fulfil, and put no limit on the numbers it would allow entry.)



I've sometimes wondered if Anne Frank would be as well known, a bye word for the horrors of the holocaust, as the teenager who wrote a surprisingly well-crafted diary in hiding, had she lived. She declared that she would like to be a journalist and wrote two versions of the diary, A and B, one the original, the other carefully edited changing some names and leaving out some of the more personal passages, in anticipation of publishing it after the war. That wish, at least, came true posthumously and the warehouse where the families had hidden became a museum where you can now tour the space they lived in. Would she have promoted her own legacy with the determination that her father Otto - the only survivor of the 8 people who sheltered in the annex - did? Would the diary have had the same poignancy had its author been able to pursue the dreams it held? Perhaps instead she would have become an intrepid reporter, shining a light on the wars, horrors, evils and injustices of the present day. What would she have made of Trump's unconstitutional authoritarianism? Or of the shenanigans emanating from Westminster? On the other hand having this memorial, this permanent record of the impact of war provides a powerful message about the need to ensure nothing similar can ever happen again - though there is little sign that today's world leaders are able or willing to prevent the growth of other totalitarian regimes.

Knowing how difficult many of us have found the 4 months of lockdown, it is almost unthinkable to have been confined for 2 years, unable to leave the building even once, to live with the constant fear of being discovered or betrayed, and having to keep especially quiet during the working week when the warehouse was full of workers unaware of their existence. Anne's outspokenness, her ability to remember and record details, her astute commentary, coupled with the fact that she was a normal teenage girl, didn't necessarily make her the easiest of housemates. She particularly struggled with her relationship with her 'imperfect mother' who, she said, would laugh in her face when she was upset. When Otto opposed a (short-lived) relationship with Peter van Pels, Anne wrote to him saying that she was older than her 14 years due to their circumstances and that her father should recognise this and trust her. She was not the only person to find the confinement extremely trying and she recorded other household arguments, such as those between the van Pels when Hermann insisted Auguste sell her fur coat to help finance their hiding. Nor can it have been easy for her to be forced to share her bedroom with Fritz Pfeffer. She found him very annoying and it seems the feeling was mutual.

But for me the real heroes and heroines of the story are the 6 non-Jewish helpers who for 2 years daily risked their liberty and even their lives to care for the eight people stranded in the annex. The forays some of us made during the early days of lockdown, tracking down toilet paper and rice for our shielding neighbours were just a drop in the ocean compared to the challenges of finding food, medicines, reading matter and other essentials for 8 people during a time of rationing, without arousing suspicion.

The youngest of the helpers was 23 year old Bep Voskuijl, who found milk and bread each day. She had a close friendship with Anne who thought nothing of passing comment on Bep's relationship with her fiancé, who she didn't believe Bep loved, and advised against marriage. Bep broke off the engagement soon afterwards. Bep's father Johann was the warehouse manager. Initially he had been unaware of the annex but was soon brought into the secret and it was he who built the bookcase that hid the only door into the annex. He also took on the unenviable task of removing the 'waste' from the annex each day. The pressures on Bep increased further when he became ill with stomach cancer and she had to care for him as well.

Miep Gies was born to a poor family in Vienna, and was sent by them to the Netherlands through a relief project for Austrian children, after she had become quite malnourished. As would be the case with many kindertransport children in the years to come, Miep never returned to live with her family. She provided the secret annex with meat and vegetables and, it was she who found Anne's diary after the family was arrested. She only read the diary after Otto returned, and said it was as well she hadn't done so earlier as she'd have had to burn it because it was too dangerous for the people Anne was writing about.

Miep's husband Jan was the only one of the helpers who did not work for Otto's company. Jan became involved in the resistance although there is little detail known about his role. But as a social worker he was well placed to visit people and, say, distribute illegal papers, and to obtain ration coupons. During this period the Gies were also hiding a young Dutch student in their own home. The student had refused to sign a declaration of loyalty to the Nazi regime, and so risked arrest and deportation to Germany.

Before the families went into hiding, Jews had been forbidden from owning businesses. So Jan Gies and Victor Kugler, set up a new company that took over Otto's spice business, so keeping it safe from German supervision. Victor, along with Johannes Kleimann, concentrated on keeping the businesses running. Victor also generated some additional income by selling spices and not entering the sales into the company books. And Johannes became the go-to person for any unexpected problems in the annex, such as the time it became infested with fleas.

When the annex was eventually discovered August 1944 Johannes and Victor were also arrested along with those in hiding. At the insistence of the Red Cross, Johannes was soon released from prison because of his very poor health but returned to take over the running of the businesses. Victor was not released until the end of the war.

After being discovered, the families were taken to Auschwitz-Birkenau, where Hermann van Pels was sent to the gas chambers in October 1944. Edith Frank died in Auschwitz-Birkenau just three weeks before it was liberated. Peter also remained there until the Germans evacuated the camp as the Soviet army approached. He survived the death march to Mauthausen but then became ill and was in the sick bay when the allies liberated the camp. He died 5 days later. Fritz Pfeffer was sent to do hard labour in Neuengamme concentration camp, where he died of a gastrointestinal infection. Auguste van Pels was sent, along with Margot and Anne, to Bergen-Belsen, but then she was moved again to Theresienstadt, dying either on the journey or shortly afterwards. Margot and Anne remained in Bergen-Belsen. Both died in February 1945, probably as a result of the typhus epidemic that spread through the camp killing 17,000 inmates.

Only Otto survived - having been too ill to take part in the death march he was left behind when the camp was evacuated. He returned to Amsterdam where he lived with the Gies for the next seven years. Supported again by them, he devoted a large part of the rest of his life to keeping alive the memory and legacy of his daughter Anne.

The friendship, loyalty and bravery of the helpers were central to the entire project. Not one had hesitated for a single moment when asked if they would help the families go into hiding and keep them safe, which they continued to do for 2 years despite the huge personal toll it took on them. Perhaps that is whom Anne was thinking of when she wrote the words that inspired this week's theme: *How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world.* Anne wrote of Victor's sense of *enormous responsibility for the 8 of us, which is sometimes so much for him that he can hardly speak from pent-up nerves and strain.* The last words must go to the helpers.

As Victor put it:

They were my friends. I could not let them be butchered by the Germans

And Johannes said following his own arrest:

Don't give it another thought. It was up to me, and I wouldn't have done it differently.

Stop For A Minute

Jo Cameron Duguid

“What is this life if, full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare?”

I have known and loved this couplet for more years than I can remember, without having any recollection of the rest of the poem nor of the poet who penned those lines. I suspect it may have been one I was required to learn by heart in my primary school years. We did a lot of that sort of thing in those days. Three weeks ago, to my delight, I discovered the whole poem online, so I can now tell you that those words are an extract from “Leisure”, by William Henry Davies (1871 to 1940).

Are you curious to know the circumstances in which I finally unearthed this long-lost information? Since 2015, a friend has been buying me the Faber & Faber Poetry Diary for the forthcoming year as my Christmas present. This is a lovely A5 hardback book, with a double page for each week of the year. Every week, the left hand page has a work by a poet, some well-known and some unfamiliar, to me at least. To give you an idea, this year's diary includes poems by William Wordsworth, Norman Nicholson and a writer called Jack Underwood whose first volume was published as recently as 2015.

The right hand page of each double spread has, as you might imagine, the usual space for the owner to enter details of their appointments, social events and activities etc., i.e. a record of their busyness. I ignore all the dates, ruled lines and “useful information” such as that July 11th is the Battle of the Boyne Holiday in Northern Ireland (perhaps best forgotten anyway?). Instead, each week, I look for other poems by the week's featured luminary, either in my own poetry collection or online. I read a few, choose my favourite and, *here it comes*, write the whole thing out longhand on that page of the diary. Thus it was that, when a poem by W. H. Davies called “Cowslips and Larks” appeared, I was led to “Leisure”.

Why do I do this weekly exercise? I hear you ask. Well, it's one of the Slowness Practices I took up after reading Christian McEwen's *World Enough & Time: On Creativity and Slowing Down* shortly after I retired six years ago. As I approached the end of my working life, people kept asking, “What are you going to do now?”, assuming I'd be taking up new hobbies, engaging in useful voluntary work or travelling the world. My answer was always, “I'm just going to go slowly.” I bought a badge with a snail on it and pinned it to one of my trademark baker boy caps. I bought a sloth to laze around in my flat and remind me to relax, breathe and enjoy my freedom from the petty tyrannies of the world of paid employment. I wanted to practise being “a human being, rather than a human doing”.

As time went on, I came to understand that my natural rhythm in life has *always* been quite slow. I have struggled to keep up in a society whose pace is simply too *fast* for me. During my years in school and college, I was always aware of the invisible hand in my back pushing me to hurry for the school bus, to get changed

quickly after much-hated P.E. times, so as not to be late for the next lesson, and write furiously in order to answer four questions in three hours in university exams.

Work saw me harried by the rush to be there on time, to meet deadlines, to run around a school first thing in the morning, pulling together resources for my teaching day before the children arrived. And, of course, as the rate of change in technology ramped up, I had to constantly acquire new skills rapidly and be nifty with shortcuts around the keyboard. In my very last job, I had a manager who would lean over me at my computer and start "helping" me by showing me how to perform some task using one or two less clicks of the mouse. I used to wonder if she saved up all those clicks and spent them on stopwatches the way some of us collect and spend our Boots points!

It hasn't helped that I'm a perfectionist and was always punctual, diligent and unfailingly reliable throughout the entire course of my education and working life. Now I can "take *my* time", knowing that it really doesn't matter if I'm slow to eat my meals, slow to get ready in the bathroom, slow to walk to the bus stop. I can stop and have a blether with a friend I meet in the street, or have a break when shopping to relax with a cup of tea.

In another piece of serendipity involving poetry, a friend recently sent me a copy of a Mary Oliver poem which she thought (correctly) would be one I'd come across before. And, as with the William Henry Davies poem, it has two lines I often have in mind, but I struggle to remember which of Mary Oliver's poems it actually comes from. The lines are:

"Tell me, what is it you plan to do
with your one wild and precious life?"

These are often quoted out of context, and seen as a "call to action", an exhortation to "wait not a single moment" before embarking on a purposeful life. In fact, the poem of which they are the concluding lines is called "The Summer Day", and is a call to *inaction*, as the poet describes the time she "wasted" just lying in the grass minutely examining a grasshopper, seeing that time as a prayer, herself as "idle and blessed". As the poem reaches its conclusion, she challenges the reader to say what else she should have done with her afternoon, knowing how privileged we all are to be given a human life to savour and enjoy. Aesop notwithstanding, the hare usually does get to the finishing line first, but the tortoise may have had more interesting encounters along the way and given herself time to acquire wisdom and patience.

Wait Not A Single Moment

Tamsin Grainger

If I could, then I would.
When I'm not needed, well then.
I'll finish this first.
I just couldn't, because.
If I did, things might.
You know, I can't, not really.
What would she do without me?

It's dangerous,
It's expensive,
It's extravagant
And selfish.
I've had a holiday this year already.
Indulgent. Simply,
Too much of a luxury.

You had the chance, it was OK for you
You're younger,
You're stronger,
You're luckier
And pluckier.
You see, you're braver than me.

But time is of the essence
And the years are passing.
Age is gaining the upper hand, as it always has.
Wait not for when the kids are all grown,
Nor for her to retire,
Not for when it's the right moment - you might not live that long.
Don't hesitate, not for a single second.

You Are Always Now

Heidi Goehrke

Time Tics

Sally Freedman

Measure it, treasure it,
Make it, do it and take it,
Enslaved when we bake
We divide it up like cake.

It's always running out,
Its rules are hard to flout,
We honour it and bawl it
Our landlords used to call it
.
We take it out or kill it,
Squander it and fill it,
I'd like it to stand still
When I'm getting a deep thrill
But I don't suppose it will.