

Anne Frank Remembered

Many millions have read the crushingly poignant diary of the girl who perished in a Nazi concentration camp. Millions more who have not read her words know the bright face of the teenage Anne Frank, her large dark eyes and the lines under them--and her fate--making her seem older than her ultimate 15 years. A just-released documentary of her life will make her special story accessible to millions more.

Anne Frank Remembered is, somewhat surprisingly, the first full-blown film treatment of the true Anne Frank story (as distinct from the feature film, which was based upon a play). It is also an updated version, based on the latest, and far more complete, published versions of her diary. Director and documentarist Jon Blair, a South African transplanted to England, was reluctant to take on the job--he had dealt with the Holocaust before in a film on Oskar Schindler--but once he did, he did it right.

A good two hours, *Anne Frank Remembered* is told in strict chronological order, tracing the Frank family from their time in Germany (Anne was ever a German refugee, never a Dutch citizen) to their move to the Netherlands in 1933 and their relatively normal life through most of the 1930's. The crucial middle of the film concerns the family's going into hiding in an Amsterdam canal house in July 1942, which prompted those writings we know from Anne's diary. The grim last section achingly details the end of Anne, her sister, and mother in the wretchedness of the Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen camps. A brief coda follows Anne's father, Otto Frank--who survived Auschwitz--and his discovery and publication of Anne's diary.

The documentary is straightforward and unadorned: the usual mix of stills (the Franks must have been shutterbugs), period footage, modern day set-ups, and interviews. The only conscious filmic technique used by Blair is shooting soft dissolves touchingly showing the furnishings in the attic slowly fading into the plain rooms present in the Anne Frank Museum. Kenneth Branagh narrates, respectfully. Glenn Close, reading the words in Anne's diary, displays a mature voice but one still full of innocence. That voice is harsher than we remember from earlier editions of the diary, as when Anne confides to the page that "I hate my mother; I have to mother myself."

The core of the film is the interviews. The most affecting are with contemporaries of Anne, her classmates all grown up, now sweet ladies in their sixties. One remembers Anne as feisty, even "impertinent." Another recalls the Jewish enclave in which she and Anne grew up. The most memorable is Hanneli Goslar, because she follows Anne Frank's life to its very end. Another inmate of Bergen-Belsen, Hanneli revisits the site of the German camp--sweet green countryside now--and quietly tells of her last halting encounters with Anne over a camp fence. This is heartbreaking film.

Besides Goslar, the "star" of the film is Miep Gies, a Dutch woman who worked for Otto Frank, and who supplied the Franks with food and provisions in their attic hideaway every day for more than two years. It was she who found Anne's diary and who treasured it for Otto Frank. It was she who tried to get the family released by the Gestapo. A genuinely modest person, Miep is the living heroine of this story, a decent person who simply did what was right. She is the opposite of the "good German" who did nothing to oppose Hitler and his kind.

Gies was seen by billions during the recent Academy Awards, where she was present with director Blair when he was awarded the Oscar for best full-length

documentary. Unfortunately, she was not heard but instead was unceremoniously whisked off the stage as the orchestra welled into a commercial break. A shame--she certainly merited a word, this sweet old woman with a noble soul.

If I have a quibble with *Anne Frank Remembered*, it is with that last third which covers the Franks' capture and their grim journey through the camps. For me, it is too long and too reminiscent of other Holocaust memoirs seen on film (*Shoah* comes to mind). The documentary is so strong because it tells one girl's *particular* story so well and so fully; this is the one part of the narrative which focuses much less on Anne herself and, instead, takes on the weight of the Six Million. The complaint is minor: once we arrive at Bergen-Belsen with Hanneli, we are back, tearfully, with Anne.

The film's final frames hold the most special moment. It seems like someone filmed a wedding around one of the Frank's residences in Amsterdam in 1941. In panning the building, the amateur filmmaker catches a glimpse of the 12-year-old Anne as she looks out a window--then whips her head around to say something to someone inside. It's a distant shot and it lasts but a second or two, but it is the living Anne Frank, moving in space as we have never seen her in those glowing photos. If we can say it for Christ, Kilroy, "Bird," and Elvis, we can now say "Anne Frank Lives" through the medium of film.

(The film is rated "PG," and is certainly suitable--and recommended--for family viewing. It does contain some graphic footage from the death camps.)

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