

## The Diaries of Two Young Girls

by Mara Palmieri

I have a photo hanging by my window of Anne Frank and her sister, Margo Frank. Though only the girls' profiles are visible in the frame, we know they sat by their own window looking out. Both have frustratingly hard to read expressions. It's impossible to tell what they may have seen out of the window based on their faces. I keep this photo to remind myself of two things: first, of my deep connection to Anne Frank and her diary; and second, of the nature of storytelling frames.

I first read *The Diary of a Young Girl* in sixth grade. By then, I had already been keeping my own journal since the age of six. I considered myself "a writer," which meant that every paragraph-of-the-week assignment had twelve-year-old humor and creative spelling choices. When we began reading the diary for book club, I felt instant kinship to Anne. Here she was, a young girl of almost the same age who also dreamed of writing her own novels. She wrote her diary entries to "Kitty," and my own journal had a picture of a kitten on the front! I was awed by her introspective thoughts, her take on the world, and her truthful, honest writing. I remember thinking: how could someone living so long ago see the world like I did? Worry about her first kiss like I did? Fight with her sister like I did? Most of all, how could someone go through the horror of hiding from people trying to kill her and still seem so much like me? Would I still be me if I went through something like that?

How powerful the words of this teenage girl must be, if they can cause another twelve-year-old girl sixty-six years later to learn empathy and perspective. I wasn't the only one affected by Anne's writing. Her story became a symbol of resilience for generations of people across the world. Anne kept the diary for herself to try to make sense of a time that didn't make sense. She included everyday events, arguments, and laughter. She also confided her fear, depression and anxiety from hiding day after day. Anne didn't think of her diary entries as life changing pieces of writing. But that's what they became. Those everyday moments she captured became windows into the upturned lives of real people, as well as mirrors to show the reader how important their own everyday moments are. I find it significant that her fame came not for some discovery or great act, but for living through painful experiences. It's important to remember that living—purely living through what life has in store—is an accomplishment to be celebrated.

I kept writing my own entries after reading Anne's diary, filling page after page and then journal after journal as the years progressed. Like Anne's, my journals were filled with mostly day to day events. When COVID hit and a quarantine was put in place, I got a small taste of what it must have been like to try to put fear and isolation into words. My entries became my daily solace and a way to wrap my mind around the scale of crisis. Through it all, I kept thinking back to Anne—how she, a young thirteen-year-old girl, could find a way to keep herself from falling too deep into despair when she had every reason to. If she could do so, so could I. Though she didn't survive her internment in the concentration camps, her inspiring resilience survived through her writing.

Anne's diary not only inspired me during dark times. It played a key role in encouraging my love for storytelling. Throughout my life, I acted in plays, danced in ballets, played many instruments and continued to write. For a long time, I used to worry that this wide selection of interests meant I had no single, driving passion. Once I let that fear go two years ago, I recognized storytelling as the root of all these interests. Identifying this connection between passions propelled me to search for a career path

that would allow me to work with stories and people. Almost magically, I discovered developmental editing as an option after working with my uncle's unpublished novel. As a developmental editor, I would be able to combine my love of storytelling, strength in writing, and skill in communication. To start on this career path, I've chosen to attend Portland State's Master's in Book Publishing program. The program is the only one of its kind available in the western United States. It combines academic learning with practical experience in publishing, as it requires students to participate in the school's own press. I have been accepted for admission in the spring of 2022.

I am forever grateful for Anne Frank. Yet, it haunts and intrigues me that she became a story rather than a person, to be edited and analyzed. What's worse, she didn't have any say in how her story was defined. Though she did rewrite some of her entries with the hope of one day publishing them, her father and editors ultimately decided what would be published after her death. We don't see any spelling errors or messy handwriting. We might even be missing some entries. So, we are left to wonder: what more did she see that we can't see? What was through that window? We can only know what is in the frame of the story. That is the violence and wonder of storytelling's nature. Ironically, this limitation is what makes storytelling so powerful. Because of its ability to show perspective, a story can change minds, inspire wonder and connect lives, as Anne's did for me. Anne Frank didn't have a say in what parts of her diary were published, or whether it should have been published at all. When I finish the Master's program and work with authors, I plan to honor Anne and do everything to share stories the way the authors want.