



The Hidden Life of Otto Frank

By Carol Ann Lee
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Introduction

Carol Ann Lee's *The Hidden Life of Otto Frank* is the definitive, astonishing portrait of a man whose story illuminates some of the most harrowing and memorable events of the 20th Century.

In the public eye, Otto Frank has always remained a one-dimensional character: the perfect father figure from *The Diary of Anne Frank*. Apart from a few basic facts, and his much-criticized editing of his daughter's legacy, almost nothing is known about the man behind the image. Now, Carol Ann Lee reveals startling new details about Otto Frank -- from the identity of the man who betrayed him, to Otto's shocking actions during WWII that made him a target of blackmail for the rest of his days. Probing this startling act of treachery she brings to light never-before documented information about Otto Frank and the individual who would claim responsibility -- a terrifying and complicated relationship that continued until the day Frank died.

With *The Hidden Life of Otto Frank*, Carol Ann Lee has presented an astonishing and moving portrait of a man whose life, both charmed and cursed, was interwoven with one of the most momentous events of the last century -- the father of Anne Frank. Based upon impeccable research into rare archives and filled with excerpts from the secret journal that he kept from the day of his liberation until his return to the Secret Annex in 1945, this landmark biography explores every facet of Frank's life. The publication of Anne Frank's diary turned this quietly heroic man into a legend, but until now, apart from a few basic facts, almost nothing has been written about Otto Frank's own extraordinary life.

The father of the most famous young girl of the twentieth century, Otto Frank was born a month before Adolf Hitler, and grew up in a wealthy German, Jewish household. In the First World War he fought for Germany -- which he believed to be his country -- as an officer in the trenches of the Somme. Lee brings to light these privileged early years, when Frank and his family were models of wholly assembled European Jewry. She also reveals the full story behind Frank's first cruelly thwarted love affair, as well as the truth about his subsequent arranged marriage to Anne's mother. After struggling to establish a business in Amsterdam, Frank and his family spent happy years together before the war. And then, came their period in hiding, their eventual betrayal and their internment in the death camps of Poland and Germany. For the first time, Frank's experiences during and after Auschwitz are told in full, drawing upon excerpts from a previously unknown journal Frank kept from the day of his liberation until his return to Amsterdam where, wholly destitute, he lost everything "except life." The subsequent delivery of his daughter's diary, and the publishing phenomenon that ensued, helped him begin to recover.

Deeply moving and powerfully honest, *The Hidden Life of Otto Frank* authoritatively brings into focus a little understood man.

Discussion Questions

1. Carol Anne Lee has chosen to entitle her biography, *The Hidden Life of Otto Frank* -- a word that she wrote in her acknowledgments stemmed from her impetus to write about Frank's "hidden, haunted life." Discuss how your perceptions of how Otto Frank's life was "haunted" changed by reading this biography.
2. "My father always told us that one weekend in 1933 a friend of his handed him a book and said, 'I think you should read this.' It was *Mein Kampf*. Father stayed up all night reading, and the next morning announced that we were going to America." Many of Otto's relatives -- like Edith Oppenheimer (quoted here) -- fled to America, and England. Discuss how fate brought the Franks to Amsterdam, and how Otto's previous efforts to establish a business abroad influenced his decision and the position he accepted as an independent pectin supplier. Imagine the Frank family's plight and discuss how you might confront the same situation in your present day life. How would your extended family; economic circumstances, and career prospects influence your decision?
3. Anne was not as close with her mother as she was with her father. Yet it was Edith who often brought comfort to Anne, and who "sympathized with Anne at night ... during the battles between German and Allied aircraft." Discuss Anne's record of her relationship with her mother. Discuss what Otto Frank chose to reveal of Anne and Edith's relationship in the diary.
4. "There's no doubt he did it," says Anton Ahlers Jr. Ahlers has said he believed his father, Tonny Ahelers, received money from Frank, because the flow of funds stopped when Frank died in 1980. Do you believe in the case that Lee has made for Tonny Ahlers as the Frank family's betrayer? Or do you think the case is still open, and that the Ahlers family might simply be seeking notoriety?
5. The publication and dramatization of Anne's diary had portrayed Otto Frank as a kind of saint. In *The Hidden Life of Otto Frank*, he is "much more flesh and blood"(AP). Discuss your own impressions and perceptions of Otto Frank before reading this biography. How have your impressions of him changed after reading a portrait rendered by a biographer rather than a daughter?
6. After his liberation in 1945, Frank wrote a letter stating "Now I am a beggar, having lost everything except life." Discuss how the discovery of Anne's diary gave Otto Frank the will to live.
7. Discuss the symbolism of the three brown beans (page 177) that Otto discovers and pockets upon his return to the secret annex.
8. The editing of Anne's diary by Otto Frank has proven very controversial. Margot Frank's childhood friend Laureen Nussbaum, who has written extensively about Anne's diary believes that "Otto should be congratulated for probably being the first to publish a

document from the Holocaust" but believes that as for his editing of the diary "he was headstrong and misled people on the content." Others felt that "Otto was not concealing anything." How did you react to the documentation and evidence of how Otto Frank edited Anne's diary? How did you feel about the particular passages that were excised? In your opinion does a version of the diary that does not include some material still qualify as authentic?

About the Author

Carol Ann Lee, a native of Yorkshire, first read Anne Frank's diary at the age of eight and became fascinated by the book and the personality of Anne Frank. She collected first editions of the diary in any language and began to study the legacy of the Holocaust. She studied the history of art and design in college and during her time as a student interviewed Holocaust survivors for the Oral History department of the Manchester Jewish Museum. She also worked for the Anne Frank Trust to bring the exhibition "Anne Frank in the World" to Cornwall. In 1999 her biography of *Roses From The Earth: The Biography of Anne Frank* -- written with the full co-operation of Anne's remaining relatives -- was published to great critical acclaim. Lee lives in Amsterdam.