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# And Then They Came for Me

REMEMBERING THE WORLD OF ANNE FRANK

BY JAMES STILL

ORIGINALLY PRODUCED BY GEORGE STREET PLAYHOUSE TOURING THEATRE, SUSAN KERNER, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR, AND YOUNG AUDIENCES OF NEW JERSEY, KRISTIN GOLDEN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

**A**nd Then They Came for Me: Remembering the World of Anne Frank is a multi-media play that incorporates videotaped interviews with Holocaust survivors Eva Schloss and Ed Silverberg, friends of the young Anne Frank, with live actors recreating on stage scenes from their lives in hiding and in the concentration camps.

Director Susan Kerner wants the audience to experience this play as a personal history lesson. Her concept is to take Anne Frank's story, which is familiar to so many people, set it in a historical context, and bring to light the generation of other children whose lives were changed forever during this time in history. To do this she must guide the actors to smoothly interweave the videotaped interviews with the action of the play. Timing is important; there are several times, for example, that the actors address a question to Eva or Ed and a response is given from the video.

Scenic designer Rob Koharchik has created a set that is simple but will allow the actors to move freely in order to make their interaction with the video easier. There will be three monitors to view the video, two on the sides and one above center stage. The upstage wall has a scrim in which audience members will first see images of Eva, Ed, and Anne at twelve years old. The scrim will disappear to reveal a curtain. As the lives of the characters change, the curtain will be ripped away to expose a broken mural. The broken image represents *Kristallnacht*, the night of the broken glass, when mobs destroyed Jewish stores, homes, and synagogues. The mural features such elements as the Star of David, photos of Eva, Ed, and the Frank family, and a broken brick wall. A stack of old furniture in front of the wall will be used to suggest

several locations. The floor of the stage is a painted with a partial map of Europe showing the journeys made by Eva, Ed, and Anne.

James Still is one of the nation's leading playwrights for family audiences and is the recent recipient of the Charlotte B. Chorpenning Playwright Award for Distinguished Body of Work. His award-winning plays have been produced throughout the United States, Canada, and Puerto Rico—including *The Secret History of the Future* at the Indiana Repertory Theatre. In addition to his work in the theatre, Still writes for the Nickelodeon television series "Little Bear." He grew up in Kansas and lives in Los Angeles.

"I read [Anne Frank's] diary when I was in the sixth grade while growing up in a tiny town in Kansas," says the playwright. "Knowing how important that first contact with Anne's story was to me as a young person learning about the world, with *And Then They*



(above)  
Ed Silverberg's  
false passport, 1940.  
(right) Eva Geiringer in Brussels, 1939.

*Came for Me* I wanted to introduce other stories to young people and their families, stories they wouldn't otherwise have the opportunity to hear. I wanted to create a theatrical event that could be approached as oral history, as multi-media, as educational."

"But most of all I wanted the opportunity (and challenge) of creating a work of art that invited young people to have an *empathetic* experience with stories from the Holocaust. It is my hope that by putting themselves in someone else's shoes—by emotionally connecting to Ed, Eva, and Anne—that young people will be driven to learn more about the Holocaust, to read more about the Holocaust, and to even seek out other survivors in their communities. In other words, I wanted to create something bigger beyond itself." ★

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# The World of Anne F.

**T**he 1919 Treaty of Versailles which ended World War I forced the German government to pay reparations for war damages. The German economy faltered under this extreme financial burden, and inflation became extreme. Jobs disappeared; money became worthless; people became desperate for order in their lives. Into this void came Adolph Hitler, offering hope and solutions when no one else did. One of Hitler's beliefs was that Jews were responsible for the condition of the German economy, and therefore they should be driven from any position of authority. Hitler's party, the National Socialist German Worker's Party—*Nazi* for short—grew in popularity to become the largest party in the Reichstag, a government body something like our U.S. Congress. In 1933 Hitler was named Chancellor, a position similar to prime minister or president. Now Hitler was in a position to advance his concepts of "ethnic cleansing" which would later become known as the Holocaust.

On November 9, 1938, Hitler's SS troops incited and led the citizens of German towns to pillage and burn 7,500 Jewish shops and synagogues. This event came to be known as *Kristallnacht*, or "Night of the Broken Glass." As Germany spread its borders through annexation or force they brought this virulent hatred with them. In each country the Nazis

would place restrictions on Jews: forbidding them to shop at non-Jewish establishments, to attend cinemas, theatres, or concerts, or to ride public transportation. Ultimately all Jews were required to wear the yellow Star of David on their clothing at all times or risk arrest.

Hitler started to expand his area of dominance by annexing Austria in 1938. Next he turned on Czechoslovakia. In September 1938 Britain and France negotiated with Hitler and gave him the fringe of Bohemia; the next year he took the rest of the country by force. When Germany invaded Poland on September 1, 1939, World War II was officially started. On May 10, 1940, Germany invaded Holland, which surrendered on May 19. Jewish families who had fled there for refuge were now trapped again.

*And Then They Came for Me: Remembering the World of Anne Frank* chronicles the lives of three young people—Anne Frank, Eva Geiringer, and Ed Silverberg—whose lives crossed paths in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, as a result of Hitler's campaign of hate. Anne is the best known of the three due to the diary she kept while hiding from the Nazis; her brief life has been memorialized in numerous movies and stage plays. Eva and Ed are both survivors of the Holocaust with their own stories and remembrances of a time the world should never forget. ★



## Anne's story

**A**nne Frank was born in Frankfurt, Germany, on June 12, 1929. When Hitler rose to power in 1933, Otto Frank took his family and emigrated to the Netherlands and started a small business in Amsterdam. When the Nazis invaded Holland on May 10, 1940, the Frank family started planning to go into hiding. Otto designated the upper floor of his business office as a hiding place, which they called the Secret Annex. His staff agreed to assist them by bringing food, magazines, and books. Soon Otto and their friends the Van Daans, who would be joining them, began preparing their hiding place. In July 1942, the two families plus a dentist friend went into hiding in that small space, a space that became home for eight people for the next two years. It was there that Anne wrote her diary which details her maturation and her love of life.

On August 4, 1944, the families were discovered and arrested. They were soon sent on to Auschwitz, a concentration camp known as a death camp. It was there that Edith Frank died. The girls were taken to another death camp in Bergen-Belsen, Germany, where they both died of typhoid fever. Otto Frank remained at Auschwitz until it was liberated by the Russians. Before leaving the camp he learned that his wife had died, but he was still hoping to find his daughters. The news of their deaths reached him after his return to Amsterdam and left him heartbroken.

Otto's former typist, Miep, had found Anne's diary after the family's arrest and had saved it for Anne. When she heard that Anne had died, she gave the diary to Otto. Anne's words moved him deeply, and he shared an edited version with several close family members and friends. Everyone who read it felt that the world should be allowed to hear her words as well, so Otto prepared a version for publication. It quickly became a best seller, and Anne's words helped heal many lives and spirits throughout the world. ★



# ink and Her Friends

## Eva's story

**E**va Geiringer was born in Vienna, Austria, on May 11, 1929. When Austria was annexed by Germany on March 12, 1938, Eva's father, Erich Geiringer, left for the Netherlands to make a new home for his family. They all joined him in Amsterdam in February 1940, and it was there that Eva met Anne Frank. While they were the same age, Anne seemed more mature to Eva; they never became close friends, merely acquaintances.

When the Netherlands was invaded, Erich Geiringer decided it was time for the family to start planning a place to hide. In July 1942, Eva's brother, Heinz, received his notice to report to a work camp, signaling that it was time for the family to go into hiding. Working with the Dutch underground, the family found two homes. The men were sent to a home in the countryside, and the women were hidden in a home in Amsterdam. The underground worker who relocated Eva and her mother (Fritzi) had a hiding place built in the bathroom. On the night the space was finished, the Germans raided the house; however, Eva and Fritzi were safely hidden.

The family remained in hiding and separated for two years. On May 11, 1944, on

Eva's 15th birthday, the Germans burst in and arrested Eva and Fritzi. They soon learned that Heinz and Erich had also been arrested, the family having been betrayed by a traitor in the Dutch underground.

After a short stay at the Westerbork holding camp, the family was sent to Auschwitz. From May 1944 (just weeks before the Normandy Invasion) to mid-January 1945, Eva and her mother were prisoners at Birkenau, another concentration/death camp five kilometers east of Auschwitz. When the Russians started approaching the camp in January 1945, the SS officers took the prisoners who could walk and evacuated the camp. Because Fritzi was ill and Eva was suffering from advanced frostbite on her feet, they were left to die in the camp hospital. Amazingly, both women lived; and with the help of the Russian and Allied troops, Eva and Fritzi returned to Amsterdam in June 1945. Erich and Heinz both died as prisoners of the Germans, as did many of their friends.

In the years that followed, Otto Frank became friends with Eva and Fritzi; and in 1953 Fritzi and Otto Frank were married. If Anne had survived the war, she and Eva would have been step-sisters. Eva moved to Great Britain after the war, married (acquiring the surname *Schloss*), and had three children. She lives there today and is the owner of an antique shop. ★



(above left) Anne Frank in 1940.

(above right) Eva Geiringer in Amsterdam, 1939.

(right) Ed Silverberg at age 12, 1936.

## Ed's story

**E**d Silverberg was born Helmut Silberberg on June 8, 1926, in Gelsen-Kirchen, Germany. In 1933 Ed's grandfather went to Amsterdam on business. Learning of Hitler's election, he opted to stay, telling his wife to sell everything and come immediately. Ed's father did not think the situation warranted moving his family so they stayed in Germany.

In 1938 on *Kristallnacht*, a mob broke into the Silberberg home, looted the house, and beat Ed's mother with crowbars and sledgehammers. As a result, Mr. and Mrs. Silberberg sent Ed, their only child, on a train to Amsterdam, to be with his grandparents until they could join him. Mr. and Mrs. Silberberg eventually arrived in Belgium, but were unable to go any further because the border between Belgium and the Netherlands was closed. In Amsterdam, Ed and Anne Frank became friends. Their friendship ended abruptly in 1942 when the Franks went into hiding. Anne did not forget her friend Ed; he is mentioned several times in her diary by his nickname, "Hello."

One evening Ed was out past the curfew restriction for Jews and was arrested and loaded on a truck. He made a daring escape from the truck and hid for the rest of the night, returning to his grandparents the next day. Fearing for Ed's life, his grandparents felt he should be with his parents. A distant cousin trying to get to Switzerland agreed to escort Ed to the Belgian border. After a two-and-a-half day journey, they arrived in Belgium and arranged for Ed to receive a false passport. The next morning the friend escorted Ed by train to Brussels.

Once the family was reunited, a friend of his parents hid the family in a house on the outskirts of Brussels for 26 months. The Silberberg family was liberated by the British Army on September 3, 1944, the day that Anne Frank and her family were moved from Westerbork to Auschwitz. ★

## IRT PLAY GUIDE

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**Q: What has been the biggest challenge you have faced writing this play?**

**A:** *And Then They Came for Me* is based on real events that happened to real people. Surprisingly, that aspect of the project feels similar to my typical process. When I write any play, I take the characters and their stories very seriously—even if the characters are fictional and their stories are “made up.” It almost feels as though the characters are telling me their stories and it is my job to be a good listener, to record what I hear, and then to shape that into a dramatic form. That approach of “listening” to the stories of fictional characters has served me well in this project because that is essentially what I have tried to do: listen carefully to Ed and Eva’s stories—to their words, to their pauses, to their questions, to their perspectives. And then to take all of that information and shape it into a dramatic form. It is perhaps an advantage that with Ed and Eva, I am able to be more direct in asking questions and getting answers. Fictional characters can be less forthcoming and even less polite—they have been known to flatly refuse to answer my questions. But Ed and Eva have been very generous.

# Q&A

## WITH PLAYWRIGHT JAMES STILL

However, to be honest, I must also point out that *because* Eva and Ed are real, living people, and because I have spent time getting to know them, I probably feel an even greater responsibility to “get it right.” Sometimes that can even be a burden because it has become even more important to me that Ed and Eva approve of how I’ve shaped their stories.

Another challenge has been how to select which stories to tell—that is, which stories become part of the play and which stories do we have to leave out? Usually those decisions have been based on practical reasons: the play has to be a certain length, or a certain story may be too confusing without more detailed context, or a story may introduce a character that makes it too difficult to understand unless we know more about that character. Sometimes I have had to approach the play as a giant puzzle with too many pieces. Which pieces do I need to make the picture I’m trying to create?

**Q: Unlike other conventional productions this is a multimedia production. How does this present a special challenge?**

**A:** I wanted video to be a part of this project from the very beginning, so it hasn’t posed a particular challenge to me. I think video will be more of a challenge for Susan Kerner [the director] and the designers and actors. For me, it was a great addition—almost like another language that I had access to and knew my audience would understand. I really approached it much the same way I’ve approached writing musicals: there are many collaborators involved.

On this project, sometimes the number of people involved (all with points of ideas, opinions, and particular interests) has made it difficult because there is always the danger that a play tries to be too many things to too many people. I have tried to remind myself—often—that this is a simple, stream-lined, elegant telling of two people who were both Jewish teenagers during World War II, both of whose lives had been touched by Anne Frank in a personal way, and who both had compelling, amazing stories to tell of their own. There are many temptations to try to make a play dealing with the Holocaust bigger, more political, more politically correct, more educational, softer, less violent, etc. Again, my

approach has been to approach it as stories about human beings: that this is not simply a chapter in world history, but a chapter in family history. This was an event that happened to real people, that affected young people and their families and continues to affect them two generations later. It’s the humanity I’ve tried to focus on, not the technical wizardry of video.

**Q: Do you think this play, or any work of art for that matter, can ever truly portray the horror of the Holocaust?**

**A:** The answer is yes and no. In my opinion you cannot re-create the horrors of the Holocaust in a *literal* sense. (Remember: even in a film like *Schindler’s List*, Steven Spielberg chose to film that story in black and white with symbolic touches of red. His visual interpretation of that story was not literal but more emotional.) That’s why it’s been important for *And Then They Came for Me* to find ways to approach the Holocaust head-on as an event that happened to real people and find ways to portray that theatrically. For me, finding a theatrical world in which to tell these stories does

not mean distorting the truth. These are stories that stand on their own. It is up to young people, teachers, parents, and the community to talk about the play, to make their own personal and global connections.

The play cannot do everything, cannot *be* everything for every person who sees it. This is not a play about the Holocaust. It is a play about three young people who *lived* during the Holocaust. We *think* we’ve seen it all, we *think* we’ve heard it all, we *think* there’s nothing left to say about the Holocaust. But we don’t know Ed Silverberg, and we don’t know Eva Schloss. I have found in working on this play that we probably—as a population in general—know very little about the Holocaust. If you believe that, then it is easy to imagine how important a play like *And Then They Came for Me* can be, even if you believe it is impossible to truly portray the horrors of the Holocaust on stage.

**Q: Have you been able to achieve personal expression as an artist, given the fact that what you’ve had to do here is to depict other people’s lives?**

**A:** This one is easy for me to answer. This play is not about a personal expression. This play is about Ed and Eva. My personal expression as an artist is in *choosing* to do this play, *choosing* to research this subject for two years, *choosing* to spend hours interviewing Ed in Hackensack, New Jersey, *choosing* to travel to London to interview Eva over a period of several days, *choosing* to travel to Amsterdam to visit the Anne Frank House and walk the same streets that Ed and Eva talk about, *choosing* to try and pull all these stories together into a cohesive whole. So this project is a little different in that you have to turn the paradigm on its ear in order to understand my personal expression as an artist. But for me it requires the same kind of passion, the same kind of obsession for detail, the same kind of relentless commitment that requires writing draft after draft after draft in search of a finished play that tells a story.

**Q: What do you hope young people will have gained after seeing *And Then They Came for Me*?**

**A:** This is always a complex issue for me as a writer. Long ago I gave up the arrogant notion that I could force audiences into having an “experience.” All I can do is care about what I’m writing, work hard on it, do my best to tell the story with clarity, emotional truth, and theatrical verve.... Personally, I have been profoundly moved by Ed and Eva and their teenage experiences that they have so generously agreed to share with audiences. In fact, I often hear their voices in my head. Something that [IRT artistic director] Janet Allen said to me several months ago is that Ed and Eva are grandparents telling grandchildren their stories. That is a powerful image for me: the exchange of life experiences from one generation to another. With that is the inherent trust that the receiving generation will listen, will try to understand, and will choose their own path based on what they’ve heard. ★