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The Helpers of the Secret Annex: A Guide for Students

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The Helpers of the Secret Annex: A Guide for Students



by

Elliot L. Hearst

Victoria N. Noriega, Research Assistant

"The best example of this is our own helpers, who have managed to pull us through so far and will hopefully bring us safely to shore, because otherwise they'll find themselves sharing the fate of those they're trying to protect. Never have they uttered a single word about the burden we must be, never have they complained that we're too much trouble. They come upstairs every day and talk to the men about business and politics, to the women about food and wartime difficulties and to the children about books and newspapers. They put on their most cheerful expressions, bring flowers and gifts for birthdays and holidays and are always ready to do what they can. That's something we should never forget; while others display their heroism in battle or against the Germans, our helpers prove theirs every day by their good spirits and affection."

-from *The Diary of Anne Frank*, entry of Jan. 28, 1944

Introduction -

In the first sentence of her memoir, Miep Gies, one of the Helpers of The Secret Annex, states that she is not a hero. Although some would disagree with her, the fact remains that the four helpers, aided by Miep's husband Jan and others, put their freedom as well as their lives on the line in order to protect eight innocent people who were being targeted by the Nazi regime. It would have been easier to stand by and do nothing or perhaps even to collaborate as many others did, but these individuals acted on their conscience, and did what they knew in their hearts was right.

The pages that follow are designed to provide some background information concerning these extraordinary helpers for those who are reading or studying Anne Frank's classic memoir, *Diary of a Young Girl*. There is very little written in this guide about Anne herself, or the seven other people who spent two years in hiding in the annex behind 263 Prinsengracht in Amsterdam, and that is intentional. Much has been written about those individuals, and there is a wealth of information available for those who seek it. This guide has been imagined as an adjunct to the *Diary* itself and to the many secondary sources that focus on other aspects of this inspiring story of selflessness, a bright light that still shines amidst one of the darkest chapters of the 20th Century.

Acknowledgements -

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A Note on Citations and References –

In the interest of usefulness and ease of reading, we have used footnotes that appear at the bottom of each page. The Bibliography conforms to MLA 8 format.

Miep Gies



Left to right: Miep with her husband Jan Gies and Otto Frank in 1961. Photo: Wikimedia Commons

Vital Statistics:

Original name: Hermine Santrouschitz

Born: February 15, 1909 in Vienna, Austria

Died: January 11, 2010, Hoorn, Netherlands, at the age of 100

Husband: Jan Gies (July 16, 1941)

Child: Paul¹ (July 30, 1950)

Additional Details:

Miep had a younger sister, and the family was very poor. During World War I Miep became extremely malnourished. She was among thousands of Austrian children who were sent to the Netherlands in 1920 for physical rehabilitation. This was initially to be for a period of three months, but Miep's family decided she would be better off there, so she remained in Holland.

Miep originally worked as a typist at an embroidery company, and it was there that she met her future husband, Jan Gies. In October of 1933 she applied for a job at Opekta and was hired by Otto Frank. She expected to perform office work exclusively, but after becoming quite an expert at making jam using Opekta's products, Otto appointed her to be the firm's public relations contact, answering customer's questions by mail and telephone.² Miep often gave live demonstrations on how to use Opekta and even appeared in a promotional film that Otto had made, which still exists.³

Miep and Jan were dating and would sometimes visit the Frank family at their apartment on the Merwedeplein before they went into hiding, and thus they became close friends as well as business associates. Miep worked in the front office alongside Bep Voskuijl and Johannes Kleiman, and deep relationships were forged between these individuals.⁴

- Miep was in charge of grocery shopping along with Bep Voskuijl. Miep would go in the morning to collect the shopping list and went off to the vegetable store and the butcher. She would have lunch with the people in the annex, telling them the current news about the world outside.
- Every Saturday Miep would bring them five library books.
- It became difficult for Miep to be able to go and get groceries, because she had to not only take care of the eight in the Secret Annex but also the student who was hiding in her home (see additional information on Kuno Lodewijk below). She had to get food for eleven people in total every single day.⁵

In the July 11, 1943 entry in her Diary, Anne wrote,

Miep is just like a pack mule she fetches and carries so much. Almost every day she manages to get hold of some vegetables for us and brings everything in shopping bags on her bicycle. She also brings us 5 library books every Saturday. We always long for Saturdays when our books come, just like little children receiving a present. Ordinary people simply don't know what books mean to us shut up here. Reading, learning and the radio are our only amusements.⁶

Researcher Rebecca Gray offers the following information about Miep:

With the world caught in the grip of the Great Depression, Miep looked for work in order to help support her family. Through a neighbor she learned that Otto Frank needed a temporary secretary to work in his company, Opetka, which manufactured a pectin powder used in jams and jellies. During the interview, Frank brought Miep into the kitchen, gave her a recipe and said, 'Make jam!' She completed the task to his satisfaction, and the job was hers.

Miep instantly felt motherly affection toward Anne. She wrote in her book, *Anne Frank Remembered*, 'Watching Anne, I thought, now here's the kind of child I'd like to have someday.' Over the years, her feelings toward Anne intensified. 'As she left [the room],' Miep wrote, 'I noticed Anne's thin little legs encased in white ankle socks and little pumps. The socks drooped slightly around her thin ankles in a touching, comical way. A wave of tenderness rose in my chest. I suppressed a smile and the desire to reach down and pull her socks back up around her ankles.'

Later asked if she was in fear of being captured herself, Miep replied, 'Of course I felt concern, but not that much about my own safety.' Twice she went to the German police to try to buy the Franks' freedom. 'This was risky, because bribing the police could have landed me in prison,' she said.

After the arrest, Anne's diary was among the possessions she and Bep Vosjkuijl found, and it remained in Miep's desk drawer until the end of the war. 'In the first place, I did not want it to be found by the Nazis,' Miep recalled. 'After Jews were arrested, the Nazis would return to take their furniture and other belongings. The second reason was that I wanted to surprise Anne if she would return. The war was going to end. Everybody felt that the Nazis would be defeated. So I had high hopes that Anne would come back. I wanted to hear her say, 'Oh, Miep, my diary!'

On October 11, 1994, she received the Raoul Wallenberg Award for bravery and for her contributions to the education of children about the Holocaust. The ceremony took place at the University of Michigan, where Wallenberg had been a student during the 1930s. Miep is the fifth recipient of the award. In her acceptance speech she urged, 'We should tell our children that most victims of poverty and discrimination are innocent. Therefore, we should help them.' She concluded, 'If help might fail, it is better to try than to do nothing.'⁷

In a 1997 interview, Miep fielded some questions from students:

Weren't you terribly frightened during the time you hid Anne Frank? Wouldn't it be easier for you just to live your life as a German without this burden? What could you tell us today about caring for others instead of just thinking of ourselves?

Of course, initially life is more comfortable if you stay out. You might silence your concern about injustice or cruel things happening to other people by telling yourself that those people should solve their problems themselves. It is a very selfish attitude, but, as I said, safe in the beginning. But, I could foresee that there would come a day that my conscience would start to bother me. This would be a kind of burden. Just like

many people, all over the world, are unhappy and restless today because they did not help the Jews during the Holocaust. Think for instance of the ships with Jews that tried to enter the U.S. and were sent back! So, my conclusion is that really thinking of yourself is often better served by making some sacrifices today than having a miserable life later, feeling remorse about the help you failed to give to those who needed you. By the way, I am born Austrian, not German.⁸

The Frank family had been planning to go into hiding in the annex above Otto's warehouse for some time, but when Anne's older sister Margot received a work call up for her to report to Germany, this plan was put into action right away, much ahead of schedule. Hermann van Pels informed Miep and Jan that the wheels were now in motion on July 5, 1942. Miep and Jan went to the Frank's apartment on the Merwedeplein to move as much of their belongings to the annex as possible, hiding much of it underneath their own clothing, which was very uncomfortable during the hot and humid Amsterdam summer. The following day, July 6, Miep and Margot rode their bicycles from the apartment to the annex while wearing many layers of clothing underneath their own.

Fritz Pfeffer was Miep's dentist, and he became the 8th resident of the secret annex when the 7 others decided to accept yet another Jew who was in danger, so Miep was also instrumental in *his* survival for an additional two years as well. There is a touching moment in Jon Blair's Academy Award winning documentary film *Anne Frank Remembered* when Pfeffer's son Peter meets Miep for the first time in the mid-1990's and with tears in his eyes, thanks her for what she had done. He grasps both of her hands and says, "Two words—many thanks."⁹ In addition to her many responsibilities at Opekta as well as ensuring the nutrition and basic comfort of those in hiding, Miep also met at times with Pfeffer's Christian girlfriend Charlotte Kaletta "to exchange letters and packages with her."¹⁰

Kuno Lodewijk van der Horst:

Despite all they had to do and the danger involved, Miep and her husband Jan (who was active in a clandestine resistance ring himself) also hid a college student, Kuno Lodewijk van der Horst in yet another location, unbeknownst to the residents of the annex.¹¹

Anne Frank biographer Melissa Müller offers the following information concerning Kuno, who wasn't always as cooperative about staying put as the others were:

Kuno, a college student at the time, had gone into hiding to avoid conscription into labor service in Germany. But . . . he tolerated confinement in his room poorly and had to be called to his senses when he left his hiding place without telling anyone, usually to pursue his passion for horse races. In his case . . . it was not only his own safety that was at stake but that of his helpers and of all the other people dependent on their reliability.¹²

Anne Frank House historian Dr. Gertjan Broek states, “His father, Hendrick van der Horst, was managing director of Lemet-Chromium N.V. (Ltd.), a large chrome plating firm. His mother, Catharina Rambonnet was board member of the company.”¹³

As Miep and Jan did not tell anyone in the annex that they were also hiding Kuno along with the Gies’ landlady, a Mrs. Stoppelman, Anne does not mention him at all in her Diary. As a result, Kuno has not received much attention over the years, but his is an important story as well, as it underscores and reinforces exactly how much Miep and Jan took on, and the danger they placed themselves in so they could help others.

Melissa Müller helps tie up some loose ends concerning Kuno’s story:

Kuno . . . was still living with Jan and Miep Gies when the residents of the secret annex were arrested. Jan and Miep immediately urged him to find another hiding place. Their apartment in the Hunzestraat had become too dangerous for him. From then on, Kuno stayed in hiding—undisturbed—in Hilversum.

After the liberation of Holland, he moved to the United States, married his young love Henny, and joined his father’s business. In 1935, Hendrik van der Horst had developed a chrome plating process that radically increased the durability of motors and other machinery. He was on a business trip in America when the United States entered the war. Returning to Hilversum was no longer an option for him, and he founded the business that still exists today under the name United van der Horst, Ltd.

After the war, Kuno van der Horst maintained some contact with Miep Gies, and Otto Frank. He died in Dallas, Texas on May 17, 1968, at the age of forty-eight.¹⁴

The Arrest:

On August 4, 1944 the occupants of the annex were discovered by police and arrested, and many people believe this was due to a betrayal by a person or persons unknown. An alternate theory is now more fully supported with additional new details published in 2016 by Anne Frank House and Museum historian Gertjan Broek. His paper points toward the possibility that the occupants might have been discovered in their hiding place as the result of a police investigation into a food coupon counterfeiting operation that may have been connected in some way to the downstairs warehouse.¹⁵ As those in hiding were being taken away, the two male helpers, Kugler and Kleiman, were arrested for helping to hide Jews and served some time in a prison camp while the women, Miep and Bep, were left behind.

While ransacking the annex in search of anything of value, SS Staff Sergeant Karl Silberbauer emptied the contents of Otto’s briefcase onto the floor, and out tumbled Anne Frank’s diary, comprised of the original autograph book she began writing in, along with the loose sheets of colored paper and account books that she continued to write on after she quickly ran out of space in the original book. Assuming these were worthless, Silberbauer left the premises, with Anne’s literary masterpiece lying on the floor. Miep immediately recognized that these were in fact Anne’s writings, and with help from Bep, the books and papers were

scooped up and placed in Miep's office desk drawer for safekeeping in the hope that they could be returned to Anne upon her return. Miep deliberately left the drawer unlocked, aware that if the police returned and found a locked desk drawer, they would assume something of value was inside and probably break it open:

In the Franks' room the cupboard where the valuables were kept was empty, drawers had been wrenched open, and the floor was lost under mounds of books and papers. Miep recalls, 'Everything was in utter confusion . . . I came across Anne Frank's diary on the floor . . . together with an account book with notes by Anne and a number of loose sheets of copy paper, which were also covered with Anne's handwriting.' She pointed out the diary to Bep, who picked it up.¹⁶

The next day, Miep attempted unsuccessfully to convince the police to release the 8 prisoners, which was very risky on her part. She continued to help run Opekta and held onto Anne's diary. The only one of the 8 people who were in hiding in the annex to survive the camps was Otto Frank. Miep was so concerned about honoring Anne's privacy that she never read the Diary until after Otto returned to Amsterdam and learned of the fate of his two daughters. On June 3, 1945 Otto went to Miep with a document which stated that Anne and Margot had perished in the Bergen-Belsen camp. Miep then "gathered up the volumes of the diary" and presented them to him with the words, "Here is the legacy of your daughter, Anna."¹⁷ Even after she knew that Anne had perished, Miep was still reluctant to read the diary, and Otto had to use his considerable powers of persuasion in order to convince her to do so.

Later years:

Otto Frank, who had once been a man of means, who owned a business and had a loving family, returned from the war a shattered man. He had lost a great deal of weight due to his mistreatment at Auschwitz, had all his possessions taken from him by the Nazis, and he had lost his entire family as well as many of his friends. Miep and Jan once again opened up their hearts and their home to him, and Otto lived with them for 7 years following his liberation.

Miep gave birth to her and Jan's only son, Paul Gies, in 1950. She decided that point to leave her job at Opekta in order to devote all her time to caring for her family and for Otto, who at that point was still living with them.

Otto eventually rebuilt his life. He had Anne's Diary published in recognition of her stated dream of someday becoming a writer, and in order to send a message of tolerance to the world. Later on he remarried and moved to Switzerland, but he never forgot the kindness of the helpers. Miep maintained close contact with Otto, often corresponding with him about the Pulitzer Prize winning Broadway play and the film that were based on Anne's Diary, the many books and articles that were published about it, as well as other miscellaneous personal matters.¹⁸

After the war, the helpers all agreed to be quiet about their actions. They believed that Otto should be the rightful ambassador to bring Anne's message to the world, which he did with tireless passion. Otto's efforts helped make Anne Frank a world famous writer, and *Diary of a Young Girl* has been translated into 67 languages and at this writing has sold over 30 million copies, second only to The Holy Bible. Upon his passing in 1980 at age 91, Miep stepped up and embraced this role. Being in the spotlight did not come easy to Miep at first. She was always a bit embarrassed about her ability to speak English—despite her facility with

English not being as limited as she thought it was—but keeping Anne's legacy alive was deeply important to her and she grew to enjoy this aspect of her life. However, Miep's added visibility did lead to some "trouble" between Miep and Bep Voskuil who remained quiet about her activities for the rest of her life.¹⁹ Late in her life Miep penned a memoir with Alison Leslie Gold titled *Anne Frank Remembered: The Story of the Woman Who Helped Hide the Frank Family* and while it is certainly a valuable resource containing Miep's first-hand accounts of many of the crucial events that took place, it is important to keep in mind that it contains some factual inaccuracies, as by this time Miep was 90 years old and "her memory was failing."²⁰

Every year on August 4, the date of the arrest of the inhabitants of the secret annex, Miep and Jan would draw their curtains closed and take their telephone off the hook in remembrance of the loss of those 7 individuals who were so dear to their hearts. Still feeling this pain, Miep spoke about it many years later:

After the war, yes, then I got more time to think about things. Jan and I, after all, faced the problem that we had lost seven people. And that is something you can't put aside. It kept coming back. And then I said, 'Jan, look, in those dark times, in the war, we did not stand aside but took action to help people at the stake of our own lives.' Indeed—we could not do more. That is a comfort, although sometimes you can feel defiant. It's the *why*. But well, that just doesn't work.²¹

After Jan's death, Miep moved closer to where their son Paul lived. She continued to remain active with the Anne Frank House until her passing on January 11, 2010 at the age of 100.

¹ Anne Frank House. www.annefrank.org

² *Anne Frank in the Secret Annex: Who Was Who?* Anne Frank House, 3rd edition, 2015, p. 136.

³ Anne Frank House. 2009, November 5. *Unique film of a young Miep Gies*. Retrieved from www.youtube.com/watch?v=kTmJtKkyQtU.

⁴ *Anne Frank in the Secret Annex: Who Was Who?* Anne Frank House, 3rd edition, 2015, p. 136.

⁵ Miep Gies: Her Own Story
www.miepgies.nl/en/biography/helping%20the%20hidiers%20in%20the%20secret%20annex/

⁶ Frank, Anne. *The Diary of Anne Frank: The Revised Critical Edition*. Netherlands Institute for War Documentation, 2003, p. 386.

⁷ Gray, Rebecca. "Austrian-Born 'Miep' Gies Was Instrumental in Bringing the Diary of Anne Frank to the Attention of the World." *World War II*, vol. 13, no. 5, Jan. 1999, p. 18.

⁸ Scholastic Teacher's Activity Guide: Anne Frank. *Scholastic Magazine*.
teacher.scholastic.com/frank/tscripts/miep.htm

- ²Blair, J. (Director). (1995). *Anne Frank Remembered* [Motion picture on DVD]. USA: Sony Pictures Classics.
- ¹⁰*Anne Frank in the Secret Annexe: Who Was Who?* Anne Frank House, 3rd edition, 2015, p. 144.
- ¹¹ Ibid, p. 145.
- ¹² Müller, Melissa. *Anne Frank: The Biography*. Picador, 2013. P. 285.
- ¹³ Broek, G., Ph.D. (2017, July). “Secret Annex Helpers: Kuno Lodewijk van der Horst” [E-mail to V. N. Noriega].
- ¹⁴ Müller, Melissa. *Anne Frank: The Biography*. Picador, 2013. p. 268.
- ¹⁵ Broek, Gertjan, Ph.D. “An Investigative Report on the Betrayal and Arrest of the Inhabitants of the Secret Annex.” Anne Frank House Collections Department/Knowledge Centre, October, 2016.
- ¹⁶ Lee, Carol Ann. *Roses from the Earth: The Biography of Anne Frank*. Viking, 1999, p. 150.
- ¹⁷ Anne Frank House. 2009, September 18. *Miep Gies tells about giving the diary of Anne Frank to her father*. Retrieved from www.youtube.com/watch?v=v-Z320oIJmM.
- ¹⁸ *Anne Frank in the Secret Annexe: Who Was Who?* Anne Frank House, 3rd edition, 2015, p. 145.
- ¹⁹ Gertjan Broek, Ph.D. Personal Interview, Anne Frank House and Museum, Amsterdam, NL, August, 2016.
- ²⁰ Ibid.
- ²¹ Anne Frank House. 2010, January 12. *Miep Gies talks about why she helped*. Retrieved from www.youtube.com/watch?v=jybUICycSKY

Johannes Kleiman



Photo: Wikimedia Commons

Vital Statistics:

Nickname: Jo

His pseudonym in early editions of Anne Frank's Diary is Simon Koophuis

Born: August 17, 1896 in Koog aan de Zaan, the Netherlands

Died: January 28, 1959 in Amsterdam, the Netherlands

Wife: Johanna Reuman, July 12, 1923

Daughter: Johanna Kleimann, 1927 ¹

Additional Details:

Kleimann's family was Dutch Reformed, but they were not particularly religious. After Kleiman's daughter Johanna was born, the family was known to intimates as Jo, Jo, and Jo. His favorite pastimes included walking and bicycling.²

In her memoir, Miep Gies recalled that Kleiman was a ". . . frail-looking, pale-faced man with a delicate look."³

- He developed gastric bleeding which caused him to be sick for the predominant amount of time the Franks were in hiding.
- Jo took over as the official Director of Opekta in 1941 due to the Nazi occupation of Holland, and the fact that Jews no longer being allowed to own their own businesses, however, Otto Frank continued to still secretly be the Director.⁴
- It was Jo's idea that the annex behind Opekta would be an ideal place for hiding.⁵
- Jo's brother Willy owned a truck and they helped transport furniture to the annex.⁶
- Jo and Victor Kugler focused on the safety and financial aspects of keeping the 8 people hidden.
- Jo also brought books for them and sometimes stopped by on the weekends with his wife
- Miep described Jo as "calm, and the sort of person who inspires trust."⁷
- Anne wrote, "As you know, we are all very fond of him, he is always cheerful and amazingly brave, although he is never well, has a lot of pain, and is not allowed to eat much or do much walking. 'When Mr. Kleiman enters, the sun begins to shine!' Mummy said only recently, and she is quite right."⁸
- Opekta had been renting the property and at one point the building was sold to a new owner. When he showed up unannounced to inspect the premises, Jo had to claim that he had forgotten the key to the door that led up to the annex. This was a close call that likely averted an early capture of the 8 people in hiding.⁹
- Kleiman made this comment to Otto Frank when they were being held at the police station together immediately after the arrest, when Otto expressed feelings of distress for having the helpers involved in their hiding: "Don't give it another thought. It was up to me, and I wouldn't have done any differently"¹⁰
- After the war was over, Kleiman said, "The reason I offered my help in looking after Otto Frank and his family during the time they were in hiding was because I had come to know him as a very decent and helpful person, qualities for which he is held in the highest esteem."¹¹
- Kleiman always remained quiet about his role as a helper, as his daughter still is.¹²
- After the war Jo became very involved in helping Otto get Anne's Diary published and in the establishment of the secret annex as a museum. He was a member of the Board of Directors of the Anne Frank House and Museum, and he even led tours for visitors from time to time.¹³
- Kleiman would regularly bring Anne books to read. She wrote in her diary, "Mr. Kleiman brings a few special books for me every other week. I'm thrilled with the *Joop ter Heul* series. I've enjoyed the whole of Cissy van Marxveldt very much, and I've read "een Zomerzothoid" 4 times and I still laugh about some of the ludicrous situations that arise."¹⁴

The last word will go to fellow helper Victor Kugler, in a letter he wrote to Otto Frank on March 3, 1959 upon learning of Kleiman's death:

"One rarely meets such an honorable man."¹⁵

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- ¹ Anne Frank House. www.annefrank.org/en/Anne-Frank/All-people/Jo-Kleiman/
- ² *Anne Frank in the Secret Annexe: Who Was Who?* Anne Frank House, 3rd edition, 2015, p. 106.
- ³ Gies, Miep and Alison Leslie Gold. *Anne Frank Remembered*. Simon & Schuster, 2009, p. 55.
- ⁴ Anne Frank House. www.annefrank.org/en/Anne-Frank/All-people/Jo-Kleiman/
- ⁵ *Anne Frank in the Secret Annexe: Who Was Who?* Anne Frank House, 3rd edition, 2015, p. 106.
- ⁶ *Ibid*, p. 113.
- ⁷ Anne Frank House. www.annefrank.org/
- ⁸ Frank, Anne. *The Diary of Anne Frank: The Revised Critical Edition*. Netherlands Institute for War Documentation, 2003, p. 424.
- ⁹ *Anne Frank in the Secret Annex: Who Was Who?* Anne Frank House, 3rd edition, 2015, p. 113.
- ¹⁰ Schnabel, Ernst. *Anne Frank: A Portrait in Courage*. Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1958, p. 118.
- ¹¹ Anne Frank House. www.annefrank.org/en/Anne-Frank/All-people/Jo-Kleiman/
- ¹² Gertjan Broek, Ph.D. Personal interview, Anne Frank House and Museum, Amsterdam, NL, August 2016
- ¹³ *Anne Frank in the Secret Annexe: Who Was Who?* Anne Frank House, 3rd edition, 2015, p. 114.
- ¹⁴ Frank, Anne. *The Diary of Anne Frank: The Revised Critical Edition*. Netherlands Institute for War Documentation, 2003, p. 260.
- ¹⁵ *Anne Frank in the Secret Annexe: Who Was Who?* Anne Frank House, 3rd edition, 2015, p.4.

Victor Kugler



Victor Kugler near the statue of Anne Frank that stands outside the Westertoren Church in Amsterdam just around the corner from the Secret Annex, in 1975. Photo: Wikimedia Commons

Vital Statistics:

Victor Gustav Kugler

His pseudonym in the early editions of Anne's Diary is Harry Kraler

Born to a single mother: June 6, 1900 in Hohenelbe, Austria-Hungary (now the Czech Republic)

Died: December 14, 1981 in Toronto, Canada, age 81

Wife: Laura Maria Buntentbach, 1928-1952 (her death); Lucie van Langen, October 22, 1953

Children: None¹

Additional Details:

- A longtime friend of Victor's, Charles Wittenberg, described him as “. . . the man who opened the doors to shelter victims escape from the Nazi hell at a time when the world had closed its doors.”²
- He brought newspapers and magazines to the annex and described the world in the most positive way to help cheer everyone up.
- He would bring the weekly magazine “Cinema & Theater” especially for Anne.³ According to Eda Shapiro, he commented later that “I would hide it in my pocket, so that I could watch those eager questioning eyes for longer.”⁴
- Kugler and Kleiman were arrested for aiding Jews when the annex was discovered. Kugler was held in three different Dutch prison camps, and escaped during a forced march from Camp Zwolle. The march was designed to compel the prisoners to travel on foot from Wageningen in the Netherlands all the way to Germany, and after his escape he went into hiding for the rest of the war.⁵
- Kugler came up with the idea to hide the entrance to the stairway that led to the secret annex with a bookcase. He was concerned that the Nazis might search for hidden bicycles, which Jews had been ordered to turn in, and he also felt that the annex would be “better hidden from strangers.”⁶ Bep's father Johannes Voskuil constructed the bookcase.

Some new information concerning Kugler has recently come to light, due to the Anne Frank House's independent research, which they have been conducting since 2008. He was originally from the Sudetenland, in the former Czechoslovakia. Born to a single mother, he gained two half-sisters and two half-brothers after his mother married a miner. All Germans were expelled from Kugler's home town in 1945. The house where he was born still stands, located near a moat that the Nazis had built. During the summer of 2016, a commemoration in his honor was being planned in the Czech Republic, to be comprised of a week-long celebration.⁷

- When he turned seventeen he was drafted into the Austrian army to fight during World War I. He was wounded and subsequently discharged.⁸
- Otto and Victor used to chat about photography often. They both owned the earliest models of Leica cameras, a German make which were among the best available at that time. Many wonderful pictures of Anne and Margot exist today because Otto loved to take photos of them as they were growing up, before the family went into hiding. Kugler even won some prizes in photography competitions.⁹ He also enjoyed riding motorcycles and listening to classical music, as well as taking long walks and bird watching. He was slim, had dark hair and blue eyes, and was a sharp dresser.¹⁰
- According to Dr. Gertjan Broek, historian at the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam, “Kugler had built the steelworks in Utrecht. He had the option to go back [to his previous home in Austria-Hungary] or stay in the Netherlands, but the Netherlands was quiet at the time, so he elected to stay here.”¹¹ He then became associated with Otto's firm, Opekta.
- Broek goes on to point out that there was a “business aspect” to the helpers. Kugler “was a factotum initially, but [hiding the people in the annex] helped him be upwardly mobile.” As Anne Frank notes in her Diary, the people in hiding often did work for the Opekta Company, in part just to keep themselves occupied, so “there was a degree of mutuality. The business had to thrive or they would lose the building.”¹²

Finally, Gertjan Broek helps us conclude Kugler's story: “After being arrested in 1944 he was lodging for some time with the Gies & Co. sales rep in Zwolle who had also supplied food ration cards to the helpers for

the [secret annex]. In the post-war years, his wife died and his business failed. He remarried and took to Canada with his new in-laws.”¹³

He moved to Canada with his second wife Loes van Langen in 1955. He worked as an electrician and an insurance agent there, but always maintained contact with his friends in Amsterdam. In 1956 he saw the play *The Diary of Anne Frank* in New York and wrote enthusiastically to Otto about it. He and his wife lived on a modest income in Canada, and after he retired he kept active by often giving lectures on the secret annex and on Anne’s Diary.¹⁴

His sister-in-law Rita Visser said of him, “Victor was friendly to everyone.”¹⁵

Otto Frank wrote a book that was published in Dutch in 1970, titled *Echo of Anne Frank*. The dedication reads as follows:

*“For Mr. Kugler, in remembrance of everything he did for me and my family during our time in hiding. In solidarity, Otto Frank, 26 April 1970.”*¹⁶

¹ Anne Frank House. <http://www.annefrank.org/en/Anne-Frank/All-people/Victor-Kugler/>

² “Victor Kugler, 81; Hid Anne Frank.” *The New York Times*. December 17, 1981.

³ Anne Frank House. <http://www.annefrank.org/en/Subsites/Home/Enter-the-3D-house/#/house/0/hotspot/4191/shortbio/>

⁴ *Anne Frank in the Secret Annexe: Who Was Who?* Anne Frank House, 3rd edition, 2015, p. 121.

⁵ Anne Frank House. <http://www.annefrank.org/en/Anne-Frank/All-people/Victor-Kugler/>

⁶ *Anne Frank in the Secret Annexe: Who Was Who?* Anne Frank House, 3rd edition, 2015, p. 121.

⁷ Gertjan Broek, Ph.D. Personal Interview, Anne Frank House and Museum, Amsterdam, NL, August, 2016.

⁸ *Anne Frank in the Secret Annexe: Who Was Who?* Anne Frank House, 3rd edition, 2015, p. 116.

⁹ Gertjan Broek, Ph.D. Personal Interview, Anne Frank House and Museum, Amsterdam, NL, August, 2016.

¹⁰ *Anne Frank in the Secret Annexe: Who Was Who?* Anne Frank House, 3rd edition, 2015, p. 116.

¹¹ Gertjan Broek, Ph.D. Personal Interview, Anne Frank House and Museum, Amsterdam, NL, August, 2016.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Broek, G., Ph.D. (2017, July). “Secret Annex Helpers: Victor Kugler” [E-mail to V. N. Noriega].

¹⁴ *Anne Frank in the Secret Annexe: Who Was Who?* Anne Frank House, 3rd edition, 2015, p. 122.

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 4.

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 115.

Bep Voskuijl



Photo: Wikimedia Commons

Vital Statistics:

Original name: Elisabeth Voskuijl, known to her family and friends as Bep

Her pseudonym in early editions of Anne Frank's Diary was Elli Vossen

Born: July 5, 1919 in Amsterdam, the Netherlands

Died: May 6, 1983 in Amsterdam, the Netherlands

Husband: Cor van Wijk (May 15, 1946)

Children: Ton, Cor, Joop and Anne-Marie, who was named after Anne Frank¹

Additional Details:

- Bep was the oldest in a family of eight children.
- The Voskuijls were a religious Calvinist family. All eight children were baptized and attended Sunday school.

After graduating from primary school, Bep worked at several jobs, which included waitress work in a restaurant. She was ambitious to better herself, and took stenography classes in the evenings with an eye toward obtaining office work. Bep loved to go dancing, was a music enthusiast, and she also enjoyed going to the movies. At 18, Bep was employed by Otto Frank's firm Opekta and worked her way up to the position of secretary in the sales department. She shared an office with Miep Gies, who was ten years her senior. Bep and Miep would often go for walks together at lunchtime and became very close. At age 22, Bep was the youngest of the helpers and the last to be informed of the plans for the Secret Annex. Some believe that this was due to her relatively young age relative to the seriousness of the situation, and the severe penalties that were inflicted by the Nazis on those who were caught helping Jews.²

- Bep's father Johannes Voskuijl is famous for constructing the bookcase used to conceal the stairway that led up to the secret annex.
- Anne related best to Bep, who was 23 – 25 years old during the hiding, as she was the youngest of the helpers. Years later, Bep stated that Anne Frank was “like a sister” to her.³
- On March 2, 1944 Anne wrote, “Aren't the grownups idiotic and stupid? Just as if Peter, Margot, Bep and I feel the same about things, and only a mother's love, or that of a very, very good friend can help us.”⁴
- Bep would always discuss movie stars with Anne in great detail, and she also ordered correspondence courses in shorthand and Latin for the people in the Secret Annex.⁵ David Barnouw of the Netherlands Office of War Documentation, and one of the editors of *The Diary of Anne Frank: The Revised Critical Edition* writes, “Under her own name she ordered correspondence courses at Leiden Educational so [the] hiding Anne and Margot Frank and Peter van Pels could learn shorthand and Margot elementary Latin.”⁶
- Bep was in charge of the groceries with Miep: Bep obtained the milk and bread. She would also supply the people in hiding with clothes, language courses and other miscellaneous items.⁷ She left her employment at Opekta in 1947, two years after World War II ended.⁸

In an interview in the magazine *Rosita* in 1960, Bep stated the following:

Once, I spent the night in the secret annexe. To tell the truth, I was terribly scared. When I heard a branch creaking or an automobile riding along the canal I became frightened. I was grateful when the morning arrived and I could return to working. It's only now that I understand what the Frank family went through, and the tension they must have had to live under.⁹

Bep was a rather shy and quiet individual: “. . . I'm not what you would call a woman of the world,” she once wrote to Otto Frank.¹⁰ Due in part to Bep's retiring nature, there was “some trouble with Miep” after Otto

Frank's death in 1980. There had been an understanding between all of the helpers to keep quiet about what they had done. It was agreed that Otto would be the ambassador, bringing his daughter Anne's Diary and a plea against prejudice to the world. After Otto's passing however, Miep stepped up, tentatively at first, but eventually fully embracing her role as a famous helper. This created some friction in the relationships between Miep and the other helpers, but particularly with Bep.¹¹

According to Bep's son Cor van Wijk, his mother "... had a very sweet personality ... very generous ... and [was] somewhat introverted."¹²

Over the years there has been some suspicion that Bep's sister Nelly, a Nazi sympathizer and collaborator, was responsible for reporting to the police that the helpers were hiding the Franks and the others in the secret annex, if in fact there was a betrayal at all. Bep's son Cor co-authored a book published in Dutch titled *Bep Voskuijl, Silence No More* that supported this theory, in which he implicates his own aunt.¹³ Recent research into the arrest published in 2016 by historians at the Anne Frank House and Museum gives this theory little credence, however.¹⁴

In her later years Bep was experiencing monetary difficulties, and Otto Frank provided her with financial assistance as one more way of expressing his gratitude for all she had done for his family.¹⁵

¹ Anne Frank House. www.annefrank.org/en/Anne-Frank/All-people/Bep-Voskuijl/

² *Anne Frank in the Secret Annexe: Who Was Who?* Anne Frank House, 3rd edition, 2015, p. 124.

³ Schnabel, Ernst. *Anne Frank: A Portrait in Courage*. Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1958, np.

⁴ Frank, Anne. *The Diary of Anne Frank: The Revised Critical Edition*. Netherlands Institute for War Documentation, 2003, p. 527.

⁵ Anne Frank House. www.annefrank.org/en/Subsites/Home/Enter-the-3D-house/#/house/0/hotspot/3306/shortbio/

⁶ Barnouw, David. *Digitale Vrouwenlexicon van Nederland*. resources.huygens.knaw.nl/vrouwenlexicon/lemmata/data/Voskuijl

⁷ Miep Gies: Her Own Story www.miepgies.nl/en/biography/helping%20the%20hidiers%20in%20the%20secret%20annex/

⁸ Anne Frank House. www.annefrank.org/en/Anne-Frank/All-people/Bep-Voskuijl/

⁹ Anne Frank Guide. www.annefrankguide.net/en-GB/bronnenbank.asp?aid=10850

¹⁰ Letter from Bep Voskuijl to Otto Frank, September 4, 1957, *Anne Frank in the Secret Annexe: Who Was Who?* p. 123.

¹¹ Gertjan Broek, Ph.D. Personal Interview, Anne Frank House and Museum, Amsterdam, NL, August, 2016.

¹² Cor van Wijk. Interview with Anne Frank House, 2007. *Anne Frank in the Secret Annexe: Who Was Who?* p. 4.

¹³ Bacchi, Umberto. "Anne Frank: Book Identifies Betrayer as Helper's Sister and Gestapo Informer Nelly Voskuijl." *International Business Times*, April 9, 2015.

¹⁴ Broek, Gertjan, Ph.D. "An Investigative Report on the Betrayal and Arrest of the Inhabitants of the Secret Annex." Anne Frank House Collections Department/Knowledge Centre, October, 2016.

¹⁵ Gertjan Broek, Ph.D. Personal Interview, Anne Frank House and Museum, Amsterdam, NL, August, 2016.

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Anne Frank House, 263 Prinsengracht, Amsterdam, NL. Photo by the author

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