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A Long-Awaited Friend

June 12, 1942, was the last “normal” birthday Anne Frank would ever celebrate. But she had no inkling of that when she woke up at 6 a.m. that day in the family apartment in Amsterdam, the largest city in the Netherlands.

Anne knew she’d get in trouble if she woke her parents that early. So she stayed in her room. By 6:45 a.m., however, she couldn’t stand it. She went into the dining room and played with her beloved cat, Moortje. A little past 7:00, she roused her parents, Edith and Otto, so they could join her as she opened her presents in the living room.

What a lovely sight awaited her! For her 13th birthday, the table was heaped with gifts.

Tucked among the many gifts were a bouquet of roses, some peonies and a potted plant. What caught Anne's eye, however, was a red, white, and green checkered autograph book. She had seen it earlier in the week when she was shopping with her father and was instantly drawn to it. She thought it would make the perfect diary. Her father saw how it made her eyes light up, and decided to buy it for her birthday.

Anne had high hopes for the little book. As she would later write, it was that "long-awaited friend" in whom she could confide her innermost secrets. She even gave it a name: Kitty. Although Anne had lots of friends, she didn't consider any of them trustworthy enough to be a true confidante. That job would fall to Kitty. "I hope I will be able to confide

everything to you, as I have never been able to confide in anyone, and I hope you will be a great source of comfort and support,” Anne wrote to her diary, in her first entry on June 12, 1942.

But Anne could never have imagined how dramatically her life would soon change and how important Kitty would become—to her and, eventually, to the whole world.

Anne’s birthday celebration stretched from Friday morning to late Sunday afternoon. At school, as a birthday honor, she got to pick the game her classmates would play in gym. She chose volleyball. After school, her classmates Hanneli and Jacqueline walked her home. Another friend, Sanne, was already there. They gave her more presents. Then on Sunday, Anne’s parents hosted a birthday party for her, which was attended by her older sister, Margot, other relatives, and even

more friends. Her parents even showed a movie that night, which featured the popular dog Rin Tin Tin.

That weekend, life seemed especially good.

But that's not to say all was perfect in Anne's world. Even on good days, there was a dark cloud looming. That's because Anne and her family were Jewish. They lived during a time in history when European Jews were persecuted and millions were killed, simply for the "crime" of being born Jewish. The persecution had begun in Germany, under the leadership of Adolf Hitler, head of the Nazi Party. Hitler blamed the Jews and the Communists for many of Germany's problems. When he became Chancellor (President) in January 1933, he began enacting a series of laws that made life miserable for the Jews and drastically limited their freedom.

At the time, Anne and her family lived

in Frankfurt, Germany. But her parents soon decided that Germany was no longer safe so they made plans to move across the border to Amsterdam, in the Netherlands. Otto moved first in October 1933, and in Amsterdam he founded a business, which made a thickening agent for jelly. By early 1934, his wife and daughters had joined him.

They were safe there for a time. But, in 1940, when Anne was nearly 11 and Margot 14, Nazi Germany, under Hitler, invaded and quickly occupied the Netherlands. And that is when the trouble started for the Jews in her new homeland.

As difficult as it was to live under German rule once again, Anne always did her best to enjoy life. She was a very lively girl—sometimes *too* lively! In school, her talkativeness so annoyed a math teacher that he called her “Mistress

Chatterback.” But she quickly won him over with a series of funny essays she wrote as punishment for talking so much.

Outside of school, Anne enjoyed the company of her girlfriends and admiring glances from the boys. One boy who liked Anne a lot was Helmuth “Hello” Silberberg. He was 16, and the cousin of one of Anne’s friends. Like the Frank family, the Silberbergs had also escaped to Amsterdam from Germany. Hello liked to keep Anne laughing as he walked her home from school. He flattered her, telling her she was a “pep tonic.” That’s how full of life Anne was.

A few weeks after Anne turned 13, Hello came to meet Anne’s parents for the first time. The Franks put out tea and dessert for the evening visit. Hello was on his best behavior. His good looks and polished manners impressed Anne’s mother. But neither Anne nor Hello could stand sitting still and making small

talk with her parents for very long. So they politely excused themselves and went out for a stroll.

They must have had lots to talk about because they soon lost track of time. Anne had promised to be back by 8 p.m. This wasn't really a matter of choice because the Nazis had just set a strict curfew for the Jews of Amsterdam. They were forbidden to be outside between 8 p.m. and 6 a.m. They couldn't even be seen on their balconies or in their gardens during those hours.

Hello delivered Anne to her door at 8:10 p.m.

Anne's father was furious. He knew that being on the street past 8 p.m. could get his daughter arrested—or worse. Otto made Anne promise to be home by ten minutes to eight the next time Hello took her out. She readily agreed.