

– Prologue –

Not long ago a dear friend died, and shortly after that an aged aunt. So began a series of deaths. I became unmoored, I was being left behind in a much altered world. These losses were happening against a backdrop of various events, large and small, faraway and near, to be remembered, negotiated, endured. (Even my own identity was erased at times, as a result of spending time with my aunt who was suffering from dementia.) In the midst of the reckoning came unexpected sources of strength, accommodation, even joy.

These were not my first experiences of loss. Several decades before, I had lost most of myself. I was a woman seriously adrift, before I washed up on Anne Frank's shore on what, coincidentally, would have been Anne's birthday – a cloudy June 12th in flower-filled Amsterdam. A life-altering encounter took place on that day with an aging couple, Miep and Jan Gies, who had risked their lives to protect Anne Frank and her family. This venerable couple had never been willing to step out of the shadows into the spotlight. I subsequently convinced them to do so, and the result became the book *Anne Frank Remembered* that would be translated far and wide.

Having begun to peer into the murk of lost, partial, and often painful memory with Miep and Jan, I began collecting other untold or little-known stories, many but not all from World War II and the Shoah, at a time when the fact that witnesses were nearing their life's end seemed to endanger these stories with forgetfulness. More fateful meetings ensued – with Claude Boule, Leo Bretholz, Zahava Bromberg, Dan Fante, Solly Ganor, Hannah Goslar, Marianne Christine Ihlen, Iakovos Kambanellis, Jane Mayhall, Padric McGarry, Irena Vrkljan Meyer-Wehlack and Benno Meyer-Wehlack, Jules Schelvis, Emilie Schindler, Yukiko Sugihara, Simon Wiesenthal, among others – resulting in further books, and a personal calling that continues to this day.

During these subsequent excavations, I always kept my personal life apart from my writing. Until today.

What I have ventured to do now is to gather fragments, materials, and letters to the living and the dead; letters to and from family, friends, friends of friends, strangers, associates, a translator, an editor, a lover. (I have occasionally used pseudonyms in order to protect an individual's privacy.) All these bits and pieces spilled through my life and heart within the space of a few years.

Yesterday, I came across the magnifying glass that allows me to peer into my micrographically reduced *Oxford English Dictionary*. As I have been moving between countries recently, like I did when I was

younger (if for less desperate reasons now), and as I've been wondering in what form to write to the dead, the first word I chose to look up was 'translate'. I was surprised to find, as its first definition: 'To bear, convey, or remove from one person, place or condition to another; to transfer, transport . . . to remove the dead body or remains of a saint, or, by extension, a hero or great man, from one place to another.' Although I'm not sure I would recognize a saint if I met one (I've met a few whom I consider heroes), and though I have been far too desultory in my learning of languages, in what I have been gathering here, it seems I too have been translating.

Once, around the time when Miep and Jan and I were at work on what became our book, I asked Jan, who was almost ninety years old at the time, to comment on an event in the news. Jan shrugged and made a sweeping gesture with his arm that encompassed his living room and his then eighty-year-old wife Miep who was seated on the couch. 'This is my world,' he told me. 'That other is not my world any more.'

Though I'm much younger than he was at the time, what he meant is beginning to dawn on me.