



## Anne Frank, Emmett Till and visiting my mom's Nazi-era home

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by ROGER GRUNWALD

I recently returned from a trip to Amsterdam where I was performing in “Anne & Emmett” by American playwright Janet Langhart Cohen. The drama, in which I portrayed Anne Frank’s father, Otto, imagines a conversation between Anne and Emmett Till, who each fell victim to murderous brutality born of hatred.

Emmett was a black 14-year-old who was lynched in Mississippi in 1955, and Anne was 15 when she was murdered in Bergen-Belsen 10 years earlier.

middle-class section of the city. A friendly, English-speaking man answered the door, invited me inside and showed me around his home.

He explained that very little had changed since the 1940s, which was important to me because his home was the very place where my mother and her family had once lived. He allowed me to walk the stairs as she must have done, touch the walls that she must have touched and look out the window as she may

grandfather and my other aunt (my mom’s younger sister) were deported to Sobibor, where they were murdered within hours of their arrival. (My grandmother, my mother’s mom, had died from breast cancer in 1940, prior to the Nazi invasion.)

In welcoming my intrusion, the resident of Raphaelstraat 22 gave me a great gift.

After spending the afternoon in my mother’s wartime home, I returned to the theater for that evening’s show ... but my performance that night was different. It was different because that night I was not just Roger Grunwald playing a part. I was Otto Frank. I was my mother. I was my aunt. I was my mother’s younger sister and my mother’s father.

The tears that flowed from my eyes on that stage — the pain, the anger and the despair of Otto Frank ... I could feel all of them standing with me in that theater, not far from where my family was taken on that night in 1943.

I’ll never forget that day and that evening. After the performance, the executive director of the Anne Frank House told me that he’d been profoundly moved. I told him I was, as well, and shared with him what I had done that day.

The next morning I flew back to the U.S. thinking about my mother, my family and the unborn millions that the world would never know.

Back in the U.S., while waiting for my connecting flight to San Francisco, I watched a news program on a TV monitor at the boarding gate. A couple of pundits were discussing a recent Claims Conference study that found that 66 percent of millennials in the U.S. have never heard of the place where they took my mother; the name Auschwitz means nothing to them.

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In the late 1930s, my mother and her family, like Anne’s family, fled from Germany to Holland after being refused entry to the United States.

After the German invasion and Dutch capitulation in May 1940, it was just a matter of time before my mother’s family, as well as most every other Jew in Amsterdam — not to mention the rest of Holland — was rounded up and deported to the east ... to Nazi concentration camps and death camps built in Poland.

While I was in Amsterdam, I did something few tourists get to do: I visited the scene of a crime.

After contacting the resident in advance, I rang the bell at a rather nondescript building in a

have done in early 1943, wondering if that was going to be her last night with her family.

We concluded the tour in the dining room where, 75 years before, on the night of March 10, 1943, my mother and her family were eating dinner when the Nazis came to arrest them. They were first taken to the Hollandsche Schouwburg (an Amsterdam theater the Nazis reclassified as a Jewish theater and used as the main holding and embarkation point for Jews being sent to the camps).

Along with hundreds of other captured Jews, they were held there for several days with no food or water, in horrendous conditions — and then deported. My mom was sent to Auschwitz, my aunt to Bergen-Belsen. My