

## **The betrayal of Anne Frank: A refutation**

**Mirjam de Gorter: My view and experiences as granddaughter of Arnold van den Bergh**

**Amsterdam, March 22, 2022**

First of all, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the authors of the report just presented for their expert and professional work. It is thanks to them that I am able to tell my story here today. I did not want to go public in the media until knowledgeable scholars had reviewed the book. Now this important and sensitive piece of wartime history is being done justice on both scientific and historical grounds. This creates room for open discussion based on facts and arguments.

I therefore wholeheartedly endorse this refutation of the book, which is meticulous, nuanced and above all giving truthful facts and context.

This case is not about me, but about the whole context of the story in which, out of the blue, my grandfather Arnold van den Bergh has been portrayed worldwide as a Jewish scapegoat. Moreover, Anne Frank's international prominence as a symbol of the Holocaust is exploited in a particularly dishonest way.

Before I go any further into how I got involved in regard to this book, and the impact it has had on me, I want to emphasize the following four points:

Firstly, Rosemary Sullivan, the author of the book, along with the self-appointed "Cold Case Team" of Vince Pankoke, Thijs Bayens and Pieter van Twisk come out with their own formulation of what I allegedly said.

- I never said I agreed with their conclusions.
- I never said that my grandfather had to save his family and would have committed treason for that reason.
- I never said that I would have sympathized with that; after all, he did not engage in that betrayal.

Secondly, I strongly reject the theory in the book that my grandfather probably was the betrayer of Anne Frank and, additionally, of many other people.

Thirdly, the authors make a wrong turn at the end of the book<sup>1</sup>: that is when my grandfather is depicted as the traitor, now with 100% certainty. Moreover, they attach a moral judgment to their conclusion: my grandfather's so-called choices are set off against those of Otto Frank. In my opinion this is a profoundly immoral way of thinking.

Fourthly, in chapter 40 on the granddaughter, the interviews I participated in during the preliminary investigation are exploited as an attribute in the accusation against my grandfather. In the following chapters, that image is reinforced. I therefore strongly reject the way my family and I have been portrayed in the book.

At this point, I would like to discuss my interactions with the Team. In March 2018, Thijs Bayens requested to talk with me on what I know about my family during the war years. In an email dated March 2 he tells me that he currently is researching the circumstances of going into hiding in the Gooi area particularly. The following is a quote from this email:

"As you can see on our website, a selected group of very reputable scholars is involved in this research on the betrayal of Anne Frank. We are working in good faith with the Anne Frank House, the NIOD (Institute for War, Holocaust, and Genocide Studies) and the National Archives, among others.

Respect for the people involved in the research and the discovery of the truth are of paramount importance."

On March 6 I replied to his email:

"I had to think about your question. (...) One's family history is a very intimate perception. Therefore, I clearly want to know where the information will end up. (...) The information I may have needs to be checked carefully for accuracy."

Thijs wrote back on March 8 saying that it is very wise for me to be careful about providing information. I quote:

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<sup>1</sup> Pages 283-284 (English paperback).

"One should not do that carelessly. I can assure you that your information will be handled with discretion within this investigation. And, of course, we always check everything thoroughly."

The conversation took place on March 15, now 4 years ago. I was open to contributing to authentic research on the history of war. As best as I could, I recounted what I knew at the time. I was very young when my family talked about the war; many details, such as a timeline, were missing. Although the war always was present at home, there was very little talk about it.

In February 2019, I had a conversation with Vince Pankoke and Brendan Rook.

Vince was very interested in whether my grandfather had been pressured or interrogated. This never was discussed in the family.

Finally, he showed me that anonymous note naming my grandfather as the traitor. That was a very shocking moment. I thought it to be inconceivable and I never had heard of it before.

My first thought was that my grandfather had been framed through this anonymous note. I wondered where it came from. There was no answer to that question. Vince was very much in search of retrieving more information from my memory.

I was surprised that Vince paid so much attention to the note. That was very disturbing to me. I asked for more details, but I did not get them. After that, of course, it gave me many a sleepless night.

Following, we started searching for information about my grandfather ourselves. We found books and reports. We visited the National Archives. Furthermore, the internet proved to be a rich source of information.

We found many relevant details adding to what was known in our family about my grandparents.

Arnold's actions during the war - going into hiding when the threat of arrest and deportation was imminent - revealed him, as told in our family's stories, to be a personality for whom betrayal absolutely was out of the question.

We realized that my grandfather would appear in the book, but certainly did not expect him to be presented as a traitor.

Thijs requested a second conversation with me. In that meeting in the Spring of 2019, I emphatically brought to his attention two recent books with passages about, amongst others, Arnold's hiding<sup>2</sup>.

At my request, there was another conversation with Vince in the early summer of 2019. Among other things we talked about my grandfather's hiding in Laren again. Vince did not seem to think it was important. In his theory Arnold walked through Amsterdam in complete freedom from the beginning of 1944. He had no proof of that, for that matter. Vince would not say anything about the development of the investigation. He only said that there was a whole list of possible "suspected traitors" and that they ruled out the theory that the discovery of the people hiding in the Secret Annex happened by chance.

In the summer of 2020, Thijs called: Rosemary Sullivan is going to write a book about de cold case study. Since I would be mentioned in the book, he advised me to use a pseudonym. Therefore, I provided a pseudonym. I asked about the contents of the forthcoming book. He told me that he was not able to provide any information.

It was not until the evening of Friday, January 14 this year, just before the media campaign began on January 17, that Vince called me. He told us that, based on the anonymous note, the book presented my grandfather as the traitor, with 85% to 87% certainty. At the same time, he added, he sympathized with Arnold: he had committed the betrayal to save his own family. Anyone would have done that. Apparently the degree of certainty had reached a full 100% now.

Besides, if it turned out not to be true after all - which he could not imagine - the book would be revised.

What can one say in response to this??

How can anyone take the copy of that anonymous note so seriously?

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<sup>2</sup> Raymund Schütz, *Kille mist, het Nederlandse notariaat en de erfenis van de oorlog*, Boom, Amsterdam, 2016; Petra van den Boomgaard, *Voor de nazi's geen Jood, Hoe ruim 2500 Joden door ontduiking van rassenvoorschriften aan de deportaties zijn ontkomen*, Uitgeverij Verbum, z.p., 2019.

How can one portray my grandfather as a traitor and, what's more, with such an absurd 87% certainty?

There was absolutely no need for my grandfather to save his family in the summer of 1944, as he, my grandmother, my aunts and my mother had already gone into hiding much earlier.

I was too stunned to respond.

How could anyone write a book whose final conclusion is so demonstrably false.

Over the weekend I got to see the book for the first time, the digital version only, including the chapter about me.

When I asked why I had to hear of this so very late, the team told me that the publisher HarperCollins had forbidden them to notify the granddaughter of this sooner.

When I asked for more detailed evidence, they invited me to look at the material at the team's office at a later stage.

The team informed me that a worldwide media campaign would begin on January 17 and that the book subsequently would be published in 23 languages.

I also received a sample text for a press statement for the Dutch and international media. I made some drastic changes. In doing so I instantly distanced myself from the contents of the book.

I had no idea what was going to happen. Moreover, I had not had the time to read the book yet.

We watched the news on Monday, January 17. Everywhere there were the same headlines: a Jewish notary, mentioned by name, member of the Jewish Council, had betrayed Anne Frank. It was the opening item of the Dutch NOS news.

All of this was downright shocking.

Immediately we received messages from distressed family members. They were dismayed.

To my surprise, that same afternoon there were already strong substantial criticisms regarding the inaccurate claims about the Jewish Council and the alleged lists of hiding addresses<sup>3</sup>.

Very quickly, from January 18, when the Dutch translation was released, criticism of the book grew and grew thanks to many journalists, historians, writers and columnists. It was an extraordinary experience as an incredible number of people so deeply had been affected by this book and continued to speak out for weeks against this slander and injustice.

The European Jewish Congress asked the American publisher HarperCollins to take the book out of circulation<sup>4</sup>. German media were fiercely critical as well. The book has not appeared in German translation yet.

All these counter-reactions were of great support to me; so unexpected, and so eloquent and perceptive, crystal clear and with well-founded arguments.

The Dutch publisher Ambo|Anthos fortunately apologized for the book to their own authors. In their book insert they write that the conclusion of the investigation insufficiently is supported by the available evidence. They also offer an apology, especially to the next of kin and other family members of Arnold van den Bergh.

The writers' response to the criticism - in their view a "smear campaign" - amounted to reiterations of what they previously had written in the book.

My personal life was turned upside down. The matter prevailed in my thoughts. But I had to continue working, as if nothing had happened. Fortunately, the Dutch journalists who wanted to speak to me were sympathetic. At that time, I did not want to be in the media.

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<sup>3</sup> Bart van der Boom, Nieuws en CO, NTR and NOS, January 17, 2022.

<sup>4</sup> Dr. Moshe Kantor, President European Jewish Congress, in a letter to Mr. Brian Murray, President and Chief Executive Officer, Harper Collins Publishers, London, February 1, 2022.

I would like to address the Cold Case Team and Ms Sullivan specifically with a few words:

Writers, in your introduction you speak of values and norms in a democracy. That these must be preserved above all, yes even strengthened and that your book wants to be conducive to this. How, for the world, can you claim this in light of your immoral behavior towards my family?

You have distorted my story in such a manner that you can incorporate it into your argument to accuse my grandfather of treason. He gets guiltier by the chapter and that without proof, on false grounds unimaginable for anyone else.

That is what I call treason: to misrepresent the truth in this manner and especially the truth of a war.

The team approached me in 2018 under false pretenses. You did not tell me about the note, which was so crucial in your view. In the book I now read that the note was already in your possession at that time.

Many things went wrong in chapter 40 about me. I will limit myself to a few examples here:

- My grandparents and their children did not live on the Minervalaan in Amsterdam at the end of the war. They all were in hiding, as I made explicit in all interviews with the team.
- In the last two conversations with the team in 2019, I provided more detailed information: my grandparents had to go into hiding in early 1944 after being warned by the resistance of impending arrest. This is not to be found anywhere in chapter 40 or for that matter elsewhere in the book.

How would you feel, if a grandparent beloved in the family was accused in such a manner all over the world?

Ms Sullivan, do you realize, how you present yourself, by writing this book in this way, so accusatory, so amoral, so ahistorical, so unjust to many involved at the time, so shocking to their extended families, their children and grandchildren, and most of all, so damaging to the real understanding of what took place in the Netherlands during World War II?

Mr President of HarperCollins Publishers, Ms Sullivan and the Cold case team, you must have known you were going too far. In any decent investigation I would have been allowed to read beforehand what was written about me and my family. There would have been room for adjustments and for open discussion based on the source material. Then you would not have been able to accuse my grandfather without the possibility of defense. But apparently that did not fit your mold as the book never would have been published. Without such a plot as the one we have now, with a Jewish notary as the betrayer of Anne Frank, no one would have been interested.

I deeply resent you for your conduct in this matter.

In conclusion, I would like to make an urgent appeal to the American publisher HarperCollins, to all other publishers involved, and to any potential filmmakers:

Take the book out of circulation.  
Refrain from making films or television series with this story as their subject.  
With this story you are exploiting the name of Anne Frank, you are falsifying history, and you are contributing to great injustice.

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