

Crescendo



## Comparing My Life to Anne Frank's Life

When I read The Diary of Anne Frank for Reading Book Club in our ABLE class, I was struck by the similarities in Anne's life and my life. Anne grew up with the brutalities of war all around her, as I did. She suffered as a child but used books as an escape from her problems. Anne's emotional life had many ups and downs, as mine did.

I was born in Cambodia in 1980 after the war in which the Communists had taken over my country. My father was killed, and my family had escaped and was hiding in the forest. We went to live in a Red Cross refugee camp where I was given books to read. I taught myself to read while studying under a tree on the grounds. Like Anne, I found that books were a way for me to escape my surroundings. When we left the refugee camp I was 11 years old. I could only carry a few things with me, and I chose my books over my other belongings.

We moved to the country where land mines were hidden underground. People in my family were injured when trying to clear the land to build houses. I wanted so badly to learn more and go to school. We had little food or clothing. We were very poor, and I could not go to school because it was miles away, and I had to help my mother with all the chores and my younger brother and sisters.

I understand why Anne's story became so popular. When I read her story, it made my heart cry. Every time I read it, I understood more and more about her. Anne had no one to talk to about her emerging adulthood. She had conflicting emotions about her family and herself. I realized that I experienced many of the same emotions as she. I did not have friends to share and explore my feelings. My life was surrounded by terror much like Anne's.

I saw man's inhumanity to man, as Anne did. Anne lived in a concentration camp and died there. Thousands of people were

tortured and died around her. However, there were people who helped the Jews and risked their own lives. People were murdered and raped all around me in Cambodia. I also had the experience of a soldier who could have killed me when I was nine years old after finding out my father was a soldier in the anti-communist forces, but instead he let me go.

Anne's and my story should remind us how lucky we are to live in a country where freedom is enjoyed by everyone. In America we don't have to be afraid. The soldiers protect you and guard our country. There are so many opportunities here. There are people here who will help you reach your goals. You can work hard and enjoy a good life. Anne Frank died at a very young age and was not able to achieve all her dreams. However, I have the opportunity to get an education and realize my dreams. I am determined to do that.

*~ Daovadi Chen*

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## I Wish ...

I wish I had an older brother or sister;  
They would have spoiled me.  
I wish I were younger again;  
I would've studied harder.  
I could have concentrated on studying,  
Not like right now.  
I'm under a lot of pressure in my life;  
There are too many things to be taken care of.  
I wish I was more thoughtful.  
If I were, I wouldn't have broken up with my first boyfriend;  
I wouldn't have hurt him so much.  
I wish I could have come to the U.S. earlier;  
The economy is not so good now.  
I wish my parents could live with me;  
They're getting older.  
If they could, I would be around them more often;  
I could take good care of them.  
I wish I had a daughter;  
I would dress her up.  
I wish I had a special skill;  
I could find an easier job.  
I wish I had a house;  
I could decorate it nicely;  
My son could have space to play;  
I could have a study and a big kitchen.  
I wish we were near China;  
I could visit my family and my friends more often.  
I miss them so much.  
I wish I had good English,  
That could make things a lot easier in my life.  
I wish...  
I have been working very hard these days;  
I hope I can have a better life in my future,  
And not just wish...

~Yuan Hua Li

## On My Way

My life is changing every day.  
My life is changing in every way.  
It took awhile but I think I'm on track.  
Now that I'm on my way, there's no turning back.  
The future is all I see.  
In five years where will I be?  
A career, a family, I don't know.  
I have a natural high instead of a natural low.  
My life is finally coming together.  
I will be grateful always and forever.

*~Angela Harmon*

## Something for the Sistas

You can do what you do  
You can do what you can  
But no matter what  
You can never change a no-good man.

You can pour your heart out to him  
You can even try to bring him the world  
But as soon as you turn your head  
He's with a whole new girl.

Don't trap yourself and get pregnant  
'Cause, boy, will you be stuck  
You'll be taking care of a baby  
Still won't have him and really be out of luck.

Get yourself together  
For you don't need a man,  
God gave you two feet and  
On your own you must stand.

Stand up for your rights and don't let him take advantage of you  
You are too beautiful to be mistreated  
And the benefits – that's something you best not go through

Don't get me wrong, all men are not the same  
But one thing for sure,  
Ms. Car is not the one  
And I'm not 'bout to play no games

Just a little word of advice for my sistas  
Be all you can be  
Don't take no crap  
We are beautiful  
And we deserve to be treated like QUEENS!

~ Caralissa Scott

## Who Am I?

Who am I?  
A cool guy  
My presence strong  
    like the scent of moonshine  
Built with the integrity that is warm like sunshine.

I'm me, a tangible being  
    who believes life is a procedure,  
So I'm proceeding  
    to dominate it any way I see fit.

I'm me, a person constructed  
    by gifted hands  
        from a greater being  
            that I can't see – that we can't see.

A personage that wanders through life  
    not yet aware of the potential  
        to operate the tools  
            that have been specially crafted for me

But striving to tap into the frequency  
    to eliminate the fuzz  
        and get a clear understanding  
            of me.

~Vyrán Clark

## Been There, Done That

Well, at this age, you're probably thinking you know it all, you don't need adults telling you what to do, and you know all there is to know. And here's the best, all you need is your friends. I thought that too at your age...

Read my story and you might think twice when you make your future choices. Around the 9th grade, I had a lot of friends. I hung around with Caucasians, African Americans, Puerto Ricans, Italians, Greeks, jocks and burn-outs. I partied with everyone. If there was alcohol or weed, I was there! My grades were dropping, my mom was getting on my nerves, and it was all good because I had my friends. Or so I thought. I moved out of my house because my mom's husband was a drug addict and an alcoholic. I stayed with a few friends for awhile, bouncing from place to place. I finally got a job at Dairy Mart on Hillman Street and got a cheap apartment on top of a bar on South Avenue.

The more I partied, the less I cared about school. I was too worried about meeting up with this person or that person. Mr. Grohovac, my principal at the time, tried talking to me. He said I was a bright young lady with an incredible future ahead of me. Miss Ruffley also tried talking to me. She was my Commercial Art teacher at Choffin. She came to my house and job on several occasions to try to convince me to stay in school and to improve my skills. She kept telling me how talented I was and how I had the potential to really be successful in life. They both seemed sincere, but I didn't listen.

By the time I quit school my senior year, I had lost several friends. First, there was Nick. He was drunk, walking home, and decided to walk across the freeway. He was hit by a car. Then, there was Tony, walking home one night, who got shot in the head by a drive-by shooter. This one I really never got over. He was a football player, and a really good kid. He hung around with some partiers (you may call them gang bangers) but really didn't do anything wrong. The police thought it was drug related. We assumed it was

because he was a young black male. They never caught the shooter. Was Tony caught up with the wrong people or just in the wrong place at the wrong time?

I was young and thought I knew everything I needed to know. I didn't understand the whole "guilt by association" idea. Was Tony's death an accident? Probably not... Where were our friends then? We thought they had our backs... Then, there was Angie who disappeared after a night of partying with a few friends. The police found her head in a trash bag at McKelvey Lake. No one would speak up, nor was her killer or killers caught. Where were her friends? Who could do something like this? Did her punishment fit her lifestyle? She was the mother of two. What about her children?

Then there was Jimmy. We were all out riding around, drinking, and having a good time. We decided to go back to Jimmy's house and get everyone's motorcycles. At the last minute, I chose to go home instead of going with them. The next morning I received a phone call telling me that Jimmy had wrecked and died. I could have been on that bike with him. I was supposed to be on that bike with him! Sometimes you have to follow your gut feeling, your instinct, and not follow your friends. Jim hit the wall so hard on I-680, they had to have a closed casket at his funeral.

Through the years, I had made my choices, still continued to party, and had no intentions of finishing school. I started feeling my choices weren't there anymore. My best friend had just been murdered, I lost my job, I got really sick and had no medical insurance, nor did I have family to turn to. I didn't think it could get any worse. As I took a look around, I had to ask, "Where are my friends now?"

I realized I had to pick myself up and change things. I chose to completely cut-away my old, so called "friends." I finally got a job. I then went to a real friend whose family had stood by my side, picked myself back up, and changed my life by choice. I found a new circle of acquaintances; like I said before, I had to cut myself off from my old crowd. I met a new man, who ended

up becoming my husband. After 15 years of marriage and three children later, I realized I had changed my life. I have looked back at those people I used to hang around with. A lot of my old friends are either dead, in prison or jail, drug addicts, or just the same as before. They have no families or life to be proud of. Then I asked myself again, "Where are my friends?" I had two that stayed by my side through the years.

It takes time to realize your mistakes in life, to realize who your true friends are, and what to do to fix those mistakes. I lived and learned. I became a better mother than what I had growing up. I became a better person for being more active in my community with children who don't normally get the attention that they deserve. I went back to school to get my G.E.D... and will earn it. I can say to you, "I've been there and done that" and really mean it. Only one person can fix your life...AND THAT'S YOU!

*~Tina Toporcer*

