

PREJUDICE by Alice, 14 years old (The Grey Coat Hospital Secondary School, London)

A girl full of dreams. A witty, critical, inspiring young girl. A smile. A face. A life. A sliver of hope. Ink printed in rows, pages glued together. Days after days of confinement, oppression, uncertainty, recorded for others to reflect on, for a voice to be heard among the clutter of thoughts that clog the world. The story of a girl breathing, thinking, dreaming. The story of a life ended prematurely, of inspiring words only amplified by her death. A stimulus for reflection.

This is what the Diary of Anne Frank means to me.

Prejudice: preconceived opinion that is not based on reason or actual experience.

The story of Anne Frank has always intrigued me. How can a girl surrounded by devastation, cruelty and prejudice remain true to her principles, and still trust in other people and have so much hope? Why did such an important message of resilience, fighting against oppression, and learning to love others and ourselves, even in times of hatred, only occur to a young girl, and not to those in power? There is only so much that can be comprehended through empathy, but I do believe that such message has influenced the lives of so many *because* of who wrote it. Anne Frank teaches us that nobody is too small to fight injustices, whether victim, bystander or perpetrator. Victims, those whose thoughts irritate perpetrators, who are reduced to numbers, whose rights are not recognised, whose actions are condemned, are the most important voices to listen to. Because they can inspire future bystanders to speak up.

Anne is the proof that prejudice is based on fear. Fear of change, of diversity, of being surpassed by the talent of others. Fear is human, but when it is exploited as an excuse for discrimination, it becomes dangerous. Perpetrators are the most fearful: they seek control and invincibility so as to conceal their weakness, to trick themselves and others into believing they are superior. Worse, they diminish others and build walls between people, as it is easier to destroy than to rebuild. They take advantage of the underlying prejudice in society and encourage its growth. But perpetrators are weakest alone. Bystanders support prejudice and discrimination also due to fear: they fear the apparent power of the most afraid. Anne is the proof that prejudice is merely fear, and is unfounded, because she was everything her opponents were afraid of. She did not fit into their ideals, and despite constant attempts to diminish her and her race, she became more powerful than her oppressors: her legacy defeats time. She believed in the goodness of humans, and in their capability of acceptance, even though atrocities happening around her screamed the opposite. Her words are timeless, as relevant today as yesterday or tomorrow.

Prejudice is fear. And only when fear will be overcome by kindness, people's good nature will shine.

Everyone thinks I'm showing off when I talk, ridiculous when I'm silent, insolent when I answer, cunning when I have a good idea, lazy when I'm tired, selfish when I eat one bite more than I should.

Prejudice's roots lie in everyday actions. People who experience prejudice are not immune to prejudicing others themselves. We often criticise someone's actions as a coping mechanism, we diminish others to feel better about our lacks. Whilst prejudice might be happening in silence, once it is out there it cannot be stopped. Judging others for the way they act, misunderstanding their reasons, is easier than empathising. It starts as something small, but as more people stand against an individual or race, the wall of separation, brick by brick, grows taller and stronger. Prejudice is often contradictory – our critiques never seem to apply to us, yet they undermine every good thing we do, so like they affect others' feelings, they also destroy our reputation.

I still believe, in spite of everything, that people are truly good at heart.

It is not surprising to hear about the destruction caused by prejudice. We hear it, see it, feel it every day. On the tube, in our households, in the news, around the world. It's here, same as, if not worse than before. What changes is how we react to it. Anne chose kindness, hope, trust. Despite having experienced the worst moments of the human race, her hope never faded, if anything, it grew. Such mature thoughts as expressed in her diary are hard to believe to have generated from someone so young. But we must believe it, because her words can inspire us to be hopeful too, and to act according to what we hope to achieve. People are good at heart, it all depends on who we choose to listen to. Many will decide to follow their senses, but only the strongest will follow their heart.

Anne is proof that power only matters so much. Politicians and wealthy individuals of her time chose to turn a blind eye. Some ordinary people were able to see, and ultimately affect change and be remembered for their efforts.

And you can always, always give something, even if it is only kindness!

Change starts from the individual. Anne's story is a sad one, and must never be repeated. But is also proof that humans are indeed capable of goodness, though only the bravest act upon it: many who were not directly affected during the war, and were privileged, chose to risk everything to help those in need. Anne's hope was that the human race learn to challenge ourselves to support kindness, often more difficult than promoting discrimination in times of brutality and totalitarianism, but equally as hard in seemingly more peaceful times. Her desire for a world free from selfishness has yet to be fulfilled, therefore humans must commit to reaching this goal harder than ever before: we, no matter our position or past, can affect change starting from now.

We must have the hope and courage needed to act upon our kindness.