

# ANNE FRANK

That winter I started work on *The Diary of Anne Frank* starring the then 15-year-old Natalie Portman and an all-star cast for Broadway. Lapine was directing again. He wanted a very minimal set - maybe some platforms against a black wall but I couldn't make sense of it.

I talked him into an ultra-realistic set based on the actual hiding place of the Frank Family. I wrote to the Anne Frank House Museum in Amsterdam and asked permission to come and see the space when the museum was not filled with tourists. They arranged for me to come early in the morning before the museum was open and late in the evening after closing. I went to Amsterdam for about a week and spent many hours alone in the hiding place photographing, measuring, and copying molding details. It was quite moving being there with those ghosts alone - nothing has changed since they hid there - Anne's movie star photos are still up on the wall. There was only one problem. I had to pee, and I used the beautifully decorated delft toilet in the W.C., not realizing till afterwards that it was part of the display and not connected to plumbing anymore!

The set turned out to be as exact a replica as possible and still function as a stage space. When the actors came onto the set for the first time, they cried. "This is the character we have been waiting for."

It was when Anne Frank was in the shop that I had another miscarriage. Perhaps trying to get pregnant and working on Broadway did not go together very well!

The show tried out at the Colonial Theater in Boston (where my *One and Only* had happened years before!). The stage crew was not the best but as it was only a one-set show and there were no serious technical challenges, it didn't matter that much. As there were no scene changes for me to choreograph, tech was a bit boring for me. I have always preferred working on musical pieces in which scene changes help to tell the story.

Maybe it was because the subject of the play was so grim, the cast and the designers had a rollicking time after rehearsal at the hotel bar where we were all staying.

THE DIARY OF ANNE FRANK.  
Written by Frances Goodrich and  
Albert Hackett. New Adaptation by  
Wendy Kesselman.

Direction by James Lapine.  
Scenic designer: Adrienne Lobel.  
Costume designer: Martin Pakledinaz.  
Lighting designer: Brian Macdevitt.  
Music Box Theatre, 1997.

Photo by Sara Krulwich.





George Hearn would regale us with Irish songs. There was a lot of drinking and hilarity.

The show was a moderate success on Broadway. Portman was impressive as the young Anne. When she left, she was replaced by a girl who could not hold the center and the show quickly collapsed but that was after almost a year run.

The Tony organization had not yet separated straight plays and musicals as two categories. All the design nominations went to musicals that spring - so there was yet again - no nomination for me! I did win a FANY (Friends of New York Theater Award) however, for my work on Anne Frank.

There was more Broadway to come as *On the Town* was slotted to move into the Uris Theater and I had to redesign the bridge for a smaller space. Taking the show, that had been so spectacular outside, inside was not an easy project - but I did the best that I could. There were cast changes and a change of choreographer. Sad to say, none of these changes made the show any better when it moved to Broadway. And George C. Wolfe was acting as director and producer which made life rather confusing as George the director would ask for a new piece of scenery in the morning. I would rush home to design it and get a price on it and then George the producer would nix it in the evening. Also, George no longer trusted the bridge and he did everything he could to pretend it wasn't there. All of Paul Gallo's gorgeous bridge lighting kept being cut so that it felt like the whole show was being performed in a black void - not very interesting and it ended by making the designers look not so good. I had the distinct impression that George didn't like me anymore - he never asked to work with me again, so I think I am right.

The excitement of doing it in the park for free as a celebration for New Yorkers was no longer there when it became just another big expensive Broadway musical and it flopped. I believe it ran for less than two months and closed in January of 1999.

On New Year's Eve of 1998-99 Mark and I went ice skating at Woolman Rink. Just before midnight I fell backwards and broke my fall with my left arm, breaking my wrist. The year began in the emergency room of Cabrini Hospital. New Year's Eve in an emergency room is quite a scene with people coming in with gunshot and knife wounds and their eyeballs hanging out from champagne cork accidents. When they started to reset my arm, I stood up and very politely said, "OK - that will be enough now". They continued anyway. It was excruciating and I spent ten weeks in a cast. But there was worse to come that year.

Fertility experiments had been going on for four years. We did another IVF cycle and this time it worked. In the spring of 1999, I got pregnant again. We had learned by now not to tell anyone anything, so we sat on the news. But this time the weeks went by, and it seemed to be sticking!

That summer Mark was playing Touchstone in an *As You Like It* at Williamstown Theater Festival with Gwyneth Paltrow. I rather foolishly, in retrospect, decided to go visit my friend Peter Wing Healey in his house in the Dordogne Valley in the southwest of France. While I was there, I started to bleed, and I panicked. Peter found a gynecologist in the nearby town of Gordon and took me to him. I didn't know what to expect from a small-town doctor and assumed the worst, but this doctor's equipment was more sophisticated than at NYU medical. He had a full color 3D sonogram machine. He looked at my womb and told me that the baby was ok. I remained pregnant and when I got back from Europe, I went up to see Mark in his play. I was beginning to show, and I was feeling those wonderful burbling sensations and little kicks. It was starting to feel real. We were going to have a baby! In September, at 13 weeks it was time to go in for the amnio. Then the dreadful call came.

"I'm sorry to tell you but your baby has Down Syndrome". "Are you sure?", I asked, "Could there be a mistake?" "No, I'm afraid not - we triple test". I was upstairs in my studio, and I went down to Mark who was on the phone in his office. When he saw my face, he quickly got off and I fell apart. We both had decided that if this happened, we would not go forward with the pregnancy. Neither one of us wanted to bring a Down Syndrome child into the world. We were too old. So then began the heartbreaking process of a late term abortion. My old friend, Ann Lilly took me to the clinic. They had to insert seaweed into my cervix to expand it overnight. The abortion itself was the next day. I was delirious with grief. We requested that the little body be given to us so we could have it cremated. I have an image of me carrying the paper bag with his ashes up the street from the funeral home. We buried him later on our land upstate.

So, there we were - back to square one in the baby department. At this point Mark was ready to give up. But I was now determined. I was going to will this child into being if it killed me. The issue was that my eggs were too old. We needed younger eggs. We had been investigating adoption, but the piles of paperwork were daunting.

The NYU Clinic, who had by now come to know us very well, advised that egg donation would be a very viable option for us. We decided to go that way - but that way was also bumpy. We pored carefully over many women's profiles. The first donor we picked got pregnant herself right before donating to me, and the second donor didn't come up with enough eggs. Months went by. I called the clinic and they said, "We were just about to call you. We have a donor for you, and we normally don't say this, but she has donated successfully before. Would you like to see her profile?" I said, "No - Its fine - Let's just do it."

It was spring of 2001 when I got inseminated with three healthy looking zygotes. I got to see them on a monitor. They looked like nice round pieces of popcorn. And it worked. I got pregnant. It felt great. I was so happy to be pregnant with healthy 26-year-old genetic material. There was nothing to worry about - but I worried anyway.

Mark and I had expanded our real estate holdings once more. We purchased a 1780s stone house in Rhinebeck, N.Y. I had gotten tired of the rented houses that we stayed in when he was doing his summer season up at Vassar and said, "If we are going to keep going up there, we need a place of our own."

When we saw the house, we fell in love with it immediately. It had 44 acres of land surrounding it and it sat on a quiet dirt road. I knew I would start painting there again - and that is what I did.



*The 1780s stone house in Rhinebeck, New York.*