

From *An Interrupted Life and Letters from Westerbork*,
published by Henry Holt & Company, translated by Arnold J.
Pomerans.

Tuesday, 8 June 1943, ten o'clock

My dear people,

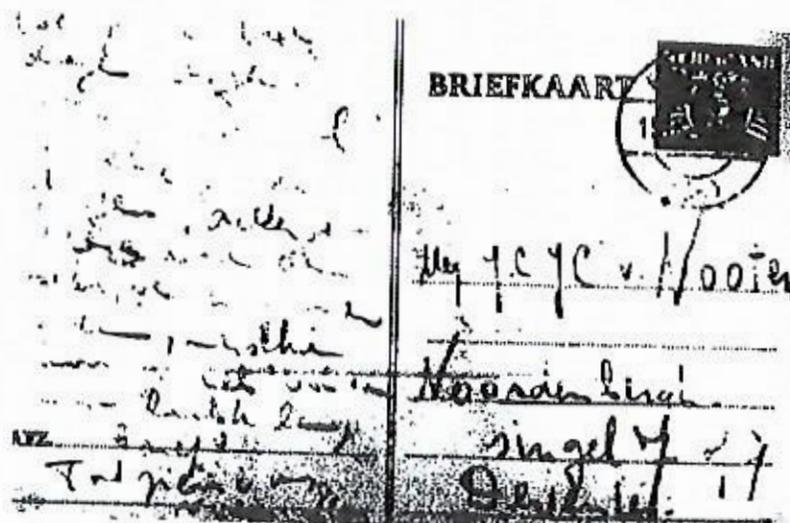
Not much heath is left now inside the barbed wire; more barracks are always being added. Only a little piece remains in the farthest corner of the camp, and that's where I'm sitting now, in the sun under a glorious blue sky, among some low shrubbery. Right across from me only a few meters away, a blue uniform with a helmet stands in the watchtower. A guard with an enraptured expression is picking purple lupins, his gun dangling on his back. When I look to the left I see billowing white smoke and hear the puffing of a locomotive. The people have already been loaded onto the freight cars; the doors are closed. There are many green police,²⁶ who sang this morning as they marched by the side of the train, and the Dutch military police are out as well. The quota of people who must go is not yet filled. Just now I met the matron of the orphanage, carrying a small child in her arms who also has to go, alone. And a number of people have been taken out of the hospital barracks. They are doing a thorough job here today; big shots from The Hague have come on a visit. It's very strange watching these gentlemen at work from close quarters. I've been up since four this morning dealing with the babies and carrying luggage. In a few hours you can accumulate enough gloom here to last a lifetime. The nature-loving policeman has gathered his purple bouquet now, perhaps he's off to court some farmer's daughter in the neighborhood. The engine gives a piercing shriek. The whole camp holds its breath; another three thousand Jews are about to leave. There are babies with pneumonia lying in the freight cars. Sometimes what goes on here seems totally unreal. I haven't been given any particular job, which suits me very well. I just wander about and find my own work. This morning I had a brief talk with a woman who had come from Vught, who told me her latest experiences in

three minutes. How much can you really tell in a few minutes? When we came to a door, and I wasn't allowed to go any farther, she embraced me and said, "Thank you for being such a help."

Just now I climbed up on a box lying among the bushes here to count the freight cars. There were thirty-five, with some second-class cars at the front for the escorts. The freight cars had been completely sealed, but a plank had been left out here and there, and people put their hands through the gaps and waved as if they were drowning.

The sky is full of birds, the purple lupins stand up so regally and peacefully, two little old women have sat down on the box for a chat, the sun is shining on my face—and right before our eyes, mass murder. The whole thing is simply beyond comprehension.

Love
Etty



"We left the camp singing . . ." Etty's last postcard, thrown from the train; it was found and mailed on September 15, 1943.

Etty Hillesum, Letters from Westerbork

Saturday 11 July 1942

Dear Kitty,

Daddy, Mummy, and Margot can't get used to the sound of the Westertoren clock yet, which tells us the time every quarter of an hour. I can. I loved it from the start, and especially in the night it's like a faithful friend. I expect you will be interested to hear what it feels like to "disappear"; well, all I can say is that I don't know myself yet. I don't think I shall ever feel really at home in this house, but that does not mean that I loathe it here, it is more like being on vacation in a very peculiar boardinghouse. Rather a mad idea [mad way of looking at being in hiding], perhaps, but that is how it strikes me. The "Secret Annexe" is an ideal hiding place. Although it leans to one side and is damp, you'd never find such a comfortable hiding place anywhere in "Amsterdam, no, perhaps not even in the whole of Holland.

Our little room looked very bare at first with nothing on the walls; but thanks to Daddy who had brought my film-star collection and picture postcards on beforehand, and with the aid of paste pot and brush, I have transformed the walls into one gigantic picture. This makes it look much more cheerful, and when the Van Daans come, we'll get some wood from the attic, and make a few little cupboards for the walls and other odds and ends to make it look more lively.

Margot and Mummy are a little bit better now. Mummy felt well enough to cook some soup for the first time yesterday, but then forgot all about it, while she was downstairs talking, so the peas were burned to a cinder and utterly refused to leave the pan. Mr. Koophuis has brought me a book called *Young People's Annual*. The four of us went to the private office yesterday evening and turned on the radio. I was so terribly frightened that someone might hear it that I simply begged Daddy to come upstairs with me. Mummy understood how I felt and came too. We are very nervous in other ways, too, that the neighbors might hear us or see something going on. We made curtains straight away on the first day. Really one can hardly call them curtains, they are just light, loose strips of material, all different shapes, quality, and pattern, which Daddy and I sewed together in a most unprofessional way. These works of art are fixed in position with drawing pins, not to come down until we emerge from here.