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## Talking at last about her writing

TYLER, FROM PAGE 1

has lived in a high-end Rouse development on the edge of Baltimore's leafy Roland Park neighborhood. Furnished in contemporary Shaker style, with lots of polished wood, her house is almost disturbingly neat.

Her upstairs writing room is so uncluttered and antiseptic you could safely perform surgery there, and what actually takes place at her desk is only a little less complicated.

She writes in longhand, draft after draft, and when she has a section she's satisfied with, types it into a computer. When she has a completed draft, she prints it out and then rewrites it all in longhand again, and that version she reads out loud into a Dictaphone. The result is a style that she modestly calls no style at all, but is nevertheless unmistakably hers: transparent and alert to all the nuances of the seemingly ordinary.

Tyler, who is as unpretentious as most of her characters, insists that she did not set out to be a writer and is still a little surprised that she became one. Her parents were Quakers and conscientious objectors, and until she was 11 she grew up in a commune in the mountains of North Carolina. "I can perfectly remember my childhood, but nothing else," she said. "I remember when I was 7, making crucial decisions about the kind of person I was going to be. That's also the age when I figured out that, oh, someday I'm going to die, and the age when I decided I couldn't believe in God." She smiled. "I've never been as intelligent as I was at 7. I have never been as thoughtful or as introspective."

As a child she read a lot — sometimes books like "Little Women" over and over again — but even in high school it never occurred to her to be a writer, because she was assigned books like "Silas Marner" and "Julius Caesar" and she knew she could never write like that.

When she was 14, living outside of Raleigh, N.C., she had a revelation when she read Eudora Welty's "A Curtain of Green and Other Stories." "I was handling tobacco in the summers," she recalled, explaining that her job was passing tobacco leaves to someone who tied them on sticks for curing. "The stringer was always a black woman, the handlers were mostly farm wives and a few teenaged girls. And they talked, talked, talked. It was a real education. I'd go home every night and my arms would be covered in tar up to my elbows, which tells you something. I realized the people Welty was writing about were country people just like the people I was handling tobacco with."

"I was just flabbergasted. I said, she's writing my life, people I know, and it's not Shakespearean English. She's just telling what's real out there that she sees. Later, I even got to know her. She was like her stories. There was something wondering about her as she spoke, as if she was marveling at everything she looked at."

Welty notwithstanding, Tyler went to Duke University and majored in Russian, not because of any particular interest in that language or its literature, but because she "just wanted to do everything different from my parents."

She said, "If I could have majored in outer space I would have." This was at

the height of the Cold War and another thing that greatly appealed to her was that the head of the Russian department had a personal Federal Bureau of Information agent trailing him around.

"I still had no intention of becoming a writer," she recalled. "I had a series of really good high school English teachers, then an English professor at Duke, and then Reynolds Price, who taught writing there, and every single one of them would say, 'You're really good. You ought to be a writer,' and I'd just say, 'O.K.' I wanted to be an artist, though it's just as well I'm not. I honestly sometimes think to this day, 'I wonder what I'm going to be?'"

Baltimore was also unplanned. Tyler moved there from Montreal in 1967 because her husband, Taghi Modarressi, an Iranian child psychiatrist, was offered a job at a hospital there, and at first she hated it. "Now I don't know where else I would live. It's a very kindhearted

**"I always say that the way you write a novel is, for the first 83 drafts, you pretend that nobody is ever, ever going to read it."**

city, friendly and gentle. That sounds ironic to say but it's true."

Almost all her books have been set there, so that by now her Baltimore has become a sort of urban Yoknapatawpha. For the most part the Baltimore she writes about — a place part real, part imaginary — couldn't be less like the neighborhood she actually lives in. The Baltimore of Tyler's novels is mostly middle class, or even working class — a place of crowded streets and small houses whose first stories sometimes double as offices for podiatrists and insurance agencies, and where people are probably a little kinder than they are elsewhere.

"I never consciously decided that from now on I'll just write about Baltimore," she said. "Part of it is just laziness — it's a lot easier to set a story in the place where you live. Part of it is admiration. I like the grit and character. If I'm in the supermarket and hear two women talking, I'll be kind of making notes in my mind. It's a very catchy way of speaking, the way Baltimoreans speak." (In the new book, someone unused to the accent thinks that one of the characters is named Sir Joe — until it turns out he is really Sergio.)

"Clock Dance," Tyler's fans will mostly be relieved to know, is hardly a departure. It's almost a compendium of familiar Tyler tropes and situations. It mostly takes place in Baltimore, though the main character is not from there. There's a difficult mother and some estranged siblings, just as in "Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant"; a marriage of mutual (and perhaps deliberate) misunderstanding, as in "Breathing Lessons"; and, above all, a curious exploration of what it means to be part of a family.

Some of the characters watch a TV show called "Space Junk," which is practically an emblem of the novel; it's about aliens who kidnap random earthlings on the assumption that they must be related and then try to figure out why they behave the way they do.



Anne Tyler is rooted in Baltimore, her home for the last 51 years. "It's a very kindhearted city, friendly and gentle," she says of it.

"Every time I begin a book I think this one is going to be completely different, and then it isn't," Tyler said. "I would like to have something new and different, but have never had the ambition to completely change myself. If I try to think of some common thread, I really think I'm deeply interested in endurance. I don't think living is easy, even for those of us who aren't scrounging. It's hard to get through every day and say there's a

good reason to get up tomorrow. It just amazes me that people do it, and so cheerfully.

"The clearest way that you can show endurance is by sticking with a family. It's easy to dump a friend, but you can't so easily dump a brother. How did they stick together, and what goes on when they do? All those things just fascinate me."

She has no plan to retire. "What hap-

pens is six months go by after I finish a book," she said "and I start to go out of my mind. I have no hobbies, I don't garden, I hate travel. The impetus is not inspiration, just a feeling that I better do this. There's something addictive about leading another life at the same time you're living your own."

She paused and added: "If you think about it, it's a very strange way to make a living."

## The ever-loyal daughter of Heinrich Himmler

GUDRUN BURWITZ  
1929-2018

BY RICHARD SANDOMIR

"Do you know how many people your father cremated at Dachau?" a British officer asked Gudrun Himmler, then young, during a postwar interrogation in 1945. "Or how many he gassed at Oranienburg? Of course you do. You're Herr Himmler's daughter, after all."

She sat silently, according to an account in the 2000 book "My Father's Keeper" by Norbert and Stephan Lebert, giving no indication of whether she believed that her father — Heinrich Himmler, the architect of the final solution to exterminate the Jews of Europe — was capable of the genocidal horrors of which he was being accused in 1945.

Indeed, whatever she might have known as a youngster, or as an adult, about her father's actions, she did not say publicly. She long contended that the family had not discussed German politics or the "Jewish question."

But what was never in doubt was her adoration of her father. Even after marrying and becoming Gudrun Burwitz, she continued to take pride in her family name and made it her life's mission to rehabilitate her father's.

Even more, when she died on May 24 in Germany at 88, she had become known not only for defending her father but also for being a prominent member of an organization that gave aid to old Nazis.

"She was sure her father had done nothing wrong," Tania Crasnianski, author of "The Children of Nazis" (2016), said in a telephone interview. "From her early 20s, she said that she would write a book to explain what a great man he was, but there is no evidence that she did."

Ms. Burwitz's death was first reported late last month by the German newspaper Bild. It was unclear whether she had died in Munich or nearby.



Gudrun Himmler with her father, Heinrich Himmler, in Berlin in 1938. She became known not only for defending her father but also for aiding old Nazis.

Reichsführer Himmler was a leading official in Hitler's Third Reich, as well as the leader of the SS, the Nazis' elite black-shirted military unit. He called his blond, pigtailed daughter "Puppi" (German for doll), and she filled scrapbooks with photographs of her "Pappi." They traveled around Germany together, at least once to the Dachau concentration camp, where more than 30,000 prisoners died.

"We saw everything we could," Gudrun Himmler wrote in her diary after that visit in 1941, when she was 11 or 12. "We saw the gardening work. We saw the pear trees. We saw all the pictures painted by the prisoners. Marvelous. And afterward we had a lot to eat. It was very nice."

On March 5, 1945, her diary entry described Germany's isolation and her view of the Third Reich's leaders.

"We no longer have any allies in Eu-

rope and can only rely on ourselves," she wrote. "The Luftwaffe is still so bad. Göring does not seem to care about anything, that windbag. Goebbels is doing a lot but he always shows off. They all get medals and awards, except Pappi, and he should be the first to get one."

On April 19, 1945, with the war nearly over in Europe — and Hitler isolated in his bunker in Berlin — she added to her diary:

"Daddy and all the others are up there" — she did not specify where — "and remain for the moment now that the great battle in the East has begun. Daddy has found it terribly difficult with the incredible amount of work. The Führer will not believe that the soldiers will no longer fight. Still, perhaps everything will turn out fine."

A secret attempt by Himmler to negotiate Germany's surrender led Hitler to fire him in late April 1945 and order his

arrest. Hitler killed himself on April 30. And Himmler, who had fled — shaving his mustache, assuming an alias and donning a black eye patch — was captured by the Allies on May 20 in Bremervörde, Germany.

He killed himself three days later while in British custody by biting down on a cyanide capsule.

Gudrun and her mother, Margarete, had also fled from their home in Gmünd, about 300 miles south of Berlin, but were captured by American troops in northern Italy.

While they were held in Rome, Gudrun went on a hunger strike until she grew weak and feverish. At a camp in Florence, the scene of her interrogation by the British officer, she was told by a guard not to tell anyone that her surname was Himmler, lest she be "torn apart."

She and her mother were taken to Nuremberg, where war crimes investigators interrogated them, but they apparently did not testify publicly.

Gudrun Margarete Elfriede Emma Anna Himmler was born on Aug. 8, 1929, the only biological child of her parents, who also adopted a son. Her father had two children with a mistress.

After the war she worked as a seamstress and a secretary. But with the occupying Allies pursuing a denazification program to rid Germany of traces of Nazi ideology, her surname became a liability, and she lost jobs because of it.

Nonetheless, she refused to change it for years, at one point rejecting a shop owner's suggestion that she marry to acquire a new surname.

"I refuse to live my life as a lie," she told The Boston Globe in 1961.

(She did use an assumed name, however, to work as a secretary for Germany's foreign intelligence service, from 1961 to '63, Bild reported.)

She eventually married a journalist, Wulf Dieter Burwitz, who became an official of the right-wing National Democratic Party of Germany, known as NPD. They had two children.

## U.S. red tape dashed hope for family of Anne Frank

Immigration rules stymied their attempts to escape to America, research shows

BY MIHIR ZAVERI

Attempts by Anne Frank's father to escape the Nazis in Europe and travel to the United States were complicated by tight American restrictions on immigration at the time, one of a series of roadblocks that narrowed the Frank family's options and thrust them into hiding, according to a new report.

The research, conducted jointly by the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, details the challenges faced by the Frank family and thousands of others looking to escape Europe as Nazi Germany gained strength and anti-refugee sentiment swept the United States.

Otto Frank, Anne's father, was never outright denied an immigration visa, the report concludes, but "bureaucracy, war and time" thwarted his efforts.

To obtain a visa, Mr. Frank would have had to gather copies of family birth certificates, military records and proof of a paid ticket to America, among other documents, and be interviewed at the consulate.

In one instance, an application that Mr. Frank said he submitted in 1938 languished in an American consulate in Rotterdam, the Netherlands, amid a swell of similar applications and was lost in a bombing raid in 1940. Mr. Frank wrote to a friend that the papers he had gathered as part of a visa application "have been destroyed there."

In 1941, as Mr. Frank was again attempting to navigate the matrix of paperwork and sponsors necessary to immigrate, the United States government imposed a stricter review of applications for visas, grew suspicious of possible spies and saboteurs among Jewish refugees, and banned applicants with relatives in German-occupied countries.

President Franklin Delano Roosevelt warned at the time that Jewish refugees could be "spying under compulsion," and the report states that "national security took precedence over humanitarian concerns."

Mr. Frank had sought help from an influential friend, Nathan Straus Jr., who was the head of the United States Housing Authority, a friend of Eleanor Roosevelt's and the son of a Macy's co-owner. Despite Mr. Straus's connections, Mr. Frank wrote to him that "all their efforts would be useless" given the immigration climate, the report states.

"We wanted to learn more about the process in itself and what documentation an applicant (e.g. Otto Frank) had to produce," said Gertjan Broek, a researcher with the Anne Frank House who worked on the latest findings, which were released Friday. "In the report, we point out how complex and tedious the process was and how the bombing of the Rotterdam consulate disrupted things."

The report was released 76 years after the Frank family went into hiding on July 6, 1942. Researchers drew on dozens of pages of correspondence between Mr. Frank and friends, much of which was first made public in 2007, as well as records involving United States immigration policy.

**The United States tightened restrictions on visas, fearing possible spies and saboteurs among Jewish refugees.**

Anne Frank's diaries describing her time in hiding gave a voice to millions who died at the hands of the Nazis. She was eventually discovered and she died in a concentration camp in 1945, when she was 15.

Mr. Frank was the only member of the immediate family to survive the concentration camps.

News about the Frank family continues to captivate the public, despite challenges in educating younger generations about the Holocaust.

"She has allowed millions of people, maybe hundreds of millions of people, to identify with persecution at the worst level," said Richard Breitman, a professor emeritus at American University who has written about the family's attempts to immigrate to the United States. "Any time there is a glimmer of new information, it's a big story."

The new research comes at a time when President Trump's attempts to curb immigration have been likened to those in the World War II era. Mr. Trump has repeatedly sought to justify letting fewer people into the country by arguing that criminals and terrorists could be among the immigrants and refugees seeking to enter.

Mr. Breitman underscored those similarities, pointing to debates over immigration policy today and after Sept. 11.

Mr. Broek said the researchers did not intend to highlight parallels. "The Anne Frank House researches into the life of Anne Frank and her family, to tell her story as accurate as possible," Mr. Broek said. "The attempted immigration is a part of that story too."