

**Interview with Rosemary Sullivan by Deborah Dundas (book editor of the *Toronto Star*) at the Eden Mills Writer's Festival (near Toronto, Ontario, Canada), February 23, 2022.**

**Online (temporarily) on: <https://vimeo.com/681627734/9ae4158bb1>  
Partially transcribed by *Droog Magazine*.**

*The interview lasted one hour. It started with a reading from the book, not transcribed here.*

**09' 47" - Deborah Dundas:** “How did you get involved with the cold case team?”

**Rosemary Sullivan:** “This time I am the voice, I am the writer who has collected, trying to narrate the experience that the sophisticated researchers have offered to me. How did I get involved? The project started in 2016 with a man called Thijs Bayens, a film maker. He, actually his grandparents, had hidden Jews during the war. He had felt there was a shift in the quality of life in Amsterdam that was moving towards authoritarian oligarchic quality, propaganda, and he thought: “you know , we should turn back to the story of Anne Frank.” He was joined by his friend Pieter van Twisk, who wanted to make clear that he felt that the Netherlands still were confronting the issue of the deportation of Jews from the Netherlands. The Netherlands deported, the number varies, in the early 70, 72, 73 per cent of their Jewish population, which was the highest percentage of Jews deported from any Western European country. There were 107.000 people who were deported and 5,500 returned.

He felt that half of his country had confronted this, but to the other half it was an important issue.

So the two began and then they decided that they wanted an outsider to take up the case. And with their contacts in special investigations and cold cases in the Dutch police, it was suggested that they turn to Vince Pankoke. Vince Pankoke, a retired FBI officer. So Vince looked at the idea and said yes.

Slowly, in 2018 they announced that they were going to be doing this project and they began to realize that what they needed was not really a film or documentary, but what they needed was a book. And so they turned to... they had sold the book to the Dutch publisher, Ambo Anthos, and then world rights were sold to HarperCollins. HarperCollins must have been involved in the selection, because I was told that they suggested me as the writer for this project, because

my books, from *Elisabeth Smart, a Life* always have been with HarperCollins. And I guess the success of *Stalin's Daughter* made me a reasonable candidate. So I was asked and we all have an experience of Anne Frank, you know, we all reading Anne Frank when you are 14 years old.... I visited Dachau when I was living in England, so I thought this could be a very compelling story to write.”

**13' 03" - Deborah Dundas:** “Relying on other people's research though, how did that inform the way you approached writing the book, was it different from the way you would have done during your own primary research?”

**Sullivan:** “I don't like the word relying on other people's research. In fact the cold case team at one point represented at least 22 people. There was Vince and Pieter and Thijs, Monique, Brandon, other specialists, young historians. This was a monumental undertaking. It wasn't like me sitting out to write a book. It took 6 years, there were archives consultants around the world. By the time Monique Koemans who was an intelligence officer with the Dutch government<sup>1</sup>, decided to create a database and they called it the “bookcase”. Eventually the bookcase had 4,600 files and 66 Gigs [gigabytes] of memory. And so this wasn't the undertaking of one person.

Did I trust the research? I did. Because it involved a very... it is a different kind of research. It is not like writing a historical book, it is a cold case investigation. And Vince Pankoke was as a very experienced FBI officer who worked on the, you know, what we would call '[The Wolf of Wall Street](#)' case; corruption on Wall Street. He worked in corruption and drug trades, in Columbia. He said about systematically he organized projects, so he had what he called the residence project, the statement project, the arrest project, the mapping project, trying to pull together, using artificial intelligence, connections which not could have been made previously. So I was one person in this process, I was a very important person, because of course I had to get it right, but each time I would send a chapter, I would wait to make sure, that, you know, no error slipped through. Of course, errors always slip through...”

**15' 36" - Dundas:** “How did that process work? Could you just send the chapter to, every time you submitted, to whom?”

**15' 43" - Sullivan:** “First to my American editor, Sara Nelson, at HarperCollins. Then I would submit a section to, say, Vince, Pieter and Thijs. I am a very experienced writer, so I wasn't about to be pushed around. I would say, this is... I

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<sup>1</sup> As far as can be checked, Monique Koemans is a novelist and criminologist, who works as a counselor for the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs; <https://www.linkedin.com/in/monique-koemans-448a1924/?originalSubdomain=nl>

want accuracy, nothing else. This is my decision. I think that the cold case team at first were not happy with the idea that I wanted to go back into the world of Prinsengracht so that people would get a sense of what was at stake. I wanted a portrait of Otto Frank whom I discovered to be a remarkable human being, a man of great integrity and courage, who took care of people. I wanted Miep Gies and her husband, I wanted the experience of Miep, saying, you know, after she slept in the super annex and lived in terror all night. She said she suddenly understood what it was to be a Jew in hiding. I wanted people to feel this, I wanted the return of Otto. The cold case investigators weren't as keen, but eventually they really liked it. They wanted to go right into the cases of one suspect after another after another."

**17' 07" - Dundas:** "You sort of do that structurally, don't you, when you go into, I mean, they sort of whittled it to 30 suspects and then down to 12 and get a look at them?"

**17' 21" - Sullivan:** "Yeah. I could have actually, I think there were 2 more suspects who were finding, delivering food, but... what I wanted to do in the selection or the description of each of those suspects was to give you one more side of the experience of being in an occupied country. A country that is under fascist dictatorship, you know, and to see how terrifying it is, you know, when you have propaganda is weaponized and people don't know what to believe, the fear is dictating how people behave, you have to be careful what you say to whom. I began with the first story, which was the first betrayal. Vince and I talked about the arch [or art?] of the investigation and decided that why not begin with the first betrayal, Otto saying, you know, that he's not sure that the Germans gonna win. And the man to whom he says this, reports him to the Dutch fascists, who will report him to the German centre for Jewish immigration and he'll be not a dead man, certainly somebody in prison. A casual conversation like that. And so each of these cases that I looked at, I'm trying to give you a texture and a warning what can happen when fascism takes over."

**18' 55" - Dundas:** "Now that comes from a lot of the AI [artificial intelligence], you know, culling through information. I want to stop here just for a second to tackle one question, because we have been talking about the research, and since it has been published, the Dutch publisher Ambo Anthos has suspended its print run, saying it wants further investigation..."

**19' 19" - Sullivan:** "No.."

**19' 20" – Dundas:** "... questioned the research, what is your reaction to that?"<sup>2</sup>

**19' 25" – Rosemary Sullivan:** "The Dutch publisher... in the last stages, when the book was submitted, were thrilled by the book. They thought it was wonderful, said so. My... the Dutch agent, Marianne<sup>3</sup>, who was the agent for Proditione who is the group who organized the project, was thrilled and then suddenly the scholars start, so called [= the so called scholars – Droog], start to question the book.

[19' 50"] I'm gonna to be absolutely candid: one of the first persons to question the book was a woman who expected to be the author of the book and was turned down. So there was a certain amount of venom in that first review.<sup>4</sup> Then, as a friend of mine says, there was a degree of territorialism of the experts. One friend, and we have a lot of supportive responses, called it "acute violated turf syndrome", hahaha. Now, when some of these issues are brought up I know that they are inaccurate. For instance it would seem that the Anne Frank Fonds, in Basel, said that the book is full of inaccuracies. Well, the Anne Frank Fonds in Basel told us we should not have Anne Frank in the title, because they had copyright to that name. They also sued the Anne Frank House in the Netherlands and won, to control full copyright. So we are talking about turf, territorialism, we're talking about the issue of... [she shakes her head] possession.

[21' 04"] One of the critics, a very esteemed... eh... scholar, said that, you know, we've gotten the Jewish Council wrong. Well, in fact he's writing a book about the Jewish Council.<sup>5</sup> Another said that we had at some point said that the anonymous note..., he claimed that the anonymous note was delivered to Otto Frank in 1957<sup>6</sup> – that is not true. In the detective report by Van Helden, which was done in 1963, the detective says that Otto Frank gave him a copy of this anonymous note which he had received shortly after his return from Auschwitz, in 1945.<sup>7</sup>

[22' 00"] So their claim that we made mistakes...often... their issues are not accurate. At the same time what bothers me about it is, with the publisher, saying they put in apparently a statement saying they apologize to anyone who is offended by this book. Well, the fascists would be offended by this book. Anyone

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2 This was part of a question I submitted via Zoom. It was also my only question from many I had that was presented by Dundas to Sullivan,

3 Marianne Schönbach of the Marianne Schönbach Literary Agency, Amsterdam.

4 Who this woman was is a complete mystery. I did ask for her name, but the question wasn't presented by Deborah Dundas to Rosemary Sullivan.

5 Bart van der Boom, professor at Leiden University.

6 Bart FM Droog pointed to this in his February 7 article ( <https://www.droog-mag.nl/2022/the-betrayal-of-anne-frank-canard.html> ), based on information provided by a well informed source from the Anne Frank House.

7 This is an utter concoction. There's absolutely no evidence supporting this statement.

offended by this book? I mean, this is so careless in its statement. Am I angry? Yes, I am annoyed by it, because what we are looking at here with the cold case team is not simply fingering somebody, in this case the Jewish notary Arnold van den Bergh. We are also looking at the other side of the story: why did Otto Frank, who according to Miep Gies, she told her friend father, the catholic priest father John Neiman, she told her friend Cor Suijk, that Otto knew who the betrayer was, the betrayer died before... we're looking at the other side of the story, that confirmed that perhaps, you know, the most likely candidate is Arnold van den Bergh. In the end I feel nothing but pity for Arnold van den Bergh. If anybody wants to criticize him they have to say to themselves: what would I do if I knew that my children, my wife, myself, was going to be put on a freight train to a concentration camp where one would be exterminated? This was known in 1944. By 1944 there was so much corruption that buying<sup>8</sup> a list of names, sorry, a list of addresses without names, I don't know if that many people could resist that temptation."

***24' 00": Deborah Dundas leads the discussion in another direction; only questions and appraisals of fans of Rosemary Sullivan are presented to her, until..."***

**46' 27" – Rosemary Sullivan:** "That is what is so disturbing about this. In stead of having a discussion about what works and what doesn't work in the book with the "scholars" [she makes the "-gesture] from the Netherlands, it is this blanket hatchet job [she's making cutting gestures]. One of the things that fascinated me when I as writing, was I came across a document, it was the US Office of Strategic Services, who were analyzing Hitler's modus operandi in 1943<sup>9</sup>. And they say his operandi was "never admit a fault, never accept blame, concentrate on one enemy, blame him for everything, conspiracy, hyperbole, defamation, lying, slander are commonplace, acceptable vehicles of cowardism[?]; does that ring any bells?"

***Droog: If I interpret this correctly, Rosemary Sullivan plays here the victim role, and accuses her critics of behaving like Hitler. Quite remarkable , I would say.***

***After this, nothing noteworthy was said anymore.***

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<sup>8</sup> Probably she meant "selling" in stead of "buying".

<sup>9</sup> She refers to: Walter C. Langer. *The mind of Adolf Hitler*. Basic Books, New York, 1972. Langer was one of the psychiatrists who worked on the mentioned OSS report. It is a well know, yet highly outdated study of Hitler's behaviour, based on many corrupted sources,