

## PROFILE

## Buddy Elias

**Buddy Elias, died this week, aged 89. Here we print his last interview with Sofia Domino from earlier this month**

BY SOFIA DOMINO

**T**HE first time I emailed Buddy Elias, I thought I would receive a reply from a kind and special man.

But Buddy is much more than that. With every word he says, he inspires me and, from the beginning of our communication, I felt that he is a lively man, with a great sense of humour and with a big heart, full of love.

Now, every time I think about Buddy, I think about kindness, respect and, of course, hope.

Buddy Elias is the stage name of Bernhard Elias, born in 1925 in Frankfurt am Main, Germany.

From 1947 to 1961, he was resident comedian for the *Holiday on Ice* revue.

Along with numerous appearances on stage, Buddy has also worked as an actor on more than 80 films and TV programmes.

Many of his film roles deal with the Holocaust. Films include *David* (1979), Menahem Golan's *The Magician of Lublin* (1979), Frans Weisz' *Charlotte* (1981), Bronstein's *Children* (1991) and *My Mother's Courage* (1995).

## Anne used to imagine she was an actress

He still works as an actor, but he mostly spends his time talking about his cousin, Anne Frank, and the victims of the Holocaust, to spread the word about their terrible destiny.

He also works for Anne's humanist ideals, doing everything he can to talk about peace and to fight against any form of discrimination.

Buddy, who describes his health as good apart from hearing problems, said: "Together with my wife, Gerti, we give lectures and talks about Anne and the Holocaust."

"We mostly visit schools and read out of our family history book."

Anne — along with her mother Edith and sister Margot — died 70 years ago this month in Bergen-Belsen concentration camp from typhus, aged just 15.

# Buddy recalled when his cousin Anne made him imitate grandma



The 89-year-old added: "As a child, I loved ice-skating and I became a professional comedian and jazz dancer on ice. I performed for 14 years and I travelled a lot. I also performed in Milan, Turin and Rome."

"During the war I lived in Basel, Switzerland, with my family and my grandmothers as well as an uncle, who left France to escape the Nazis."

"My hometown, Basel, is only minutes away from Germany and France, so we were afraid daily of a German invasion."

In many past interviews, Buddy said he had much in common with cousin Anne Frank.

One of the last memories he has

of the tragic teen was when she asked him to dress up like his grandmother and imitate her.

"Anne loved to dress up and to imagine she was an actress," Buddy recalled.

"We also played games like other children."

"She was clever at hide and seek, always finding places where I could not find her. Especially when we were on vacation in the mountains before they went into hiding."

"We were very fond of each other. Anne's older sister Margot was not so playful. She was a reader, but also a lovely girl."

"Their father, Otto, always said, 'The whole world talks about

Anne and nobody about Margot'. That made him sad."

In 1929, Buddy's father, Erich, became a representative of a German company in Basel. Buddy and his mother joined him in 1931.

Meanwhile, the Frank family fled to Amsterdam. Until the Wehrmacht was formed in 1936, they used to travel regularly to Switzerland.

After that, Anne kept in touch with Buddy through letters.

He recalled: "She wrote to us very often and she sent us letters telling us all about her life, about school, her friends, her activities etc."

"When Margot received the notice to report the next day for

crimination and, because of that, are more interested in humanitarian issues."

"For example, in her diary, Anne had taken a stand for the rights for women, she hoped that one day people could live in peace, no matter what religion, colour of skin or nationality."

Anne also wrote about Buddy in her diary. She spoke directly to him, mentioning a dream that she had about them shopping together in Basel and also writing that she had heard he had finished drama school.

He said: "I was moved to tears when the diary was published in German and to read what she wrote about me."

Since 1996, Buddy — who said he was devastated when he discovered his cousin had died — has been president of the Anne Franks Fonds in Basel.

The AFF is a foundation under Swiss law domiciled in Basel. It was established by Otto Frank on January 24, 1963, and promotes charitable works and plays a social and cultural role in the spirit of Anne Frank.

"I became its president after Otto's passing," Buddy said.

"All income from book sales and from anything else concerning Anne Frank is used for a wide range of charitable and educational projects, especially for children in need."

To mark the 70th anniversaries of the deaths of Anne, Margot and Edith, the AFF is supporting UNICEF as well as its own Medical Fund for the Righteous, which was established in 1987.

Its purpose is to guarantee basic medical care for non-Jews who risked their lives to save Jews from certain death during the Second World War.

The *yahrzeit* for the three will be marked by the family and the Board of Trustees of the AFF with a private ceremony.

■ Details: [www.annefrank.ch](http://www.annefrank.ch)

**SO FIA Domino founded the Italian charity Un Ponte Per Anne Frank (A Bridge to Anne Frank) in October.**

**The organisation aims to continue Anne Frank's legacy and to use her story and messages to analyse the consequences caused by**

**discrimination, prejudice and injustice and to encourage others to improve our world.**

**"The mission of A Bridge to Anne Frank is to encourage people to never forget the Holocaust and to help those in need," Sofia said.**

**Representatives of the charity visit schools**

**throughout Italy to educate pupils on the Holocaust and is also collecting clothes and medicines to send to children affected by the war in Syria.**

**The charity is arranging a visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau this year.**

■ [tinyurl.com/m95vaw9](http://tinyurl.com/m95vaw9)

## Afraid daily of a German invasion

transport to a 'work camp in Germany', they wrote a last postcard to us, saying we would have to understand that they could not correspond with us anymore.

"We then realised that they went into hiding. But we had no idea where they were hiding. Then for two years we had no contact at all."

"The relationship between Anne and Margot was good. Differences were natural, like with other sisters or brothers."

"But they had different personalities. Anne was lively and Margot was more quiet. Anne was more Otto's child and Margot more Edith's child."

Buddy added: "Many children, during the Holocaust, wrote diaries and I respect all of them. Anne is the voice of all the victims of the Holocaust because many people, thanks to the diary of Anne Frank, learned what the Holocaust was, learned about dis-



**BELOVED COUSIN:** Buddy Elias at an exhibition in Frankfurt about his cousin Anne Frank, who was born almost four years after him. She died in Bergen-Belsen concentration camp 70 years ago this month after hiding from the Nazis in Amsterdam between 1942 and 1944

**BORN:** 1925 in Frankfurt am Main, Germany. Died, March 16, 2015, in Basel.

**FAMILY:** Wife Gerti and sons Patrick and Oliver.

**CAREER:** Actor.

**AWARDS:** Honorary Medal of the City of Frankfurt am Main in 2012 and Basel Star in 2007.