

Press Release

London, UK – November 22nd 2011

Alice Herz-Sommer, the renowned Czech pianist and the oldest known survivor of the Holocaust and the Theresienstadt (Terezin) concentration camp, celebrates her 108th birthday this weekend. To honour her extra-ordinary life, Web of Stories is proud to present a wonderful video archive of Alice Herz-Sommer's first-hand experiences at Theresienstadt and how music helped her survive. The video stories are available free of charge for everyone to view at <http://webofstories.com>.

Theresienstadt opened on 24th November 1941 and operated for three-and-a-half years, serving as a transit camp for Czech Jews who were artistically and culturally talented. It was used in a propaganda function as a 'show camp' for the Germans to justify to the rest of the world the deportation or resettlement of Jews from Germany to the east. In reality, it served as a ghetto, a concentration camp and a holding bank for Jews before their deportation to killing centres in Eastern Europe. Now, 70 years later, it retains its reputation as a place in which many gifted writers, musicians, academics and actors were incarcerated and forced to give performances and lectures in an effort to create an impression of normality to the rest of the world, and although teaching was banned, many children were taught by these exceptionally talented individuals. Over 90 per cent of these children, however, were later murdered in death camps.

Four years ago, at the age of 104, Alice Herz-Sommer published a book called *A Garden of Eden in Hell*, where she recalls her time in Theresienstadt and how she was forced to play over a hundred concerts inside the concentration camp. Despite the terrible atrocities she and her family not only witnessed but also endured, she still maintains that the Nazis were "only human".

In one of her video stories, Alice Herz-Sommer recollects a Nazi who was living in the apartment above her flat. His name was Hermann. Here she recalls the evening before she and her family were sent to Theresienstadt when the man came to visit her with his wife bearing biscuits, and said, "*Mrs Sommer, I see you are [going] away. I don't know what to tell you. In any case, I hope you will come back. What I know... what I want to tell you is that... I admire your playing... hours and hours, the patience and the beauty of the music... I thank you. In any case, I thank you.*"

<http://www.webofstories.com/play/17993>

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NOTES TO EDITOR

About Web of Stories:

Everyone has a story to tell. Over time many stories become forgotten, but now Web of Stories offers members of the public the chance to tell their stories for future generations to enjoy.

Web of Stories began as an archive of life stories told by some of the great scientists of our time. As the number of stories grew, it became obvious that some were on related topics and a web was slowly being created of connected stories. After a while we also invited famous people outside the field of science to tell their life stories.

Web of Stories is also open to the public to record their stories for the world to view and share. The project is built on the belief that we all have wonderful stories to share, and have family and friends whose tales we would like to hear. The great thing about Web of Stories is that anyone can come and talk about virtually anything they like. Just like our famous speakers, it is an account of their experiences as they remember them.

We hope to provide lasting, first-hand accounts of people's experiences – imagine that in a hundred years' time your grandchildren or great grandchildren will be able to watch you telling stories about your life today!

Contact:

For more information on Web of Stories or Alice Herz-Sommer's video interview with Web of Stories please contact the Press Desk on +44(0)20 7323 0323 or email press@webofstories.com

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