I AM ONE AND A HALF MILLION SILENT GIRLS AND BOYS,
I AM HERE TODAY TO BE THEIR VOICE.

I was born on December 31, 1934 to a religious Jewish middle-class family in Kippenheim; a village in south western Germany. I remained an only child. Papa had served in the German Army in the First World War; was wounded and decorated with the Iron Cross. Our world crashed when my parents and I were included in the August 22, 1942 transport from Stuttgart to TEREZIN (THERESIENSTADT in German) concentration camp in Czechoslovakia. I was 7 years old wearing a YELLOW STAR, and was given the number XIII -1-408; the youngest in the group of close to 1200 people. I arrived with few belongings and my beloved doll Marlene in my arms. TEREZIN was an old fortress town converted into a concentration camp.

It was sealed off from the outside world with high brick walls, wooden fences, barbed wire, and in control by an SS Kommandant. It was called a MODEL Ghetto for propaganda purposes. Among the prisoners were the elderly and prominent Jews. They came from Czechoslovakia, Germany, Austria, Holland, and Denmark.

TEREZIN actually was a holding area before sending the inmates to be killed in the gas chambers of Auschwitz and other killing centers. The camp was beautified for the International Red Cross Inspection in the summer of 1944. They sadly accepted the deception. Life was especially harsh for children. We slept on the floor, or if lucky on straw-filled mattresses packed like sardines on double and triple-deck bunk beds. We grew up fast. The most important words in our vocabulary were bread potatoes and soup. We got used to the carts piled with dead bodies. Three times a day we stood in long lines holding our metal dishes to get our meager food rations. Hunger, over-crowding, bad hygiene, mice, rats, fleas, bed bugs, lice, and fear of being sent to the East plagued us daily.

We were finally liberated on May 8, 1945 by the Soviet Army. I was 10 years old. I had spent 3 years in this hell. About 144,000 people had been sent to TEREZIN. Of those 88,000 were sent mainly to Auschwitz to be killed and 33,000 died of starvation and diseases. Of 15,000 children sent to Terezin very few survived. Most were sent to Auschwitz to their death; including my best friend and bunkmate Ruth. We returned to Germany for less than a year and emigrated to America in May, 1946. We had lost 20 family members; including my beloved Grandma. Of our transport to Terezin only a handful had survived; including my parents and I. Our destination was New York.

Unfortunately, my new-found freedom was short-lived, and I became very ill from the consequences of my life in Terezin. I was diagnosed with a severe case of tuberculosis of both lungs. Years of hospitalization and complete bed rest, plus painful procedures followed. Finally, drugs were discovered to give me a cure. During my long illness I found solace in writing, which gave me a purpose in life and took away the loneliness I was feeling. Eventually, I returned to school at age 15, after the loss of 8 years of education. I attained a college degree in chemistry, and worked for 38 years in the medical field. Six published books followed; including I AM A STAR - child of the Holocaust. I am immensely grateful to
my co-writer - composer Madeline Stone, and choral director Gregg Breinberg of PS 22 in Staten Island. Special thanks go to the wonderful children of the choir who personify the blending of many ethnic backgrounds.

Thank you all for bringing our song: WHO AM I to life. My hope, my wish and prayer is for every child to grow up in peace without hunger and prejudice. I plead with you, world: Make good choices. The antidote to hatred is education. No more genocides and another Holocaust, and no more anti-Semitism.

Thank you.