

NEWS FROM: BENSINGER GLOBAL MEDIA FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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“REFUGE: STORIES OF THE SELFHELP HOME”

Award-Winning Documentary Tells Story of Last Holocaust Survivors

Award-winning Documentary to be Broadcast on Public Television Stations in May 2016 to Commemorate Holocaust Remembrance Day

Reaching back more than 75 years, the documentary “REFUGE: Stories of the Selfhelp Home” gives a voice to the final generation Holocaust survivors from Central Europe.

REFUGE explores the lives of six survivors and refugees against the context of the Nazi cataclysm and how a small group of them came together to create a community that has given shelter to more than 1,000 victims of Nazi persecution from Central Europe. The film illuminates the lost world of Central European Jewry prior to World War II--middle class, educated, cultured--and the remarkable courage, resilience and character of its final generation at Selfhelp in Chicago. The one-hour documentary is distributed to public television stations by American Public Television and presented by WOUB Public Media.

The film’s director, Ethan Bensinger, who lives in Chicago, comes from a German-Jewish family who fled Nazi Germany in the 1930s and eventually settled in Chicago in 1958. The documentary grew out of a project to interview the last remaining survivors and refugees at the Selfhelp Home.

“Our film explores a community that will not exist for much longer,” said Bensinger. “Many of the stories are heartbreaking, and speak of loss of family, of place, of separation. But they also tell of renewal, of resilience, of finding love and creating new families, of starting again in a new land.”

Since its premiere at the Illinois Holocaust Museum in June 2012, REFUGE has been screened widely at film festivals, museums, schools, libraries, churches and synagogues. It has been honored with the top award for excellence at the Beloit International Film Festival, as well as "Best Documentary" and "Best in Fest" awards at the Sycamore Film Festival, and the Emerging Documentary Filmmaker Award at the Geneva Film Festival. Recently the film was featured in a project by Germany's national broadcaster, Deutsche Welle to trace the remnants of Germany's Jewish community around the world. REFUGE has screened in London, Hong Kong, Zagreb and in the German cities of Hamburg, Fulda and Lüneburg.

The refugees and survivors in the film speak vividly of the loss of family and of place, and of decisions that meant the difference between life and death. Several of the elderly survivors personally witnessed Kristallnacht. Others speak of finding refuge in England through the Kindertransport, escaping to the United States and Shanghai, hiding on estates and in castles in France, and deportation to the Theresienstadt and Auschwitz concentration camps.

Selfhelp was founded in the late 1930s by a handful of young Jewish refugees who fled Nazi Germany to the safety of Chicago. Through prescience, pooled resources and a strong spirit of volunteerism, Selfhelp provided housing, food, English classes and job placement services to other displaced Jewish émigrés and later, after the war, to Holocaust survivors. They put people up in their own homes and reached deep in their pockets to give those who came with nothing the basics of what they needed to start new lives in a new country.

In 1952, Selfhelp opened up a residential home for the oldest refugees and survivors, whose atmosphere reproduced some of the home life and cultural experiences that they had lost. To date, more than 1,000 refugees and survivors have spent their last years at the Selfhelp homes in Chicago's Hyde Park and Edgewater communities.

“Within 10 years or so, there will be no Jewish victims of Nazi persecution living at Selfhelp,” said Bensinger. Out of the 30 refugees and survivors he originally interviewed, just six are alive today. “As a filmmaker, I feel obligated to give a voice to these last eyewitnesses to life as it was before, during and after the war, so that future generations understand the consequences of intolerance, injustice and unmitigated hatred.”

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About American Public Television

American Public Television (APT) has been a leading distributor of high-quality, top-rated programming to the nation’s public television stations since 1961. APT also has distributed about half of the top 100 highest-rated public television titles for nearly 10 years. Among its 300 new program titles per year, APT programs include prominent documentaries, news and current affairs programs, dramas, how-to programs, children’s series and classic movies. America’s Test Kitchen From Cook’s Illustrated, Rick Steves’ Europe, Doc Martin, Nightly Business Report, Moyers & Company, NHK Newslines, Lidia’s Italy in America, Globe Trekker, Simply Ming, BBC World News and P. Allen Smith’s Garden Home join numerous documentaries and performance programs like Live from the Artists Den which are popular with public television viewers. APT licenses programs internationally through its [APT Worldwide](#) service. Now in its 8th year, [Create](#)® TV — featuring the best of public television’s lifestyle programming — is distributed by APT. APT also distributes [WORLD](#)™, public television’s premier news, science and documentary channel. To find out more about APT’s programs and services, visit [APTonline.org](#).