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New Dimensions in TestimonySM,
Where Cutting-Edge Technology Allows Visitors to Have “Virtual Conversations”
with Holocaust Survivors,
Opens at Museum of Jewish Heritage – A Living Memorial to the Holocaust
on September 6

World Premiere of Interactive Testimony from Eva Schloss, Anne Frank’s Stepsister

New York, NY – The Museum of Jewish Heritage – A Living Memorial to the Holocaust is piloting *New Dimensions in TestimonySM*, an interactive testimony installation created by USC Shoah Foundation. The first of its kind in the New York area, *New Dimensions in TestimonySM* allows visitors to have “virtual conversations” with Holocaust survivors Pinchas Gutter and Eva Schloss. Visitors ask questions and lifelike projections of Pinchas and Eva answer those questions in real time—offering personal reflections about life before, during, and after the Holocaust. Specialized recording and display technologies and next-generation natural language processing revolutionize the ways we can communicate and learn from each other across time and space.

On view September 6 to December 22, 2017, the Museum’s installation of *New Dimensions in TestimonySM* presents the world premiere of the testimony of Eva Schloss and the New York premiere of the testimony of Pinchas Gutter. Eva Schloss, the stepsister of Anne Frank, is a survivor of Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp who now lives in London, England. Pinchas Gutter is a survivor of six German Nazi concentration camps who now lives in Toronto, Canada. The installation’s technology draws on the rich resource of 1,500 recorded answers triggered by visitors’ unique questions—allowing direct, seamless conversation. *New Dimensions in TestimonySM* will ensure that future generations will still be able to speak with and learn from survivors.

“The Museum of Jewish Heritage – A Living Memorial to the Holocaust is helping to define the future of testimony-based Holocaust education,” said Michael S. Glickman, Museum President & CEO. “Survivor testimony documents personal experience of global significance, reminding us of the individual lives that were brutally cut short or changed forever. It is vital that we find ways to still be able to ‘speak’ to and connect with survivors far into the future. Technology is giving us a chance.”

USC Shoah Foundation Executive Director Stephen Smith said that *New Dimensions in TestimonySM* has incredible historical potential.

“In 10, 20, 50, 500 years from now and beyond, students will learn about the horrors of the Holocaust and genocide—and perhaps more importantly, the necessity of tolerance—from Pinchas Gutter, Eva Schloss and others,” he said. “A price can’t be attached to so valuable a gift to humanity.”

Museum tickets, which provide access to all permanent and special exhibitions, can be purchased online at mjhny.org or in-person. The Museum of Jewish Heritage – A Living Memorial to the Holocaust is located at 36 Battery Place in Lower Manhattan.

Pinchas Gutter is a survivor of six German Nazi concentration camps who now lives in Toronto, Canada. Pinchas was born in Łódź and was eight years old when the war started. He fled with his twin sister and entire family to Warsaw, where they were confined in the Warsaw Ghetto for two and a half years. They were captured in April 1943 and deported to Majdanek death camp. When the family arrived at the camp, Pinchas’ father, mother, and sister were murdered by the Nazis. Pinchas would eventually pass through several other concentration camps, including Buchenwald. He was liberated in Theresienstadt by the Soviet Army on May 8, 1945.

Eva Schloss is a survivor of Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp who now lives in London, England. Originally from Vienna, Austria, Eva and her family fled to Belgium and then Amsterdam when the war started. In Amsterdam, her family lived in the Merwedeplein, in the same area as Anne Frank and her family, and eventually went into hiding in 1942. The family was betrayed on Eva’s 15th birthday and sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Eva’s father and older brother died on a death march at the end of the war. The Soviet Army liberated her and her mother on January 27, 1945.

ABOUT THE TECHNOLOGY AND PROJECT

A collaboration between USC Shoah Foundation and USC Institute for Creative Technologies (ICT), in partnership with concept developer Conscience Display, *New Dimensions in TestimonySM* is currently in development. Pilot installations like the one at the Museum of Jewish Heritage – A Living Memorial to the Holocaust will provide vital user feedback as the project continues to evolve.

The key element of *New Dimensions in TestimonySM* is the ability of its system to (1) interpret the question asked, and (2) identify and deliver the most relevant response from each survivor’s pre-recorded responses to 1,500 questions. ICT pioneered the natural language understanding technology to provide viewers with a truly immersive experience. When visitors ask questions, relevant data is captured and processed into video segments that can be played back verbatim, precisely as the survivors delivered them. The playback technology is able to recognize similarities between word patterns in questions and answers. It allows the testimony to be viewed in 3-D from the front, as if it were given in a classroom or museum setting, and is diffusely lit to blend with the environment.

ICT has developed a number of virtual human characters with this capability, but this is the first time a real person has been integrated into the technology.

New Dimensions in TestimonySM is an initiative by the USC Shoah Foundation to record and display testimony in a way that will preserve the dialogue between Holocaust survivors and people far into the future. Collaborating within the project are Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center, with technology by USC Institute for Creative Technologies, and concept by Conscience Display. Funding for *New Dimensions in TestimonySM* was provided in part by Pears Foundation, Louis F. Smith, and Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center. Other partners include CANDLES Holocaust Museum and Education Center.

The Museum of Jewish Heritage – A Living Memorial to the Holocaust is piloting *New Dimensions In TestimonySM* as part of a 20th anniversary commemoration that includes special exhibitions and installations, public programs, and community events. The Museum’s 20th anniversary commemoration is made possible by major support provided by David Berg Foundation, Bruce C. Ratner, and Bernard and Anne Spitzer Charitable Trust.

In addition to the Museum’s 20th anniversary sponsors, this presentation of *New Dimensions In TestimonySM* is made possible by the Murray and Frida Krell Testimony Fund. The Krell Testimony Fund enables the Museum to preserve and present survivor testimony—documenting personal experience of global significance.

ABOUT THE MUSEUM OF JEWISH HERITAGE – A LIVING MEMORIAL TO THE HOLOCAUST

The Museum of Jewish Heritage – A Living Memorial to the Holocaust is New York’s contribution to the global responsibility to never forget. The Museum is committed to the crucial mission of educating diverse visitors about Jewish life before, during, and after the Holocaust. Anchoring the southernmost tip of Manhattan, the Museum of Jewish Heritage completes the cultural and educational landscape it shares with the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island.

Since 1997, the Museum of Jewish Heritage has welcomed more than two million visitors; it maintains a collection of 30,000 artifacts, photographs, documentary films, and survivor testimonies and contains classrooms, a 400-seat theater (Edmond J. Safra Hall), special exhibition galleries, a resource center for educators, and a memorial art installation, *Garden of Stones*, designed by internationally acclaimed sculptor Andy Goldsworthy.

The Museum receives general operating support from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs and New York State Council on the Arts.

For more information, visit mjhny.org.

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