



Portrait of Ilse Weber

(continued from front flap)

where she and her son Tommy were both murdered.

Willi, who had been deported before Ilse, managed to hide his wife's poems and songs in a garden shed. He survived and, in late 1945, with Hanuš, who had joined him from Sweden, retrieved them. As for the letters, there is no way of knowing how many Ilse actually wrote during those years, as we only have the ones fortuitously found decades later while the attic in the London house in which Ilse's friend Lilian had lived was emptied.

A born writer, fluent in both Czech and German, Ilse managed to disclose through her various writings a rich, multifaceted Jewish life. Her songs and poems mirror the harsh and cruel reality of the Theresienstadt ghetto that the Germans tried so hard to mask from the world.

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ILSE WEBER

The literature about Theresienstadt (Terezin) and the fate of Czech Jewry during the Holocaust is voluminous, but Ilse Weber's story is unique. A tremendously gifted young woman, a poetess and musician, a son who is rescued to Britain and Sweden, a devoted husband, and many of whose wonderful poems have been miraculously rescued, form a unique testimony. Ilse Weber worked as a nurse in a children's sick-room in Theresienstadt, and refused to abandon her charges when they were transported to Auschwitz. Miraculously, again, her last spoken words at the entrance to the gas chamber were preserved. Her husband survived, and her older son finally made this publication possible. I have read many accounts, but this account by someone who did not survive, and whose story has been reconstructed, is exceptional.

PROF. YEHUDA BAUER, YAD VASHEM.

“Reading these letters today one remains speechless.
Likewise the . . . visually expressive poems.”

—ROLAND MAURER, *Der Kleine Bund*, Zürich

“Ilse Weber's letters and poems . . . get ‘under our skin.’”

—HUGO ERNST KÄUFER, *Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*

“ . . . one of the most important testimonies of the Shoah.”

—FLORIAN HUNGER, *Jüdische Zeitung*

“With her smuggled guitar . . . Ilse became a legendary figure
among the survivors of Theresienstadt.”

—OLIVER PFOHLMANN, *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*

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“You will probably be happy to know how do we live here now? [. . .] It's like dancing on a powder keg. The air is impregnated with insane rumors, which we no longer believe.”

May 6, 1939, Ilse Weber in a letter to her sister-in-law, Zofiah Marení.

In 1933, Ilse Weber (née Herlinger), a known author of children's books and radio scripts, lived with her husband Willi and their two-year-old son Hanuš in her ancestral village of Vítkovice in northern Czechoslovakia. In 1934, her second son Tomáš (Tommy) was born and four years later, their town was annexed by Hitler's Third Reich. In the spring of 1939, the Webers sent Hanuš on one of Sir Nicholas Winton's Kindertransport to London, to Ilse's childhood friend, Lilian von Löwenadler, who took him to Sweden to live with her mother. This was the last time Ilse saw Hanuš. In February 1942 Tommy, Willi and Ilse, then living in Prague, were deported to the Theresienstadt ghetto where they were incarcerated until 1944.

In addition to her professional writings, Ilse wrote dozens of letters between 1933 and 1942, mostly to Lilian. In these letters, Ilse recorded details of her personal experience and provided vivid testimony of her small family's daily life during a time of increasing danger, when Europe descended from peace to the chaos of war and genocide.

During her stay in Theresienstadt, Ilse sent a few short letters that, due to censorship, reported how “well” they were doing. Her true experience and emotions are conveyed in the more than sixty poems she composed there. Working in the children's infirmary, Ilse entertained the young patients with songs trying to make their daily suffering slightly more bearable. In the beginning of October 1944, the entire children's infirmary was deported. Ilse, who refused to abandon them, voluntarily registered to the transport to Auschwitz

(continued on back flap)