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Ordinary People Leading Extrordinary Lives: Making History Interviews with Fritzie Fritzshall and Art Johnston

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Contents

6

Composing the Union's Battle Cries
Christian McWhirter

24

Sing a New Song
Robert M. Marovich

40

Snow Days
Rosemary K. Adams

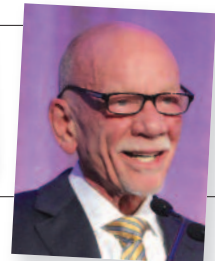
4

Departments

From the Editor
Rosemary K. Adams

60

Making History
Timothy J. Gilfoyle

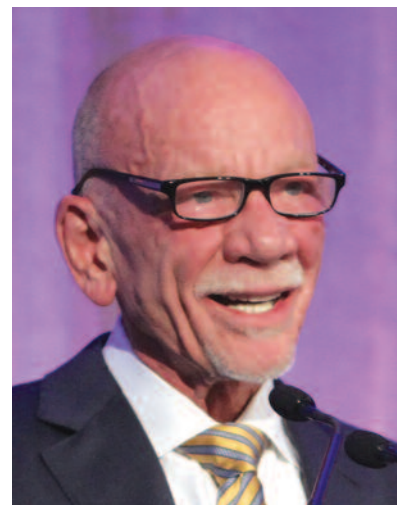


Ordinary People Leading Extraordinary Lives: Making History Interviews with Fritzie Fritzshall and Art Johnston

TIMOTHY J. GILFOYLE

Few migrants to Chicago have overcome as many discriminatory obstacles in their lives as Fritzie Fritzshall and Art Johnston. For more than thirty years, Johnston has made his mark on Chicago's lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) communities.¹ His video bar Sidetrack was one of the earliest institutions in Chicago to promote HIV/AIDS awareness and sponsor related health campaigns. Active in the passage of human rights ordinances at the city, county, and state levels, Johnston cofounded the Illinois Federation for Human Rights (now called Equality Illinois). He was among the first to advocate for a LGBTQ community center, and today, the Center on Halsted is the largest such facility in the Midwest.² Fritzshall of Buffalo Grove, Illinois, is also a longtime community activist. Responding to the proposed neo-Nazi march in Skokie in 1977, Fritzshall, a Holocaust survivor, proved an instrumental figure in the creation of the Illinois Holocaust Museum & Education Center and, for many years, served as its president. Through her influential activism with the Illinois Holocaust and Genocide Commission, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, and Jewish United Fund/Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago, she continues to promote antidiscriminatory and educational programs to combat genocide.³

Arthur Johnston was born in 1943 to Lloyd Vernon Johnston and Mary Leone Singer Johnston in North Tonawanda, New York.⁴ The Johnstons were recent migrants to upstate New York, with Lloyd working first in a hoist and chain factory and later as a shipping clerk: "My parents had moved there from the



Fritzie Fritzshall (left) received the 2015 Bertha Honoré Palmer Making History Award for Distinction in Civic Leadership. Art Johnston (right) received the 2016 Jane Addams Making History Award for Distinction in Social Service.

mountains of Pennsylvania, and like many folks who grew up in north central Pennsylvania, there were no jobs. They moved up in the early 1940s for work.” Johnston describes his family as “country folks,” stating, “I was born at home on the kitchen table.”⁵

At an early age, Johnston recognized that he was gay. Living in a homophobic era, he confesses that “like so many gay kids, I tried to commit suicide a number of times. It was that sense of aloneness, of knowing that there were things about me that were very important that I could not talk to anybody about.” And, despite Johnston’s later interest in organizing and leading Chicago’s Gay Athletic Association, he was not attracted to sports as a teenager. “I hated sports,” he puts it bluntly. “I was not remotely gifted as an athlete. Clearly, my least favorite part of every week were phys ed classes, which were very large with fifty to seventy people.”⁶

In 1961, Johnston became among the first in his family to attend college.⁷ “I recall this well,” says Johnston. “It was the third week of May of my senior year of high school. I get called to the guidance office, and they say, ‘You’ve won this scholarship, congratulations, so where do you want to go to school?’ I said, ‘I have no idea.’” On the advice of that high-school guidance counselor, Johnston elected to attend the State University of New York at Albany (now the University at Albany, SUNY) and major in French. Although slow to adjust to college life, Johnston thrived. Before he graduated, he was elected student body president. He was also a member of Kappa Beta, the local fraternity that Harvey Milk had joined while attending SUNY Albany about a decade earlier.⁸

Fritzie Weiss Fritzshall was born in 1931 and raised in Klyucharki, Czechoslovakia (now Klyucharky in western Ukraine), near the city of Mukacheve.⁹ Her father, Herman Weiss, was a farmer and a storekeeper who immigrated to the United States in the mid-1930s. “When my dad came to this country, he started to work for Vienna Sausage Company,” she states. “He rented a room, a bedroom actually, and lived in someone else’s apartment.” Weiss intended to save enough to pay the passage for his family. “It was during the Depression years, however, and he made very little money,” Fritzshall explains.¹⁰ By the time he could bring his family over, World War II had broken out. Fritzshall’s mother, Sara Davidovich Weiss, fearing attacks on transatlantic shipping, made the fateful decision to remain in Europe.¹¹

Fritzshall has no childhood memories of her father. “I do know that he came here with good intentions of bringing his family to this country,” she recounts. “He did not desert his family, which is important to know. He would send a five-dollar bill in a letter every so often for the family, which was a lot of money in those days. My mother was able to support her family with this.”¹²

Fritzshall (left) pictured with her mother, Sara Davidovich Weiss, in Klyucharki, Czechoslovakia, c. 1940



Johnston, pictured c. 1997, never intended to make Chicago his home, but his adopted city has greatly benefited from his work on behalf of the LGBTQ communities.





In 2008, Fritzshall returned to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Above: Fritzshall (third from left) walks toward the entrance with her friend Joy Erlichman Miller and her grandsons, Scott and Andy. Below: The group visits the Birkenau latrine barrack. Photographs by Steve Fritzshall



Fritzshall recalls the fateful day when Jewish families were transformed from neighbors to outcasts in her small town: “We woke up in the morning to go to school,” she recounts. “I and the rest of the Jewish children who came to school that day were not allowed to walk into class. I couldn’t understand what made me different from the night before to the next morning.”¹³ Then, on a dreary, rainy winter night in 1944, soldiers gave the Weiss family fifteen minutes to pack up their property.¹⁴ They were initially transported to a local ghetto and then packed into cattle cars so tightly that everyone was forced to stand. When the train stopped, they were at Auschwitz.¹⁵

Fritzshall survived the concentration camp by luck. By the time the train arrived at Auschwitz in Nazi-occupied Poland, many of the people in her boxcar had died, including her grandfather. Fritzshall’s mother, two younger brothers, and other relatives would ultimately perish at the hands of the Nazis. When she departed the train, she remembers a skinny man in a dirty, striped uniform whispering to her in Yiddish: “Tell them you are fifteen years old.” Fritzshall, only thirteen, soon realized that if the Nazis thought she was older, she would be sent to a work detail, not the gas chamber. “He was the first to save my life,” Fritzshall recalls.¹⁶ On a death march from Auschwitz several months later, Fritzshall escaped into the forest, where she was liberated by the Russian army in 1945.¹⁷

Johnston, upon graduating from SUNY Albany in 1966, embarked on a teaching career. He moved to Virginia after accepting an appointment at Woodberry Forest, a private boarding school where he taught French. “I was the only faculty or staff member from north of the Mason-Dixon Line,” remembers Johnston.¹⁸ He also served as soccer coach, a prelude to his later involvement with the National Association of Amateur Gay Athletes and a sharp departure from his own experience with high-school sports.¹⁹ “I had the most wonderful experience of meeting coaches who actually cared about their students, unlike every experience I’d had in high school with coaches and PE classes, which were horrible,” recounts Johnston. “I had never met such wonderful human beings as the people at Woodberry Forest. There was nobody there who was just a coach; you were a teacher and a coach. They were wonderful examples.”²⁰

Johnston’s pedagogical enthusiasm spread to other areas. “Eventually they asked me to assist in the theater program by taking over some of the tech work, which I did,” he explains. Then the colleague who chaired the theater program moved and another opportunity appeared: “We had a brand-new theater, and they asked me to take over. So suddenly, I was directing shows, and they were successful.”²¹

In 1972, Johnston received a sabbatical from Woodberry Forest and was encouraged to study for a master of fine arts degree in directing at



Fritzshall in Chicago, c. 1947

Northwestern University. “I intended to stay [at Woodberry Forest] my entire life. I loved my work. I loved it, loved it, loved it,” he gushes. And for good reason: “It was challenging, and I was around people who were very dedicated to what they were doing.”²² But in 1973, he met José “Pepe” Peña, who shortly after became his life partner.²³ Johnston never went back to Virginia.²⁴

Woodberry Forest’s loss was Chicago’s gain. Johnston soon found a teaching position north of the city at Wheeling High School. “I interviewed for this job and it was to run all of the tech for the theater productions and to teach English.” He discovered that since the theater program was in the English Department, he could not teach French. “I had a minor in English, and I had taught some English,” he remembers, “so they said you’re going to be an English teacher from now on.”²⁵

Fritzshall would also have to adapt to her new home in Chicago. As a homeless refugee without a family, her prospects at the close of World War II were bleak. “But my dad, from his end here in Chicago, started to look for his family. He wrote letters to neighbors that he could remember and to the post office,” she explains. Fritzshall returned to her hometown, but she recalls: “I’m there alone, and I’m not knowing what to do or whom to contact. The neighbors that got [my father’s] letters did not even acknowledge that I was back, let alone hand me a letter. They didn’t want to know that we Jews had come back, and so we were a nonexistent people at that point.”²⁶

One day fortune fell on Fritzshall. “We had this tiny post office, probably the size of a small Starbucks, and the man from the post office came to where I was living at my grandmother’s house and said if I come to the post office tomorrow morning, there was going to be a call from America. I knew who the call from America was going to be.” When Fritzshall arrived at the post office at the expected time, “all our neighbors were there,” she remembers. “They recognized that somebody’s calling from America, even though they didn’t say hello to me. So everybody’s there to listen to the conversation that I was going to have with my dad.”²⁷ But the nosy neighbors were out of luck: Fritzshall spoke to her father in Yiddish.

Leaving war-torn Europe in the immediate aftermath of World War II was not easy. “I wouldn’t have been able to leave under communism,” explains Fritzshall. So her uncle made arrangements for Fritzshall, her cousin, and two other women: “He paid for a smuggler, and they smuggled us across the border at night from communism into the Sudetenland.” After briefly living with another uncle in the Sudetenland, Fritzshall made her way to Gothenburg, Sweden, where she stayed for a short time. She then traveled by ship to England and finally the United States. In 1947, Fritzshall was reunited with her father in Chicago.²⁸

Johnston taught at Wheeling High School for several years. On weekends, he and his partner bartended: Johnston at Carol’s Speakeasy at 1355 North



Opened in 1982, Sidetrack is co-owned by Johnston and his spouse, José Peña. Above: The couple with the Anheuser-Busch Clydesdales during the bar’s tenth anniversary celebration, June 1992. Below: Sidetrack’s national championship gay softball team, 1984.



Wells Street and Peña at Cheri's on Surf and Clark Streets and Alfie's on Rush. Johnston explains that at the time in the LGBTQ community "people who were bartenders were celebrities," adding that Peña "was one of the best."²⁹ After several years, they were recruited to form a partnership with Rocco Dinverno to start a bar of their own. On April 22, 1982, the three opened Sidetrack.³⁰ Running a gay bar was risky business in 1982. Because of Mafia shakedowns, routine police harassment, and homophobic assaults, most gay bars had life spans of about two to four years.³¹ But not Sidetrack. "We were jammed from the moment we opened, and we had astonishing business every night," recalls Johnston.

Sidetrack was the first video bar in Chicago. After visiting Midnight Sun in San Francisco's Castro District, Johnston and Peña gambled that the concept would work in Chicago.³² They built their own video studio and created their own material. "People had never seen this; they didn't know what this was," Johnston emphasizes. "We had a giant screen when nobody else had ever done this. We had almost no sports bars, even those who had put TVs up, nothing like there is today." A year later, on May 1, 1983, Johnston and Peña became the sole owners.³³

In retrospect, Johnston is incredulous about their success: "We knew nothing about business. I was a schoolteacher and notoriously stupid about business." In short time, Johnston and Peña realized they needed to gain control of Sidetrack's property. "We knew, just by listening to our friends, that it was always better to own your building, so I began the long process of trying to convince the landlord to sell it to us. And he finally agreed." Sidetrack started with eight hundred square feet and six employees. Today, it occupies almost fifteen hundred square feet along Halsted Street and employs a staff of sixty-five.³⁴

Sidetrack proved to be the vehicle for Johnston's transformation into a human rights activist. "In those days, my community had no institution except bars," he explains. Johnston believes bars played a role in the LGBTQ community analogous to churches in the African American community. "In our gay history, we have not given nearly enough credit to . . . the gay bar people whose names nobody ever kept track of . . . who organized the marches in the '70s and early '80s, who did the early work with AIDS." Today it's a different story. "You go to a gay pride parade, and you'll see groups of gay bankers, gay supermarket workers, and gay post people," Johnston points out. "You'll see two groups of gay police officers." In the 1970s and 1980s, it was different political landscape: "In those days we had none of that," Johnston recounts. "The only place we had were bars."³⁵

Upon arriving in Chicago in 1947, Fritzshall spoke very little English. "I knew how to say, 'No, thank you,' 'I'm not hungry,' and 'I don't smoke,'" she laughs. She initially lived with her uncle and aunt, Al and Dorothy Weiss, and their three children. "The decision was that I should not live with my dad, whose English was truly bad," she explains. "I would be better off living with



Johnston photographed in front of Sidetrack during a 2013 boycott to call attention to Russia's treatment of gays and lesbians.



Johnston (left) with Dr. Ron Sable, political and HIV/AIDS health care activist, 1989. Photograph by Lisa Ebright



The Gang of Four—Johnston (from left), Rick Garcia, Jon-Henri Damski, and Laurie Dittman—burn the bylaws of the Chicago Town Meeting after the successful passage of Chicago Human Rights Ordinance, December 1988.

my aunt, and being with three children, and learning the language.” The family resided in a cramped, four-room, one-bedroom apartment at 1348½ West Estes Street in East Rogers Park. Fritzshall enrolled at the Dante School, where she remembers being in a class of refugees. “I was from Hungary. There was someone from Greece; there was someone from Italy. We’re from all over the world, and we were all put into this pot.” Outside of class, she helped raise her three small cousins. “Then I went to beauty school—the American Beauty Academy—and earned my beauty license and worked in a beauty salon all my life.”³⁶

In 1949, she married Norman Fritzshall, a former US Marine who was captured at Wake Island and imprisoned by the Japanese while she was in Auschwitz.³⁷ They lived for several years in a Rogers Park apartment at Sheridan Road and Chase Avenue. Eventually, the couple and their son, Steve, settled in Skokie, off Oakton Avenue.³⁸

In short time, Johnston’s Sidetrack became a leading LGBTQ community institution, playing a key role in the passage of Chicago’s nondiscrimination ordinance. In 1986, some LGBTQ community organizers suggested closing the city’s gay bars on the Sunday night before the city council was scheduled to vote on the measure, thereby encouraging attendance at a rally in Daley Plaza. Johnston stood up at the meeting in opposition. “I think you should keep the bars open,” he advocated. “We should rent some buses, let people gather at the bars, pick them up in the buses, and bring them back [afterward].” Furthermore, he added, “the bar owners will contribute, because they’re going to get some customers, and everybody goes to the rally.” Without warning, Johnston was in charge of organizing the event.³⁹

He now admits that at the time he did not know most bar owners along Halsted Street. Johnston cold-called different owners and requested contributions between one hundred and two hundred dollars. To his surprise, every bar contributed. He also decided to rent public buses. The rally proved a major historical event for Chicago’s LGBTQ community, even though the council rejected the ordinance by a vote of 18 to 32.⁴⁰ “As recently as five years ago,” explains Johnston, “people would come to me and say it was the experience they remembered most of their life as a gay person, because for the first time, they were not in the minority. When we pulled up around Daley Plaza and



Johnston speaks at a community meeting about the Cook County Human Rights Ordinance, 1993.



Johnston and Peña with happy onlookers on Civil Union Day, June 2, 2011. Photograph by Jason Smith

unloaded, it was a moment of magic that I don't even know how to describe. It was just remarkable."⁴¹ The event inspired activists and organizers to work for the additional eight votes. On December 21, 1988, they succeeded: the city council passed the Chicago Human Rights Ordinance.⁴²

The ordinance was a seminal moment in local LGBTQ history. "Up until they passed this in December 1988, the people doing the work were mostly bartenders," explains Johnston. "There were no attorneys because you couldn't be 'out.' That changed after 1988. Over the next two or three years, we doubled the size of our activist base, then tripled, then quintupled." Johnston adds that many were attorneys "trained in writing and thinking and understanding government. We started having all these professionals which we didn't used to have. That was an astonishing change."⁴³

The impact went beyond Chicago. Johnston helped cofound the Illinois Federation for Human Rights, later renamed Equality Illinois (EI). As president of the board, he became a driving force. EI was instrumental in the passage of the Cook County Human Rights Ordinance in 1993 and successfully lobbied for the inclusion of sexual orientation in the Illinois Human Rights Act in 2005. By then, EI was considered one of the most influential civil rights organizations in the Midwest.⁴⁴

Even sponsorships changed. Johnston was among the first to convince suppliers and vendors to sponsor gay and lesbian athletic events, street fairs, community-based HIV/AIDS service providers, and other LGBTQ organizations.⁴⁵ He and Peña even refused to sell products that did not support their community. When Rolling Rock beer distributors stopped donating funds to LGBTQ causes, for example, Sidetrack stopped serving the brand.⁴⁶ "In the early years of looking for sponsors, it'd be Stolichnaya, Bacardi, Miller Beer," remembers Johnston. The passage of the nondiscrimination ordinance convinced banks, law firms, and other businesses to sponsor such events. "It changed everything," insists Johnston. "Now you look at the list of sponsors of our big events and it's Coca-Cola and other all-American brands. It's all changed."⁴⁷ By 2007, Sidetrack had raised more than one million dollars in sponsorships for the LGBTQ community.⁴⁸

Fritzshall probably would have continued to lead the ordinary life of an American postwar family, but for Frank Collin and the National Socialist Party

of America, more commonly known as the American Nazi Party. In 1977, Collin, who was half-Jewish and a child of a Holocaust survivor, petitioned the Village of Skokie to allow his group of neo-Nazis to march in the Chicago suburb. The event attracted international attention, because by the 1970s, Skokie was home to one of the world's largest populations of Holocaust survivors. In the decades after World War II, the village had been transformed into an American shtetl, full of synagogues, yeshivas, kosher delicatessens, Hebrew schools, and other Jewish institutions. Many were built and run by Holocaust survivors like Fritzshall. Despite the worldwide outrage, Collin and his hate-mongering horde refused to relent, eventually taking the First Amendment case to the US Supreme Court. Although the Court ruled in favor of Collin, he elected to take his protest to Chicago, avoiding a potentially violent confrontation in Skokie.⁴⁹

But Collin unwittingly unleashed a movement. The Jewish community in Skokie and the greater Chicago region, aghast at the resurrection of swastikas and anti-Semitism in their own backyard, recognized the pervasive public ignorance concerning the Holocaust. Fritzshall and others organized to address the problem. First meeting in the basement of David Figman's Skokie residence, a group of survivors decided to create a museum and educational campaign dedicated to remembering the atrocities of the Holocaust.⁵⁰

On June 2, 1985, they opened the Holocaust Memorial Foundation of Illinois in a storefront in Skokie.⁵¹ "We had a small room in the little museum on Oakton Street, and most of it was posters," remembers Fritzshall. "We had posters made, and speakers and classes would come in." At first, she admits, "We would only accommodate maybe thirty or forty students, because we were still new, and most if it was through books."⁵² In 1987, they helped build the Holocaust monument in downtown Skokie.⁵³





Demonstrators gather outside the Skokie Village Hall in 1977 in protest of the National Socialist (Nazi) Party's petition to march in their community. Photograph by David Kantro

From the museum's inception, Fritzshall and her compatriots were focused on education: "What do we do? How do we teach? Who can go to the schools? Who can do outreach?" were the questions Fritzshall and others raised. "We asked to speak to the principals of the schools. We asked to go to their meetings once a month . . . and explain what we do," remembers Fritzshall. "We're not bringing the horror stories to you, but we would like to present the stories—we would like to teach."⁵⁴

Fritzshall and others recognized that they needed to create a curriculum. "In those days, the teachers didn't know how to handle the subject matter, because it wasn't talked about," she explains. "So we were the first that would approach the teachers and the schools. Then we created a class." They recruited two historians, Dr. Elliot Lefkowitz of Loyola University Chicago and Dr. Leon Stein of Roosevelt University, to develop a series of courses and teacher-training programs. "They became our teachers and created classes of how to teach the teachers about the Holocaust."⁵⁵

Their work paid off. In 1990, officials from the Holocaust Memorial Foundation of Illinois successfully lobbied the Illinois General Assembly, and the state became the first in the nation to require public schools to incorporate the Holocaust into their curricula.⁵⁶ In 2005, the organization was again influential in expanding this instruction; the Holocaust and Genocide Education Mandate now requires Illinois schools to teach about all genocides in world history.⁵⁷

Chicago is frequently described as a city of neighborhoods. By most measures, Chicago's gay neighborhoods have been transformed in the past two generations. In the 1970s, the North Halsted Street area running from Belmont Avenue to Grace Street was not yet identified as a "gay area." Gay and lesbian Chicagoans soon began buying their own buildings around Halsted, creating a level of residential and economic stability that was nonexistent near the Hubbard Street "Towertown" district by the Water Tower and in other areas with gay bars.⁵⁸ The Lakeview neighborhood, colloquially

The Holocaust monument in Skokie portrays a member of the Jewish underground protecting a Jewish family during the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising of 1943. The maquette of the monument (pictured here), originally made by sculptor Edward Chesney, was restored by his son, Dean, in 2012.





known as “Boystown,” became the gate of entry for gay migrants after 1970. The opening of the Center on Halsted in 2007 solidified the change.⁵⁹

Chicago, Johnston proclaims, is now “one of the best cities to be a gay person.” This was evidenced when the Gay Games were staged in Chicago in 2006. Johnston vividly remembers Mayor Richard M. Daley addressing the more than fifty thousand participants and spectators at the opening at Soldier Field: “He said, ‘I want you all to know you are welcome in Chicago.’ People had never heard this before, never heard it from a public official, let alone the mayor of a major city.” Johnston paraphrases Daley, “Please know you are always welcome here. Please come back any time. There’s always a home for you in Chicago.” He recalls, “People in the stands were crying. They’d never heard this.”⁶⁰

Johnston further adds that Lakeview is “healthier than the gay business districts in New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco.” More importantly, the LGBTQ residents are not just an abstraction. “Here, we actually have a community,” insists Johnston. “We take care of each other. We all know each other. We’re small enough that all of the activists in the gay community know each other.” From AIDS activism to the creation of the Center on Halsted, the LGBTQ community has matured into a powerful political and social force in the metropolitan area. “I really believe this is the best place,” summarizes Johnston.⁶¹ Others agree. In 2013, OutTraveler.com named Lakeview the best gay neighborhood in the world.⁶²

In July 2006, twelve thousand participants from seventy countries came to Chicago to compete in Gay Games VII. Above: The opening ceremony at Soldier Field. Photograph © John A Faier



The Honorable Dawn Clark Netsch and Mayor Richard M. Daley after presenting Johnston (center) with a Lifetime Achievement Award at the Equality Illinois Gala, February 2011.

On April 19, 2009, the Illinois Holocaust Museum & Education Center opened its new headquarters at 9603 Woods Drive in Skokie.⁶³ Designed by Chicago architect Stanley Tigerman, the sixty-five-thousand-square-foot, \$45-million structure can accommodate 250,000 visitors annually.⁶⁴ The building's main façade is divided into two halves. The black half incorporates the entrance. "They see those dark years" upon entering, explains Fritzshall. But museum officials did not want to close their story with dead bodies. Rather, visitors are directed beyond the concentration camps. "Then they go through the light side of the building, where it gives them courage, and it brings them out with a lighter feeling." The museum's design instills a message: "I have overcome. You too can stand up. You too can have this courage, and you too can overcome," emphasizes Fritzshall. "This is what we try to teach here."⁶⁵

The Illinois Holocaust Museum & Education Center is the "culmination of thirty years of hard work by the local Holocaust survivor community." Photograph by David Seide



The new museum's focus remains education. Fritzshall says, "This is also a teaching building and a teaching museum. It is the Illinois Holocaust Museum *and* Education Center."⁶⁶ The museum has sponsored exhibitions or programs on genocide events in Rwanda, Armenia, Cambodia, the Balkans, the Soviet Union, and most recently Darfur. "We need to care for our neighbors," states Fritzshall. "Someone took a chance and risked their lives and because of that I survived."⁶⁷

Fritzshall gives remarks at the Illinois Holocaust Museum's annual Humanitarian Awards Dinner. Hosted each spring, the event honors pillars of the community, Holocaust survivors, and the museum's achievements. Photograph by Ron Gould Studios



For Fritzshall, the Holocaust Museum & Education Center demonstrates the value and importance of history, of how bright the future can be if people work at it and listen to the past. “What we’re trying to do is bring across a message of what can happen,” said Fritzshall. “So this doesn’t happen to your children, your grandchildren. It’s not just a museum, it’s a teaching institution.” It’s not without some irony that she says, “We really need to thank the Nazis who were going to march on Skokie [in 1977]. Because of the march, we now have created this wonderful institution.”⁶⁸

Fritzshall and Johnston have devoted decades to fighting discrimination and educating the Chicago public. Johnston points out that most LGBTQ people long viewed themselves “as strangers in a strange land. We really didn’t view ourselves as Chicago citizens. We were all passing through from somewhere else.” Only with the election of Harold Washington as mayor and a growing sense of awareness did “our community wake up and realize that we weren’t second-class citizens.”⁶⁹ Fritzshall often recalls the starving, skinny man who told her to lie about her age when she departed the train at Auschwitz. “I made a promise that if I survived, I would tell the world what happened.”⁷⁰ And she did.

Timothy J. Gilfoyle is professor of history at Loyola University Chicago and current president of the Urban History Association.

ILLUSTRATIONS | 60, left: courtesy of Fritzie Fritzshall; right: Chicago History Museum. 61, top: courtesy of Art Johnston; bottom: courtesy of Fritzie Fritzshall. 62–63, courtesy of Fritzie Fritzshall. 64–67, courtesy of Art Johnston. 68–69, Skokie Heritage Museum, collection number 1989.015.001. 70, courtesy of Dean Chesney. 71, top: used with the permission of the photographer, John A Faier; bottom: courtesy of Art Johnston. 72–73, courtesy of the Illinois Holocaust Museum & Education Center. 74, Chicago History Museum.

FOR FURTHER READING | The most authoritative books on the history of Chicago’s LGBTQ community are Tracy Baim, ed., *Out and Proud in Chicago: An Overview of the City’s Gay Community* (Chicago: Surrey Books, 2008); Chad Heap, *Slumming: Sexual and Racial Encounters in American Nightlife, 1885–1940* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); and Timothy Stewart-Winter, *Queer Clout: Chicago and the Rise of Gay Politics* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016). In conjunction with the *Out in Chicago* exhibition, the Museum published a collection of scholarly essays: Jill Austin and Jennifer Brier, eds., *Out in Chicago: LGBT History at the Crossroads* (Chicago: Chicago History Museum, 2011). Valuable information on Art Johnston can be found at Tracy Baim, “Art Johnston,” Chicago Gay History video interview, 60 min., June 7, 2007. A useful introduction to the Illinois Holocaust Museum & Education Center is Leon Stein, *Voices: Memories of Chicago Area Holocaust Survivors: A Study Guide* (Northbrook, IL: Holocaust Memorial Foundation of Illinois, 1984). See also Linda G. Kuzmack, “Oral history interview with Fritzie Weiss Fritzshall,” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum videocassette, 60 min., June



Above: John Rowe presents Fritzshall with her Making History Award, June 3, 2015. Below: Laura Ricketts presents Johnston with his Making History Award, June 8, 2016. Photographs by Dan Rest



27, 1990. Helpful articles on the museum and Fritzie Fritzhall include Howard Reich, “Reawakening the Ghosts of Skokie,” *Chicago Tribune*, January 16, 2013; Bernard Schoenburg, “Auschwitz survivor shares her story during Holocaust observance,” *State Journal-Register* (Springfield, IL), April 16, 2010; and Deborah Donovan, “‘We knew one line was going to the gas chamber’: Auschwitz survivor heads exhibit that highlights holocaust horrors,” *Daily Herald* (Arlington Heights, IL), October 31, 2010.

ENDNOTES

- 1 “Arthur L. Johnston,” Chicago Gay and Lesbian Hall of Fame, 1998, accessed March 5, 2016, http://www.gllhalloffame.org/index.pl?todo=view_item&item=112.
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