



OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
CITY OF CHICAGO

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CONTACT:

Mayor's Press Office

312.744.3334

press@cityofchicago.org

Mayor Emanuel Interviews Holocaust Survivor Fritzie Fritzshall on Chicago Stories Podcast

On this week's episode of [Chicago Stories](#) podcast, Mayor Emanuel had the deep honor to sit down with Holocaust survivor and Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center President of the Board Fritzie Fritzshall to hear her incredible story of survival and dedication to education and advocacy.

Mayor Emanuel was also joined by Illinois Holocaust Museum CEO Susan Abrams to talk about its mission. This live podcast episode took place on the 75th Anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, and highlighted the Take A Stand Center, with interactive holograms of survivor stories.

"I consider myself one of the lucky ones," Fritzie told Mayor Emanuel.

Born in 1929 in Mukachevo in what was then Southeast Czechoslovakia, Fritzie was raised in what she called "a normal Jewish family" with her mother and two younger brothers, along with her extended family. At the time Fritzie's father had moved to Chicago during the Depression for work.

Fritzie's life quickly changed following the rise of Nazi Germany, which led to increasing Jewish discrimination, her move to a Jewish ghetto, and then finally being transported to Auschwitz.

Looking back on the horror of her experience, Fritzie says there were still moments of humanity and grace that ended up saving her life.

"Even during those darkest, darkest days there were good people that tried to help other people," Fritzie said.

The horror was unimaginable. Fritzie was later moved to a slave labor factory where she was the youngest among her fellow factory workers, whom she called her "599 mothers."

"After the day was over everybody would say, 'Who is going to believe us? Who is going to believe that humanity can do these things to other human beings? Who is going to tell the story and who will live?' And so they looked around and I was the kid. I was the youngest that came there. And the decision was that I was the chosen," Fritzie said. "I was going to carry the story. And if they could help it, they would help me survive."

As Fritzie told Mayor Emanuel, every night these 599 women lined up to share the crumbs they had.

121 NORTH LASALLE STREET, ROOM 507, CHICAGO, ILLINOIS 60602

“I extended my hand and I had 599 crumbs—*crumbs*—that maybe would have saved their life,” Fritzie said. “Maybe they would have lived another day if they ate that crumb, but they gave it to me. In turn I stood, every night, and repeated: ‘If I live, if I live, I will carry their story. I will tell their story of what happened.’ Not just here in this factory, but what happened in Auschwitz. What I saw, and what I lived through.”

In the closing days of the war, Fritzie was forced to join “death marches” where she was eventually liberated by the Russian Army. Fritzie first returned to Mukachevo, then moved to Chicago in 1946 to live with her father, where she was determined to bury her past and live the life of a normal American teenager and woman.

Then in 1984 at the instigation of her son, Fritzie recorded her story as part of an oral history conducted by the Holocaust Museum. As Fritzie said, it was then “the floodgates opened” and she decided to dedicate her life to speaking of her experience and educating the public about the Holocaust.

Today, Fritzie serves as the President of the Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center and continues to tell her story. Despite the efforts of Fritzie and countless others, the work to educate the public about the Holocaust, hatred and crimes against humanity never stops.

“I have a job to do. I made a promise. They helped me live. I must, I *must* carry their story and I must tell their story, and this is what I’ve done all of these many years. And I often wonder when am I done, when have I repaid. I don’t know,” Fritzie said. “Whenever I stand up, whenever I speak, it is in the name and in the memory of those skinny, sick women.”

Chicago Stories is Mayor Rahm Emanuel’s weekly podcast featuring the stories of everyday Chicagoans and special guests.

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