

LILLI VINCENZ

b. September 26, 1937

GAY PIONEER

“We were laying the groundwork for what we hoped would be later activism that would give homosexuals equal rights.”

Lilli Vincenz is a pioneering gay rights activist. In 1965, she was the only lesbian to participate in the first White House picket. From 1965 to 1969, Vincenz demonstrated each Fourth of July in front of Independence Hall and the Liberty Bell. These protests, called Annual Reminders, launched the gay and lesbian civil rights movement.

Vincenz was born in Hamburg, Germany, and grew up during World War II. Her father died when she was 2 years old. In 1949, after her mother married an American, the family moved to the United States.

In 1959, Vincenz earned bachelor's degrees in French and German from Douglas College. The following year, she received a master's degree in English from Columbia University.

After college, Vincenz enlisted in the Women's Army Corps and worked at Walter Reed Army Medical Center. After serving nine months, she was outed by her roommate and was discharged for being gay.

In 1963, Vincenz joined the Mattachine Society of Washington (MSW). She was in the MSW delegation that held the first meeting with the Civil Service Commission to discuss discriminatory policies toward gays and lesbians.

In 1971, Vincenz helped launch the Frank Kameny for Congress campaign. This marked the first time an openly gay person ran for public office in the United States.

Vincenz filmed two important gay rights demonstrations: the 1968 Annual Reminder in Philadelphia and the first anniversary of Stonewall, known as the first New York Pride Parade.

From 1971 to 1979, Vincenz hosted a monthly Gay Women's Open House in Washington to provide a safe setting for socializing and discussing common concerns.

In 1990, Vincenz earned a Ph.D. in human development from the University of Maryland. Vincenz has written for numerous publications and has appeared on television and in film.

She resides in Arlington, Virginia, with her partner, Nancy Ruth Davis.

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