

# MIZZOU

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## Alumni Profile

### From battle to bench

In 1939, a young Norbert Ehrenfreund bought a beat-up 1920s Model A with a friend and hightailed it from Peekskill, N.Y., to Columbia, where he was told he'd find the best journalism school in the world.

At MU, Ehrenfreund discovered a passion for the stage under the guidance of Donovan Rhynsburger and the Missouri Theatre Workshop. To pay for school, he took various odd jobs, including shining shoes, cutting corn and announcing the play-by-play for Tiger football on KFRU using the name Bob Norbert.

After graduating from college, Ehrenfreund distinguished himself in World War II as an artillery forward observer. After the war, a Bronze-Star-decorated Ehrenfreund took a reporting job with *Stars and Stripes*, the newspaper of the U.S. armed forces, where he was given the assignment of a lifetime: covering the Nuremberg war-crime trials of Adolf Hitler's Third Reich.

Ehrenfreund remembers that the Allies disagreed about how the trials should be conducted. "Some of them supported a summary trial and execution," he says. "But the American prosecutor Robert Jackson insisted that they hold fair trials with due process and the presumption of innocence. That was a beacon for fair trials all over the world, and it planted the seed in me to become a lawyer." He described all this in his book, *The Nuremberg Legacy: How the Nazi War Crimes Trials Changed the Course of History* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).



Lawyer, soldier, writer, actor — Norbert Ehrenfreund, BJ '43, is a man for all seasons.

Then came law school at Stanford (where he was named the graduate most likely to achieve honor), 16 years as an attorney on both sides of the aisle and 30 years as a California Superior Court judge. Ehrenfreund's career includes undeniable successes. As a family court judge, two of his courtroom rules were so effective that they later became state laws. Thanks to Ehrenfreund, counseling is mandatory in all California child custody cases, and battered spouses have access to immediate restraining orders and protection from the abusive partner.

There have been awards and honors, including the opportunity to demonstrate an American jury trial in Portugal, the chance to help hammer out the details of a new Albanian constitution and the Award of Judicial Excellence from the National Conference of State Trial Judges. Although officially retired from the bench, Ehrenfreund still presides over trials from time to time at the request of the California judiciary.

He's just as busy off the bench. There have been performances in community theater productions (including a Best Actor award); two other books published, *You're The Jury* (Henry Holt, 1992), *You Be The Judge* (Sphinx, 2008); a leading role in *From the Ashes*, a dramatic video production for television and now on exhibit at the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C.; and a draft of a new novel.

Forever driven by the need to express himself — in the evocative realm of the literary arts and in the elegant, precise language of the law — Ehrenfreund looks back on his life and finds, amazingly, that he has more to do. "I'd still like to do something that I feel is good and lasting." — *Sona Pai*

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