



2025

ILLINOIS HOLOCAUST MUSEUM

HUMANITARIAN AWARDS DINNER

by Ina Bochian

A NIGHT OF HOPE FUELED A NEWFOUND PURPOSE FOR SURVIVAL

The Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center hosted its annual Humanitarian Awards Dinner on March 6th at the Hyatt Regency downtown Chicago. This year, the event featured Dana Bash, CNN Chief Anchor and Political Correspondent, as the master of ceremonies.

According to a 2024 article by Michael M. Grynbaum in the New York Times, Dana Bash, "who is CNN's chief political correspondent and the anchor of its weekday show 'Inside Politics,' has spent her entire career at the network. She started as a producer after college and rose to become the channel's lead White House and congressional correspondent. She has reported on presidential elections since 2000."

As a rising star in political journalism, Dana Bash has had both the opportunity and the challenge of covering many controversial topics, all while remaining deeply connected to her Jewish identity. Born in Manhattan to Frances (née Weinman) Schwartz, Dana's maternal grandmother, Teri Vidor Weinman, escaped to the United States with her husband in 1941; however, her parents met a tragic fate. In her piece titled "Reporters' notebook: An intensely personal trip to Auschwitz-Birkenau," Dana shares the harrowing story of how her parents and sister were murdered at Auschwitz concentration camp following the occupation of Hungary by the Nazis in 1944.

"The opposite of love is not hate, it's indifference. The opposite of art is not ugliness, it's indifference. The opposite of faith is not heresy, it's indifference. And the opposite of life is not death, it's indifference."

Elie Wiesel

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Bash notes that her grandfather, “Frank Weinman, who, along with my grandmother Teri Vidor Weinman, was among the few to escape,” while her great-grandparents, “Rudolph and Matilda Vidor, along with her sister Magda,” met an untimely death at the hands of the Nazis. When she learned from the guide how her family members had been executed, Bash described the experience as “numbing.”

Given her history and passion for educating both Jews and non-Jews about the Holocaust, it is no surprise that the Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center has called upon her to serve as the master of ceremonies at the 2025 Humanitarian Awards Dinner. During a time when antisemitism is on the rise, especially as media platforms allow Nazi sympathizers like Ye West—who openly identifies as a Nazi and adorns himself with swastikas while promoting merchandise designed to empower Holocaust deniers and anti-Semites—Holocaust education is more crucial than ever.

Having a seasoned high profile journalist like Bash coordinate the awards ceremony while putting her Jewish identity at the forefront provided an ideal foundation for a memorable evening, which consisted of a tribute to World War 2 veterans [Howard Cain and Bruce Johnson, 95th Division Charlie Company Drill Sergeant Color Guard, and the Navy Band Great Lakes Woodwind Quintet], leadership remarks by Michelle Feiger and Rob Romanoff, the Humanitarian Award Presentation accepted by Brian Fahrney on behalf of Sidley Austin LLP, Dinner, CEO Update by Bernard Cherkasov, a tribute to born survivors, Survivor Legacy Award Presentation for Ann and James Goodman, in memoriam, and a conversation between Retired U.S. Army General and Former CIA Director, David H. Petraeus and Retired Brigadier General, Alicia Tate-Nadeau.



Photo Credit: Ina Bochian

Illinois Governor JB Pritzker made an appearance and delivered opening remarks that reflected his belief that Trump's America is failing Jews and fostering open antisemitism. Although this perspective may appear politically biased and left-leaning, it is important to acknowledge that extreme sentiments and violence against the Jewish community have also emerged from the far left. The governor's presence at the Holocaust Museum Humanitarian Awards demonstrated his support for Holocaust remembrance, yet he did not address how the left might seek common ground with level-headed Republicans who aim to prevent another Holocaust. It's crucial to recognize that, while Trump is the current president, not all Republicans align with him. Some Republicans are Jewish, and many former Republicans and Democrats feel politically disenfranchised.

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“The Illinois Holocaust Museum & Education Center serves as a poignant reminder of our past and a trusted source of education for schoolchildren, community members, and visitors from across the country.”

JB Pritzker

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Photo Credit: Ina Bochian

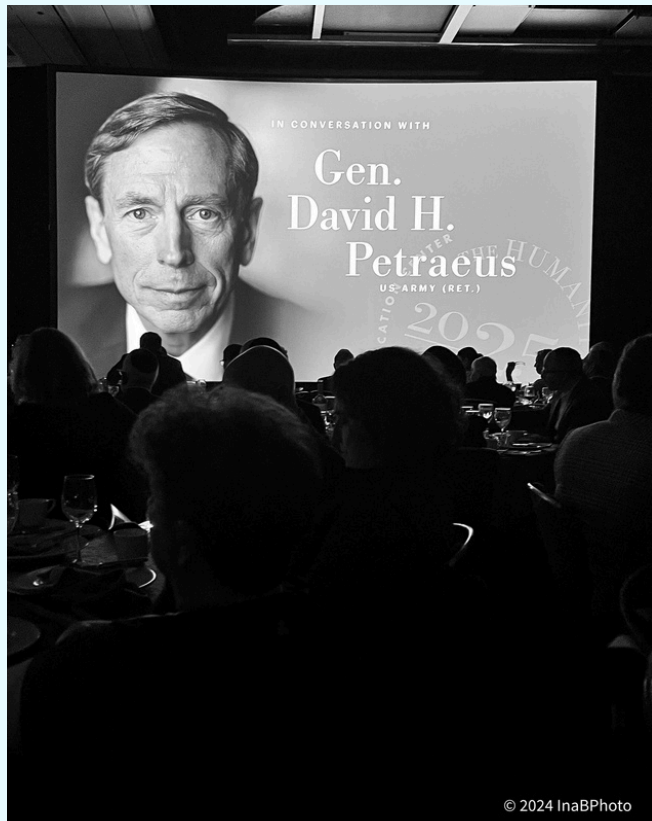


Photo Credit: Ina Bochian

When it comes to combating antisemitism, a one-size-fits-all approach is inadequate. Fortunately, General David H. Petraeus, who does not identify with any political party and has not voted in years, articulated the complex nature of fighting Jewish hatred. Winning the battle against neo-Nazis and propaganda, as well as engaging in an ideological struggle, requires more than merely blaming a single leader or political party for the ticking time bomb that must be dismantled. In a room filled with Holocaust survivors and their descendants, as well as supportive friends and Jewish allies, the key to preventing further atrocities lies in the willingness of individuals to engage in uncomfortable conversations with those with whom they may fundamentally disagree. Such dialogue is essential for fostering a safer world for the Jewish community.

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To quote General Petraeus, “Never forget who your enemies are... and never forget who your friends are.” In today's context, the enemies of the Jewish people include anyone who promotes Hamas propaganda and incites violence against Jews, such as certain protesters on college campuses. Additionally, individuals who endorse the rhetoric of figures like Kanye West, who provokes harmful stereotypes about Jewish people, as well as Holocaust deniers, fall into the same category. Conversely, friends are those who stand ready to confront these challenges, even when they may be among the few taking a stand. They are individuals willing to invest their time and resources to create supportive organizations, such as the Chicago Jewish Alliance (CJA). This organization was co-founded by Danny Schwartz, the grandson of a Holocaust survivor and museum Board Member, who graciously invited a group of us to this memorable dinner.

For the second consecutive year, Danny made it possible for me to attend the Illinois Holocaust Museum Humanitarian Awards, allowing me to connect with my Jewish identity and awaken my inner fighter. Together with Simona Citron, the daughter of a Holocaust survivor and fellow museum Board Member, Danny ensured that I had a place at this significant event. From the moment I met him, he has led with an open heart, fostering an inclusive "you can sit with us" environment. By doing so, he inspires individuals to engage in the necessary work to combat antisemitism without needing to be prompted. Furthermore, Danny creates a platform for people of varying political views to share their thoughts and insights.



Danny Schwartz | Simona Citron (Museum Board Members) & Ina Bochian at CJA Event

Photo Credit: Simona Bogode

*"FIRST THEY CAME FOR THE COMMUNISTS,
BUT I WAS NOT A COMMUNIST SO I DID NOT
SPEAK OUT. THEN THEY CAME FOR THE
SOCIALISTS AND THE TRADE UNIONISTS,
BUT I WAS NEITHER, SO I DID NOT SPEAK
OUT. THEN THEY CAME FOR THE JEWS, BUT
I WAS NOT A JEW SO I DID NOT SPEAK OUT.
AND WHEN THEY CAME FOR ME, THERE WAS
NO ONE LEFT TO SPEAK OUT FOR ME."*

Martin Niemöller

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Photo Credit: Kevin Schultz

**Natan Ostro & Ina Bochian at Illinois Holocaust
Museum Humanitarian Awards Dinner**

In just one year, the Chicago Jewish Alliance (CJA) has evolved from humble grassroots beginnings to embrace unlikely collaborations, demonstrating that the heart of a movement originates from a leader willing to compromise, evolve, and inspire with love rather than merely for love. Being part of this movement has healed parts of me that were lost due to my disconnection from my Jewish heritage. While I have some knowledge of my Austrian, Hungarian, and Romanian roots, my family's need to blend in for survival led to a forced erasure of my history. In my quest to reconnect with my identity, I met Danny, as well as the other co-founders of CJA, Natan Ostro and Josh Weiner. Together, they helped me focus on reinventing myself so that future generations do not feel as lost as I have felt.

*"Never doubt
that a small
group of
thoughtful,
committed
citizens can
change the
world; indeed,
it's the only
thing that
ever has."*

**MARGARET
MEAD**

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“The mission of Illinois Holocaust Museum & Education Center is expressed in its founding principle: Remember the Past, Transform the Future.”

Illinois Holocaust Museum Website

Not long before attending the Awards dinner, I encountered a Nazi sympathizer outside the Holocaust Museum in Skokie, openly giving the Nazi salute. At first, he paced back and forth along the path around the museum before sitting on a bench. At one point, he stood on the bench and resumed his salute. As I stood there holding the leash of a small yellow dog, formerly known as Kanye, I felt a sense of paralysis; the man appeared unhinged. My mind raced with unsettling thoughts—I wondered if he might be wearing a suicide vest. For some inexplicable reason, that was the direction my thoughts took.

Having attended a screening on October 8th the night before, where a security professional detailed the recent surge of planned attacks against Jews on U.S. soil, the chilling sensation I experienced in that moment felt justified. One particularly alarming detail was what appeared to look like upside-down red triangles on the hat of the Nazi sympathizer. From the film discussion the previous night, I had learned that these upside-down red triangles symbolize Jewish targets in the war plans of Hamas and its proxies. Supporters of Hamas have adopted this symbol, using it on the dark web and social media, or pinning it to clothing to incite violence against Jewish people. While some of these attacks manifest online, more extreme domestic terrorists take matters into their own hands, arming themselves with homemade bombs and setting out to hunt and kill Jews.



Nazi sympathizers outside Holocaust Museum Giving Nazi Salute

Photo Credit: Ina Bochian

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While this is not 1930, domestic terrorists walk among us, vandalizing Jewish-owned businesses, shooting men and women on their way to synagogue, terrorizing and attacking students on campus—like DePaul students Max Long and Michael Kaminsky—breaking into synagogues to disrupt services (an experience I witnessed firsthand at Loop Synagogue on the same day that Max and Michael were attacked), and targeting Jewish neighborhoods, such as the North Shore. I felt as if the ground beneath me had transformed into a giant magnet, rendering me physically immobile. In an effort to avoid drawing too much attention to myself, I decided to record the incident and shared it in our group chat, confident that Simona or Danny would take action, even though I felt an inexplicable paralysis.

Not long after I sent my messages in the group chat, a couple of museum security officers arrived and escorted the man off the premises, thanking me for my assistance. Before I left, one of the guards, a retired police officer with over 30 years of service, offered me his number in case I ever needed security in the future. Coincidentally, his name was also Daniel, which prompted me to mention Danny and express my excitement about the upcoming Humanitarian Awards Dinner. “You can save my number as the Second Daniel,” he joked. I laughed, noting how it seems that every Jewish mother a little over 30 years ago decided to name their son Daniel. “You’re probably the twelfth Daniel I’ve encountered. I can’t even keep track of all the Dannys I know, but one thing is for sure: Danny Schwartz is number one.”

Photo Credit: Ina Bochian



Michael Kaminsky & Yosef Haddad at Loop Synagogue the day Michael was assaulted on DePaul Campus & when protestors broke into Synagogue to provoke speaker

Gathering my thoughts, I uttered a short prayer of gratitude and texted someone about the incident, needing to unpack everything that had just happened. The irony of walking a dog formerly known as Kanye—a name given by my friend’s son before Ye’s descent into full Nazi mode—made the situation even more poignant. Although we now call the dog Buddy, I felt a sense of grief for the artist formerly known as Kanye. “He didn’t have to go that far,” I thought to myself. However, the next day, I was reminded there might not be a road back for Ye after seeing his post requesting a jeweler to create a custom diamond swastika for him.

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Struggling to concentrate, I resolved to channel the incident outside the Holocaust Museum into a show that had been on my mind for years: "Shabbat in the Hood." I envisioned using this real-life incident as the opening scene for a scripted series aimed at fostering meaningful dialogue between Jews and non-Jews. My intent was to educate the new generation about the dangers of blindly following figures like the artist formerly known as Kanye. If Debra Messing and others could produce meaningful documentaries such as October 8th, then I could certainly create an inspiring scripted series. While this goal feels ambitious, I remind myself that Danny's journey to establish CJA also seemed daunting at first, yet he persevered and made it happen.

Attending the Awards Dinner after that incident ignited a renewed sense of hope and purpose within me. Surrounded by extraordinary individuals who made courageous choices to ensure their own survival and that of others, I felt my own ambitions solidified—not only to make my ancestors proud but to carry on their legacy. As I stood alongside Holocaust survivors, it struck me that my grandmothers also survived the Holocaust by blending in, through concealing their Jewish identities, by passing for non-Jews. They diminished their identities, almost erasing their Jewishness, so that I could be where I am today. Because they dimmed their light for the sake of survival, I was able to meet the son of a Holocaust survivor who believed in me enough to let me shine in my own way. He, too, sometimes dims his own light to allow others to dazzle in the spotlight.



Photo Credit: Kevin Schultz

Ina Bochian & Danny Schwartz at Illinois Holocaust Museum
Humanitarian Awards Dinner

As the Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel warned years ago, to forget a holocaust is to kill twice.
IRIS CHANG

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CJA Group Illinois Holocaust Museum Tour 2024

To maintain this momentum, I encourage you to get to know descendants of Holocaust survivors and visit the museum. You can join the CJA Holocaust Museum Tour on April 15th at 2pm alongside Museum Board Member & CJA's, Simona Citron, the daughter of a child survivor, share her mother's story of survival.

After narrowly escaping the ghetto, at the tender age of four, Cipora Katz was hidden beneath the damp, cold, earth for 22 months. Woven into this narrative is loss, betrayal, strength, faith, and hope.

Must register individually with first and last name that appears on ID and phone number. 1 RSVP form per attendee. To sign up click [HERE!](https://www.chicagojewishalliance.org/holocaust-museum-tour-april2025)

<https://www.chicagojewishalliance.org/holocaust-museum-tour-april2025>

To donate to Illinois Holocaust Museum Click [HERE](https://www.ilholocaustmuseum.org/) or visit <https://www.ilholocaustmuseum.org/>

Photo Credit: Ina Bochian

*"WHAT IS TO GIVE LIGHT MUST
ENDURE BURNING."*

Viktor Frankl