

**MEMORIAL RESOLUTION OF THE FACULTY
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON**

ON THE DEATH OF PROFESSOR EMERITUS FRITZ A. ALBERT

Fritz Albert, renowned filmmaker and professor in the Department of Life Sciences Communication, passed away on September 16, 2012 at the age of 90. Over his three-and-a-half decades at UW-Madison, Fritz produced more than 200 feature-length and short films for his department (then known as Agricultural Journalism), the university, and international organizations. In collaboration with UW-Extension and the Land Tenure Center, he devoted much of his attention to land reform and agricultural issues. He was a visionary about the environment long before the term “environmentalism” became part of the American vocabulary.

Fritz was born in Mylau, Germany and attended Bayerische Staatslehranstalt für Lichtbildwesen (Bavarian State School of Photography). In 1939, he enlisted in the German Air Force and became an aerial photographer and cinematographer for the Luftwaffe. His experiences during the war and its aftermath indelibly shaped his political views as an avowed socialist and committed pacifist. After the war, Fritz worked briefly as a photojournalist then joined a German agricultural development agency. He returned to school and was awarded a Marshall Fund grant to study in the United States. After taking a course in the College of Agriculture at the University of Wisconsin, he and his wife, Ingeborg, decided to make Madison their home. It was here that the couple raised their six children. In 1954, Fritz joined the faculty of Agricultural Journalism where he began to teach filmmaking and document rural life in Wisconsin. He had, as one colleague described it, “an extraordinarily rich career.” From cranberries to cheese production, from integrated pest management to honey bee management, Fritz made films that captured the essence of Wisconsin.

As his reputation grew, Fritz continued to make films about his adopted home but also looked internationally for topics. A Fulbright grant took him to Budapest where he made a documentary about Hungarian agriculture. In the 1960s, his fearlessness took him to South America where he produced twelve films about agrarian reforms. One of them, an examination of land distribution under Chilean President Salvadore Allende, drew criticism and accusations of being a communist. That film is still used as a teaching tool at such prestigious universities as the London School of Economics. His cinematic research explored diverse topics, including okra farming in Gambia, winemaking in France, rice paddies in Java, and industrial pollution in the former East Germany. He truly became a photojournalist to the world. In a 2000 newspaper interview, Fritz said that he viewed himself as a middleman. “What you see in the viewfinder is what you present to other people,” he said. “What you think is the truth is what it will look like to the world.” This, he explained, obligated him to place social responsibility on the same par as artistic expression. It’s not surprising that his environmental awareness and commitment to land reform and best agricultural practices drew him to progressive politicians such as senators William Proxmire and Gaylord Nelson, for whom he created campaign materials on his own time. His “Wisconsin Runs on Time” spots for Proxmire were innovative for their time and for years were pointed to as changing the face of television political advertising.

His service to the university and the state included his appointment to the Governor’s Blue Ribbon Task Force on Cable Communication and to the Educational Communications Board. His photography and non-theatrical film courses were immensely popular and created a legacy reflected in the multimedia courses still taught today in life sciences communication.

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As much as he loved Wisconsin, Fritz never forgot his native Germany. From the beginning of his tenure at UW-Madison, he arranged for German farm groups to visit the state and worked to promote mutually beneficial opportunities for German and American agricultural, communication, and labor specialists. He served numerous terms as chair of the jury of the International Agricultural Film Competition in Berlin. He was an advisor to the Max Kade Institute for German-American Studies. In 1984, a year that marked his 30th anniversary at UW-Madison, the Federal Republic of Germany awarded him the Cross of Merit “for promoting better understanding between his native land and his new homeland.”

MEMORIAL COMMITTEE
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