

## PROFILE OF RESISTANCE

### Barbara Gittings LGBTQ+ equality activist

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*“As a teenager, I had to struggle alone to learn about myself and what it means to be gay. Now for 48 years I’ve had the satisfaction of working with other gay people all across the country.”*



#### Background Information

Born: July 31, 1932 in Vienna, Austria

Died: February 18, 2007

#### Education and Background

Gittings was born to U.S. Diplomats stationed in Austria. Her family moved back to the United States just prior to the start of WWII, when she was 18 years old. Gittings attended Northwestern University. She lived in and became an activist in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, following her graduation.

#### Gittings' Resistance

Gittings is largely considered to be one of the most influential activists for LGBTQ+ rights in American history. Prior to the riots at Stonewall Inn in 1969, she had already organized the New York chapter of the Daughters of Bilitis (DOB), a leading national civil and political rights organization. From 1963 to 1966, she was at the forefront of protesting the ban of employment of gay people by the U.S. government. Her activism on behalf of the LGBTQ+ community after the raids and riots of Stonewall Inn shifted towards the American Library Association's (ALA) gay sector. Gittings is considered to many as the mother of the LGBTQ+ civil rights movement<sup>1</sup>.

#### Achievements

Barbara Gittings was a key player in accessing equality for the LGBTQ+ community and continued her fight for equality throughout her lifetime. Gittings was instrumental in the acts of removing the negative connotations and associations of homosexuality at the time. As the ALA representative, Gittings worked tirelessly to get the American Psychiatric Association to drop homosexuality from their list of mental illnesses, a goal that was not achieved until 1972. Both the ALA and the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) named activist awards after her, honoring her contributions to society. After her passing in 2007, Matt Foreman, the director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task force at the time, famously declared: “What do we owe Barbara? Everything.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Arnold, N. (2019, June 3). Pride 2019: Seven people who changed LGBT history. Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bbcthree/article/1f4c71a6-1359-4241-9f91-7b0a1b5ac9a0>.

<sup>2</sup> Jennings, K. (2011, May 25). Fighting for Freedom in Philadelphia: Barbara Gittings, 1932-2007. Retrieved from [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/fighting-for-freedom-in-p\\_b\\_47208](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/fighting-for-freedom-in-p_b_47208).

