



A program of the Hartford Public Library

[Web Sites, Articles & Documents](#)

[Community Data](#)

[About HartfordInfo.org](#)

[FAQ](#)

[Site Map](#)

[Web Sites, Documents and Articles](#) >> [Hartford Courant](#) News Articles >

[Last Page Visited](#)

Hartford Library Starts Circus Fire Scrapbook Project

Survivors share stories to be presented on the 70th anniversary

By NICOLE PEREZ

July 07, 2013

HARTFORD — David Fitzgerald doesn't remember much of the Hartford circus fire that killed his 3-year-old brother.

He remembers the 95-degree temperatures on July 6, 1944. He remembers jumping on a crowded bus with his brother, mother and next-door neighbors to go to the circus. He remembers sitting high on the wooden bleachers, and seeing orange flames to his left. But that's where his memory stops.

"Next thing I knew was I was standing on a pile of sidewalks at a construction company next door, crying for my mother," said Fitzgerald, who was 6 at the time.

He was taken to Mount Sinai Hospital to be treated for first-degree burns on his arms, and his father eventually found him there. His mother was in the hospital for three months with third-degree burns, but survived. His brother, James, died; he had shared a hospital bed with another child because there weren't enough beds.

On Saturday, 69 years after the fire, which killed an estimated 168 people and injured another 700, Fitzgerald, armed with photos and books about the fire, attended the Hartford Public Library kickoff for a year-long scrapbook project librarians are starting. Memories from survivors like Fitzgerald will be collected and presented in one large scrapbook next year at the 70th anniversary of the fire.

But for Fitzgerald, who suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder related to the event, the memories aren't easy.

"Our family didn't talk about it," Fitzgerald said. "I think about it every day, and at first I didn't realize it, but now I do."

Brenda Miller, executive director of the Hartford History Center who spearheaded the project, said she hopes it can help commemorate the experiences of people like Fitzgerald.

"We want to honor the memories of those who lost their lives in the Hartford circus fire, and who helped save lives in the Hartford circus fire, and anyone or everyone who has been impacted by this tragedy," she said. "If you weren't directly impacted by it but just want to write your thoughts, you are more than welcome to do so in the scrapbook."

At least 10 people visited the Hartford History Center on the third floor of the library on Saturday afternoon to participate. Some left personal written accounts, while others wrote the names of dead loved ones on paper flowers.

Fitzgerald, now 75, dabbed his eyes with a tissue as a librarian made copies of the articles he brought in.

To participate in the scrapbook project, visit the Hartford History Center on the third floor of the main library.

Reprinted with permission of the *Hartford Courant*. To view other stories on this topic, search the Hartford Courant Archives at <http://www.courant.com/archives>.