

Entertainment

Photographer starts nonprofit to help people find meaning in life

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Photographs pause life and capture its most precious moments, allowing one to hold on to that moment forever.

Portrait photographer Monni Must recently started the nonprofit A Dime & A Penny Foundation to help people remember their loved ones by taking their portraits to help "Find meaning in the brink of tragedy."

A Dime & A Penny Foundation, founded in memory of Miya Jo Must and Billy Jacobs, Must's father, photographs terminally ill people with their family members. Must says these photographs are important because it may be the last or only photo families have of their dying loved ones.

Must was first introduced to photography in high school more than 40 years ago. She believes she communicates better through a camera than verbally.

"Pictures are expressive for me," she said.

Must has created two books, "Living Witnesses" and "Living Witnesses 2." Both focus on Holocaust survivors around the world. The books tell the story of survivors through pictures and biographies. Must's daughter, Sabrina, wrote the biographies for both books.

"The books are kind of like directories for people to be able to find other people to connect with," Must said.

Must traveled to Berlin, Germany, France, Poland, Israel, cities around the U.S. and Windsor, Canada, to photograph Holocaust survivors.

"I have the ability to allow these people to be remembered by doing their portraits," Must said. "I was blessed with using the tool of a camera to show a real person's heart and soul through a photograph. To show who they really are and capture that."

"Living Witnesses 2" has more than 300 photos and biographies of Holocaust survivors.

Must will debut her first traveling exhibit, "Triumph Over Tragedy: Faces of the Holocaust," at the Janice Charach Epstein Gallery inside the Jewish Community Center, 6600 W. Maple Road, West Bloomfield Township.

The exhibit opens Sept. 10, and will raise money for A Dime & A Penny Foundation.

The exhibit consists of 50 photographs taken from Must's second book, along with a slide show presentation. Some photographs have a guide-by-cell feature, which allows people to call a number on their cell phone and hear the survivor's story.

Must titled the exhibit "Triumph over Tragedy," "Because these people survived the unspeakable."

"All of their lives were disrupted, as they knew it," she said. "They experienced things at young ages that most people will never experience and they survived. They survived to build a life."

The books, exhibit, and nonprofit organization came about after Must suffered her own tragedy, losing of her 28-year-old daughter Miya. Must used photography as an outlet to heal.

"Instead of going to grief counseling I needed to go to people who endured tragedy," she said. "I wanted to make sure that with those years that had past they still remember things about their loved ones,"

"As I started photographing and interviewing them, very slowly I started to see that my daughter would be able to live through my photographs."

Must said when she and Linda Schlesinger, her assistant of six years, walked into survivors' homes for interviews, the first thing they would show them were photographs.

"It really changed my life," Must said.

Must wants people to walk away from the exhibit knowing "that no matter how horrible things appear and seem in your life there is a reason for whatever happens in a person's life, for why they lived and who they are."

"There is a reason why people have touched you."

IF YOU GO

The exhibit "Triumph Over Tragedy: Faces of the Holocaust" debuts 6:30-8:30 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 10, at Janice Charach Epstein Gallery, inside the West Bloomfield JCC. For more information visit www.naturallymonni.com. Visit <http://dimeandpenny.org>, or <http://livingwitnesses.net>.

URL: <http://www.theoaklandpress.com/articles/2011/09/01/entertainment/doc4e6017f5f20db876553322.prt>

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