

## SMALL TALK WITH *Monni Must*

BY MARK HICKS  
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For Monni Must, what began as a glimpse into tragedy has become a portrait of survival.

In 2007, the longtime Sylvan Lake photographer's eldest daughter, Miya Jo, died unexpectedly at age 28.

Stricken with sorrow, Must sought inspiration to cope. That eventually led her and her team to photograph and interview survivors of the Holocaust for a book, "Living Witnesses: Faces of the Holocaust."

Since then, the project has expanded to chronicle other survivors worldwide for a second book. And this year, Must created A Dime & A Penny Foundation, a nonprofit that raises money and creates books and exhibits to inspire others after tragedy.

On Sept. 10, her "Triumph Over Tragedy: Faces of the Holocaust" exhibit debuts at the Janice Charach Epstein Gallery in the Jewish Community Center, 6600 W. Maple, West Bloomfield Township.



Holocaust Projects

Monni Must photographed and interviewed survivors of the Holocaust for a book.

The exhibit will include portraits, profiles, a slide show and audio from the collection.

Must spoke with The Detroit News about her efforts.

**How did you find some of the survivors?**

We were in Israel in May ... meeting with a survivor there — she knew five people from

Detroit. ... There is the thread — this person knows that person who knows that person. The world is very small in reality. Basically, what happened is we would get to a city and most times we would maybe have one connection, meet with that one connection that first day and by the time we left that interview, we'd be filled up for the week.

**How willing were the survivors to tell their stories, and what was the experience like?**

A lot of times we'll walk in and the survivor will say: "I don't want to talk." But sometimes they say they don't want to talk and they end up talking. A lot of times they haven't spoken to anyone ever (about the experience). We've gotten calls from their kids saying: 'Please burn a disc for us. They've never talked to us.' It's incredible. ... This particular man is the cover for the exhibit. We went to his house... He had worn the Holocaust on his back his whole life. ... This particular man told us his

story and towards the end he pulled out a sweater that his sister who had perished during the war had handed him as he was running to Russia to hide. She said, "...You're going to be cold, take this with you." This man held that sweater for 72 years. His wife died five years ago. She never knew he had that sweater.

**What was something you learned from interviewing these survivors, and what inspired you?** There are people who in spite of the atrocities and the things that have happened to them just have a spark of life. And they appreciate every little thing that has happened to them. They appreciate that they were chosen: Most survivors will say they were just lucky — there was nothing in particular they did, that they were chosen to survive and they persevered and they built these amazing lives.

**How do you hope people will be helped by this work?**

I want them to remember (the survivors), and that is why I started it.