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ARTS FLASH: Living Witnesses photo project documents the faces and stories of Holocaust survivors



Monni Must is a photographer who **has portraited hundreds of Holocaust survivors**. Together, these faces make up her **Living Witnesses** project — a nonprofit book series that preserves the stories and faces of those who triumphed over trauma. While Must's first book, *Living Witnesses 1*, looked at survivors living in the Detroit area, her follow-up book has taken a broader view, compiling the photographs and stories of survivors across the world. **Must is coming to Philadelphia on April 10** for a collaborative project with local high school students; she'll take the photos, and students will write up the stories of survivors. **(If you know someone who would like to participate, call Must at 248-867-4884.)**

City Paper: What made you start this project?

Monni Must: In 2007, **my daughter died tragically and suddenly**, everything stopped. I'm a portrait photographer. I found a strong connection with Holocaust survivors, because they too lost their families suddenly, without any chance to say goodbye. They reassure me that year later I will still be able to remember my daughter. So, **it has slowly become a life's mission for me** and has helped me heal.

CP: Were you involved with Holocaust survivors before you started?

MM: Actually, I didn't know anything about Holocaust survivors. I had friends whose parents who had accents and **numbers on their arms**, but I really didn't have a sense of the scope.

CP: What are your interviews with survivors like?

MM: Well, I'll give you an example from when I was in Germany. In Munich, we showed up at a survivor's house and

it was a couple. The wife spoke English and I thought it was just the man who was the survivor — it turned out both of them were. Their entire families were annihilated in the world. **They didn't have a single relative.** Not until the interview was mostly over did I realize the wife was a survivor, too. When I asked her, she didn't want to talk about it. Eventually, though, she decided to show portraits she still had and the pictures were a way for to open up and share with me.

CP: How is taking picture of survivors a different experience?

MM: Because I'm a portrait photographer, I watch every movement you take **I want to watch your eyes, your hands,** your facial expression. From that, I get a sense of who they are and how I can capture that in a photo. The difference is that in my studio, I'm controlling the environment. But when I'm in their house, it's their house and it's about them, so I always try to incorporate that into the shot. **I want to capture their personality, who they are.** I don't want to represent just their their pain, because it's about them being survivors.

Posted by Will Stone @ 2:30 PM

<http://www.citypaper.net/blogs/criticalmass/ARTS-FLASH-Living-Witnesses-photo-project-.html>