

Hope *and Faith*

Holocaust survivor tells her story so others will learn

columns editor | **Liz Hipes**

A plethora of angel statues sit on a glass shelf. Posters, articles, pictures all commemorating the horrific event cover the wall. A woman with green and pink hair sits on the back porch, piercings all over her nose and ears. Dotted with tattoos, she strives to tell people -- tell them about what they mean and how the events behind those tattoos changed her life.

This is Diny Adkins. She is a Holocaust survivor.

Born in 1938 in the years before World War II, Dientje (Diny) Adkins was a Jew living in Bussum, Holland. She grew up with her family and best friend Edid. Adkins was a "silly rascal" always trying to cheer everyone up.

But when the Germans came, the Adkins' house was turned upside down.

"We lived in a street that was really a Jewish neighborhood," Adkins said. "This place was terrible because the Germans would come on the street with the blaring sirens on their trucks.

"The cries and the screaming were just awful to listen to," she continued. "We couldn't stand constantly the horrible cries of people who were being taken out of their homes forcefully. And to this day, I still have a phobia of sounds of a siren."

The Germans didn't take everyone from the neighborhood at once. Adkins' family wanted to escape as a group, but there were just too many of them. So they split up -- and sent her into the woods by herself. She was only four years old.

"I had to say goodbye to my parents my grandparents, and my uncle...Edid and I never saw each other again," Adkins said. "Edid was in the street where we were, and I saw her being killed by a German soldier."

She bounced between homes -- different families, different couples who would take her in for a short while, but she always ended back on the streets. Eventually, one couple who just couldn't keep her any longer took her to a Catholic nun for three years. Living in a tiny closet, Adkins was left with a pillow, blanket, an open bucket and grass to eat.

"One day, I was crying because my tummy hurt so very, very bad because I was so hungry.

She (the nun) opened the door, took my face, pulled me by the hair and put my face in the dirty potty," Adkins said. "She screamed 'If you're hungry, then you eat that.' I was and felt so dirty, so humiliated and smelled so gross."

Adkins' only true companion while living under the shadow of the nun was her doll -- Anneke Pop.

"She was everything to me. She was the only one I had to talk to. I cried with her. I ate with her. I had tea with her. And she was somebody, she wasn't just a doll," Adkins said.

She still has her doll to this day.

The only place that was worse than living with the nun was living with the nun's brother, a piano teacher. When the Germans were coming to search the nun's home, she would cover Adkins with a blanket, put her on a bicycle and took her to her brother's house.

"He was a very, very bad man....He touched me in improper places, and sexually

hurt me. After the war the doctors told me that because of the sexual abuse, I could never have any children," she said. "He told me many times that if I didn't do what he wanted me to do, he would take

me to the Germans. And he did. He took me there, to my first concentration camp."

After going to two concentration camps -- Camp Amersfoort and one more, both in Holland -- Adkins was out on a train with other people, headed to another camp -- apparently Treblinka.

"I was very lucky because since I was so tiny, there were good and nice people...they



Diny Adkins holds the book she wrote, *Can Forgive, But Cannot Forget* (left). Her flag of Israel with the star of David expresses her Jewish pride as it sits in her flower vase (top right). She shows the camera her tattoos including the number she was given at the camp. **photos // Liz Hipes**

shoved me to the back of the train...and they threw me out on the railroad track," Adkins said.

Adkins -- along with both of her parents -- survived the war. But she was ultimately diagnosed with PTSD and has a phobia of sirens. Her physical and mental problems caused her

to be hospitalized for 18 months after the war.

"I was very weak from dehydration, undernourished and had bladder and kidney problems from the cold, I had tuberculosis and dysentery," she said.

Today, Adkins tries to remind people of the tragedies she endured because of the Holocaust.

"It is so unreal that some people tell me there was never a Holocaust. I tell them: 'If you want proof, I will show you the scars on my body,'" Adkins said. "Too bad I can't show them the scars on my heart."

After her time in the psychiatric ward, Adkins did not discuss her experiences for a while.

"I suffered panic attacks, flashbacks and

nightmares," said Adkins, who eventually married and gave birth to three children despite doctors' diagnosis. "I call children from survivors, survivors also. They had to see me depressed and mentally disoriented. There were lots of times they had to do without a mother because I needed treatment and therapy,"

Adkins' troubles didn't stop after the end of WWII.

"I lost my husband, a Vietnam veteran, he had Agent Orange. Then after that, my son committed suicide," she said. "Then from sorrow, my mom passed away... I feel like I've been through another Holocaust."

Adkins has forgiven the people who abused and mistreated her. But she says she will always remember what happened in her life. She has a tattoo of her Holocaust number on her left forearm and over it says, "Never forget, remember." She calls these her Holocaust tattoos.

"I remember. I don't forget. But I have forgiven. I'm a forgiving person," she said. "You've got to, otherwise you've go no life yourself if you don't forgive,"

"You might think that I hate the Germans. No, I don't. How can I hate a new generation who had nothing to do with it?" she said.

Through her troubled past, Adkins uses her experiences and tells people about her past in hopes of sparking change -- including speaking at Wando on May 3.

"My heart tells me that I need to tell you this because it's history. I have to because I don't want all of you to experience a war being so very scared and afraid," she said. "Hunger, killing, hatred and pain."

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Diny Adkins