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A story of faith, heroism: Ten Boom's own words used for one-woman play



By **DAVID YONKE**
BLADE RELIGION EDITOR

Corrie ten Boom's legacy has been preserved in many ways, including the numerous books she wrote about how she and her family protected Dutch Jews from the Nazis during World War II. One of her bestselling books, *The Hiding Place*, also was turned into a Hollywood movie in 1975.

But a New Mexico writer, Susie Sandager, thought it would help raise awareness of this heroine's life by taking Miss Ten Boom's own words - from her writings and lectures - and using them to create a one-woman play. The play, *Corrie Remembers*, will be presented at 3 p.m. tomorrow at Congregation B'nai Israel in Sylvania.

"When I had the idea for this drama, I went to a professional actress to get her to do it. I took her out to lunch. I brought all the materials for her to read," Mrs. Sandager said in an interview from Albuquerque. "But she never heard of Corrie ten Boom. She said this role was for a Christian who loves Jews. She said she could never do it - but that I would be perfect for it."

Mrs. Sandager was disappointed that the actress rejected the role but over time began to consider the possibility of doing it herself.

It was an unlikely role for a middle-aged mother with very limited acting experience.

Susie Sandager portrays Corrie ten Boom, who saved untold numbers of Jews from the Nazis.

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"I had a minor part in a high school play and I was miserable," she said.

But Mrs. Sandager was passionate about Miss Ten Boom's story, and like the Dutch heroine, was a devout Christian who cared deeply about Jews and Israel.

In doing the research she learned that both she and Miss Ten Boom, who died in 1983 at age 91, were 5-foot-7 and had another thing in common: Both women cared for developmentally disabled children.

Before the war, Miss Ten Boom's ministry involved working with retarded children in her hometown of Haarlem, Holland. Mrs. Sandager said that her only biological child is developmentally disabled.

"When I realized the connections, that's when I sort of got the courage to do it," Mrs. Sandager said. "If all that Corrie ten Boom had done prior to the amazing things she did in the war was to

care for retarded children, and I'm just a mom of a retarded child, well I thought maybe I'll try it."

She spent a year rehearsing, fine-tuning the Dutch accent and trying to overcome stage fright. She performed *Corrie Remembers* in front of an audience for the first time in 1999.

"Once I started doing it, it kind of has taken off," Mrs. Sandager said. "By word of mouth, I've been invited to perform it all over the world now."

She estimated that she has performed the drama more than 400 times, including a presentation to 5,000 people - translated live into eight languages for people using headphones - at the Israel Convention Center, and a performance last month at Yad Vashem, the Holocaust memorial in Jerusalem.

She has tours scheduled this year in the United Kingdom and South Africa.

"My first performance, what I call my dress rehearsal, was for my group of Christian and Jewish friends. Then I did it for a Jewish women's club and about 100 were there, and the response was so incredible in both venues that I knew I had touched something," Mrs. Sandager said.

"We are all looking for heroes and people that have moral courage and can navigate in times that are uncertain," she said. "When other people are going the wrong way, we can still do the right thing."

For Mrs. Ten Boom, doing the right thing by protecting an untold number Jews from the Nazis - hiding them behind a false wall in a bedroom in their home - carried severe penalties.

The Gestapo raided the Ten Boom family's home on Feb. 28, 1944, and arrested Mrs. Ten Boom's 84-year-old father, Casper, her sisters, Betsie and Nollie, brother, Willem, and nephew, Peter. Another nephew, Christiaan, was arrested separately.

Her father, two sisters, and Christiaan died in Nazi prisons. Corrie Ten Boom spent 10 months in the Ravensbruck concentration camp in Germany and was released only because of a clerical error - or divine intervention, depending on one's outlook.

Despite the high price paid for protecting Jews, the Ten Booms never regretted risking their lives for "God's chosen people," as they considered the Jews.

"Her family suffered for what they did and they did not regret it," Mrs. Sandager said. "This is a big statement of affirmation, that the people they saved were worth it even if her family did suffer."

She said one goal of her drama is to help build relationships between Christians and Jews, a cause that she has worked hard to support in Albuquerque.

One of the keys to the success of that effort is to accept one another's faith without any intentions to convert, she said.

"If we're going to do this, we're going to do this without proselytizing. We want to love one another unconditionally," Mrs. Sandager said.

Another reason the play has been successful, she said, is that the dialogue is taken from Mrs. Ten Boom's own words.

"I spent a year of my life reading everything she wrote and listening to her tapes before I wrote my script. She left a lot of herself behind in her writings and her talks," she said. "One of the things I'm very proud of, and I feel very fortunate to have been able to do, is I think I have nailed her voice."

In *Corrie Remembers*, Mrs. Sandager dresses and acts like Mrs. Ten Boom in her 80s and speaks to the audience about her life.

"There are some humorous spots and some tender-hearted spots. Some people have a tear in their eye and some have outright cried," Mrs. Sandager said. "It's uplifting, it's heartbreaking, it's challenging, and it's comforting. It's strange that one story can have all of that."

She said she believes the concept for the play was divine inspiration.

"I know God did this," Mrs. Sandager said, "because what middle-age woman in her right mind comes up with an idea of making herself look old?"

Susie Sandager will present "Corrie Remembers" at 3 p.m. tomorrow at Congregation B'nai Israel, 6525 Sylvania Ave., Sylvania. Admission is free. A question-and-answer period and reception will follow the performance. More information is available online at sandagerpresentations.com and corrietenboom.com.

Contact David Yonke at:

dyonke@theblade.com or

419-724-6154.