

COVER STORY

By Lucinda Breeding, Arts & Entertainment Editor

Living history

**Scholar and performer
evokes life of freedom
fighter Corrie ten Boom**

A quiet one-woman show about a Christian woman who opposed anti-Semitic atrocities during the Holocaust has changed Evelyn Hinds' life.

Hinds, an Irving resident, got interested in the Dutch Christian in the early 1980s.

Corrie ten Boom made history by opposing the tide of Nazi violence and legislation that legally segregated Jews from German society. As anti-Semitism swept over Europe, ten Boom and her family offered their home as a hiding place for Jews who were fleeing genocide.

She and her family were eventually arrested, and spent the remaining years of the war in concentration camps. Corrie ten Boom, who held fast to her Christianity throughout her life, survived the camps and eventually traveled the world recalling her trials. She also wrote several books about her faith and her life. Bitterness was never a byproduct of ten Boom's suffering.

Pat Harberson, the president of the Presbyterian Women at First Presbyterian Church of Denton, said it was serendipitous for the women's ministry to learn about Evelyn Hinds' one-woman show. The group invited Hinds to Denton for a single performance of her show, set for 7 p.m. Tuesday at the church.

"We were sitting there, 9:30 a.m. on June 1 planning for the next year, and one of the ladies pulled a clipping from *The Dallas Morning News* out of her purse. We didn't even know she existed, Evelyn, but we looked at it and decided that, yes, this was something we needed to investigate," Harberson said. "So we sent two ladies to Dallas to see her perform. They came back and said we had to do it."

Typically, the Presbyterian Women bring speakers from missionary projects they support to speak to their group. Sometimes, they'll bring a program to the whole

congregation. This is a program the ministry wanted to open to the public, Harberson said.

“There are so many people who are knowledgeable about Corrie ten Boom,” Harberson said. “They know about her and her heroism.”

Hinds is one of those people. She gradually got into her study of the activist, who was part of the Dutch Underground during World War II. The Dutch Underground smuggled Jews away from Nazi invaders and helped them flee from the occupation. *The Hiding Place* documents the ten Boom family’s methods for hiding people, and how it changed their lives. It was that story, which is required reading in some literature curricula, that piqued Hinds’ interest.

“It was mostly through the movie *The Hiding Place*,” Hinds said of the roots of her ministry, which stands on its own as a theatrical, one-woman show, even though it has a decidedly evangelical thrust for the performer. “Then, it was through her books. She became a spiritual grandmother to me.”

Hinds’ performance of ten Boom started out as a teaching tool for a Christian women’s retreat. But the germ of her show, *Hope and Inspiration*, actually started as a volunteer gig at an Oklahoma art museum, where Hinds offered to teach a class on one of the museum’s donors, whom she describes as “a real pioneer sort of lady.”

“The education director at the museum said, ‘Why don’t you dress up like her?’ I thought, ‘OK, I can do that.’ I had done a little acting, I had acted before. If I hadn’t acted before, I might not have done it. So I interviewed her family, and I adopted her voice. I dressed up like her, like the education director suggested.

“The funny thing was, her family came to the class and afterward, they came up to me and said: ‘You really captured Grandma’s spirit.’”

Her class as a pioneer and arts buff led the actress to trying the same approach with the historic activist. She made her debut as Corrie ten Boom in 1997.

“My church, at the time, was considering a women’s retreat and we were brainstorming about things to do. I started thinking about it and I thought: ‘I can do this. Who should I be?’ I thought of Corrie ten Boom. She had come to mean a lot to me. I decided to use the same dress, the same shoes [from the museum class]. I just had to add a wig, a hat and a mismatched sweater.

“Then, about a week before I was going to do it, this person came up to me at church and said: ‘I have this recording of Corrie ten Boom. I found it with my grandmother’s

things. Do you want to use it?' I said, 'Sure.' I didn't have her voice, really, at the time. But this gave me her voice."

In her performance as Corrie, Hinds depicts a woman of simple words. Her Corrie captures the freshness and candor of ten Boom, opting for the truth rather than flowery language. Hinds takes to the stage — a church hall, sanctuary or wherever she might be invited to perform — in a simple dress, gloves, wig, hat and glasses. The production values are no-frills, but, after all, it's ten Boom's extraordinary life and choices that are the meat of the show.

Hinds even takes on the staccato, accented English of her heroine. Her demeanor is neither big, nor affected, and her story takes on the poetry of a life lived in suspense, captivity and, eventually, freedom.

"Corrie ten Boom was such a spiritual person," Harberson said. "She went through something terrible, but she came through it a whole, loving and forgiving person."

Hinds is the spokeswoman for the Corrie ten Boom Fellowship, the American organization that represents the Corrie ten Boomhuis and museum of Holland in the United States. She said she views her project as a ministry with broad applications. This is the kind of project that inspires Christians, but attracts history buffs and social justice acolytes. *Hope and Inspiration* has taken on a little more importance to Hinds now that war rages in Iraq, and both Palestinians and Israelis struggle for anything resembling common ground

"I hear of the anti-Semitism that is taking place across the world, and with the 60th anniversary of Auschwitz, I think about how we need to remember what happened, and not forget," Hinds said. "It can happen again. I think Corrie reminds me that an ordinary person can do extraordinary things. And there is no retirement. Even if we are old or tired, God still has a purpose for us."

Her ultimate goal? To take her performance to Jerusalem, where three strong faith traditions intersect, sometimes with violent results. Corrie ten Boom is a light that won't be hidden under a bushel, Hinds said.

"Her singleness of purpose," Hinds said, answering what made the woman extraordinary. "Her passion. She never wavered. Her traveling after the war wasn't easy at times, and she never wavered. She was called to do that. I travel myself, and I think that must have been so difficult for her — she had illnesses. But she never stopped."

“It is all about forgiveness of those who were persecuting. By God’s grace, she remained to have a ministry, but it’s all about hope and inspiration for others. Evelyn does give, in her presentation, the idea of how she had to come to a point of forgiveness for her family. That’s what we all need, isn’t it? Hope and inspiration?”

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