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way to go!
nice story Peter



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Shooting leaves Opat with scars, mixed emotions

Incident changed her life in ways she can't explain

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TOWN OF PEWAUKEE — It happens every time Judy Opat runs into acquaintances lately. They ask, "How are you doing?"

It's a question Opat knows is sincere, but one that she finds very hard to answer.

Opat found herself in the middle of one of Waukesha County's deadliest bank rob-

beries and police chases on April 28. James and Theodore Oswald, who were fleeing police after having allegedly robbed a Waukesha bank and murdered a Waukesha police captain, shot their way into Opat's home and took her hostage.

The father and son, who were wearing bulletproof vests, forced Opat to drive them in her gray van through a hail of gunfire.

She was shot in her left shoulder as she jumped from the moving van and crawled to safety. The Oswalds crashed the van into a tree less than a block from Opat's home overlooking a neighborhood park.

"I can't honestly say my life is fine and I can't honestly say my life has gone to hell, either. It's somewhere in between," Opat said Sunday.

It was the first interview given in months by the woman whose courageous escape from the armed robbers made national news.

She has not wanted to talk to the press for the same reason she finds it hard to talk to neighbors and acquaintances who approach her at the grocery store, the doctor's office and other places.

"I don't know what to say," she said. "People don't ask, 'How are you?' the same way

they would say it to anyone else. They mean, 'How are you after this thing happened?' Every time I run into someone I haven't talked to for awhile, they ask me that."

Opat can talk about some of the practical aftereffects of the incident.

She said her shoulder no longer hurts, and that the bullet wound left scars, but no permanent disability or loss of motion.

And no, she and her husband, Dale, have not yet replaced the van that was destroyed.

"We have another car, but we kind of miss our van," she said. Opat is planning a quiet

Thanksgiving dinner with family members. She said her husband and the couple's dog, Sammy, are doing fine.

She is not looking forward to the Oswalds' upcoming trial.

But it's the deeper issues, the wide range of emotions with which she wrestles privately, that she cannot discuss.

"There are things that have happened since, but I just can't talk about it," she said. "I don't know how to explain it, but something like this changes your identity."

"I'm lucky I didn't get hurt worse, and I know I'm lucky in a lot of other ways, too, but I wish it had never happened."



Judy and Dale Opat