



Jan Hamel Solomon will play a rare flute performance during a Memorial Day service at the park named for her late father, J.D. Hamel, following a parade on Monday. Solomon doesn't play very often due to painful facial nerve damage she suffered during a failed kidnapping attempt in 1989 in Colombia. **STAFF PHOTO / E. SKYLAR LITHELAND**

Understanding their pain

FLUTE PLAYER: Despite agonizing nerve damage, she will play for troops

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SARASOTA — Jan Hamel Solomon was one of Sarasota's top flute players in her youth, performing with the Florida Symphony at age 14, but chronic nerve damage has prevented her from playing the instrument for years.

But on Monday, following the Memorial Day program in downtown Sarasota, Hamel Solomon will ignore the intense pain it causes and lift a flute to her mouth to play a medley to honor

veterans who have given far greater sacrifice in honor of their country.

She will likely be in great pain for several days after Monday's event.

"It hurts horribly just to smile," says Solomon, 53, who eschews oral painkillers but uses a morphine cream on her face. "But this is a sacrifice I want to make on this day."

The Memorial Day parade begins at 10 a.m. Monday at U.S. 301 and Main Street, and concludes at J.D. Hamel Bayfront Park — named for Solomon's late father — across from Marina Jack. The brief service will begin at 11 a.m.

Solomon's father, a World War II veteran and longtime chaplain

for Sarasota police, sheriff, hospital and fire department units, devoted his life to the ministry after nearly losing a leg in the South Pacific.

Solomon and her husband Tim followed mutual family paths into missionary work. They were serving in Colombia in 1989 when they were targeted in a foiled kidnapping attempt. The ordeal left her with permanent facial nerve damage and put an end to a promising musical career that included first chair flute with the Florida Symphony at age 14.

Today, the Solomons run a 41-foot charter yacht out of Key Sailing in Sarasota, and Tim continues to minister at Iglesia de Los Hermanos in Sarasota. But as parents of a son in the Army, both have an enduring connection to the U.S. military.

Jan Hamel Solomon does not own a flute anymore and will use a borrowed instrument to play the medley on Monday.

"I don't think I play that great anymore — that girl is gone," she says. "I tell our wounded warriors I may still have both arms and legs, but I do understand pain, and I want to honor them with this sacrifice."