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## **"Play Depicts the Price of Being German"**

**By L.A. Chung**

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Eberhard "Zip" Fuhr, 17, was a speedy baserunner with dreams of playing for the Cincinnati Reds when two armed FBI agents entered his fifth-period class. In one moment, they ended his dream and his innocence.

It was spring 1943. Handcuffed and fingerprinted, Fuhr, his parents and two brothers disappeared into a remote Texas detention camp for nearly five years, one family among 10,000 Germans and German-Americans interned as "enemy aliens" during World War II. They were guilty of one thing: being German when America was at war with Germany, Italy and Japan.

For Belmont writer John Christgau and a group of German-Americans, this little-known, heartbreaking chapter of American history has relevance to the present.

"It was a terrible injustice," Christgau said. He took his inspiration from the Emmy-winning documentary of a Japanese couple separated in two camps, called "From a Silk Cocoon."

"Zip" is the name of Christgau's new play, which will be performed tonight at Manzanar National Historic Site, one of 10 internment camps for Japanese-Americans during that war. Christgau and the German American Internee Coalition just received a state grant of \$10,000 to develop a curriculum project for high schools and two more acts for the play, which will delve into the internment of "enemy aliens" during World War II.

Now 81, Fuhr is in Manzanar this weekend for the "world premiere" of "Zip," and the opening of a traveling exhibit called "The Enemy Alien Files." The true story of the Guercke family of Santa Cruz, is told in family letters and documents as well.

With the help of the grant, the coalition hopes the stories of others who lost their homes, careers and something much harder to replace— trust—will be performed on the Peninsula in 2007, and become part of a history unit in high school classrooms.

The story of the 120,000 Japanese and Japanese-Americans who were interned in 10 World War II internment camps, including Manzanar, is well-known because of the extraordinary sustained efforts by the Japanese-American community over 20 years.

Virtually unknown is the internment of 31,280 German, Italian and other

Japanese "enemy aliens" in eight main camps in North Dakota, New Mexico, Texas and Montana, run by the Department of Justice. About 10,000 were German and minor German-American children, 18,000 Japanese, about 3,000 Italians and a small number of other Europeans. Some were people who had been "reported" by suspicious neighbors whose allegations had not been substantiated. Others had maintained cultural ties with their homeland.

Still others, in the most bizarre of the cases, had been resident entrepreneurs of Latin American countries, who were forcibly removed and handed over to the United States ostensibly for prisoner-of-war exchange fodder. All three groups were interned together in Crystal City, Texas.

A former teacher and assistant principal at San Mateo High School, Christgau is writing a series of curricula covering the laws that enabled the internments, and how America turned people from Latin America into internees. There will be oral histories about the camps and lesson plans developed. Three one-act plays, designed as "minimalist theater" can be performed by students.

Two more acts of the play will tell the story of an Italian from the Arcata area and those who were brought from Latin America. Heidi Guercke Donald's family is one of those.

"I know the same thing is going on today under the rendition program where we take Muslims to Afghanistan and Egypt," Christgau said.

The Germans were not released from the camps until 1947, and even then were fighting deportation on Ellis Island. "All I ever saw was the back of the Statue of Liberty, as though she turned her back on me and my family," Fuhr said. He was 22 years old, past the time he might have tried out for professional baseball.

Who knows if Zip might have made the pros, Christgau mused. Obsessed with making up for five lost years, Fuhr propelled himself into college, worked 12 years in the oil industry, got an MBA. But dreams dashed and bittersweet memories are still with him these 63 years. He never got his belongings out of his high school locker that day he was hustled out of the classroom with guns drawn.

The bank foreclosed on the family home. The church took them off the rolls.

I spoke with Eb Fuhr when he was still in his 70s. Reuniting with former internees at the Crystal City, Texas camp, he observed, "only the names and originating places are different. That is true whether of German, Italian, or Japanese heritage."

A small contingent led by the German American Internee Coalition visited Capitol Hill last month in the slow process to educate lawmakers about the

proposed Wartime Treatment Study Act, Senate bill 1354, or House bill 3198. It would research what happened and report it to Congress.

"I am determined that our story is told," Donald said. "It is such a classic important symbol of what can go wrong. If I can get it out, maybe we can learn."

But the road is so hard alone. Even other German-Americans know nothing of this episode.

Over the past five years, I've written about the internment of enemy aliens no fewer than seven times. I'm tired of calling it a "little-known chapter of American history." I'm tired of seeing such a small group of former internees and their children unable to enlist supporters when I know there should be some.

If German-Americans themselves and their friends do not get involved to work on the bill, spread the story, it will die.

It will die, just as surely as the former internees are now. And we will repeat our mistakes.

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