

# D.P. (1953)

Interpreted by Mia Sheperd

This was the German village of Karlswald in the American Zone of Occupation.



Eighty-one small sparks of human life were kept in an orphanage set up by Catholic nuns.

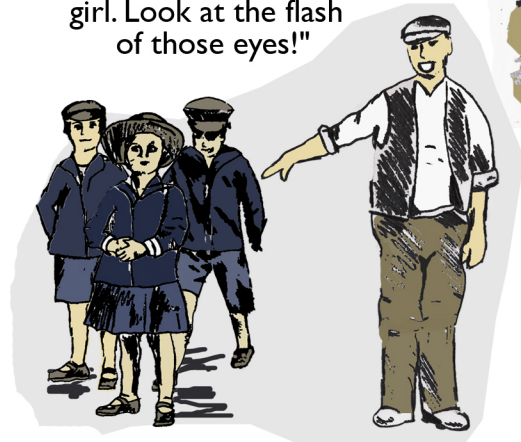
Children searched for parents who had long ago stopped searching for them.



Every mild afternoon, the nuns marched the children, two by two, through the woods, into the village, and back for their ration of fresh air.



"See the little French girl. Look at the flash of those eyes!"



The village carpenter always came out of his shop to speculate the nationalities of the children in the orphanage.

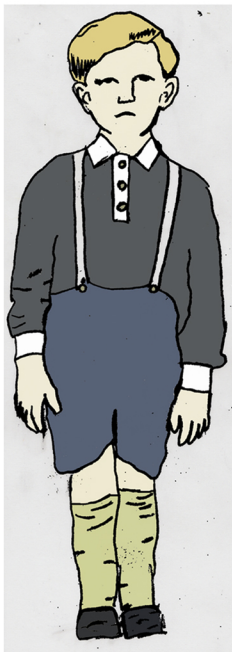


“There we have an American!” the carpenter called. “Joe! How is the Brown Bomber today?”

His name, chosen by the nuns, was Karl Heinz. But the carpenter had given him name that stuck, Joe Louis.

The nun and Joe spent a great deal of time together since Joe, no matter where he was placed in the parade, always drifted to the end.

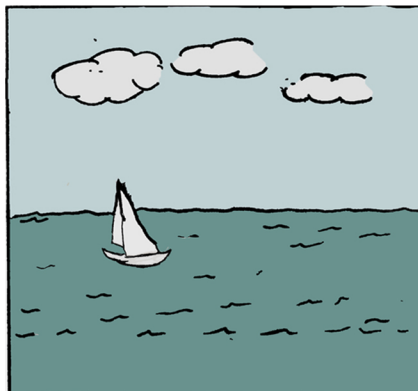
“Sister, am I American? Peter said my mother was a German, and my father was an American soldier.”



Peter, a German, was the oldest boy in the orphanage, an embittered old man of fourteen. Peter seemed superhuman to Joe, like a man who had been to heaven and hell and back.



“You mustn't worry about it, Joe,” said the nun.



“...Your mother and father lived across more water than you have ever seen. You could get on a boat and go for days and days and still not get to the other side.”

One hot summer day, as the parade passed the carpenter's shop, the carpenter came out to call something new to Joe.



"Joe! Hey, Joe! Your father is in town. Have you seen him yet? Just keep your eyes open when you go past the school!"

As they approached the school, Joe saw a massive brown man, naked to the waist. The man drank from a canteen and disappeared back into the woods.



At ten o'clock, the young nun found Joe's cot empty. Joe watched and listened to the soldiers through a thin screen of shrubs. The words he overheard made no sense to him.

Joe didn't move a muscle until the big boot struck his side.

"My golly, boy, where you come from? What is your name and where are your people?"

"Joe Louis," said Joe, "and you are my people. I ran away from the orphanage because I belong with you."



"Now Joe, we'll take you home."

"Papa! No-papa! I want to stay with you."

The sergeant replied helplessly, "Sorry sonny, I ain't your papa."



Joe refused to leave. He tightened his grip on the sergeant as the other soldiers attempted to bribe the boy to go back to the orphanage.

"Look Joe," said a soldier, "ever see a wristwatch? It's yours."

"Want some chocolate? Jus' leggo the sergeant and move over into the lieutenant's lap."

"Joe-want a knife? You got to promise to be careful with it, now."



"We'll come back if we can, Joe. Soldiers never know where they'll be from one day to the next. We'll come back for a visit, if we can."

"Joe, Joe, wake up, Joe." The voice was that of Peter, echoing damply from the stone walls.

"Last night I went to see my papa, Peter," said Joe.

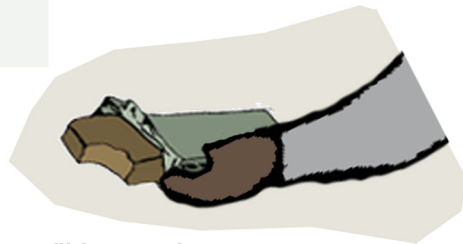
"Where did you get the chocolate, Joe---and the watch, and knife?" said Peter.



"What did he look like?" asked a little girl.

Joe glanced thoughtfully around the room. "Papa is as high as this ceiling," he said at last. "He is wider than that door."

"And as brown as this!" Holding out the chocolate bar for the other orphans to see.



"Somebody played a joke on you, Joe," said Peter. "He wasn't your father. How do you know he wasn't fooling you?"



Because he promised to take me back someday across the water as fast as he could." He smiled airily. "Not like the river, Peter- across more water than you've ever seen. He promised, and then I let him go."