Heartland
A Historical Drama about the Internment of German-Americans in the United States during World War II

Lojo Simon and Anita Simons

During World War II, the US government confined thousands of Japanese-, German- and Italian-Americans to isolated, fenced and guarded relocation centers known as internment camps. At the same time, it shipped foreign Prisoners of War captured overseas to the US for imprisonment.

Heartland reflects on the intersection between these two historic events through the story of a German-born widow and her family who take in two German Prisoners of War to work their family farm. But the German-American family and the POWs bond too well for the townspeople to accept, and the widow is arrested, interned and eventually suffers a breakdown, which tears her family apart.

Based on true stories, Heartland illustrates what can happen when fear and prejudice pit neighbor against neighbor in times of war. A dramatic tale that grants insights into American history, Heartland is a winner of the Dayton Playhouse FutureFest and a runner-up for the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival David Mark Cohen National Playwriting Award.

“The story is shocking; for me it was revelatory,” wrote theatre critic Pat Launer. “Deporting our own citizens? Who knew? But the play, while conveying historical information, is not in the slightest didactic. It’s a family story, a tale of survival and acquiescence, of racism, of neighbor against neighbor. Not a pretty picture ...”

While it may be read for pleasure, Heartland also is a useful tool for exposing students to important lessons in history, politics, economics, sociology, psychology, women’s studies and other academic disciplines.

Heartland is a winner of the Dayton Playhouse FutureFest and a runner-up for the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival David Mark Cohen National Playwriting Award.

Lojo Simon is a playwright, dramaturg and journalist. Her play, Adoration of Dora, about surrealist photographer Dora Maar, won the David Mark Cohen National Playwriting Award given by the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival and the Association for Theatre in Higher Education. She holds an MFA in Theatre from University of Idaho.

Anita Yellin Simons is a political activist and playwright who combines both her love of history and activism in her many award-winning plays. From her first play Goodbye Memories about Anne Frank before going into hiding to a later play This We’ll Defend about female rape in the military, Simons presents thought-provoking theater with humor and pathos.

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Heartland

A Historical Drama about the Internment of German-Americans in the United States during World War II

By

Lojo Simon and Anita Simons
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When asked to write the Preface for HEARTLAND, I could not help but think about a conversation with my father, Max Ebel. It was in the early 1980s, and the subject of the removal of West Coast Japanese Americans to camps during World War II had been all over the news. “Something like that happened to me,” Dad said. I was taken aback, confused. He was German, not Japanese. All I knew was that he helped build railroads in North Dakota during the war. My reaction then wasn’t unusual and still isn’t. Very few know that Germans and Italians were interned during World War II in Department of Justice camps. I didn’t.

Years later, when Dad was 80, he reluctantly told me his story. Only 17, Dad arrived in New York Harbor in 1937 from Speyer, Germany. He had left home because of a dangerous knife fight with local members of the Hitler Youth, angry that he wouldn’t join up. Dad boarded the “SS New York” with a nickel in his pocket, new woolen knickerbockers, and hope. He told me, “I was an American right from the beginning, and I always will be. I appreciated my freedom as much as a fish let out of a bowl.”

Dad worked enthusiastically to become a citizen, but then Pearl Harbor was bombed. Overnight, he and a million German, Japanese, and Italian resident aliens became the enemy with a stroke of Franklin Roosevelt’s pen. Under the alien enemy laws, they had to register with the US Government, be fingerprinted and carry certificates of identification. Their travel and personal property rights were limited. Most importantly, any enemy alien could be interned for the duration of the war for being a potential security risk, a determination made with little due process. Dad did what the law required. He even became a junior air raid warden to help his newly adopted country. In 1942, when the FBI arrived on his doorstep and ransacked the house, he never saw it coming.

They didn’t find anything, but Dad was later arrested and detained. At his brief, adversarial hearing, he was denied an attorney and not permitted to question the proceedings. The hearing board recommended parole, but the Department of Justice deemed him
potentially dangerous to the public peace and safety of the United States. Internment was ordered. Dad was back in the fishbowl.

After three months in an East Boston detention center, he was sent to Ellis Island, where he joined hundreds of other internees living in squalid conditions. Then, by blacked out railcar under guard, he was sent to Army facilities at Fort Meade, then to Camp Forrest in Tennessee. Finally, in May 1943, he landed at Fort Lincoln in Bismarck. He remarked in his journal: “Arrived. North Dakota. This is hell.”

That fall, about 100 trustworthy internees, including Dad, marched out of Fort Lincoln. They lived under guard in boxcars, replacing rails on the North Dakota plains. In April 1944, while still interned, Dad was drafted. He flunked the physical, but then got a rare rehearing because the railroaders’ good work helped the US war effort.

Like most internees, Dad never knew why he was interned, but the release recommendation I obtained years later implied that it was because he didn’t want to fight family in Europe and made pacifist remarks. He allegedly once said Hitler built good roads. The recommendation states that Dad was in no sense disloyal, that his further internment was unjustifiable and recommends unconditional release. He was eventually paroled, but not allowed near railroads. In November 1945, at age 25, his parole term ended and he was finally free. Though he was not at fault in any way, this was the story my father was too ashamed to tell. Tearfully he said, it was “immer im Hinterkopf” – “always in the back of my mind.”

Digging deeper, I learned about other parts of American history still in shadow: the enemy alien laws, the internment camps, the internee exchanges, and the Latin American program. I learned about an entire system unrelated to the relocation camps operated by the War Department, which held the West Coast Japanese and Japanese Americans. Many still don’t believe Germans and Italians were interned. Others think there weren’t enough to care about, that the internees were “only aliens,” and that they must have been guilty of something to be there in the first place.
The internees deserve recognition. The public should know what happened. Progress has been made, but slowly and not enough. Former internees are increasingly speaking out, getting solace from finding each other, the facts and others who care. Media coverage has increased. Websites have been created. We formed the German American Internee Coalition to act as a voice for the internees. In 2002, the Wartime Treatment Study Act was introduced in Congress. It was a wonderful, miraculous day for the internees. The act would have created an independent study commission to analyze the experience of the European American and Latin American internees, the alien enemy laws and to make related recommendations. Failing
year after year to get enough votes for passage, after ten years, the legislative effort ended.

A bright spot appeared in 2008 when I learned by coincidence of the insightful play, HEARTLAND. I was elated to read that the playwrights, Lojo Simon and Anita Simons, dealt head on with internment and war by bringing to life the timeless issues of what it means to be “foreign” in one’s adopted country, how soldiers are “just people,” and how love breaks down all barriers. It has been my privilege to work with them over the past several years, and I greatly appreciate their long efforts to bring the unknown travesty of German American internment to the public. I wish them the best of luck as they continue their good work.

January 7, 2014
Karen E. Ebel
New Hampshire State Representative
President, German American Internee Coalition
HEARTLAND owes its existence to the men and women who have dedicated themselves to sharing their often-personal stories of German-Americans interned in the United States during World War II. Among them are Karen Ebel, Arthur Jacobs, Lothar Eiserloh, Suzy Kvammen, Heidi Gurcke Donald, Ursula Vogt Potter, John A. Schmitz, Eberhard Fuhr, Anita Levy, Lori Johnston, Randy Houser, John E. Schmitz, John Heitmann, John Christgau, Steve Fox and all the members of the German American Internee Coalition.

Director Eric Bishop and the cast and crew who produced the premiere of HEARTLAND at MiraCosta College were essential to the development of the script. Thanks also go to the late Sandra Ellis-Troy, Gudaly Gubarek, Christy Coobatis, Rob Miller, Christine Agresti, Char Nelson and the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival (ACTF) and ACTF Region VIII respondents, Scripteasers, the Dayton Playhouse, Linda Dunlevy, Elissah Becknell, Emily Roxworthy, Arnold Krammer, and the late Rita Bronowski, all of whom assisted in the development of the play.

Individuals we’d like to acknowledge for their role in publishing HEARTLAND include Anna Banks, Social Fictions editor Patricia Leavy, and Sense Publishers owner Peter de Liefde. Thank you to the Door County Historical Society and to the University of Washington Daily newspaper for allowing permission to reprint their photographs.

Finally, we’d like to thank our friends and families for their support and for being patient with us as we went on the journey of HEARTLAND and continue to do so.
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In 1798, John Adams signed into law the Alien Enemies Act, which gave the President of the United States authority to deem “all natives, citizens, denizens, or subjects of the hostile nation or government, being males of the age of fourteen years and upwards, who shall be within the United States, and not actually naturalized, shall be liable to be apprehended, restrained, secured and removed, as alien enemies.”¹

Figure 2. University of Washington Daily newspaper article, “Alien Students Must Register,” 1942. Used with permission of the University of Washington Daily. Photo credit: Dick Takeuchi.

¹ An Act Respecting Enemy Aliens.
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Figure 3. Alien Enemy Internment Order for Maximilian Ebel, 1943. Used with permission of Karen Ebel.
After the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued Presidential Proclamations 2525, 2526, and 2527 to authorize the United States to detain allegedly potentially dangerous enemy aliens. The FBI and other law enforcement agencies arrested thousands of suspected enemy aliens living throughout the United States.2

President Roosevelt also issued Executive Order 9066, under which approximately 117,000 Japanese, Japanese-Americans and their families were forced from their homes and confined to isolated relocation camps that were fenced and guarded by the War Relocation Authority.3 Nearly 70,000 of the evacuees were American citizens.4 The government made no charges against them, nor could they appeal their incarceration. All lost personal liberties, and most lost homes and property.

Figure 4. Gurke Family in Crystal City Internment Camp, 1943. Used with permission of Heidi Gurke Donald.

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3 http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/japanese-relocation/
4 Ibid.
INTRODUCTION

Less well known is the fact that the US government also detained nearly 11,000 German-Americans and 3,500 Italian-Americans under the alien enemies law. The reason for these detentions? They or their families came from a nation that was at war with the United States. Most of the detainees did not have a history of collaborating with the enemy, nor were they enemy sympathizers. Most were law-abiding people who had come to America to fulfill their dreams of living in a free and democratic society.

![Map of Major Department of Justice Internment Facilities Holding German-Americans during World War II](image)

Figure 5. Map of Major Department of Justice Internment Facilities Holding German-Americans during World War II

Nonetheless, these so-called enemy aliens were arrested, detained and brought before an Alien Enemy Hearing Board, which determined their fate. They were not permitted legal representation nor were they allowed to challenge evidence against them, and in some cases, the Hearing Board met in secret without the detainee present at all. Although some detainees were released, about half

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5 German American Internee Coalition Alien Enemy Curriculum.
6 Ibid.
were sentenced to internment with no opportunity for appeal, and their assets were frozen, leaving their families destitute.\textsuperscript{7}

GERMAN POWS IN THE UNITED STATES

At the same time as the United States was ferreting out immigrant Americans from countries hostile to the US, it also captured German, Italian and Japanese soldiers and held them as Prisoners of War (POWs). From 1942 through 1945, more than 400,000 Axis prisoners were shipped to the United States and detained in prison camps in rural areas across the country.\textsuperscript{8}

\begin{figure}[h]
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\caption{German Prisoners of War Working in an Orchard in Door County, Wisconsin. Used with permission of the Door County Historical Museum and Archives.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{7} Ibid.

As POW camps were filling up and able-bodied American men were fighting overseas, farms and factories across America were struggling with acute labor shortages, leading the US government to permit tens of thousands of captured soldiers to leave American POW camps on a daily or weekly basis and to travel and work on nearby farms and in factories in cities and towns.

“At first there was a certain amount of apprehension,” said Tom Buecker, curator of the Fort Robinson Museum, a branch of the Nebraska Historical Society. “People thought of the POWs as Nazis. But half of the prisoners had no inclination to sympathize with the Nazi Party.”

Sometimes American immigrant families found that they had a lot in common with POWs from the same country. Mel Luetchens’ family was of German ancestry and his father spoke fluent German. “Having a chance to be shoulder-to-shoulder with [the prisoners], you got to know them,” said Luetchens, who grew up to become a minister. “They were people like us.”

HEARTLAND ON STAGE

HEARTLAND is a drama based on true stories of German-American families during World War II. Set in March 1945 on a small, family-run dairy farm in Wisconsin, HEARTLAND tells the story of a German-born widow and her children who struggle to make ends meet after the family patriarch has died. When they receive notice from the War Manpower Commission offering two Prisoners of War to work their farm, they eagerly accept the offer. But the German-American family and the German POWs bond too well for the townspeople to accept, and the widow is arrested, interned and eventually suffers a breakdown that tears her family apart.

HEARTLAND had its world premiere to sell-out houses in November 2008 at MiraCosta College in Oceanside, California. MiraCosta entered the production in the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival (KCACTF), which sent an adjudicator to review and comment on both the play and the production. As a result

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9 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
INTRODUCTION

of this review, HEARTLAND was selected as one of six plays to be featured at the KCACTF Region VIII festival at Cal State Fullerton in 2009.

HEARTLAND placed second for the David Mark Cohen National Playwriting Award sponsored by KCACTF and the Association for Theatre in Higher Education (ATHE) and won top honors for the best new play at the Dayton Playhouse FutureFest of new works for the stage. HEARTLAND also was honored by University of Akron, Reverie Productions, Long Beach Playhouse and the Oxford International Institute for Documentary & Drama in Conflict Transformation.

As part of the MiraCosta production and as a teaching tool for students and audience members, the college invited former internees Lothar Eiserloh and Suzy Kvammen to attend a performance of the play, followed by a discussion about their experiences in the internment camps.

Eiserloh was a child living with his German-born parents and American-born siblings on a farm near Cleveland when Pearl Harbor was attacked in 1941. Days later, his father was taken by the US government to an internment camp in Crystal City, Texas. The family’s dogs were shot, Eiserloh’s mother was physically attacked and left disabled, and the family lost its home and ultimately moved to the internment camp. A year later, they were deported to Germany, where they faced suspicion and even greater hardship. After the war, the family was repatriated to the United States, but the experience cost them their life savings and their father’s health (he died from a heart attack a few years after their return).

Chicago-born Kvammen and her family also were interned at Crystal City, Texas, before being deported to Bavaria in 1944, where they were nearly killed in American bombing raids. In 1951, then 15-year-old Kvammen and her family returned to the US and resettled with family in the Los Angeles area. Kvammen’s story is told by author Patricia McCune Irvine in the book, *Sing to Me PaPa* (Xlibris Corporation, 2000) Eiserloh and Kvammen were extremely moved by HEARTLAND, and spoke passionately afterwards, bringing history and art to life in unforgettable personal lessons.
Eiserloh’s comments after viewing a production of HEARTLAND are recorded in the documentary film *From Page to Stage: The Journey of Heartland*. Conceived, written, filmed and directed by Rob Miller, the documentary won first place in the student film category at the Idyllwild International Festival of Cinema in 2010. This short film supplements other media available to instructors who are interested in incorporating the lessons of HEARTLAND into their classroom.

The MiraCosta production of HEARTLAND also had a powerful impact on reviewers, who noted the value of presenting this play to contemporary audiences. Writing for *San Diego Theatre Scene*, theatre critic Pat Launer wrote:

The story is shocking; for me it was revelatory. Deporting our own citizens? Who knew? But the play, while conveying historical information, is not in the slightest didactic. It’s a family story, a tale of survival and acquiescence, of racism, of neighbor against neighbor. Not a pretty picture, or an attractive chapter of American history. … It’s a testament to the writers, director and
actors that we get completely caught up in the characters’ lives, while at the same time, we’re appalled by what their story tells us about our own history.

HEARTLAND IN THE CLASSROOM

Drama has long been appreciated as a tool for learning. Students study *The Iliad* to learn about war. Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible* is the basis for lessons about the Salem Witch Trials. More recently, Anne Nelson’s play *The Guys*, based on interviews with New York City firefighters, has been incorporated into classroom study of the September 11, 2001 World Trade Center attack.

On stage as well as in the classroom, HEARTLAND exposes students to visceral lessons about a dark chapter in American history and makes history come alive by personalizing the impact of wartime attitudes and government policies on American citizens and immigrants.

Just as the stage play *The Diary of Anne Frank* (Random House, 1956), adapted by Frances Goodrich and Albert Hacket from the autobiography by Anne Frank, has been effectively used in schools to teach students about Jewish life during the German occupation of Europe, HEARTLAND is a valuable tool to illustrate the disposition of German-Americans under Roosevelt.

Lesson plans that incorporate HEARTLAND in American history can be built around:

- The Alien Enemies Act and subsequent actions used to identify individuals in the United States that the government considers a potential threat to American safety and the moral, legal and practical implications of those decisions;
- American internment policy and Roosevelt’s decision to identify and imprison Japanese, German and Italian immigrants and American citizens during World War II;
- Wartime economics and Roosevelt’s decision to transfer Prisoners of War to American detention camps and then permit them to work on American farms and in factories;
- The sociological and psychological impact of wartime detention and POW policies on individuals, neighbors and communities;
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– The changing role of women in the US as a result of World War II and its impact on the American economy; and
– The relevance of wartime attitudes toward suspected enemy aliens for students of contemporary immigrant policies.

Lesson plans can also be built around several of HEARTLAND’s major characters. For example:

– Berta’s story: How a German immigrant was suspected of fraternizing with German POWs and was sent to an internment camp;
– Sonya’s story: How a young German-American woman whose mother was taken away by the US government tries to keep her family together and successfully operate her family’s dairy farm;
– Emma’s story: How a German-American teenager copes with her feelings for two German POWs who are sent to work on her family’s dairy farm;
– Rolf’s story: How a young German man copes with being drafted into military service, captured and held as a POW, and what happens when he finds his way onto a German-American farm;
– Peggy’s story: How a well-meaning woman becomes suspicious of her German-American neighbors when they accept German POWs to work on their farm.

In addition to creating their own lesson plans, instructors may want to consult a curriculum created by the German American Internee Coalition and made available on its website, www.gaic.info. These online materials were created by scholars and advisors affiliated with a photographic exhibit, “Enemy Alien Files: Hidden Stories of World War II,” and are intended for use by schools, universities, museums, libraries, and community organizations as stand-alone educational material or in conjunction with the appearance of the photographic exhibit. Seventeen Lesson Plans focused on the World War II Alien Enemy Control Program are included in the online curriculum guide. Topics covered include: profiling, property and travel restrictions, exclusion, removal, relocation, arrest, detention, internment, and deportation.
The lessons of HEARTLAND are not limited to history. The play’s characters and stories also are relevant to contemporary study of political science, international relations, economics, ethnic studies, German studies, sociology (law and society, social inequity), psychology, women’s studies, and performing arts. For example, the four female characters in the play shed light on the changing role of women as a result of labor shortages at home during World War II, particularly for women like Sonya who are forced to assume traditionally male roles in the absence of husbands and fathers. In the play, Sonya tries to fill her father’s shoes to run the farm, but she is constantly challenged by characters such as Jack, who questions whether a woman is as capable as a man in controlling the business and operational aspects of a dairy farm.

Across disciplines and in interdisciplinary courses, HEARTLAND is germane to discussion of current events because it highlights prejudice against a cultural minority that remains a part of the fabric of America today. Students reading and discussing HEARTLAND will easily recognize how prejudice against German-Americans during WWII mirrors prejudice against Arab-Americans, Mexican-Americans and other immigrant groups today that are falsely accused of threatening the American way of life.

HEARTLAND IN DEVELOPMENT

Research for HEARTLAND began in 2005 when we viewed a television broadcast about German POWs who had been imprisoned in the US during World War II, a story that paralleled national concern at the time over the detention of terrorist suspects at Guantánamo Bay Detention Camp in Cuba. Located in southeastern Cuba, Guantánamo Bay military base has been under American lease since 1903; however, since 2002, it has been used to hold individuals (primarily Muslims) detained during overseas counterterrorism operations. During the George W. Bush administration, the US claimed that Guantánamo Bay detainees were not on American soil

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and therefore not covered by the Constitution, and that enemy combatant status meant they could be denied some legal protections. This argument harkened back to US policy regarding individuals of Japanese, German and Italian descent during World War II.

We began our research into German POW camps in the United States, using primary source material as much as possible, online and in local libraries. Sources in this initial research phase included US government documents about the Alien Enemies Act and Presidential wartime proclamations. Several POW camps were identified in places as varied as New Ulm, Minnesota, and Clinton, Mississippi, and we found useful photographs and documents about these camps on websites dedicated to the preservation of local history in these states. Additional research was gleaned from officials at Fort Robinson, Nebraska, now a state park and museum, which once served as a German POW camp.

After our initial research phase, we created a timeline of events, and explored themes such as patriotism and xenophobia that we felt could be woven into the fabric of the play. We chose Wisconsin as the location for the play because of its many dairy farms in close proximity to POW camps. Once we knew the setting, we conducted additional research on dairy farm life, using texts such as *Give Me a Home Where the Dairy Cows Roam* by LeAnn R. Ralph, and *Letters of a German-American Farmer*, by Johannes Gillhoff.

However, as any researcher knows, the best laid plans rarely come to full fruition in academia or art, and as we proceeded to lay out the plot and characters in HEARTLAND, we became concerned that the story too closely mirrored that of a 1973 young adult novel by Bette Greene called *Summer of My German Soldier*, in which a young Jewish girl falls in love with a POW housed near her home in Jenkinsville, Arkansas. We also had difficulty crafting a likely plotline for the Berta character, thus we knew that more research was in order to find the heart of our story.

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INTRODUCTION

A major turning point in the development of HEARTLAND revealed itself when we came across a related but new topic in our research – the internment of German-Americans during World War II. At the time, neither of us knew about this long hidden part of American history, but we quickly found it to be the “missing link” to the development of HEARTLAND.

Our initial foray into internment research came with the discovery of The Freedom of Information Times at www.foitimes.com, a website created by Arthur D. Jacobs, who was a young boy when his German-American father was arrested by the FBI. Jacobs documented his story in the book, *The Prison Called Hohenasperg, An American Boy Betrayed by his Government during World War II*. We corresponded with Jacobs, who shared his story and provided us with the names and contact information of other internment researchers, many of whom are former internees or children of internees.

Figure 8. Families in Crystal City Internment Camp, 1943. Used with permission of Heidi Gurke Donald.

An organization called Traces at www.traces.org provided us with additional personal stories about life in the Midwest during the war. Other stories were obtained from books such as *The Misplaced*
INTRODUCTION

*American,* the story of internee Karl Vogt, as told by members of the Vogt family and edited by Ursula Vogt Potter. Other books that we found particularly useful include: John Christgau’s *Enemies: WW II Alien Internment* (University of Nebraska Press, October 2009) and Arnold Krammer’s *Nazi Prisoners of War in America* (Stein & Day, New York, 1979).

John A. Heitmann, Ph.D., Professor of History at the University of Dayton, served as an excellent resource, as did Karen Ebel of the German American Internnee Coalition (www.gaic.info). Both Heitmann and Ebel’s personal stories, as well as many others’, are documented in an online library on the GAIC website. Emily Colborn-Roxworthy, PhD, of the California Cultures in Comparative Perspective initiative at University of California, San Diego, lent her perspective to the project, as well. Foxworthy is the author of *Theatre of Japanese American Internment: The Academy, the Press, and Camp Performance* and an expert in performances of the Asian diaspora during World War II.

![Alien Registration Identification Document](image)

*Figure 9. Alien Registration Identification Document belonging to Eberhard Fuhr, 1942. Used with permission of Eberhard Fuhr.*

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Based on this and other research, we wrote the initial draft of HEARTLAND in 2006 and brought it to San Diego-based Scripteasers playwriting group in early 2007, where the play was read by local actors before an audience of about 40 people. After obtaining their feedback, we made additional revisions, and then submitted the script to various theatres and playwriting competitions. In 2008, a revised script was presented as a public reading at the Dayton Playhouse as part of that theatre’s FutureFest competition, where the play won first prize for Best New Play. Subsequently, additional revisions were made in conjunction with HEARTLAND’s world premiere production at MiraCosta College later that year.

Finally, a thought about fiction and history that derives from a common question: Why did you write HEARTLAND about fictional characters rather than telling a real story, and is HEARTLAND a true story? It's a simple question with a complex answer. First, the story of German-American internment is not our story. We are not former internees or children of former internees, and therefore, we could not tell their story as our own. More importantly though, it was our goal to share what we had learned about American history in an experiential way that could go far beyond the facts as they often are presented in history books and scholarly articles. We wanted to tell the story by showing how government policies impact people and lives at the most personal level.

Writing for the stage allows us to weave facts, historical research and documented evidence into fictional characters and stories that live first in our imaginations and then in the imaginations of directors, designers and actors who lift the words from the page to the stage. Each of us brings our own experience and insight into a collaborative form of storytelling that has the potential to far surpass the most well told piece of non-fiction. The answer then is yes, and no: HEARTLAND is based on true stories, as best as we know them. It is deeply rooted in actual events and circumstances of American history, as best as we understand them from our research, using a variety of public and private sources. In this sense, HEARTLAND is a useful tool for exposing audiences and students to important lessons in history, politics, economics, sociology, psychology,
women’s studies and other academic disciplines. However, the specific characters and events in HEARTLAND are fiction, and as a result, we encourage readers to let the story breathe a little. Absorb it not only through your eyes and ears, but let it soak in through your skin. Feel it resonate in your heart. That’s where its truest lessons reside.

Lojo Simon & Anita Simons
February 2014
CHARACTERS AND SETTING

Berta Gertzoff – dairy farmer’s widow, 40s, German immigrant, speaks German and English with German accent
Sonya Gertzoff – daughter, 20, German-American
Emma Gertzoff – daughter, 16, German-American
Peter Gertzoff – son, 10, German-American
Peggy Downing – banker’s wife and town busybody, 40s, American as apple pie
Jack Downing – banker, married to Peggy, 40s, American
Rolf – German POW, 18, speaks German and English with a German accent
Gunther – German POW, 22, speaks German and English with a German accent
FBI Agent*
Police Officer*
Guard*

* May be played by actors playing the characters of Rolf and Gunther

Act I – Family kitchen of the Gertzoff dairy farm in Wisconsin, March 1945
Act II – The farm and Detention Center, later 1945

Note to Actors: The English translation of the German text (denoted in parentheses) is provided for actor and director use only. The German text is intended to be spoken in German only and not translated for the audience.
HEARTLAND: THE PLAY

By Lojo Simon and Anita Simons

ACT I

Scene 1

Before the curtain rises, we hear music from the 1940s and then a series of radio broadcasts from December 7, 1941 to 1945. At rise, it is a sunny Saturday afternoon. SONYA, wearing her work clothes (her father’s old bib overalls), turns the radio dial until she settles on a news broadcast. As the radio plays, she washes her hands in the sink. On the kitchen counter is a ball of used tin foil that grows larger throughout the play. SONYA sits at the kitchen table to read her favorite newspaper column.

RADIO ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
Now for news from the Western Front. The leading tanks of the U.S. Third Corps reached the Rhine River today opposite Remagen and found the Ludendorff Bridge there damaged but still standing.

BERTA enters from the back door with a basket of fresh vegetables, dabs her eyes with her hanky and then places it in her apron pocket. She does not want her daughter to see that she’s been crying.

RADIO ANNOUNCER (V.O. continued)
Troops immediately rushed across and established a bridgehead. Other elements of the U.S. First Army completed the capture of Cologne. The U.S. Twelfth Corps from the U.S. Third Army continued to advance rapidly. …

BERTA prepares the vegetables for dinner, but is clearly agitated over the news on the radio. She speaks over the radio broadcast, but Sonya doesn’t hear.

BERTA
Sonya, why always with the radio?
BERTA takes out a bag of potatoes.

RADIO ANNOUNCER (V.O. continued)
On the Eastern Front, the German offensive by Army Group South continues and achieves more gains in Hungary.

BERTA
Sonya!

BERTA turns off the radio. She takes the potatoes, a bowl and some knives and joins SONYA at the table.

SONYA
Good news today, Mama. We captured a bridge over the Rhine and our troops marched into Cologne. And it says here that when we win the war, the Germans will no longer be –

BERTA
Every day you listen to radio, read these papers. You think these Americans have all the answers?

SONYA
Why do you say “Americans” with such disdain?

BERTA hands Sonya a knife.

BERTA
Just peel.

SONYA
I read in Mrs. Roosevelt’s column that people who live in rural America have more meat than people in big cities. Aren’t we lucky?

BERTA
Someone should tell that Mrs. Roosevelt there is more meat because no one has money to buy the meat.
They peel in silence.

SONYA
Mama, your eyes are all red.

BERTA
Hank was a good farmhand and a loyal friend.

SONYA
The Army got a good catch. Too bad it was at our expense.

BERTA
Sonya, I am thinking on something. With Papa passing so suddenly and no young man for helping out, I think on the advice of Peggy.

SONYA
Stop listening to that woman!

BERTA
But Sonya, her husband is a big shot at the bank, and he says to sell the farm now is better than to wait until –

SONYA
We aren’t selling the farm!

BERTA
We should think on what I hear from my cousin in Anaheim. She writes of the good weather there, and she has a big house, you know.

SONYA
They also have earthquakes. I'll take my Wisconsin winters any day.

BERTA
A lot of German families are there – you could find a husband.
SONYA
I don’t need a husband. After the war is over, I’ll have dozens of men working for me when the Gertzoff dairy is the biggest in Wisconsin. We’ll have trucks delivering milk all over the county. You’ll see.

BERTA
You are your father’s daughter. Always in a traumwelt. (dreamworld).

SONYA
You bet I’m a dreamer. Remember Papa said, “Anything is possible in America.”

BERTA
Look at you, dressed like a boy. The hands all rough and schmutzige (filthy). This is not the way for a young lady.

SONYA
I’m proud to look like Rosie the Riveter.

SONYA whistles the tune “Whistle While You Work.”

BERTA
Sonya, bitte (please).

SONYA
Papa taught me to whistle to call in the cows.

BERTA
Then do that in the barn.

SONYA
Come on, Mama. Whistle with me. I know you can.

SONYA whistles and peels.
BERTA
Papa and I took you children to see that picture show.

SONYA
“Snow White.” Remember Emma called Peter “Dopey” all the way home.

BERTA
Those were the good times.

SONYA
We’ll have them again. Why don’t you go to your choir group tonight and see some of your friends? That’ll cheer you up.

BERTA
For me the time of grief is not finished.

SONYA
There’s no law forbidding a widow from visiting with friends. Besides, Papa would want you to go.

BERTA
If that keeps you quiet, I will think on it.

_PETER enters. He is “flying” pretending to be Superman with a toy airplane in one hand and some letters in the other._

PETER
Super air mail! Special delivery for Mama and Sonya!

_PETER drops the letters on the table as he flings himself into BERTA’s lap knocking the table._

SONYA
Peter! The potatoes! Say _auf wiedersehen_ (goodbye) to quiet time.

_PETER picks up a potato and holds it to SONYA’s face._
HEARTLAND: THE PLAY

PETER
Sonya, look – the potato is staring at you.

EMMA enters. SONYA opens a letter.

BERTA
Did you give Mrs. Downing a proper danke (thank you) for the picture show?

EMMA
Yes, Mama.

BERTA
Good. How you like the movie?

EMMA
It was supermergetroid. I wish you’d been there – Bing Crosby really sends me.

PETER
I thought you loved Frank Sinatra.

EMMA
Oh, he sends me, too.

PETER
I think we should send you some place.

SONYA
How cute, Emma has picked up some of the new “swing” lingo.

PETER
Lingo, schmingo, she’s just a show off.

EMMA
I don’t care what you say about me. Someday I’m going to be a famous dancer and swing with all the hep cats.
SONYA
I thought you wanted to study nursing.

EMMA
I did, but now that we’re winning the war, I don’t suppose anyone will need a nurse by the time I get my training.

SONYA
Being a dancer isn’t a very practical alternative. Not with all we have to do here.

EMMA
I’m not staying here, no matter what. It’s so off the cob.

BERTA
Emma, help Peter wash up, and you, too. Then help Sonya peel.

EMMA and PETER wash their hands. EMMA sits at the table to peel potatoes. PETER flies around the room using a dishtowel as a cape.

BERTA
Sonya, what is that letter?

SONYA
It’s from the War Manpower Commission. It was addressed to Papa.

EMMA
What’s the War Manpower Commission?

SONYA
It says his application for employment of prisoners of war has been approved.

EMMA
Prisoners of war?
SONYA
Shh! Let me read. “This certificate is issued to Mr. Anton Gertzoff, address and place of business listed below, for essential work at his establishment or farm. As an employer, you must certify that you are willing to use through contract with the government the labor of prisoners of war detained by the United States of America and in custody of the war department.”

BERTA
This is a government letter?

SONYA
It says we are expected to “provide transportation to and from the prisoner of war enclosure at the start and the close of each business week, and to provide a noonday meal.” I’ve heard about this program. They had some POWs on the Miller farm over in Green Field. Papa must have made this application before he –

BERTA
I did not speak with him about these prisoners of war.

EMMA
I don’t think Papa would want those men on our farm.

SONYA
He must have. He signed this application. Look, here’s a copy.

EMMA
I don’t want Nazis living here. What will my friends think?

SONYA
Who cares what your friends think? Besides, there are plenty of prisoners of war who aren’t Nazis.

PETER
Yeah, they could be Japs. I’d like to meet a Jap or a Nazi. A japanazi!
HEARTLAND: THE PLAY

BERTA
Peter, hush! Sonya, does the letter say where these prisoners come from? They are German?

SONYA
It doesn’t say, just that they’re housed at Camp Oakfield and we’re required to pick them up on Monday morning and bring them back on Friday evening.

EMMA
They’ll sleep here?

SONYA
All we do is pay their wages and make sure they are fed. With all the work, Mama, I don’t think we can refuse.

EMMA
How many are coming?

SONYA
Two. No names or other information. Just that two will be available on March twelfth – that’s in two days!

EMMA
Will they come in the house?

BERTA
I do not say they come at all. I am thinking on it, that’s all.

SONYA
What will convince you? Do you want another cow to die because I don’t have the strength to pull out a calf on my own?

BERTA
Sonya, you surprise me. You always say women are strong like men. But now this government letter come and you say yes without thinking on it!
SONYA
Fine, Mama, do as you wish. Come on, Peter, I can use your help outside.

*SONYA and PETER exit. BERTA busies herself with the cooking.*

EMMA
You won’t let them come, will you?

BERTA
I am not kind to the idea, but Sonya works so hard, and with Papa gone … I do not know, Emma.

EMMA
But they’re the enemy.

BERTA
This talk is rubbish – German, Italian, Japanese, it makes no matter for us. These are young men, boys, not much older than you.

EMMA
But the newsreels show all the bad things that the Nazis are doing.

BERTA
You cannot believe all that.

*SONYA rushes in with PETER, who is crying and holding his arm.*

BERTA
Oh, now what? Peter!

SONYA
He was supposed to be helping me with the paddock gate but instead he was walking on the rail, and he fell. I think he landed on his shoulder.
BERTA
Peter, you are not the Superman!

PETER
My arm! My arm!

EMMA
Let me have a look. I’ll be gentle. Alright, let’s just try to move it a bit. (she moves his arm) Does that hurt?

PETER whimpers.

How about this? (she moves his arm a different way)

Same response.

It doesn’t appear to be broken, but I think it should be immobilized.

PETER
No! I don’t want that.

EMMA
Sonya, hand me the first aid kit. Peter, remember that movie we saw where the soldier had his arm in a sling? Well, that’s what I’m going to do for you.

BERTA
You are lucky boy, Peter. If you had done such a thing in my Mama’s house, she would make your bottom hurt more than your arm.

EMMA applies a splint to PETER’s arm as BERTA comforts him by singing or humming a German tune.

EMMA
I think that should hold it, but he really shouldn’t use that arm for at least a week or he could re-injure the joint.
HEARTLAND: THE PLAY

PETER
A week? Does that mean no school?

SONYA
Emma, you’ll have to do Peter’s chores.

EMMA
Why me?

SONYA
How else will we get the work done? Of course, if we had those POWs, then –

EMMA
Mama!

SONYA
Emma, be reasonable. Peter can’t help out with the milking, at least not until he’s healed, and someone has to fill in.

BERTA
Emma, someday you will be a wonderful nurse. I think your time is better spent at school to get the training you need, not doing Peter’s work. I do not think so good on strangers in my house, but we can make the best of this. Sonya, make ready the plans to have them here. Emma, a little radio, bitte. We have much cooking to do.

EMMA turns on the radio to “Pennsylvania Polka” as lights fade.