Gifts From the Enemy

By Trudy Ludwig

Adapted for Reader’s Theatre by Stephanie Richards, PhD

Narrator 1, Narrator 2, Mama

Narrator 1: There are those who say what I’ve lived through never could have happened. I’m here to tell you that it did happen.

Narrator 2: My name is Alex and I’m an ordinary person with an extraordinary past.

Narrator 1: Many years ago, I was young like you. I lived with my family in a small town in Poland.

Narrator 2: However, we did not have indoor plumbing or refrigerators or cell phones or TV’s or computers. We didn’t even have a car.

Narrator 1: But, like you, we did have books and food and laughter and love.

Narrator 2: And every Friday, my Papa invited a poor student or a homeless person to share our Sabbath dinner with us. We always ate Mama’s freshly baked bread, called challah. Mama always prepared wonderful meals and she had such wisdom, too.

Mama: “there are two ways to deal with the cold. Put on a fur coat to be warm, or light a fire so that others can be warm, too”.

Narrator 1: But in September of 1939, things changed. Hitler ordered that the Nazis attack my country.

Narrator 2: and Hitler ordered his army to seek out, imprison, and destroy people who looked, thought and acted differently than his people.

Narrator 1 and 2 and Mama: Hitler hated differences.

Narrator 1: Things changed when Hitler sent the army in. We couldn’t go to school or worship or go to parks or playgrounds. We were prisoners in our own homes.

Narrator 2: When I was 13, the German soldiers killed Papa.

Narrator 1: When I was 14, the German soldiers took my brother away in the middle of the night.

Narrator 2: When I was 15, the Nazis came for me. I wasn’t even able to hug Mama or my little brother good bye. I never saw them again.

Narrator 1: I was shipped from one prison labor camp to another, forced to work long hours in very crowded, dirty conditions. There was never enough food to eat and I was always hungry. I kept thinking about Mama’s home baked challah bread.

Narrator 2: Months went by. Then years went by. Lack of food and so much suffering and an empty belly and a heavy heart made me want to give up.

Narrator 1: Then something amazing happened.

Narrator 2: I received gifts from a stranger. Not just any stranger. A stranger I thought was my enemy.

Narrator 1: One day when I was working in a German factory, a German worker caught my eye and pointed at a box on the floor. When I looked under it, there was a piece of bread and cheese. I couldn’t believe it! She could have been killed for leaving this for me. Why had she done it?

Narrator 2: And every day for the next 30 days, the worker left me a piece of cheese and bread under that box. What an amazing gift she gave me in the face of certain death if she were to be found out!

Narrator 1: But she gave me the hope to survive. Her acts of kindness made me stop and think: How can all Germans be my enemy when this woman, a German, has risked her life for me?

Narrator 2: That is when I learned the most important lesson in life: There are the kind and the cruel in every group of people. How those you meet in life treat you is far more important than who they are.

Narrator 1: In May 1945, we were freed by the Russian army, but not a day goes by that I don’t think about the German worker who risked her life to provide a simple kindness of a piece of bread and cheese.

Narrator 2: Today, when I bite into the challah bread, I don’t just taste heaven. I taste freedom.