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THE BIG PONDER

Hidden History

By Cariad Harmon

[DOOR OPENS]

Cariad Harmon: So nice to meet you, Curtis!

Curtis Peters: Gotta lot of stuff to show you ...

Cariad Harmon: I'm here at the Old Jail Museum in Lawrenceburg, Tennessee, a small town about two hours south of Nashville. [JAIL DOOR CLOSING] This building was a functional jail from 1893 all the way up until the mid '70s, and museum curator Curtis Peters says old inmates still drop by all the time to take a look around.

Curtis Peters: See the guy right here, Jimmy Bennet? He went around showin' me everywhere he wrote his name

Cariad Harmon: The jail cells, and the graffiti in them, are now living display cases, full of Lawrence County history. And I can't think of a better custodian than Curtis. He was born and raised in town, taught history in the local school system for 40 years, and knows just about everything there is to know about the area.

Curtis Peters: I have to get used to your accent now since you're a Londoner.

Cariad Harmon: And I am a recovering Londoner, now living in the American South. I'm also a reporter, and I love telling stories about the history of ordinary people. So, I'm a real sucker for a good community museum, and this one does not disappoint. [SQUEAKING BILLOWS SOUND] Curtis has a vacuum cleaner from 1914. An old dentist's cabinet ...

Curtis Peters: Take a smell right there.

Cariad Harmon: That's okay!

Curtis Peters: Smells just like the old dental offices.

Cariad Harmon: And all kinds of odds and ends that he may or may not have asked me to smell.

Curtis Peters: You ever heard the term 'pop goes the weasel'?

Cariad Harmon: Yes!

Curtis Peters: That's a weasel!

Cariad Harmon: Just in case you're wondering, that's actually a device for measuring yarn, but not everything in the museum is nursery rhyme material. The collection I've come to see tells a different kind of story altogether. [MUSIC] And it wasn't bought at an auction or found at an estate sale. There's a whole cabinet full of artifacts that Curtis literally dug up out of the ground, just a couple of miles from here.

Curtis Peters: One of the first things we found – the guy dug it up, he thought it was a button. It was round, and you know, it sort of looked like a button. 'Course being the history guy, I would have to identify what they'd found. I get over there, I start cleaning it off. I said, hey guys, this has got a swastika on it. Nah, it doesn't. I said, yeah, it does.

Cariad Harmon: What Curtis and his friends discovered was not the home of a white supremacist or the stockpile of a Nazi collector. They had uncovered a lost piece of American history. And right at the very center of it was the story of Curtis's own family and a German prisoner of war camp, right here in Lawrenceburg, Tennessee. [NEWSREEL MUSIC] The story begins almost 80 years ago and 3,000 miles away on the coast of North Africa, just as the tide of World War II was beginning to turn. Allied forces had struggled for years to defeat Hitler's army, and in the spring of 1943, victory in Tunisia changed the course of the war forever.

Archival tape: The greatest mass surrender of fully equipped troops in modern history ...

Cariad Harmon: An incredible quarter of a million German and Italian troops surrendered. Now, Allied forces were not about to kill unarmed men. But the war itself was far from over, and they couldn't just let these enemy soldiers go. So, they became prisoners of war – POWs. And that, in turn, left the American government with a huge logistical problem.

Curtis Peters: They capture all these Germans, what are they going to do with 'em? They gotta build a camp over there to put 'em in, they gotta take soldiers to guard them over there ... So, it becomes a liability to the army.

Cariad Harmon: The Geneva Convention of 1929 laid out detailed rules for the treatment of captured military personnel. International laws governed everything from hygiene and medical attention to working conditions. The army couldn't just lock their prisoners in a cage and let them starve.

Curtis Peters: So, they said, oh, let's just put 'em on these ships and send 'em back to the U.S., and they can deal with them over there.

Archival tape: En route to prison camps throughout the United States, 3,000 German prisoners of war arrive in New York ...

Cariad Harmon: Thousands of POWs began arriving in the U.S., just as a mass labor shortage gripped the country. The war industry had exploded, and new factories sprang up, making everything from planes to

tanks and army uniforms. But the men who normally would have taken those jobs were now fighting overseas, so the government had to get creative.

Archival tape: Employers find that women can do many jobs as well as men!

Cariad Harmon: Women became essential workers – and so did the newly arrived German prisoners of war. [MUSIC ENDS] Over 700 POW camps were built across 46 states from Massachusetts to California. German prisoners were deployed to small farming communities across the country, where they worked side by side with American civilians. And one of the towns they were sent to was Lawrenceburg, Tennessee. The very same spot, where Curtis found the rusty swastika.

Curtis Peters: I taught history all my life and have a history degree. And nobody ever talked about that.

[PAPER RUSTLING]

Cariad Harmon: But that's not the only thing Curtis discovered ...

Curtis Peters: There is a book in here that we got out of the Brock house, and it is a German-English, English-German dictionary that they used to translate with the prisoners when they went out there.

Cariad Harmon: In the spring of 1944, Curtis's own relatives, the Brocks and the Striblings, brought six of those same German POWs to work on their farm. They helped the family for two whole years, planting, harvesting, felling trees ...

Curtis Peters: And they got paid 80 cents a day, what was considered a normal wage for people working.

Cariad Harmon: Now, Great Aunt Jim, the matriarch of the Brock family, didn't talk about the war very much. And she certainly didn't tell the POW story to Curtis. But she lived in the same house all of her life. And when she died, she left behind a wealth of POW history. Buried deep in the back of a closet, the family found photographs, keepsakes, even a cornflakes box stuffed with letters written by the prisoners themselves.

Curtis Peters: I bet there is more stuff from the Lawrenceburg camp than any of the others because all these letters were kept in one place. And so, in the letters, we had the photos, and we had the other stuff that was sent back. So, it was this great treasure trove of information.

Cariad Harmon: And the story Aunt Jim's archive has to tell us is quite surprising.

[MUSIC]

Curtis Peters: You know, they were real scared of 'em when they first came. The first newspaper articles we found here talk about the Nazis are coming to town, and the Nazis this, and the Nazis that.

Cariad Harmon: And it wasn't just the family. The POW program was controversial all over the country. Labor unions were against it and so was the general public. Prisoners or not, a German was a Nazi after all. And Nazis were killing American boys by the boatload. But if Aunt Jim's archive is anything to go by when the POWs actually arrived in Lawrenceburg, they didn't act at all like the Nazis in the newsreels. And they were so ... young.

[MUSIC ENDS]

Curtis Peters: This is a picture that was made in Lawrenceburg at the POW camp in front of the tool shed.

Cariad Harmon: Curtis is pointing to a black-and-white photograph of eleven German POWs.

Curtis Peters: They're all in there. 18, 19, 20 years old – none of 'em are old.

Cariad Harmon: Their faces are dirty. A couple of them look sunburned. They have their arms around one another, and they're smiling

Curtis Peters: They don't look too unhappy, do they?

Cariad Harmon: They really look like they're having a good time – are they holding beer?

[MUSIC]

Curtis Peters: They're holding beer. They were allowed to purchase two bottles of beer a day. That was their limit. Of course, those aren't little bottles. Those are big bottles of beer.

Cariad Harmon: When I think of POWs, I think of starving men in cages. Torture, resistance, and military punishment. But under the protection of the Geneva Convention, these men were soldiers. And they had to be treated as such. That meant they were paid for their labor, they had Sundays off, and frankly, they ate better than a lot of civilians.

Curtis Peters: They learned to drink buttermilk. They ate watermelons, which they didn't have back in Germany. They talk about that in their letters some, about the stuff that they had at the farm to eat for lunch.

Cariad Harmon: As crazy as all of this sounds, the whole point was actually to protect American soldiers. If Lawrenceburg boys were caught fighting overseas, the Geneva Convention was supposed to keep them safe too. So, you followed the rules and prayed to God that if your own kids were captured, the enemy would do the same.

Curtis Peters: What were you doing when you were 17 and 18 years old? Were you captured and a prisoner of war and overseas in a strange land wondering what's gonna happen to you?

[MUSIC]

Cariad Harmon: This complex relationship between local people and the POWs they worked with was playing out in small towns across the country. But what makes Lawrenceburg and Aunt Jim's archive different is that here the townspeople didn't just tolerate the prisoners. We don't know exactly when it happened, but somewhere along the way, as they worked together on the farms and in the factories, the Germans and the Americans became ... friends.

[SOUND OF PAPER RUSTLING, UNPACKING TREASURE]

Curtis Peters: I wanted to show you this.

Cariad Harmon: Curtis has unwrapped a small lead statuette of a horse ...

Cariad Harmon: Oh gosh, that's heavy

Curtis Peters: Turn it over, and read the bottom.

Cariad Harmon: A gift, from one of the POWs, to Aunt Jim and the family. Prisoner of war Eugene Hirth. So he made this?

Curtis Peters: Yes, I told you he's talented.

Cariad Harmon: Eugen, or Eugene as the Americans would have called him, was one of the six prisoners who worked on Aunt Jim's farm.

Curtis Peters: But I would say Eugene was the closest one to them.

Cariad Harmon: And in the two years he spent there, he made them all sorts of gifts. In the same box, is a toy horse carved out of wood and another out of soapstone. He even made an oil painting for Aunt Jim's birthday. Looking at this box of treasures, it seems quite clear that Eugen felt deeply for the family. And he wasn't the only one. In their letters, most of the prisoners call Aunt Jim and her husband "aunt" and "uncle."

Curtis Peters: Now, these are some of the ones I liked. This is Leopold Klakl from Austria in 1947.

Cariad Harmon: Some of the POWs like Leopold even took photographs of the family back home with them ... Curtis is reading a letter he wrote to Aunt Jim after the war.

Curtis Peters: I would not have dreamed when I was put aboard a ship in Africa that fate would bring me to such noble and good people. Many of our comrades envied us for, with you, we prisoners only had happy bright days.

[MUSIC]

Cariad Harmon: Curtis could not believe that his own family had been sitting on this story for so many years, and it all happened right here in his hometown. He is possibly the biggest history nerd I have ever met, and he knew nothing about it. So, the researcher in him kicked into high gear. He poured through Aunt Jim's letters, scoured old newspapers, even interviewed some old-timers in town. And when he was

finally done, he gathered all of Aunt Jim's treasures together and hosted a presentation at the Old Jail Museum.

Curtis Peters: So, it was standing room only, up the steps, down the hallway ...

[MUSIC]

Cariad Harmon: And the whole thing took on a life of its own.

NBC Anchor: They came here as enemies of the United States, but they left as friends ...

Cariad Harmon: Local press picked up the story, and somewhere along the way, NBC got involved.

NBC Anchor: This story of kindness and love begins with the horrors of World War II.

Cariad Harmon: For a while, Curtis was a local celebrity. Everyone wanted to tell the amazing story of generosity and brotherly love in wartime Tennessee, and it is a beautiful story. But I don't know ... I can't help thinking there's more to it. [MUSIC] One of the things I find so fascinating about these relationships is that I just can't imagine anything like them being remotely possible where I'm from. My grandmother was a student in London when German aircraft destroyed the city. She remembers blackouts, running into the underground station because she didn't have a bomb shelter. And my mum grew up surrounded by rubble in the only house left standing on her street. I wonder if being in America, so far away from the war and everything that came with it, gave the people of Lawrenceburg a buffer. Less reason to ask questions about who these German soldiers were and what they might have done. And like all of the questions we ask about our history, the truth – or as close as we can get to it – is complicated.

Dr. Antonio Thompson: On one hand, you've got Americans that despise them. They're our enemy. They're Nazis, they've committed atrocities. And many of those things are absolutely true.

Cariad Harmon: This is military historian, Dr. Antonio Thompson.

Dr. Antonio Thompson: On the other hand, you've got people who are working closely with them. And on their end of things, they say, well, this person is nice. They've worked hard. They've saved our farm. So, you've got these two big things that as Americans, I think as historians, we've got to resolve.

Cariad Harmon: Many farmers were eager to defend German POW labor. And that's because prison workers had a big impact on the American economy. In Tennessee alone, the program saved the state's crops for two years in a row. It's also true that not everyone in the German army was a Nazi.

[MUSIC]

Dr. Antonio Thompson: The Germans are recruiting from all sorts of places.

Cariad Harmon: Though many soldiers were avid supporters of Hitler's regime, the Nazi party was a political organization, and you didn't have to join it to be drafted. By 1941, Hitler was expanding his military by any means necessary.

Dr. Antonio Thompson: We've got boys, we've got old men, World War I veterans, fighting in this war, but they're also recruiting from within their own prison systems. So, people who fought against the Germans are being put into uniform because the need for manpower is so great.

Cariad Harmon: So when all of these German soldiers began arriving in the same American POW camps, all hell broke loose. Nazis were threatening and killing anti-Nazi soldiers and anyone who criticized the regime. So, the U.S. government stepped in and began segregating the camps, moving Nazis and anti-Nazis out of the general population.

Dr. Antonio Thompson: So, what we're left with is a group of people that say, well, I'm not like those anti-Nazis, but I'm definitely not in that fanatical group either. I'm the average soldier, whatever that actually means. And the segregation is not perfect. I mean, there are holes all through this. But what we find out is, we can put these guys to work out in the fields and they're mostly going to be fine.

Cariad Harmon: Given all of this, it wasn't unreasonable for American families to assume that the German soldiers working in their towns and eating at their tables were relatively apolitical. Not Nazis or freedom fighters but regular people, caught up in a war they didn't create. Just like them. And it didn't hurt that they were white. [MUSIC] All of this was happening in pre-Civil Rights era America, and the vast majority of POW camps were located in the Jim Crow South, where segregation was alive and well. So while German prisoners in local communities enjoyed many of the same rights and privileges as their white American guards, Black American U.S. citizens did not.

Dr. Antonio Thompson: A German prisoner who is our enemy, whatever you might think – we're at war with these nations – might be able to, say, go into an establishment that denies service to African Americans.

Cariad Harmon: And these rules didn't just apply to public spaces. Segregation was military policy. So while white POWs shared canteens, recreation centers, and military transport with white U.S. soldiers. Black U.S. servicemen couldn't even use the same latrine. It made me feel, wrote one Black U.S. soldier, that here, the tyrant is actually placed over the liberator. Over a million Black men enlisted in the U.S. military during World War II, and all of them would have to wait another 20 years before the end of legally sanctioned segregation in America. [NEWSREEL MUSIC] And of course, Jim Crow laws weren't the only place America's democratic promises were broken.

Archival tape: When the Japanese attacked pearl harbor, our West Coast became a potential combat zone ...

Cariad Harmon: The very same year that German prisoners began arriving in the U.S., President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066.

Archival tape: All persons of Japanese descent were required to register.

Cariad Harmon: Hundreds of thousands of Japanese American civilians were forcibly removed from their homes on the West Coast and relocated to prison camps in the middle of the country. Behind them, they left shops and homes they had occupied for many years. In a frightening loophole, as U.S. Citizens, Japanese Americans were not included in the Geneva Convention. That treaty only covered enemy nationals. So while the Lawrenceburg POWs were drinking buttermilk and eating watermelon on Aunt Jim's farm, hundreds of thousands of Japanese American citizens were forced to work in dangerous conditions for minimal wages with little to no legal protection.

Dr. Elizabeth Rivera: The way the North American government has legalized injustices repeatedly throughout our history is discouraging and disheartening.

Cariad Harmon: This is Dr. Elizabeth Rivera, and she's probably spent more time pouring over the Stribling Brock family archive than anyone else.

Dr. Elizabeth Rivera: Sometimes one of the questions that comes to me is: did the Striblings and the Brocks treat the German prisoners of war better because, as European descendants, the Striblings and the Brocks looked like the Germans, right? That's the question that I've wrestled with many times.

Cariad Harmon: Dr. Rivera's question isn't an easy one to answer. There's nothing in the archive itself that sheds any light on the family's racial politics. But I do know that in 1942, the American Institute of Public Opinion conducted a poll. The results showed that 93 percent of Americans were in favor of the removal and internment of Japanese immigrants from the West Coast.

[RUSTLING PAPER]

Dr. Elizabeth Rivera: As an archivist, we love to make stories come alive, especially out of the chaos, so if you had seen what this was when it first came ...

[LAUGHTER, TALKING CONTINUES AND FADES UNDER NARRATION]

Cariad Harmon: A few years ago, Curtis donated Aunt Jim's entire box of POW letters to Lipscomb University, where Dr. Rivera works as the Associate Librarian and Archivist.

Dr. Elizabeth Rivera: It's just amazing that all these years later, Aunt Jim saved them in the same way that many women would save their love letters from their dear ones who were fighting in the war.

Cariad Harmon: There are over 350 letters in the collection from 46 different writers. Some are in German, some in English. There are photographs and postcards, even a tiny watercolor painting. And all of them were written by German POWs and sent to Aunt Jim and her family after the war.

Dr. Elizabeth Rivera: I'm pulling out the folder. Stribling Brock collection, Hirth Eugen

Cariad Harmon: Inside the folder, are a few pages, yellowed with age, and carefully preserved in an acetate sleeve. This letter is from Eugen, the artist who Curtis told us about back at the museum. And one of the longest running writers in the collection.

Dr. Elizabeth Rivera: And he is incredibly devoted and disciplined. And so, you can see here that he's typed his letter in proper German.

[MUSIC]

Cariad Harmon: The POWs left Lawrenceburg in March of 1946. Eight months after the war had ended. And Eugen was back in Germany by December of that same year.

Dr. Elizabeth Rivera: And he says, my dear Brock family ...

Cariad Harmon: Elizabeth is reading an English translation.

Dr. Elizabeth Rivera: [READING] I was very pleased to hear that you were able to celebrate a wonderful Christmas. Unfortunately, it wasn't as wonderful for us. The past year brought us the longest period of drought since one can remember. It also brought us the highest water level. Thousands of people became homeless. Bridges and houses were washed away. There is a German saying which states: Misfortune seldom comes alone.

Cariad Harmon: The Germany that Eugen returned to would have been very different to the country he remembered. As part of the Allied war reparations program, machinery and manufacturing plants were dismantled, along with the railroads, and German industry was completely destroyed.

Dr. Elizabeth Rivera: [READING] I can only say that the protests are starting to get serious now. The people are becoming increasingly restless. It cannot go on like that much longer because no man can live with what the card allots. Under these circumstances, people rather wish for a dictatorship with food than a democracy with hunger.

Cariad Harmon: He paints a very, very bleak, bleak picture. There's no reassurance ...

Dr. Elizabeth Rivera: He's very honest. He's very honest in his circumstances. War has decimated the continent of Europe. And that does a lot to the people's hearts and minds.

Cariad Harmon: And war reparations were not limited to Germans living in their own country. As part of that same Allied agreement, instead of going home, many POWs were shipped from America to new camps in Britain and France. They were used to clean up rubble and rebuild for years. Some of them remained imprisoned indefinitely.

Dr. Elizabeth Rivera: So, Rudi was from eastern Germany, and he had the hardest time getting home.

Cariad Harmon: Elizabeth has pulled another letter from the archive.

Dr. Elizabeth Rivera: So remember: the war's ended in August of 1945. And so, in 1947, he was still in England as a prisoner. That's a long time to remain a prisoner of war, even after the war is over.

Cariad Harmon: Rudi Lorenz finally returned home to Sonneburg after a brutal winter. Crops in the region had failed, fuel for heating was scarce, and the entire population was on the brink of starvation.

[MUSIC]

Dr. Elizabeth Rivera: [READING] I could not believe during the first days of my return that people can exist with so little. I think and speak of you every day and remember at every meal those days with you, where we had plenty of food. Here, we have to count every slice of bread. All the week, soup and soup. Our only sorrows are to get something for the next meal. Dear Mrs. Brock, we must not start thinking over these hard times in order not to lose the courage to life.

Cariad Harmon: After the atrocities of the Holocaust, sending any foreign aid to Germany was controversial. Even the Red Cross was prevented from distributing medicine and food to civilians. When discussing the subject, President Roosevelt himself is quoted as saying: Let them have soup kitchens! Let their economy sink! And when asked if the German population should starve, he replied simply: Why not?

Curtis Peters: They don't have anything in Germany. It's desolated. I mean, buildings are destroyed. There's nothing there.

Cariad Harmon: Back at the Old Jail Museum, Curtis is pointing to a slip of crumpled paper with a group of names and check marks written on it in pencil.

Curtis Peters: And this is a list of all the people who sent packages to Germany from Lawrenceburg, that we know of, just in December of '47 and January of '48.

Cariad Harmon: 18, 20 ... That's 24 families.

Curtis Peters: Just on that one list, yeah.

[MUSIC]

Cariad Harmon: In response to the desperate letters from Eugen and the rest of the POWs, Aunt Jim, her family, and the entire Lawrenceburg community mobilized to help them.

Curtis Peters: They send 'em clothes, they send 'em shoes, they send 'em food, they send a little bit of everything, medicine, anything they can't find, and that kept those people going.

Dr. Elizabeth Rivera: [READING EXCERPTS FROM VARIOUS LETTERS] Today, I got your package of food, sugar, coffee, rice, and flour, stamped on the 10th of November 1947. It took 56 days for the trip ... My little sister was the first who was eating lard, and we all burst into laughter. My sister is not called little because she is young. She is 40 years old, but her weight is only 82 or 90 American pounds ... The greatest concern is the question of sustenance ... My mother was very interested in your products. She could not believe sweet potatoes or peanuts butter ... For me, the pralines were the most important because I haven't seen something like that in a long time ... The suit was so nice that actually people stood still and looked back at me ... I am ashamed to receive so much good from you. And all I can do is to thank you with words.

Cariad Harmon: The packages from Lawrenceburg continued for several years after the war ended. But as time went on, the POWs began to put their lives back together.

Dr. Elizabeth Rivera: [READING EXCERPTS FROM VARIOUS LETTERS] Because I was opposed to the Nazi government, I was chosen by the railroad ...

Cariad Harmon: Slowly, there were signs of the German economy improving.

Dr. Elizabeth Rivera: [READING EXCERPTS FROM VARIOUS LETTERS] ... better and better after the reform for our money ...

Cariad Harmon: And one by one, the men put the war behind them. They meet sweethearts who turn into wives ...

Dr. Elizabeth Rivera: [READING EXCERPTS FROM VARIOUS LETTERS] My husband told me a lot about you.

Cariad Harmon: And send pictures of their children.

Dr. Elizabeth Rivera: She's pulling a real grumpy face!

Cariad Harmon: And then gradually, over time, the letters are less frequent.

Dr. Elizabeth Rivera: [READING EXCERPTS FROM VARIOUS LETTERS] We think a lot of your country and of the boys who are in Vietnam ...

Cariad Harmon: Eventually, there are just a handful of cards at Christmastime.

Dr. Elizabeth Rivera: It's a New Year's card ...

Cariad Harmon: Until the last one we have from 1980, 34 years after the end of the war.

Dr. Elizabeth Rivera: [READING EXCERPTS FROM VARIOUS LETTERS] So, I want to close now with a special wish for a quite long health for you with the most heartfelt greetings and everlasting gratitude, your Eugen Hirth.

Cariad Harmon: Aunt Jim kept a framed photograph on her wall until the day she died. In the picture, herself and her husband Delma are side by side with six German POWs. A couple of the prisoners are kneeling next to a farm dog, and one has a kitten in his arms. The war is behind them, the return home ahead of them, and here they are together. Standing in the Tennessee sun.

[CAR DOOR CLOSSES, FOOTSTEPS IN LEAVES]

Curtis Peters: We found our first German buttons right back here

Cariad Harmon: Before I leave Lawrenceburg, Curtis has brought me to the old POW camp site.

Curtis Peters: Watch your step here ...

Cariad Harmon: It's now a suburban neighborhood much like any other. There are tree-lined streets and large front yards. In fact, if it wasn't for a plaque that Curtis had the city erect, you'd never know there was anything here at all.

Curtis Peters: We think the washhouse was over in this area over here, and then, you have the edge of the bluff right there that drops off ...

[MUSIC]

Cariad Harmon: Seven years after Curtis found that first Nazi medal, he's still looking for clues here in the dirt. Broken plates, where the mess tent would have been. Toothpaste tubes over by the old washhouse.

Curtis Peters: Look, we'll go up here, and I'll show you where they ...

Cariad Harmon: There's no one left in Lawrenceburg who remembers the POWs themselves, so it's Curtis that keeps their story alive. And me? I'm glad he does. I spent a lot of time looking for reasons to doubt the family narrative. I was suspicious of the Brocks, and I thought perhaps the German soldiers were using them to get the things they needed after the war. But at the end of the day, there's only so much the archive can tell us. All I know for sure, is that war is hell, and history is complicated. Perhaps, the only defense we really have is our humanity. So, I think, any evidence of that is worth holding onto.

Curtis Peters: All the trees have grown up since then. There's very few trees that were probably here then ...

Cariad Harmon: This piece was produced for THE BIG PONDER by Cariad Harmon and edited by Rachel Aronoff.

THE BIG PONDER is a transatlantic podcast by the Goethe-Institut that explores abstract concepts and phenomena through personal radio essays. Every other week, one of our producers transforms a broad topic into a captivating story told from a U.S.-German perspective.

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