

ZIP

By John Christgau

Cast

(in order of appearance)

NARRATOR/NEWS READER

EBERHARD "ZIP" FUHR, a German American
FBI AGENT

JULIUS FUHR, Zip's older brother

HEARING BOARD CHAIRMAN

CARL FUHR, Zip's father

Set and Costumes

SL and SR are two chairs. A desk is SR, close to the chair. Between the chairs, UC is an American flag on a tall standard.

Zip wears a baseball cap, corduroy or chino-like trousers, and a plaid shirt with sleeves rolled up to below the elbow.

NARRATOR: (*Enters SR. Positions himself at far SR*) One night about 6:00 o'clock in mid-October of 1942, there was a hard knock on the door of a small home in Cincinnati.

FBI AGENT: (*Knocking, off SR. Voice off SR*) Eberhard Fuhr!

(*No answer. Knocking a second time off SR*) Eberhard Fuhr!

(*Still no answer. Knocking a third time, shouts now*)

Eberhard Fuhr!

ZIP: Yes?

FBI AGENT: Come out here!

ZIP: (pause) Who is it?

FBI AGENT: I wanna talk to you! You, and your brother Julius.

ZIP: My brother's not here.

FBI AGENT: Open up the door.

ZIP: I'm not supposed to let in strangers.

FBI AGENT: Open the damn door! This is the FBI! I need to talk to you.

ZIP: About what?

FBI AGENT: Are you gonna make me break down the door?

ZIP: O.K., O.K. I'll let you in. But don't break the door! I'm not supposed to let anything happen to the house.

NARRATOR: The FBI agent took Eberhard Fuhr to the Federal Building in downtown Cincinnati, where they led him up to a dimly lit room. The agent who interrogated him had a

shoulder holster, but no weapon in the holster.

ZIP: Sir, how long is this gonna take?

FBI AGENT: *(Enters SR.)* It'll take as long as it takes.
Sit down.

(Zip sits on edge of chair. FBI agent sits at desk)

FBI AGENT: Now give us your full name.

ZIP: Eberhard Ernst Frederick Fuhr.

FBI AGENT: Age?

ZIP: Seventeen.

FBI AGENT: How long have you been in America?

ZIP: I came here in 1928 with my parents. I was three.

FBI AGENT: Any aliases?

ZIP: Aliases? You mean, like criminals have?

FBI AGENT: Any other names you go by?

ZIP: Sure. Lots of them.

FBI AGENT: Like what?

ZIP: My mother calls me "Abie." That's short for my name Eberhard. But the nickname I like best is "Zip." That's what my teammates at Woodward High call me. Because I'm pretty fast playing baseball.

FBI AGENT: --Baseball?

ZIP: Sure. (*Proudly*) I play catcher for the Woodward High Bulldogs. I love baseball.

FBI AGENT: If you love baseball so much, tell us, who is the catcher for the Cincinnati Redlegs.

ZIP: That's easy. Ernie Lombardi. They call him "The Schnoz," because his nose is so big.

FBI AGENT: So, whaddaya think? Some day you're gonna be as good as Ernie Lombardi?

ZIP: Well, maybe not that good. But I'd like to be in the Major Leagues some day. (*Pauses*) That's my dream anyway.

FBI AGENT: Well, (*with dripping sarcasm*) Zip, we've been looking all over for you.

ZIP: I've been in school. If I don't go to school every day, I can't play baseball.

FBI AGENT: We haven't been looking for you so we could talk about baseball. We wanna ask you a few questions.

ZIP: I'll answer everything honestly. I don't have anything to lie about.

FBI AGENT: All right. Tell us about your mother and father.

ZIP: My father's a baker. He and my mother came from Germany to America looking for a chance at a better life. But the FBI came and took them both away six months ago. They said they were "enemy aliens," and they sent them to an internment camp in Texas.

FBI AGENT: So you're blaming *me*?

ZIP: No.

FBI AGENT: If you're gonna blame anybody, blame President Roosevelt. He's the one who signed the law making you and your parents enemy aliens.

ZIP: So now I'm considered the enemy too?

FBI AGENT: Sure. You're over fourteen, aren't you? That makes you an enemy alien, along with a million others. including your mother and father. You're all considered "dangerous."

ZIP: My father's a baker! You think he's dangerous?

FBI AGENT: But isn't it a fact that your mother is an agent of the German government?

ZIP: You mean, a spy? My mother?

FBI AGENT: You deny that she was working directly with a German woman named Ursula Friedman?

ZIP: --Mrs. Friedman? (*Shakes his head*) Mrs. Friedman was

a friend. Her husband was killed in the First World War. My mother helped Mrs. Friedman get her pension from the German government. My mother was no agent for anybody. Neither was Mrs. Friedman. She was Jewish.

FBI AGENT: Lots of Jews were sent here to be spies. And we've got reports that your father loves Hitler and doesn't like America.

ZIP: My father doesn't care about Hitler one way or another.

FBI AGENT: Then how come you have a picture of Hitler hanging in your house?

ZIP. We don't! Maybe his picture's in some of the magazines we get. But we've never had a picture of him hanging on the wall.

FBI AGENT: We've also got reports that your father is a Nazi.

ZIP: *(Pause. Then with irritation)* Who's giving you these "reports"?

FBI AGENT: Answer the question!

ZIP: My father's not a Nazi!

FBI AGENT: If he's not a Nazi, why is he a member of the German American Bund?

ZIP: He's not! Who said he was?

FBI AGENT: So, (*sarcastically again*) Zip. What are your father's political convictions?

ZIP: He loves politics. A lot of times at supper, my brothers and I, we argue with him.

FBI AGENT: About what?

ZIP: About anything. My father just loves to argue. And as soon as my brothers and I agree with him, he switches to the other side.

FBI AGENT: So where are your brothers?

ZIP: My little brother went with my parents. When they were arrested and sent to Texas. My big brother Julius and I, we're supposed to make sure nobody breaks into our house

and steals everything. But Julius is a great football player. He's got a scholarship to play at Wittenberg College in Ohio.

FBI AGENT: So who's watching after you?

ZIP: Nobody. I'm on my own.

FBI AGENT: On your own? Taking care the whole house?

ZIP: My father made sure there was plenty of coal in the coal bin. I've got enough to last through the winter.

FBI AGENT: You sure you're not getting money from somewhere. Like maybe your father's Nazi friends?

ZIP: No, sir.

FBI AGENT: Well, somebody must be helping you out!

ZIP: I can take care of myself.

FBI AGENT: You sure there's nobody helping you?

ZIP: Nobody! I've got my paper route. That gives me

enough money to buy a hot lunch at school. Then after school, I buy one of those little cherry pies. That's my supper. I eat them cold, but they still smell good. Like one of my mother's pies, right out of the oven.

FBI AGENT: That's all you eat? A little pie.

ZIP: That's all I want.

FBI AGENT: So what are you trying to tell us, *Zip*? That just because you like baseball and hot dogs and cherry pie, you're not a Nazi.

ZIP: Well, that's right. I'm not a Nazi! You can ask any of my friends.

FBI AGENT: (*Looking at wrist watch*) Well, we might just do that. But it's nine o'clock. (*Stands*) We're finished. You want us to drive you home?

ZIP: No thank you. (*Stands*) I'll take the streetcar home.

(*FBI agent, exits SR*)

NARRATOR: In the spring Zip played baseball again for

Woodward High. And it was 1:30 in the afternoon of March 23, 1943. Zip was sitting in his fifth period class at Woodward High. (*Zip sits*) Most of the students were falling asleep. Then the door to the hallway opened suddenly.

FBI AGENT: (*Enters SR*) Which one of you is Eberhard Fuhr?

ZIP: (*Raising one hand.*) I'm right here.

FBI AGENT: Eberhard, you'll have to step outside in the hallway.

ZIP: Right now?

FBI AGENT: Yes.

ZIP: I already talked to you once.

FBI AGENT: Well, you gotta come with me again. So just get up out of your desk.

ZIP: (*Stands*) What about my baseball practice?

FBI: You can forget about baseball for a while.

ZIP: What about my books?

FBI AGENT: You know, you've got too many smart questions for just a kid.

ZIP: Where are you taking me?

FBI AGENT: You'll need a jacket. It's cold out.

ZIP: All I've got is my blue "Bulldogs" letter sweater. It's in my locker.

FBI AGENT: O.K. I'll take you to your locker to get your sweater. Meantime, where's your brother, Julius?

ZIP: He's back home from college.

FBI AGENT: Well, that's good, Eberhard. You can introduce me.

NARRATOR: From the Cincinnati Inquirer, March 24, 1943:

ALIEN BROTHERS FACE HEARING.

The two brothers were brought to the United States from Germany when they were youngsters, according to reports.

Their parents and a younger brother are now in a permanent internment camp. Under censorship regulations, the names of the aliens could not be made public. The two boys were fingerprinted and booked on "suspicion." Late last night, they were placed in adjacent cells in the Hamilton County Workhouse in Cincinnati.

ZIP: *(Circles chair clockwise. Whispering)* Julius!

Julius! Can you hear me?

JULIUS: *(Enters SR. Whispering also)* Go to sleep, Eberhard.

ZIP: I can't sleep, Julius. There's a guy in the cell next to me.

JULIUS: He's drunk.

ZIP: He keeps calling me a Kraut, a dirty Hun.

JULIUS: Ignore him!

ZIP: He says we're goddamn Nazis, and he's gonna get us in the morning.

JULIUS: Go to sleep, Eberhard!

ZIP: I can't sleep!

JULIUS: You gotta get some sleep.

ZIP: Julius, what's gonna happen to us?

JULIUS: They're gonna send us to a prison in Chicago.

ZIP: How do you know that?

JULIUS: It's in the papers. Don't you even read the newspapers you deliver?

ZIP: Julius, we didn't do anything wrong!

Julius: Well, don't tell them anything.

ZIP: Don't tell who anything?

JULIUS: The Hearing Board! We have to appear before an Enemy Alien Hearing Board in the morning. There'll be a whole bunch of them sitting there. They'll try to make you say you're a Nazi.

NARRATOR: The next morning, it was Zip's turn to go before the Hearing Board.

(Hearing Board Chairman enters SR, wearing a fedora. He sits in the chair at the desk, SR. Zip sits in chair, SL)

ZIP: *(Firmly and loud, to Chairman):* Sir, my brother and I aren't Nazis!

HEARING BOARD CHAIRMAN: Now, calm down, son!

ZIP: We don't wanna get sent to Chicago!

CHAIRMAN: Who said anything about Chicago?

ZIP: It's in the papers. We're gonna get sent to a prison in Chicago.

CHAIRMAN: Well, you shouldn't believe everything you read in the papers.

ZIP: We're not gonna get sent to Chicago? So why have my brother and me been arrested?

CHAIRMAN: You've been arrested under the authority of the Enemy Alien Act. The Act provides that in the event of war or threatened invasion, you can be (*slowly*) apprehended, restrained, secured, and removed as an enemy alien. The purpose of this hearing is to consider your case. We will decide where you'll be sent. Based on your honest answers to our questions.

ZIP: I don't have anything to lie about. And I haven't done anything wrong.

CHAIRMAN: But didn't you at one time say that Germany had a better government than America?

ZIP: I don't remember ever saying that, no.

CHAIRMAN: Could you have said it?

ZIP: Well, I guess I could have said it. I could have said just about anything at one time or another. When the FBI took my mother and father away for no reason, I was mad. I said a lot of angry stuff.

CHAIRMAN: But didn't you go to German meetings in Cincinnati?

ZIP: Once or twice, maybe. To some meetings with my father. But I usually stayed in the hallways because the room was always purple with smoke. I could hardly breathe.

CHAIRMAN: Eberhard, this Hearing Board is in possession of a picture of you wearing a Swastika.

ZIP: --Who gave you that picture?

CHAIRMAN: (*Slowly*) Is it, or is it not you in the picture?

ZIP: That picture was taken a long time ago.

CHAIRMAN: What are you doing wearing a Swastika"

ZIP: It was . . . a parade.

CHAIRMAN: What kind of parade?

ZIP: It was a German American Day parade in Cincinnati. They have it every year in Coney Island Amusement Park. My whole family, we'd take the ferry called "The Island Queen" up the Ohio River to the park. They had water slides and a Ferris wheel and lots of rides. We'd spread out a blanket

and have a picnic lunch that my mother made. Potato salad. Hard boiled eggs. Sausages. (*Pauses*) I remember every little thing about those picnics.

CHAIRMAN: So what were you doing in the parade, marching around with a Nazi armband?

ZIP: That was five years ago! I was twelve years old! I don't remember who put that armband on me.

CHAIRMAN: I thought you just said you remembered everything about those picnics.

ZIP: I don't remember about the Nazi armband.

CHAIRMAN: Did your parents make you wear it?

ZIP: No! I told you! My parents weren't Nazis!

CHAIRMAN: So how come they never wanted to be American citizens?

ZIP: My father couldn't find work as a baker. He worried that he might have to go back to Germany to find work.

CHAIRMAN: Is that where you wanna go? Back to Germany?

ZIP: No! I wanna stay here.

CHAIRMAN: So, tell the members of this Hearing Board, Eberhard. If you don't go back to Germany, will you register for the draft here when the time comes?

ZIP: Sure, I will. I'll get my citizenship too, when I'm old enough.

CHAIRMAN: Will you serve in the Army if your parents are still interned?

ZIP: *(After a pause, and slowly)* You mean, you'll let my parents come back to Cincinnati if I go in the Army?

CHAIRMAN: We didn't say that!

ZIP: What are you asking?

CHAIRMAN: We're asking if you'll fight for America.

ZIP: I won't say what I'll do. Until you let my mother and father come back home.

CHAIRMAN: So you refuse to pledge your allegiance to the United States--

ZIP: Sure, I'll pledge my allegiance. (*Stands, faces flag, begins reciting*) I pledge allegiance, to the flag, of the United States of America--

CHAIRMAN: We're not talking about the pledge of allegiance to the flag.

ZIP: (*Sitting again, slowly*) So you're gonna make me go back to Germany? If I don't agree to fight for America?

CHAIRMAN: Your whole family can be sent back to Germany.

ZIP: (*Lifts arms in futility.*) All right! Fine! Send me back to Germany. If that's what you're gonna do. But what do I know about Germany? I left there when I was three.

CHAIRMAN: But we understand that you still have cousins in Germany. (*Zip folds his arms over his chest. Slumps.*) Eberhard, what if your German cousins come up the Cincinnati River in a U-boat? What if they come to you and ask you for a place to hide out? What will you tell them?

ZIP: How the hell would a German submarine get up the Ohio River?

CHAIRMAN: Don't be a smart aleck with us!

ZIP: I'm not being smart. How would a submarine get up the Ohio River? It's not deep enough.

CHAIRMAN: (*Suspiciously*) How do you know what's deep enough for a U-boat?

ZIP: It's just common sense.

CHAIRMAN: If that is all you have to offer this Board is what you call common sense, this hearing is adjourned.

ZIP: Adjourned? You haven't explained what's gonna happen to us. What's gonna happen to our house?

CHAIRMAN: Young man, this hearing is adjourned? (*Exits, SR*)

NARRATOR: The next day after Zip's hearings, they sent him and his brother Julius to Chicago and locked them up in an

old mansion for three months.

JULIUS: (*Enters SR, also wearing a baseball hat now. Sits in chair.*)

ZIP: Ping pong, Julius. That's the only recreation they've got for us here. *Ping pong!* Who the hell wants to play ping pong?

JULIUS: Don't worry. We're not gonna be here long.

ZIP: Will they send us to Crystal City, in Texas, to be with our folks?

JULIUS: Maybe not. They've got about fifty camps all over the country. For Germans like us, Japanese, even Italians. They could send us anywhere. Maybe we'll run into your hero, Ernie Lombardi.

ZIP: --Ernie Lombardi?

JULIUS: He's Italian, isn't he?

ZIP: Sure he is.

JULIUS: Well, they're locking up Italians too. He better watch out, or they'll lock him up.

ZIP: What's he done wrong?

JULIUS: It doesn't matter. We haven't done anything wrong either. But they think we're all dangerous. All your baseball teammates back at Woodward probably think you're a German spy.

ZIP: I don't care what they think. I know I can play baseball.

JULIUS: That's a dream you better forget.

ZIP: I won't ever forget it.

JULIUS: You'll have to, if they keep us locked up long enough.

ZIP: They can't keep us locked up forever. When the war ends, they'll have to let us go. Then I can get back to baseball.

NARRATOR: In the summer of 1943, they sent Zip and his

brother by prison train from Chicago to Crystal City in Texas. There were nearly two thousand Germans and Japanese in Crystal City when Zip and his brother Julius arrived. They were happy to be back together again as a family. And in hopes of keeping his baseball dreams alive, Zip and his brother Julius formed a slow pitch softball team of young Germans in the camp, and they joined a league of Japanese teams. But after the war ended in the fall of 1945, President Truman ordered continued internment for thousands of German aliens, and the entire Fuhr family remained locked up at Crystal City. Meanwhile, their home in Cincinnati was lost, all their personal belongings seized, and no explanation was given for their continued internment.

Two years later, in the spring of 1947, Zip sat with his father one evening on the steps of their family's barracks at Crystal City.

(Carl Fuhr enters SR)

ZIP: *(Stands)* Papa, do you want me to get you your pipe and tobacco.

CARL: No, no. We'll just sit here a little bit and watch the sun go down. *(Repositions SR chair, sits)* We'll listen to the crows.

ZIP: *(Moves chair SL closer to his father. Sits also)*

When they sent Julius and me here from Chicago, they told us the scenery around Crystal City was beautiful. But all I've seen for four years now are jack rabbits and rattlesnakes and crows.

CARL: There's a lot worse places than this, Eberhard.

ZIP: But, I'm not stuck inside one of those other places. I'm stuck here. There's no chance now that I'll ever get back to baseball.

CARL: They could send us all back to Germany. That could make things even worse.

ZIP: Well, as long as they don't tear us apart again as a family, I won't mind.

CARL: That's been the worst part for your mother and me. But now at least, we're all together.

ZIP: Papa, remember how you'd argue politics with us at supertime?

CARL: Sure, I remember.

ZIP: As soon as we agreed with you, you'd switch sides.

CARL: That was to make you and your brothers think.

ZIP: Well, it worked. Now, whatever anybody argues, I always see the opposite side. I know that national security is important. But they shouldn't throw away the Constitution to have it.

CARL: Eberhard, you have to tell people what happened to us.

ZIP: You can tell them too.

CARL: No, I'm an old man.

ZIP: You're aren't that old.

CARL: No one cares what happens to an old man. You and your brothers are young. They'll care what happens to you. You have to make sure people don't forget.

ZIP: Don't you worry. I won't ever forget the words they

read to Julius and me at the Hearing in Cincinnati. That when war comes, people like us can be (*counting each word with his fingers*) "apprehended, restrained, secured, and removed" as enemy aliens.

CARL: Those are just words.

ZIP: Those words took over four years out of my life. Because I went to a picnic! Because I marched in a parade!

PAPA: But Eberhard, nothing will change if all people remember is a few words.

ZIP: Papa, what got us all in trouble was a few words in the enemy alien law.

CARL: What's a law, Eberhard? Just more words. Nobody will know whether the words were right or wrong if they don't know what happened to you. How they came and took you right out of school. You have to tell the story. Promise me you'll tell people the story. The people will listen to a story. With a beginning and an end.

ZIP: I promise you. I'll tell the story. And I already know how it begins.

CARL: All right. Good. How does it begin? For people to listen, a story has to have a good beginning.

ZIP: It begins the night they came to get me. I was home alone. (Listening to the World Series) There was a loud knock on the door. I was scared out of my wits. Then they shouted: Eberhard Fuhr! Eberhard Fuhr! (*Normal voice.*) That's how the story begins.

CARL: That's a good beginning, Eberhard. That's a good beginning. But how does it end? Your story has to have an ending too.

ZIP: It ends with us never being let out of Crystal City. (*Stands. Angry now.*) It ends with my baseball dreams ruined. It ends with all of us locked up for years with the jackrabbits and rattlesnakes and crows.

(*Pause. Both exit*)

The author gratefully acknowledges the following sources for

the reader's theater material used in ZIP:

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