

Holocaust Car Wash

by Steele Diamond

There was always something about the air in the deep south. The summer air. It was always so thick. So heavy. Joey didn't notice. He didn't know any better. He had lived in Savannah all six years of his life. He did remember the one time his father and step-mother took him to the coast. They were looking at a hotel that they were going to manage. Right on the ocean. The air was better there. It moved and did not seem so heavy. Instead they moved to the hotel in town. That worked out better for Joey anyway. His mom was a waitress at the restaurant next to the hotel. On the same lot with the car wash.

Joey's sister, Linda, who was nine, would hold his hand as the walked through the parking lot from the restaurant to the hotel, past the car wash. Even though their dad was at work all day, they would go and spend time with their step-mom, Patty. They loved going to the restaurant with their mom in the summer, but they couldn't do anything except sit in the office, while she worked. Normally coloring endless pictures on typing paper. Patty managed the hotel, which had a playground and a pool. There was much more to do. So Joey didn't notice the heavy air.

Each day Joey and Linda would get twenty cents from their mom and walk to the hotel. They always stopped at the car wash to buy 2 sodas. They could get free sodas at the restaurant, and even the hotel. But it was always fun to get them out of the machine at the car wash. Besides Doc and Eve, who owned the car wash, liked seeing the kids. They were fun to talk to and had no grand kids, or even kids, of their own, in America. They spoke with very thick, foreign accents. Mom had once said they were from Germany.

Eve was always proper, walking with a very good posture and had her hair piled high on her head. She was short, but with her hair she was a bit taller than Doc. She was always sitting behind the counter

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in the office, and smiled when Joey and Linda walked in. Eve always looked so happy to see them. She spoke of her youth in the "old country," when she was a young girl and played games Joey had never heard of. Sometimes the stories would be of when she was older, and met Doc. They had a boy and a girl, that she said were about the same age as Joey and Linda, the last time she saw them. Sometimes Joey would see the tears in her eyes as she talked about her children. Eve always said it was just memories that caught in her eyes. She never complained. She never said what happened to her kids. She would just be sad. When Doc would hear Joey and Linda up front, he would emerge from a backroom with a grin from ear to ear on his face.

Doc limped when he walked, and always looked rough, like he was working on something. But Joey never saw him working. He always saw the big smile come through the door. Doc always asked, "How are my two American friends today?" There was always a big bowl of penny candy on the counter, that Doc and Eve sold to customers with kids. Doc always reached in and gave a handful each to Joey and Linda. Easily ten pieces each. Doc said he could never think of a better reason to be in America than to give the daily handfuls of candy to Joey and his sister. Unlike Eve, Doc rarely talked about the "old country." Doc never mentioned his kids. He had a pocket watch that he carried. He said his father was a watchmaker, and had made the watch. Everyday Joey would ask Doc to see the watch. It had a train engraved on the front cover with smoke billowing out of the stack. On the back it had one word engraved. HOPE. Doc was Yankees fan. He knew the score from the Yankee's game last night, and even every score for the last week. He knew more about everything than any man should ever know. That was not lost on Joey. The fifteen or twenty minutes a day he spent with Doc and Eve, were special to Joey. He knew it was special, even when he was six and didn't know the air was heavy.

A few months after meeting Doc and Eve, Joey's grandfather passed away. Doc and Eve did not know Joey's grandparents, but Joey saw Doc at the funeral and went to him. Joey wanted to pay his respects at the open coffin like all of the grownups and Doc talked him out of it. "Inside that coffin is just the shell that held your grandfather's love. You don't want to see an empty shell. You want to remember the love," Doc told him. So while everyone else went up, Doc sat with Joey.

As time passed, Joey and Linda got too old to go to work with mom. There were other things to do. Linda was soon old enough to where she and Joey could stay home. Friends to be had. Mom soon quit working at the restaurant, and dad and Patty moved on from the hotel. Whenever they were in the neighborhood, they would stop by and see Doc and Eve. It was few and far between. When Joey got his first car, he would go by every couple of months to get it washed. Eve would always take his \$1.50, telling him, "You appreciate things more if you pay for them." When Joey graduated from high school Doc and Eve sat in the crowd, with Joey's mom. After the graduation they gave Joey an envelope with five, one hundred dollar bills in it. Eve said as close as she could figure, that was about how much Joey had spent on car washes. Joey figured he might have spent fifty.

Joe went to college and graduated. He took a job in San Diego, where the air wasn't so thick.

He answered his phone one day and his mom was calling with bad news. It seems, Eve had passed away. The funeral was in 2 days. Joe packed a bag and caught a plane the next day.

When Joe first saw Doc at the funeral, he was surprised how he had not changed. Over twenty years, and he looked the same. The only difference was today, his face was tired. When Joe walked in Doc was standing near the coffin, with his hands in his pockets. He looked at Joe and a smile tried to come to his face. A sad smile. He

hugged Joe and told him he had missed him. Joe could not think of anything to say. Doc sensed this and said, "It's ok son, you don't have to say anything. It is good to see you. Eve is happy you are here."

There were only a few people there. A half of dozen ladies from the Jewish church Eve attended. The husbands who looked like there was somewhere else they wanted to be. A few loyal car wash customers. Joe counted twenty five people total. The Rabbi performed the service and said things eluding to the trials Eve had faced in her life. She was always a positive person and we could all learn from that. He asked if anyone had anything they wanted to say about Eve. There was a restless silence in the room and then Doc stood up from the front row and limped to the pulpit. He turned and looked right at Joe, and a more familiar smile came to his face.

"When Eve and I left Germany, it was not by choice. The government came and took our two children. Margoleta was nine. Josef was six." Joe felt the tears in his eyes well. He never even knew their son's name was Josef. "We do not know where they took them. We never saw or heard from them again. They put us on a train with many other Jews. Eve had hidden what little money we had in her hair. I had a pocket watch my father had given me, in the sole of my shoe. We had heard the stories. We knew we were going to die. They beat us. When I tried to protect Eve from things they would do to the women, they broke my leg. Every step I take is a reminder of watching those heathens do things....unspeakable things to my wife. Through it all, she trusted I would take care of her. I would get her out of this mess that Satan made. Then, by the most precious of miracles, your Army showed up one day and rescued us. We were sent to New York. There were too many of our people there. They only spoke bad of the experiences. Eve and I wanted to put that behind us. We moved down the coast, until we came to your town. Your people welcomed us. We worked hard to save money to start our car wash. You people brought your cars to us and supported our

business. We felt like you were our friends. We fit in here. I thank you for making my wife as happy as she could be. I thank you for being our friends."

After the service, Doc asked Joe to go with him to the cemetery. "You are the closest thing to family I have." Joe nodded, fighting the tears and drove Doc's car. He stood with Doc at the grave site. It was a cool, fall day, and the air was not heavy, but crisp. After the internment, Joe told his mom to go ahead without him, that he would stay with Doc and take him home. He sat with a Doc a long time at the grave site. Doc told some funny stories about Eve. Joe would laugh. Doc tried to laugh but normally managed only a crooked smile. He told some sad stories about Eve. Joe held Doc when he cried. When the sun was setting, Doc said he wanted to go home.

Joe took him home, only because Doc insisted. Joe tried to talk him in to coming back to his mom's place for the night. But Doc said he would rather be alone.

The next day, Joe stopped by Doc's on his way to the airport. He asked Doc his plans. Doc said he had saved a little money and figured he could sell the car wash, and retire. He winked at Joe, and smiled. "Don't worry about me, Joey. I have been through a lot. I'll be alright." And he hugged Joe.

"I wish I could do more," Joe said as he got in the car with his mother.

"Don't worry," she said. "Doc has good friends. They will take care of him. I will stop in on him too."

When Joe went through security at the airport, he went through the actions. When he emptied his pockets of his jacket, he found some candy. About an old man's handful.

