

Brothers is about two young German boys growing up in pre-WWII Germany. The year is 1937 during Hitler's reign, a time of great turbulence and strife. The brothers develop opposing ideologies about the Nazi Reich as a result of their different life experiences and temperaments. It is the story of how the brothers learn to handle this dichotomy.

Brothers By Susan Rizzo

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Susan Rizzo

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This is a work of historical fiction, based on actual persons and events. The author has taken creative liberty with many details to enhance the reader's experience.

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**First Edition** 

### Parents' & Teachers' Guide

As a teacher for 20 years, I know the importance of teaching students higher order thinking skills, such as inferencing, deductive reasoning, point of view, foreshadowing, summarizing, predicting, character analysis, comparing and contrasting, forming an opinion, and being able to support conclusions with evidence from the text. It is equally important to help students develop a rich vocabulary.

<u>Brothers</u> was written with all of this in mind. It was originally created to be used in a classroom setting to teach both reading comprehension and about the Holocaust. However, in these uncertain times in which we now find ourselves, it can just as easily be used by parents who are homeschooling their children.

Brothers is historical fiction and has rich vocabulary. It can be used for a Book Club, small group instruction, as a read aloud, or for independent reading.

I have also created a comprehensive guide to support all hard-working teachers and parents who are trying to improve their child's reading comprehension. In the guide you will find vocabulary and discussion questions for each chapter using the strategies mentioned above. Finally, I have provided ideas and examples of final projects that can be assigned. At your discretion you can choose which parts of it you'd like to use, or use it all.

With the help of this guide, parents will be able to work with their children at home, as it will "guide" you through the chapters with appropriate higher order thinking questions. To order a copy of this 30 page guide, complete with graphic organizers, please email me at <u>brothersbysusan@hotmail.com</u>. The cost for each guide is \$10.00 and due to copyright infringement laws cannot be copied. Once you've placed your request, I will provide payment options. After receiving payment, a copy of this guide will be emailed to you.

If you have questions about using this guide once you've received it, you can email me at the address above or visit my website: brothersbysusan.com.

Brothers covers many themes, including:

The Power of One Brotherhood Bullying The Importance of Reading How Personality and Temperament Form Opinions Standing Up For What You Believe In The Importance of Different Abilities The Power of Propaganda/Advertising Opposing Ideologies True Courage

I truly hope you enjoy reading my story as much as I have enjoyed writing it.

### **German Translations**

ach du grofser Gott – oh great God or dear God, used when in distress ach du lieber Gott - Dear God! An expression of surprise achtung – pay attention, be on guard bleib – stav braver hund - good dog! brummen – growl Deutsch – German donauwelle - German cake made with cherries & topped with buttercream & chocolate fass – attack Frau – Mrs. fuss - heel Gott – God Herr – Mr. Herzlichen Gluckwunsch zum Geburtstag – Happy Birthday! kind - kid (pronounced with a short "i") kinder - kids (pronounced with a short "i"), children kuchen – cake mama – mom mieze – an insult, as in calling Hans a little girl mutter – mother muttering - mothering

Obergruppenfuhrers – one of the Third Reich's paramilitary ranks; one of Hitler's senior leaders

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ogottogottogott – oh my God, oh my God, oh my God – used when in distress oh mein Gott – oh my God papa – dad platz – lie down setzen – sit suche – search vater – father Danny gripped the railing with both hands. He leaned into the wind and squinted over the choppy waves. He couldn't believe they were finally on their way. Far in the distance, he thought he could see a giant figure rising against the sky. The ship rolled slightly and the ever-present pressure at his hip became more pronounced. Automatically, Danny's hand slid down and comforted his constant companion.

"Don't worry, Fritz," he soothed the huge German Shepherd at his side. "We're almost there."

As he turned back to the railing he smiled at the fact that his dog had never shown fear in combat, but was frightened by the gentle rolling of the ship. Reflecting on the past several eventful years, Danny thought about how Fritz had been with him since the beginning of what had turned into the adventure of a lifetime. He thought back to that summer day in 1937. No one could have imagined what was about to transpire.

#### \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

Emma Wolf left the skillet heating on the stove and went to get the eggs and sausage. She paused at the window to admire her tiny garden next to their dilapidated shed. Jacob said it couldn't be repaired and he was going to tear it down one day, but he'd been saying that for years. The warm June sun streamed into the kitchen mitigated by a cool morning breeze. The combination lifted both her spirits and a tendril of her light blond hair that had drifted across her cheek.

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Absently she tucked the errant strand back behind her ear and dumped the sausages into the pan. As she turned to go wake her boys they surprised her, bursting through the door engrossed in hurried whispers. Seeing her, they fell silent and slipped into their chairs at the table. Emma turned back to the stove with a smile and a sigh. She knew what was coming. All the signs were there. Hans, normally disheveled and sleepy, sat alert and neatly dressed. She could feel his startlingly beautiful eyes on her back and could hear his younger brother, Danny, whispering, urging him on. She steeled her resolve and turned to them with steaming plates of food.

"Guess what," Hans began tentatively, "Herr Schmidt's dog, Daisy, had a litter! There are five puppies and he said he can't keep them all. So he's giving them away!"

Here he paused, letting that sink in while his brother squirmed beside him, willing him to say what they had rehearsed before coming down to breakfast.

"Pleeease, Mama! My birthday is coming up in a few weeks..."

Hans was going to be celebrating his 16<sup>th</sup> birthday and this was a big year for a young German boy. Boys of that age generally got a special gift commemorating their passage into "adulthood."

Hans continued since his mama hadn't stopped him yet, "I promise I'll take care of the puppy. I'll walk and feed him, and clean up after him every day."

When his mutter put her hands on her hips, Hans knew it was a sign that she was losing patience and was about to say, "No." So he quickly got in the last few words of his plea.

"Have you considered that having my own dog will help teach me responsibility, which you keep telling me I lack....Please, Mama," Hans implored. Danny had come up with that last part about learning responsibility and Hans figured it was worth a try.

Danny was silently rooting for his brother, as he, too, wanted a dog more than anything else.

Emma looked into Hans' eyes and they almost melted her. His eyes were extraordinary – they were blue like most Germans, but they had an unusual tiny circle of green within the blue that gave him a unique, beguiling look. However, she was exhausted from this daily tirade of begging from her older son.

It was the summer of 1937. The Wolf family lived in a small home in the poorest part of Guben, Germany, close to the border of Poland. It was a mixed community. While predominantly German, there were many Polish families, as well as a small sprinkling of Jewish families residing there as well. Most of the Jewish families they knew lived in the more affluent section of Gorlitz, a town bordering their own.

Guben was located on the Lusatian Neisse River in the state of Brandenburg, Germany. The land surrounding the town of approximately 50,000 people was covered by pine forests and lakes. Most importantly, it was still a time of peace and friendship among the different nationalities.

While the houses were almost literally on top of each other, the Wolfs at least had a small yard surrounding their property, which was a luxury in that poor area. The town always seemed to be covered in a thin layer of grit from the weapons factories the Nazis had set up. The pretty buckets of perennials on most doorsteps did little to liven up the

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neighborhood. Though it was a dreary residential area, fortunately it was a tight-knit community where neighbors looked after each other and each other's kinder. It was rare that any kind got away with any mischief without someone seeing and reporting it to the appropriate parent.

"Hans, we've been over this a thousand times," Frau Wolf responded, "I know how badly you want a dog and I truly wish you could have one. But a dog has to eat and you know we can barely feed ourselves. And if you think you're wearing me down, you're not, you're just wearing me out. Now, eat your breakfast."

Emma got up and began to clean the skillet. Behind her, the boys ate silently, their sullen moods readily apparent.

"What are you boys doing today?" Emma inquired trying to lighten the atmosphere, which had suddenly turned gloomy.

Danny pushed his shaggy, sandy colored hair out of his eyes and answered, "We're picking up Chaim and heading to the park." While Hans resembled their papa with his dark brown hair and slight frame, Danny definitely looked more like his mutter. He was by no means fat...that could never have happened with their meager meals. But, he was soft around the middle since he didn't get the exercise his brother got by playing sports almost daily. He had his mutter's light blue eyes and her gentle disposition. He was much more easy-going, considerate, and thoughtful than his brother.

"Good. When you stop at Chaim's, please bring this casserole to Frau Schwartz. You know she hasn't been feeling well and we need to help out."

As she stopped by the table to pick up their dirty dishes she put her arm around Hans' shoulder in a small act of comfort,

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and again was shocked at how tall her boy had grown. Soon, she knew, he would be a man.

While Hans wondered why they needed to help Chaim's family; who had more money than Gott, according to Hans' papa, Jacob; he knew better than to say anything. Chaim's family was more than generous to the Wolfs. In fact, the only time Hans wasn't hungry was when he ate dinner at their house, which was usually about three times a week. The food there was always plentiful and Frau Schwartz just laughed when he'd ask for seconds, something he could never do at home. She'd tease him about having a hollow leg, as no matter how much he ate he never seemed to gain an ounce.

Chaim's papa, Herr Schwartz, owned and ran the local grocery store located in the downtown area where there were a variety of other businesses and the town's only bank. It was a prosperous business, though it could not in any way account for their wealth. Hans had heard his mutter say, during one of his frequent eavesdropping sessions, that Frau Schwartz's vater had been a rich banker and being the only child, she had inherited everything upon her parents' deaths. Whenever Hans and Danny were sent to do the shopping, Herr Schwartz would always give them extra. If they ordered four sausages, they inevitably came home with six. When they bought cheese, flour, sugar, or rice there was always more in the package than they had paid for. Nothing was ever said, but in gratitude, Frau Wolf would do all their mending. She was an accomplished seamstress, and it was her way of giving back for all their kindness and generosity. Frau Wolf would also sew pretty doilies and lace runners for Chaim's mutter, who would "ooh" and "ahh" over them like they were prize possessions. The two families had been friends for many years since Hans and Chaim

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started to play together when they were eight years old. Chaim was only a month older than Hans.

Frau Schwartz was aware that Hans looked after Chaim. While her son was on the chubby side and large for his age, he was a gentle soul. When other boys would cruelly make fun of his weight, Hans always had his back. While Hans was certainly lacking in many areas, loyalty wasn't one of them.

Anyway, thought Emma, fortunately that ended this latest session of Hans' beseeching her to get a dog. Since Hans and Danny would be out playing ball with their friends for the rest of the day, she felt relieved at having the rest of the afternoon free from listening to Hans' pleading. She had enough to keep her busy, that was for sure. She was a housewife, a mutter, and a part time seamstress for her neighbors. It seemed as if there were never enough hours in the day to get her chores done. Since her husband lost his job as a cobbler when the government forced his business to close in 1936, the only work he could get to support his family was downtown in one of the Nazi weapons factories. Being a gentle, peaceful man, he hated every minute of it. Jacob worked long hours and still barely earned enough to house and feed their growing boys. Secretly it broke her heart not to be able to get Hans a dog. Even though she herself loved animals, her husband stood firm on the matter. They just couldn't afford it and that was that.

As Emma went through her day doing her chores, she hummed off-key to herself and thought about how fortunate she really was. She had a loving husband, who would do anything for their family, and two healthy young boys. Granted they fought constantly, but she knew, without a doubt, that they loved each other deeply. However, their small family was not without their share of difficulties and tribulations. Money, or rather lack thereof, was always one of those difficulties. More traumatic to their family was that Danny, who had just turned twelve, had been born with a club foot. Fortunately it wasn't a painful foot abnormality. However, it caused him to walk with an awkward gait. It prevented him from playing sports like the rest of the boys in the neighborhood. It also subjected him to a lot of teasing from his peers. On top of that disability, Danny was also afflicted with extreme nearsightedness. Emma was aware that both of these disabilities could be corrected if they weren't so poor, and though Danny never complained, both she and Jacob felt guilty that he had to suffer with them. Nevertheless, he was a very bright, determined boy who always sought and found other activities to keep himself busy and happy. Danny also knew that when the bullying got to be too much, all he needed to do was let Hans know. While scrawny and small for his age, Hans had the heart of a lion, and very few kinder ever messed with him.

Even though Danny couldn't participate in most of the games his brother played, Hans was his idol. When he wasn't

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fighting with him about inconsequential matters, he followed Hans wherever he could. Hans and the neighborhood kinder had taken to playing baseball fairly frequently. The sport had been introduced a year ago, in 1936, and seemed to have gained in popularity almost overnight. While Danny's club foot kept him from running, he'd make himself useful by retrieving errant balls and cheering on Hans' team.

As usual, on their way to Mayer Park, they stopped to pick Chaim up. Since Chaim came from a wealthy Jewish family, he always had the latest toys which he willingly shared with his friends. He lived in the more prosperous community of Gorlitz that bordered theirs. His home was at least twice the size of theirs and Chaim even had his own room, which was the envy of all the boys in their neighborhood. As they climbed the steps to his wrap around porch, the boys couldn't believe their ears. Was that a puppy bark they heard???

They rushed the rest of the way to the door and sure enough, there in the foyer was a beautiful purebred German Shepherd puppy jumping on their friend. They had long ago learned that they never needed to knock to enter the Schwartz's household. They had always been welcomed and treated like family. So when the pup spotted the boys entering the foyer, he just about bowled them over in his exuberance for more attention and new friends.

"Ach du lieber Gott!" yelled Hans as he rolled on the floor with the puppy, "When did you get him?! How old is he? What's his name?"

Chaim laughed and told him, "My family celebrated my birthday last night. He is four months old and I named him Fritz. Isn't he amazing?" Then he added, "And Fritz isn't even the best part!"

"What could be better than a puppy?" exclaimed Hans as he continued to play with the pup. He was the most adorable thing Hans had ever seen and what he wished for more than anything else in the world. He was bewildered that Chaim could think that there was something else that could be better.

Even so, that "something else" proved to be pretty cool. Chaim's parents had also bought him an air rifle. Both Hans and Danny itched to try it out and Chaim promised they could shoot it with him the next day.

To Hans' delight, Chaim slipped a leash on Fritz and brought him along with them to the park. When they arrived, Luca, Noah, Henry, and Frank were already there tossing the ball around and arguing, as usual, about who was the best fielder. Chaim handed the leash to Danny to take care of Fritz while he and Hans raced off to join their friends. Danny couldn't believe his good fortune, and for the first time ever he was thrilled that he couldn't play the stupid game. And for the first time ever, Hans was jealous of his little brother.

Hans was very athletic and a natural born leader. It was an unspoken rule that he would always be the captain of one of the teams. Yet, today Hans wasn't playing up to par. He kept watching Danny and Fritz and was wishing he was the one playing with Chaim's puppy.

Danny had the time of his life with Fritz as they rough housed and Fritz chased sticks with boundless energy. When it started to get dark and they headed home, Danny's happiness continued as Chaim let Danny hold the leash and walk Fritz home. Chaim had always been his favorite of Hans' friends. He never teased him or made fun of him, as most of the other boys did from time to time, especially Henry. Danny assumed Chaim was just being nice to him because he couldn't play ball with them. Yet he still found it strange...if Fritz was his own dog, he didn't think he would have been so generous.

Not surprisingly when the Wolf boys got home they couldn't stop talking about Chaim's new dog.

"You're not going to believe it!" Hans excitedly told his parents. "Chaim's parents got him a German Shepherd puppy! He is the cutest thing I've ever seen! Danny got to play with him all afternoon while I was playing baseball. He also got to walk Fritz home." Looking Danny in the eye, he continued, "Seeing as he got to play with him, I would have thought he should have let me walk him home though. Don't you agree?" Hans' disappointment led him to complain about Danny. He had great difficulty dealing with his emotions, and his impulsivity often got him in trouble.

Desperately trying to change the subject before the boys started to argue, and her husband lost his patience, Emma quickly replied, "Well yes, I think that would have been a fair thing to do. I'm sure Danny just didn't think of it. And how is Frau Schwartz feeling?"

As expected, that shut the boys up pretty quickly. In all the excitement, they had forgotten to ask. They had left the casserole sitting on an end table in the foyer, so lost were they in their enthusiasm over Fritz. They had been brought up to have good manners, and looked sheepishly at each other when they realized they had been rude, which was a big taboo in their home.

"We're really sorry," Danny responded to the silent, gentle criticism. "We didn't even see her. Right after we met Fritz, Chaim put a leash on him and we left for the park." Their parents looked at them with disappointment, but also with understanding. The boys asked if they could go over to Chaim's the next day to shoot his air rifle, and they promised to be more polite and to even offer to help Frau Schwartz with her chores. At this, Emma and Jacob acquiesced, but not without several warnings about being careful and not pointing the gun at each other.

"You can take an eye out with that thing," cautioned their mutter several times. Little did she know at the time that her words were prophetic. The boys couldn't get dressed fast enough the next day. They did their chores without protest and when finally allowed to leave, raced each other to Chaim's house. Well, perhaps raced wasn't accurate...Hans jogged at what he considered to be an excruciatingly slow pace so his brother could struggle along and try to keep up. While excited about shooting a real air rifle, Hans was much more anxious to play with Fritz.

Fritz met them at the door and jumped all over both boys who laughed and enjoyed the "lick fest". Chaim had his air rifle in hand and again slipped the leash on Fritz and handed it to Danny. Before they left Danny remembered their promise. He was relieved when Frau Schwartz told them she was feeling better. She thanked them for their kindness and sent them on their way. Before they rushed off she reminded them to thank their mutter for the delicious casserole. She had obviously found it the day before.

As the three boys set out for an open, abandoned field just outside of the pine forest surrounding their town, Hans gave Danny a look that was unmistakable, and Danny reluctantly handed the leash over to his brother.

When they arrived, they emptied out a bag of tin cans Chaim had collected and set them up on tree stumps and on the tops of some old boxes they found in the scrub grass. They spent the afternoon taking turns trying to out shoot each other. As with all sports, Hans took to this as a natural, and was the only one who could hit a few cans by the end of the day.

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While waiting their turns to shoot, Hans and Danny took turns playing with Fritz. When Chaim waited, he barely acknowledged the loveable mass of fur vying for his attention. Chaim clearly loved his new puppy, however, he seemed more enamored with his new gun.

It was the subject of the brothers' conversation on their way home that evening. It was beyond frustrating that Chaim had this amazing dog, who he sometimes ignored, while they, who wanted a dog more than anything, couldn't have one. Hans explained that was irony, a new word he had learned the previous school year. Danny, being exceptionally bright, knew what it meant, but decided to give Hans the satisfaction of "teaching" him something for a change.

This became their new summer routine, and it was a joyous one, especially with Fritz accompanying them wherever they went. Always looking for ways to be helpful Danny had gotten some books out of the library on target shooting.

"Those little nubs on the gun are there for sighting," Danny taught Hans and Chaim.

"What's that mean?" questioned Hans.

"Well, according to this book, you're supposed to hold the gun up, level with your shoulder and lean into it. Then you align the front notch in the middle of the two rear ones and point the front one at your target." Danny showed them the illustration.

It was extremely awkward at first, but once they got the hang of it they were overjoyed to see how well that worked. Subsequently, when Chaim had trouble aiming at the targets when they were placed at a greater distance, Danny read about elevation and windage. He taught him to aim his rifle higher to account for these issues which helped Chaim tremendously. With enough practice even Danny improved, even with his terrible vision. He was pretty good at close range, but had no chance of hitting the targets at any great distance as Chaim and Hans had now mastered.

When they weren't target shooting, the boys were usually at the park with their other friends, playing baseball or football. Danny was not only very smart, he was very observant. He'd watched so many ball games from the sidelines, he'd figure out how to beat the other team and would always share his observations with his brother.

On that particular sunny afternoon Hans was playing baseball. When Danny gave Hans their secret signal, Hans did the usual; he called for a break to go 'check on Danny'.

"Henry's next at bat, so remember he always pulls to the right. You'd better put Noah in that position because Frank can't catch to save his life. Also, when it's your turn to hit, try to aim it passed Luca because he's the slowest fielder they've got and can't throw very far," Danny instructed Hans.

"Thanks, Coach," Hans smiled at his brother and ran off to take up his position on the pitcher's mound. He had taken to calling Danny, "Coach," which Danny absolutely loved. It sounded important and made him feel like part of the team.

Over the course of the summer the boys started playing War Games, which Danny considered to be an oxymoron if he'd ever heard one; but was smart enough to keep that to himself. Each team would hide a flag, which was no more than an actual rag, and the first team to capture the other team's flag won the game. When Danny saw where the opposition was hiding their flag, he'd signal his brother's team, who would inevitably win. He knew this was cheating, yet having found a way to be useful and feel included, he could easily overlook that small thing.

As the summer wore on, it became the norm for the boys to either be playing ball or shooting cans with Chaim, always with Fritz by their sides. They were all blissfully unaware of what was happening in their country. They knew from listening to their parents talk when they were supposed to be sleeping, that their Chancellor, Adolf Hitler, was promising to help all the German people by eliminating their common threat. What that threat was, the boys had no idea, nor did they really care. Their focus was on wrestling every possible moment of fun and freedom out of the waning summer days. Both Danny and Hans became masterful marksmen with Chaim's rifle, though truth be told, it was Hans who was the true marksman. They had moved the cans farther and farther away and with Danny's coaching, Hans could hit them every time at any distance. It was the most wonderful summer for Danny, for he at last had found some things he was good at, as well as finding a friend in Fritz.

Danny had loved to read since the second grade. It made sense. Since he couldn't participate in most games, he learned to get great pleasure from reading. Reading became his passion and he had been going to Fisher Library by himself since he was in third grade. The library was only a few blocks from his house. It was a huge wood and stone structure that looked somewhat foreboding from the outside, yet inside it was warm and cozy. He had always found it to be a haven, a safe place where he could sit for hours on end and read, without anyone teasing or judging him. Danny had become good friends with the Head Librarian, Frau Zimmerman, who had taken an instant liking to the young boy. He was always polite, and there weren't many his age who preferred reading to playing outside. Of course, she realized that that wasn't an option for Danny, and she felt incredibly sympathetic towards him. She would go out of her way to find time to sit and chat with him about what he was reading. She kept a bag of candy in her desk drawer just for Danny. Danny felt very close to Frau Zimmerman and had enjoyed their relationship for many years.

On his latest trip to the library, Danny asked Frau Zimmerman to help him find books on dog training. She appeared surprised and asked, "Has your family gotten a dog?"

"Oh, I wish!" Danny exclaimed. "No, my friend just got a German Shepherd puppy, named Fritz, and I want to help teach him basic commands." They had a wonderful

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conversation about Frau Zimmerman's past dogs and Danny couldn't help but laugh when she described their antics.

"My favorite dog was a Labrador, named Buddy," Frau Zimmerman shared with Danny. "He was too clever for his own good! Do you know that little miscreant used to hide my shoes to get me to take him for a walk! It was only when I had his leash in hand that he would go fetch them so we could go outside! In fact, he was so smart he learned how to open the ice-box door, and one Easter he did just that...he ate the entire lamb I had prepared for Easter dinner. Would you believe we had to eat frankfurters instead?!"

"Oh I love frankfurters so that would have been fine with me," laughed Danny.

"When I lost my Buddy, I was devastated." Frau Zimmerman continued, "So after several weeks of grief, my husband came home with a little bundle. He had gotten me a German Shepherd puppy and I named her Gretel. Well! She made Buddy look like a saint! She was smart as a whip and a wonderful dog when she grew up. But, when she was a pup she seemed to have this weird fascination with toilet paper. Whenever she could get into the bathroom she'd pull it all off the roll and be covered in it when I'd find her. We'd try to keep the bathroom door closed, but she learned to open it and that was the end of the toilet paper!"

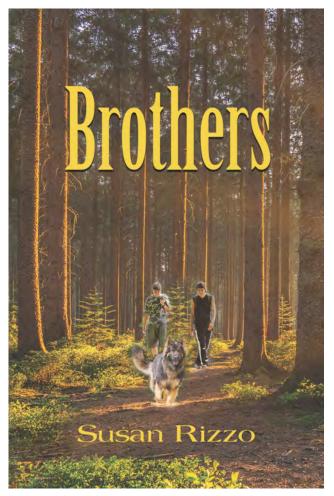
It was obvious that Frau Zimmerman had never actually gotten mad at her dogs; she clearly loved them too much.

Once Danny got home, he read several of the books and began to work with Fritz on the days when the other boys played ball. Fritz was an excellent pupil and seemed to pick everything up effortlessly. Within a month, he would sit, stay, fetch, lie down, heel and come on both voice commands as

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well as hand signals. Though Danny read that shepherds were the smartest breed of dog, it was still remarkable how fast Fritz learned and how eager he was to please. He had also learned that this breed was extremely protective over their masters. By six months he had grown so much that he could easily take Danny down when they wrestled, but he never hurt him. In fact, to Danny's delight, one time when Henry came over and started to push him around, as he was known to do, one growl from Fritz sent Henry swiftly on his way.

Danny noticed that Hans had started striking out at ball games, which was previously unheard of. Danny never said anything, yet he suspected it was so his brother could come over to join him in order to spend more time with Fritz. Danny would then show Hans how to give Fritz the commands that he had taught him that day.



Brothers is about two young German boys growing up in pre-WWII Germany. The year is 1937 during Hitler's reign, a time of great turbulence and strife. The brothers develop opposing ideologies about the Nazi Reich as a result of their different life experiences and temperaments. It is the story of how the brothers learn to handle this dichotomy.

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