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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**THE STORY MAY BE 75 YEARS OLD, BUT THE ISSUES ARE MORE RELEVANT THAN EVER.**

*World War II novel addresses the challenges of spousal abuse, being a single mother and dealing with love lost--issues that were as common in the 1940s as they are today.*

**MILWAUKEE, WI, USA** - (August 26, 2020) - For a battered woman in the 1940s, fear was a constant companion, denial her only refuge and she most often suffered in silence. Thankfully, this painful reality is about to change for Maggie Wentworth, the protagonist in DW Hanneken's debut novel, *The Home Front*.

"Physical and emotional abuse are not new problems," said Hanneken, the author of *The Home Front*. "And neither are the challenges of dealing with a love lost. Even in the 1940s,

women often kept their pain locked away from the prying eyes of friends and family. My new book addresses many of these issues head-on, all under the backdrop of a whispered piece of history few Americans ever heard about."

That whispered piece of history Hanneken refers to involves a US military program which brought more than 400,000 German POWs to America during the war. Many filled labor shortages in American lumber yards, on road crews, in factories, and yes, in farm fields. It provides the perfect setting for his debut novel.

"We've all heard a lot about the Japanese internment camps in the US during the war, but few have any idea there were German soldiers here at the same time," said Hanneken.

So far, the book is getting some stellar preliminary reviews. Here is what Dave Luhrssen from the Shepherd Express, Milwaukee's largest independent newspaper, had to say:

*"With The Home Front, DW Hanneken explores that missing chapter from 'The Good War' in a novel set in rural Wisconsin. He doesn't pretty-up the life of Maggie, but delves into anxieties that remain relevant today. The details of 1940s farm life are vivid enough for a Hollywood screenplay."*

"This story was influenced by my mother," said Hanneken. "She actually worked in a German POW camp during the war. Only it wasn't in Poland, France or Belgium. The camp was just outside of Rockford, Illinois, and she worked inside the camp's health clinic."

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### STORY OVERVIEW

For Maggie, life on her Wisconsin farm starts to look brighter after her abusive husband joins the U.S. Army and is sent to fight in the European Theater. Most who live in the farming community of Ramsey, Wisconsin are of German descent and they simply adore Maggie, her four-year-old son Benny, and her widowed father John “Big Jack” Mueller – himself a *Deutschland* immigrant.

Maggie, Big Jack and Benny do what they can to wrangle the farm, but when the harvest becomes too much to handle they enlist the assistance of a half-dozen German POWs along with a handful of Jamaican migrants. This small German contingent is part of a group of nearly 250 POWs who live in a makeshift *stalag* just outside of town.

One of the German POWs is Adam Klein, a former member of Rommel's elite *Afrika Korps*, and he takes an immediate liking to Maggie. Though the attraction is mutual, Maggie does her best to keep temptation at bay.

*The Home Front* is a timeless story which lets the reader believe that amidst the hostilities of war and bitter political strife, love knows no boundaries. It's one part *The English Patient* and one part *Bridges of Madison County*, with the perfect amount of humor mixed in for good measure.

**This story takes place during a time in history that seems to appeal to many readers. In looking at the most recent *New York Times Bestseller List*, three of the top 15 books use this time period as a backdrop. (*The Lost Girls of Paris*, *The Reckoning*, and *Lilac Girls*.) Are stories with WWII timeframes trending? Apparently so.**

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### ***The Home Front* Basics:**

Genre: Historical Fiction | ISBN: 978-1-64538-127-3 | Pages: 399 | Publication Date: January 2021

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### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

While growing up in Milwaukee's Washington Heights neighborhood, DW Hanneken gorged himself on a steady diet of the masters: Kurt Vonnegut, John Updike, Ernest Hemingway, Mark Twain, and anyone connected to *Mad Magazine*. (Hence, everything he writes can be folded in half to form a witty and subversive message.)

A career in advertising followed. The one common denominator throughout DW's life has always been his ability to tell a story. Whether in a television commercial or within the pages of a novel, the goal is the same: Grab the audience's attention, let them shake hands with some fascinating characters, create some tension, and ensure the audience feels something in the process.

**EXPERIENCE:** Winner: *Communication Arts* Showcase (4 times) | Winner: Cannes Lion | Winner: One Show Gold Pencil | Adjunct Professor, Marquette University | Journalism Major, Marquette University | Advertising Copywriter

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## ABOUT DW HANNEKEN

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## THE HOME FRONT

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## WHAT'S NEXT?

Currently DW is putting the finishing touches on his next story entitled "The Fire Place" – a period piece about growing up in 1970s Milwaukee.

## CONTACT

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## ***The Home Front:***

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### **LOGLINE:**

After her abusive husband leaves to fight in Europe during WWII, Maggie Wentworth struggles to find balance in her life and on her Wisconsin farm. Each day she has to deal with an aging father, a four-year-old son, and the temptation of a German POW who is harvesting apples in her orchard.

### **SYNOPSIS (Includes Spoilers)**

For a battered woman in the 1940s, fear is a constant companion, denial is her only refuge and she most often suffers in silence. Thankfully, this painful reality is about to change for Maggie Wentworth.

Life on her Wisconsin farm starts to look brighter after her physically abusive husband joins the U.S. Army and is sent to fight in the European Theater. Most who live in the small farming community of Ramsey, Wisconsin are of German descent and they simply adore Maggie, her four-year-old son Benny, and her widowed father John “Big Jack” Mueller – himself a Deutschland immigrant.

Maggie, Big Jack and Benny do what they can to wrangle the farm, but when the harvest becomes too much to handle, they enlist the assistance of a half-dozen German POWs and a handful of Jamaican migrants. This small German contingent is part of a group of nearly 250 POWs who live in a makeshift *stalag* just outside of town. And they are but a small fraction of the nearly 425,000 that filled labor shortages in the United States during WWII.

One of the German POWs is Adam Klein, a former member of Rommel’s elite *Afrika Korps*, and he takes an immediate liking to Maggie. Though the attraction is mutual, Maggie does her best to keep temptation at bay.

The leader of the Jamaicans is Oku Manley, a tall, sociable fellow with a wide smile and big laugh. Maggie and Oku become fast friends and it was not uncommon for her to step in to resolve the friction between these two ethnically diverse and contentious groups. Despite the fact that both parties work in different fields – the Germans in the apple orchard and the Jamaicans in the oat fields – the tension is omnipresent.

Maggie comes to appreciate that POW Adam is kind and generous, especially to her son Benny. She later learns that prior to the war, Adam had a wife, and a son about the



same age as Benny. Tragically, both were killed by a gang of pro-Hitler *Sturmtruppen* (Stormtroopers) during an anti-Nazi demonstration in their hometown of Munich. Never believing he could find love again, especially thousands of miles from home, Adam discovers that here in America's heartland something has awakened inside of him he thought was forever lost.

Late in the fall, Adam survives a terrible fall from a ladder, and the injuries are so severe he becomes bedridden inside the farmhouse for nearly three months. It is also during this time that bittersweet news arrives via Western Union telegraph: Maggie's husband Erik is proclaimed "Missing in Action and Presumed Dead" in Europe. Maggie soon begins to loosen her grip.

The one person who often helps Maggie through her many trials and tribulations is her best friend Audrey Stanton. A local seamstress by trade, she and Maggie grew up together and always lean on each other in times of need. Audrey is married to a traveling salesman who is rarely home. They have no children, but she pines for the day the stork will arrive. In many ways, these two women balance each other out – Audrey pushes Maggie to take more chances in life, while Maggie reciprocates as the voice of reason and reins-in her friend from time to time.

During a much-needed weekend getaway to "the big city" of Milwaukee, Maggie gets extremely drunk and opens her soul to Audrey. She tells her best friend about Erik's drinking, the beatings she had sustained, and confesses her attraction to POW Adam. Later that same night, after unknowingly gaining access to a dark, back-alley gay bar, Maggie sees Audrey's husband, Bob, with another man. Against her better judgment she does not tell Audrey, and it comes back to bite her after Bob commits suicide in Maggie's apple orchard several days later.

As Spring arrives, Adam is healed and back at the POW camp, yet fate proves to be no friend as the war in Europe begins to wind down – which means Adam will soon return to Germany. Pain and worry are constant companions for Maggie. Adam tries his best to remain optimistic that something can keep them together in the post-war period. Little does he know what is to come.

This story concludes in June of 1945, soon after V-E Day. On the eve of the POW camp's closure, Adam escapes the *stalag* to see Maggie one last time. After consummating their love, the unthinkable happens... a drunken Erik returns – as if from the dead – and he catches Maggie with Adam in the barn. In the midst of a violent storm, a final showdown takes place between the man Maggie truly loves and the monster she despises.

After a brutal and bloody brawl, both Maggie and Adam are severely beaten. Just before Erik can land a death blow to a nearly unconscious Adam, Oku unexpectedly appears from the shadows and tips a large piece of farming equipment onto Erik, killing him instantly and grossly disfiguring his face beyond all recognition.

An ingenious plot is quickly hatched, with little time to spare. Oku summons Big Jack from the farmhouse and together they switch Adam's clothing with an unrecognizable Erik's, and in the process switch their identities. With Adam still alive and hiding in the barn loft, the military and civilian authorities conclude that Adam is the one who died as a result

of the fallen farm equipment, and the case is closed. After living under the radar for several months, Adam miraculously “returns” to the farm.

Those who recognize him come to understand the truth, and say nothing because they know it was Erik who nearly killed Maggie during the fight, not Adam. With the POW camp closed, the U.S. military gone, and an entire community behind their favorite family, these two sweethearts finally get to reap the love they have sown.

*The Home Front* is a timeless story which lets the reader believe that amidst the hostilities of war and bitter political strife, love knows no boundaries. It makes us pull for the underdog. It’s an age-old story about forbidden love, yes, but is presented under the backdrop of rural America during WWII – a scenario few have written about before. It’s one part *The English Patient* and one part *Bridges of Madison County*, with the perfect amount of humor mixed in for good measure.

**This story takes place during a time in history that seems to be most appealing to many readers. In looking at the most recent *New York Times Bestseller List*, three of the top 15 books use this time period as a backdrop. (*The Lost Girls of Paris*, *The Reckoning*, and *Lilac Girls*.) Are stories with WWII timeframes trending? Apparently so.**

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## SAMPLE Q&A

### **What inspired you to write this piece of historical fiction?**

When I was a boy, my mother liked to talk about WWII and how she worked at Camp Grant, just outside of Rockford, Illinois. She would regale us with stories about her time here on “the home front,” and often referenced the German POWs who were housed in the camp. Many Americans have heard about the Japanese internment camps during WWII, but little is known about the German POWs who were shipped here. That fascinated me, and I always believed it would make an amazing backdrop for a piece of historical fiction.

### **Why do you think this book is important?**

History is a terrific teacher. Yet, we often ignore its lessons. When we look back in time, there tends to be a glorified idea of what life was like generations ago. But in reality, there were many problems in society back then which we rarely consider. Issues like racism, intolerance towards homosexuals, alcoholism, a romantic notion of war, and spousal abuse. Topics that are addressed in this book. For women in abusive relationships back then, leaving a marriage was out of the question. Many felt scared at the thought, and held onto the hope their partners would change. We’ve come a long way since then, but these issues are still relevant. This book touches these concerns, and perhaps readers who have experienced violence, drug & alcohol abuse and racial prejudices can take consolation in knowing they are not alone. Hopefully Maggie Wentworth (the protagonist in this book) can be a character they identify with.

### **What kind of research went into writing this novel?**

I did a great deal of research for this book (which is one reason it took so long to finish). Some of the best resources included: *World War II Milwaukee*, by Meg Jones; *The Barbed-Wire College*, by Ron Robin; Francisco Jiménez’s *The Circuit: Stories from the Life of a Migrant Child*; and Betty Crowley’s terrific book *Stalag Wisconsin*, served as a great reference for me. Betty’s many interviews with German POWs and American guards helped preserve this quiet piece of history.

My mother and father were wonderful resources as well. Both shared their perspectives of what life was like during the war. As mentioned above, my mother worked at Camp Grant, just outside Rockford. She had access to the German POWs and often talked about how “normal and friendly” they seemed. No horns. No pitchforks. My father was raised on a farm in southern Illinois, and his stories of how he planted and harvested crops proved to be invaluable.

### **Was it difficult finding a publisher?**

I did send the book to a handful of agents in New York and I soon found there was a fantastic publisher in my own back yard: TEN16 Press. Shannon Ishizaki and her team are fantastic and proved to be invaluable with their advice and assistance.

## SAMPLE Q&A

### **Were there really German POWs in America during the war?**

Yes. According to Betty Crowley's aforementioned book *Stalag Wisconsin*, there were roughly 425,000 German POWs in 700 camps spread throughout America. In Wisconsin specifically, there were 20,000 POWs, interned at 36 camps. Filling labor shortages, they worked in lumber yards, on road crews, in factories, and on numerous farms.

### **How did the German POWs come to arrive here?**

In the early 1940s, Winston Churchill had a problem. As the British troops were making progress in North Africa and into Italy, they were running out of places to keep the POWs. Likewise, Roosevelt had to deal with countless crops dying in the fields. So when Churchill asked him to take the POWs to America in our empty cargo ships, it turned out to be a win-win for both sides.

### **Why did the U.S. military keep it so quiet?**

Simply put, they were afraid of the backlash. Imagine if you knew there was a Taliban POW camp right down the road from where you lived. That would be hard to take. So the Defense Department (then called the War Department) set up the camps in rural communities, often in tent cities, that could be easily dismantled at the end of the war. Thankfully, Wisconsin was (and still is) a state made up of many German immigrants. So when residents heard the news about the German neighbors down the road, most weren't that upset at all. In fact, there are stories of some Wisconsin cousins having reunions with German POWs.

### **Is it true the POWs were actually paid for their work?**

Yes, they were paid in camp script, which they could use to buy goods like cigarettes or candy in the camp confectionary. And some could even put money in a government savings account. Many POWs returned to Germany with some mad money in their pockets, which likely helped them after they returned.

### **Have you received any feedback on the book?**

Yes, I have been very fortunate to have a handful of influencers and literary critics give me some glowing reviews. (See attached review sheet for specifics.)



## WHAT READERS ARE SAYING ABOUT *THE HOME FRONT*

### **Dave Luhrssen—Literary Critic, *Shepherd Express***

“With ‘The Home Front,’ DW Hanneken explores that missing chapter from “the Good War” in a novel set in rural Wisconsin. He doesn’t “pretty up” the life of Maggie, a farm wife whose abusive husband signed up for the Army, but delves into anxieties that remain relevant today. Maggie balances caring for her child and an elderly parent, confronts a marriage deflated as love seeped away and the attraction of another man – a German prisoner helping with the harvest. The details of 1940s farm life are vivid enough for a Hollywood screenplay.”

### **Bobby Tanzilo, Literary Critic *OnMilwaukee.com***

“Hanneken tells the story of the resilient and resourceful Maggie Wentworth, and along the way gives us a dose of history as we learn about the POW camps that dotted the rural landscapes of America during World War II. Hanneken weaves a gripping tale.”

### **Pam Ford, Author “*To Ride A White Horse*”**

“DW Hanneken brings to life a little-known chapter of WWII, delivering a story that touches the emotions at every level. It’s a must read.”

### **Brad Hicks, Emmy-Winning Journalist**

“Perfectly paced. Hanneken keeps the surprises coming as the emotional armies of lust, love and loyalty clash on a secret World War II battlefield inside a young woman’s heart. DW Hanneken creates a story from rural Wisconsin that’s so real, I could feel the mud on my shoes.”

### **Jim Palmer, Professor, Columnist *Milwaukee Magazine***

“With breathtaking imagery and compelling characters, Hanneken weaves a tale of intrigue and suspense, surprising the reader with a gripping tale of Wisconsin’s (yes, Wisconsin’s!) involvement in World War II – painting vivid pictures of every scene along the way. A wonderful debut.”

