

Joe Pieri was arrested in Glasgow in June 1940 because he was an Italian. He was neither a Fascist, a Nazi nor a dangerous war criminal, but because of a government error he was shipped to a POW camp in Montreal, Canada, where he remained until the end of 1943. Born into a poor rural family in Tuscany in 1919, his family emigrated to Glasgow, Scotland when he was two, where his father found work as a fish fryer. Joe grew up to the daily taunts of Wee Tally at school, but ironically often had to fight alongside his tormentors against rival gangs of boys on the way home. At home Joe spoke only Italian and observed the traditions of Italian family life. In June 1940, when the family had begun to attain a certain level of prosperity, Mussolini declared war on Britain. Winston Churchill nurtured fears of a Fifth Column of enemy nationals living in the UK, and uttered his famous collar the lot command. Most of the Italians arrested were sent to internment camps on the Isle of Man, some were torpedoed and killed on the ill-fated Arandora Star, and some were transported to Australia. But Joe's fate was different. Owing to a governmental blunder he was shipped 3000 miles and spent three years in a POW camp on St Helenes Island, in the shadow of the Jacques Cartier bridge spanning the St Lawrence river in Montreal. His longing for freedom and home, his sense of displacement and injustice, heightened by the fact that his brother was serving in the British Army, his help with attempted escapes and the vital bonds he formed with other prisoners are all timeless records of one man's struggle for survival. But it was a survival which left him with a sense of statelessness. When Joe wrote this biography he admitted to feelings of conflict between his love of Scotland and his natural feelings as an Italian.

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