

What They Didn't Burn

Uncovering My Father's Holocaust Secrets

by Mel Laytner



Non-Fiction - Memoir

Kindle Edition

Reviewed on 08/29/2021

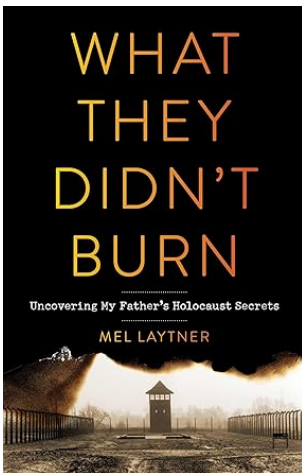
Book Review



Reviewed by Asher Syed for Readers' Favorite

What They Didn't Burn: Uncovering My Father's Holocaust Secrets by Mel Laytner is the non-fiction memoir of the author in which he documents a paper trail that leads to a search spanning the globe. Laytner is a journalist, which proves helpful in both the investigation of his father's past, which is incredibly extensive, and the writing of this book, which is exceptional. His father is Josef "Dolek" Laytner, a survivor of the Auschwitz sub-camp Blechammer, prisoner 177904. The facts that emerge as the layers begin to truly peel back are stunning. Laytner weaves his father's tale initially as the story of his search for information, transitioning to the story of his father from the earliest moments under a rising Nazi Party to his days as a prisoner and all that followed.

"My father survived that nightmare and went on to build a new life," writes Mel Laytner. The line is striking to me. It parallels how very little he knew about his father initially but is written as he finally begins to grasp the scope of what was required to be one of those who survived in What They Didn't Burn. Tightly written and compelling on every page, the progression of Dolek's "luck" proves to be a terrifying endurance test. This is most certainly not luck. It is the grit and rapid intelligence of a man who can read a situation quickly to maximize the odds of survival. Knowing what jobs permit indoor work and rations of 1,700 calories per day compared to the 1,300 allotted to "unskilled" workers, though still far below the 2,500 calories a day required by a man doing heavy physical work. Knowing when to partner and bend power and when to fade into a box in the barracks, fighting back only when a precious blanket is stolen, and bribing his way out of a camp for transfer. The death marches are brought to life and the way Laytner describes his father's final escape... I was choked up. Particularly as he is told: "Well, you are free now. And safe." Very highly recommended.



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Author Biography



For nearly 20 years, Mel Laytner was a reporter and editor of hard news, much of it covering the Middle East as a foreign correspondent for NBC News and United Press International.

Mel's began his full-time career with UPI, where he covered all manner of urban mayhem in New York City, his hometown. He was promoted to a bureau manager before moving to the General News and Cables (Foreign) Desks where he had final responsibility for selecting and editing the top stories of the day for UPI's 400 afternoon newspaper clients.

Mel's first foreign posting was London. A year later, UPI assigned him to the Tel Aviv bureau. Soon after, he was named Jerusalem Correspondent. NBC News recruited Mel as its Middle East Radio Correspondent.

After seven grinding years overseas, he won a prestigious Knight-Bagehot Fellowship in Economic and Business Journalism, which included a year's residency at the Columbia Graduate School of Business.

Mel holds Master's degrees from the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism and from Columbia's School of International and Public Affairs.

He and his wife, an artist, live in New York City and are the proud parents of three daughters.