



Discussion guide: *What They Didn't Burn: Uncovering My Father's Holocaust Secrets*

About the Book

"*What They Didn't Burn*" is Mel Laytner's investigative memoir about uncovering his father's experiences during the Holocaust. As a veteran journalist, Laytner uses his investigative skills to piece together his father's story through Nazi documents, witness accounts, and personal memories.

Discussion Questions

1. How does Laytner balance his roles as a son and a journalist in telling his father's story? Discuss the challenges he might have faced in maintaining objectivity.
2. What surprised you most about Josef Lajtner's experiences during the Holocaust? How did these revelations change your understanding of survival stories?
3. Discuss the significance of the book's title, "What They Didn't Burn." How does it relate to both the physical evidence Laytner discovered and the broader themes of the book?
4. How does Laytner's journalistic background influence his writing style and approach to uncovering his father's past?
5. The book alternates between past and present tense. How does this structure affect your reading experience and understanding of the story?
6. Discuss the impact of intergenerational trauma as portrayed in the book. How does Laytner's journey of discovery reflect the experiences of many children of Holocaust survivors?
7. What role do official documents play in this story? How do they complement or contradict personal memories and oral histories?
8. How does Laytner's portrayal of his father evolve throughout the book? Discuss the complexities of Josef's character as revealed through Laytner's investigation.
9. How does this book contribute to our understanding of Holocaust literature and memoirs? What makes it unique in this genre?
10. Discuss the theme of resilience in the book. How did Josef's experiences shape his life after the war, and how did they impact his family?
11. What lessons can we draw from Laytner's investigative process about the importance of preserving historical records and personal testimonies?