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The Man at the Other Side of the Seder Table: Understanding Paul Edelsberg

As a young girl, I never questioned who the man who often came to our Passover Seders was-- he was just another longtime friend of my grandfather. Years rolled by, and I began to pick up bits and pieces of information about Mr. Edelsberg. When it came time to choose a minor historical figure to research, I called my parents. My original intention was to research somebody within my family, but they both insisted that Paul Edelsberg would be a fascinating subject.

While a general Google search revealed some information about Edelsberg, I struggled to find more than vague dead ends. I decided to call my father to get a proper interview about Edelsberg. This proved to be quite useful; my father had grown up around Edelsberg and remembered many stories told to him and details about Edelsberg that provided me with information that gave my research a purpose.

The biggest break through on my project occurred with help from *Ancestry.com*. While the website brought up many records that had nothing to do with Edelsberg, it did find papers relating to his immigration to the United States. On one of these documents, a petition for naturalization, I noticed that when Paul Edelsberg arrived in the United States, it was not as Paul Edelsberg, but rather as Pinkus Edelsberg. My father said he did not know that Paul had changed his name, however, searching for Pinkus Edelsberg proved far more fruitful in finding information that directly correlated with the life of Mr. Edelsberg.

Searching now for Pinkus, I found a picture of Edelsberg and one of his fellow Soviet-Jewish partisans on the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum website. While the picture was fascinating, what proved to be more useful was learning that Edelsberg donated a small collection of items to the museum. Under one of the webpage for one of the items, a child's dress, I noticed that it had a biography of Edelsberg based upon an interview he had with the museum, and this biography filled in some of the gaps missing from my father's information.

Armed with new knowledge, I went to the library in order to find books concerning the relationship between Soviets and Jews, details on life as a partisan, contextual information concerning Poland during World War II, and information on the death camp Sobibor and its surrounding labor camps. I left the library with six books for my portfolio. I decided to use excerpts from the books instead of trying to read the entirety of each of them. I combed through the indexes searching for sections that I felt would be relevant to my research.

Throughout my process, I encountered numerous struggles: dead ends, inability to access materials, and a language barrier. However, I did not anticipate my biggest struggle being the mental fatigue. My temple had us study the Holocaust for three separate years, so I felt prepared to study the topic in depth, but I found myself increasingly burdened by the tragedy of the situation. Perhaps it was the nature of the long term project or the fact that it was more personal, but I was unable to work in increments longer than a few hours, which hindered my process.

However, researching Mr. Edelsberg enthralled me, and my desire to better understand his life journey made me determined to preserve. While many of my sources are not as directly related to Edelsberg as I would have hoped, I feel as though I succeeded in finding resources that allowed me to evaluate the complexities of his story and better empathize with the personal ramifications of this dark chapter in history.