Oskar Seidlin’s Inspiring Journey as a Gay Jewish Scholar and Soldier

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ABSTRACT

Oskar Seidlin (1911-1984) was a distinguished scholar in German Language and Literature at the Ohio State University (OSU), where he, alongside his life partner, Dieter Cunz (1910-1969) shared a remarkable life that transcended both academia and adversity. Fleeing Nazi Germany in 1938, they sought refuge in the United States, where Dieter's academic prowess eventually led him to become an esteemed chair of the German Department at the Ohio State University. Oskar continued his academic career as a professor at various institutions before joining the United States Army, taking part in the D-Day Invasion at Normandy, France and helped to create the first educational film about concentration camps before settling at OSU. Throughout their professional accomplishments, they privately navigated their identities as gay men in a time of significant social challenges. Despite never being open about their sexuality, many colleagues at OSU knew that Dieter and Oskar were a couple and, remarkably, they did not care. In spite of the need for secrecy, their commitment to knowledge and their love persevered, leaving a lasting impact on their students, colleagues, and the communities they touched. Their shared legacy stands as a testament to the power of queer resilience in the face of historical hostility.

Keywords: German Studies; History of Education; Life History; Queer History; WWII Studies

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1 Through a series of life history interviews, I have met individuals who knew Oskar and Dieter and have confirmed this.