For my object, I something that meant a lot to me and has more of a theoretical history, this one little Paris pin my great Aunt Clara gave me when I was a kid.

First I’d want to describe the pin because to me that part doesn’t matter as much. the pin is fast in bronze slayer with gold and depicts a little Eiffel Tower followed by a decal saying “Paris” on it. It doesn’t really smell like anything and I haven’t tasted it. It feels real which is rarely said nowadays for products.

The pin symbolizes a lot for me. For one thing, it was an original kindness. When I was seven, my family took a trip to Israel to celebrate my first Cousin’s Bat Mitzvah. Dad wanted to visit family really badly on the trip, at one point we were at a huge dinner with a ton of relatives from all around the world that I’d never met. One being Clara.

I remember she tried to feed me and I was about 2-3 years past that being socially acceptable, but I let her. Later dad would explain that she would feed him as a child. I’d never met anyone that old.

Clara didn’t speak any English. When I tried to talk to her I was met with earnest smiles and a slight nod. I remember not knowing what to say in my little unsocialized 7-year-old way. I told her I liked a little pin on her outfit and she took it off and gave it to me.

Back then I just thought I’d been given this small pin that’s as kinda cool. I felt bad that I’d forced her hand in a way with politeness etiquettes that I didn’t know about. Now I recognize how much my presence meant to her and what passing something down, even something as insignificant as her pin, meant.

That side of the family, my dad’s side, are all descendants of Holocaust survivors. I’m named after my Great Grandpa Zalman who fled death at age 12. I believe the pin to symbolize a perceived world, a place, where the Jewish people can simply be.

To someone who grew up in the 40’s, it’s somewhat of an unheard of concept. Whether we are ghettoized in France, Russia, Prague, Iraq or Ethiopia, Jews have been othered and ghettoized, “oldest scapegoat” is a common Jewish self-reference. There hasn’t been a time and place that has been safe for the jews, only an ever shifting grace period we are allowed to stay in.

I don’t know when Clara went to Paris. I assume she did and didn’t simply get it at some shop, it’s sufficiently old with some oil erosion around the “Paris” part. To me it partially doesn’t matter. The pin is a hole for the future. That one day I may go to Paris and not look over my shoulder in the street. That I may be loved and accepted as a Parisian before being considered a Jew. My family is from Poland, my grandmother was born there, but we are not considered Polish, we don’t even have citizenship. On my Grandma’s passport it says she is a “Jew” and it’s implied to be the first and last bit of identifier. I think the pin is a wish to exist beyond identifiers like that, branding like that. My Judaism is a part of me but I am multifaceted.

Maybe Clara wanted to be asked about it and it was put there to display an interest in Paris? I’m not sure.

I can’t help but consider “Paris” it’s self to be important. In Clara’s time, when she was still learning the ways of the world, France was fighting nazis. France was Europe, it was outside, it was culture, it was new, it was the city. And I imagine she wanted to be a part of it. I hope she went. I hope they accepted her and treated her with kindness. It reminds me of the safe feeling in New York I have, my grandparents live in New York. How many swastikas I see now when I go out, how I’m sure it is more than my dad did when he went down those streets. I’m sure it is more than Clara envisioned Paris would be like. I’ve never been to Paris but in 2014, 70% of its Jews would be concerned about harassment and France would lead the world in Jews fleeing to Israel, there being the last place on earth where one can be openly Jewish unquestioned.

Anti-Semitism is on the rise in America, it’s on the rise globally. Signs of pogroms are starting and Jews are scared. I’m sure Clara envisioned a world where no stranger asks you where your horns are and yet it’s happened to my Mother. I’m sure she envisioned a world outside of nazi rhetoric and yet I’ve been asked more this year than ever if me and my people own the media. Hatred is brewing as it has been brewed as it has been ingrained. I don’t even like saying antisemitism, it comes from the nazis trying to appeal to science to call us less than. Jew-hate as a translation of judenhass is more accurate. People forget too easily how this happened and fall into similar trappings. They’re falling further as I type this.

Things are grim. It is difficult to be a Jew in the modern day, as it always has been. Maybe this is the best it has been and maybe it’s the best it will be. I hope to house her pin in a safe land and pass it down in one. I hope to keep the Jewish spirit alive, my history, and to never let hate win.