

Overview: Jack Mandelbaum was 12 years old when the Nazis invaded his native Poland in 1939. Though Jack was Jewish, his family was not particularly religious and he knew little about his religion. They lived in a city and dressed no differently than their mostly Catholic neighbors.

Two weeks after Hitler took over Poland, Jack's father, a well-to-do businessman, was sent to a concentration camp. Jack, his mother, brother and sister, went deep into the countryside to live with relatives. For the next three years, Jack supported them by the pennies he earned substituting for Jewish men ordered to do forced labor for the Nazis. But at age 15, Jack was separated from his family and sent to the first of a series of concentration camps.

Plunged into a dark new world, he was determined to survive. He learned how to tolerate the horrible food, the backbreaking work, and the brutal living conditions. He learned to think of his imprisonment as a game and to not take personally what was happening to him. He also resolved not to hate his captors and vowed to see his family again.

In the midst of this intolerable life, he forged friendships and helped others, determined to survive this nightmare created by Hitler and his willing minions.

Liberated at age 18, with his family gone and Europe in ruins, Jack decided to build a new life in America. Today he is a successful businessman, a loving husband, father, and grandfather. He is also devoted to Holocaust education.

I came reluctantly to the topic of the Holocaust, for I had always been horrified by what had happened to the Jews in World War II. I was literally pulled into this project, when I met a Holocaust survivor who told me his story. I immediately recognized its power and importance. I am the adoptive mother of a Vietnam War orphan, so I knew first hand about the innocent victims of war, but I wasn't sure I wanted to immerse myself in studying the Holocaust.

Yet I went forward. I met Jack Mandelbaum and decided I would capture his story in print. Jack was patient and fully cooperative with me, though recording his memories was a grueling process for each of us. He's a very special man, and I am richer for knowing him. If I have conveyed his generosity of spirit in my book, then I have given a gift to anyone who reads it. This is a man who relishes life, a man who was an incredibly brave boy, a man who can teach us lasting lessons about tolerance, love, and forgiveness.