

Jack Mondschein

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Summary

Jack Mondschein was born Yaakov or Yosef Mondschein January 13, 1923 in Chzanów, Poland, a town with 20,000 Jews about 40 kilometers west of Krakow. His parents were Chaim and Raisel Friedman Mondschein and he had a brother, Ureck who was a year older than him. His father died when he was a year old. They lived on his maternal grandmother's farm and his mother supported them by owning a grocery and the father's Army pension. At five or six years, Jack started Hebrew school and at eight attended the public school for boys. He and his brother belonged to Zionist organizations. Jack spoke Yiddish and knew some Polish and Hebrew. As they were observant, a Polish couple turned on their lights and fire on the Sabbath. His mother remarried a divorcee Solomon Mailer from Berlin. Jack played soccer in the summer and skied in the winter. Antisemitism in the city was seen upon Hitler's arrival as there were pogroms (putting stores on fire and beating up the Hasidism). Jack shows a portrait of his mother from 1936 or 1937. At 13, Jack became an apprentice to a tailor and attended school at night. On September 3, 1939 his family evacuated and placed their belongings on a cart and took four days to walk to Krakow. When they got to Plaszow, his mother placed him with neighbors and his brother disappeared. They walked toward Lublin at the Russian border and stopped at Beyhavar where a Jewish family helped them for a few days. The Germans arrived and the family told them they were Poles, not Jews, and were placed on a truck to Krakow. When he arrived in Chzanow, Jack found his mother and brother waiting for him. One day his brother got beaten by a German for not saluting him with his cap and he ran away to Lvov, Russia. Later he sent the family a package of food and notified them he joined the voluntary resistance so he would not be sent to Siberia. In early '40 the family was ordered to leave their house and store and went to live with friends on Kadlubek, a street in the Ghetto. Everyone had to register Jack was 15 and was required to join a work camp. He was sent to Goggaline about 20 kilometers from Breslau, Germany where he shoveled sand and was hungry and next sent to Marchsted which was nearby. Jack was assigned to the Shalhor construction company that built factories. He had to take a 2 and ½ hour bus ride each way and soon met the cook and was assigned to the kitchen. His stepfather sent him his mother's clothes when she was sent to Auschwitz. Jack's camp was closed and the prisoners were naked and put into two lines with two physicians and divided according to their work ability. His Uncle Itzak, his father's brother, was put on the left and sent to a crematorium and Jack on the right. He had to march six miles with 3,000 prisoners to Funfteichen, a political camp, where he worked on the Autobahn under the SS. The Russians were coming so they closed the camp and he walked to Fonthruch work camp, also near Breslau. When that was closed they walked to Pilsen near Prague, Czechoslovakia. Thirty-five prisoners were placed in an open train and they traveled at night. They went to the Baskeed Mountains in Austria in early '44. By the time they arrived in Mauthausen Concentration Camp, only 10 prisoners survived. Then they went to Ebensee in Austria where they remained for a year until

the Americans liberated them May 5. Jack ate the pork and beans that were cooked and got sick and the Red Cross took him to the Bad Lebl Hospital. After three weeks, he was released and took a train to Vienna. He was assisted with food and clothes by UNRRA and the JOINT. Jack went to Katowice and saw some cousins and then the Russians took him home. He stayed with a woman while his legs were healing and helped the tailor. (Jack shows a photo of him with his brother in his Polish military uniform.) There he learned his stepfather had been taken to Auschwitz and he received a letter from his brother who was in a hospital in Biddegosh and took a train there. His brother was recuperating from a wound in his leg. When he got demobilized, the two brothers succeeded in getting some money for property they inherited. His brother was drinking, smoking and seeing girls so Jack hired a smuggler and left for Czechoslovakia. The JOINT put him on a plane to Prague and a train to Uln, Germany. His brother goes to Passow near the Czech border and returns to Uln and Jack joins him and they obtain an apartment in Passow. They got help from UNRRA and the JOINT including a sewing machine so Jack earned some money while his brother sold cigarettes. His brother falls in love with a Romanian and Jack decided he must leave for Paris (where he has a cousin) to meet a Jewish girl to marry and resides at the Rothschild Hotel. His cousin, Albert Zagorsky, helps him get employment and a residence and gives him valuables. Then Jack opens his own business manufacturing fabrics. He meets Rosie Manovich, his childhood friend, and in December 21, 1952 they marry. In December '57 Rosie is pregnant with her second son (first is Harry, age 3) when they take the Cherbourg to NY and fly to LA where they meet the person who gave them an affidavit. Rosie had obtained an affidavit through a cousin of Max Factor. Jack obtains a career in the motion picture business through Rosie's friend. He learned some English and they bought a house. They were married 59 years when his wife died two months ago. He has never returned to Poland and only recently thinks and talks of his experiences. Some Germans were nice to him so he is not upset with Germans of today. He lost his family and believes everyone should know about the Holocaust. After the interview, Jack shows a number of old family photos, mostly of him and Rosie in Paris and one in Poland during the war.