

Jacques Ribons

Part 1

May 20, 2014

RG-50.030*0752.01

Telephone Interviews

Abstract

Jacques Ribons was born Jacob Ribstein on August 15, 1927 in Shenyshitza (?) outside of Bengin (?) in Western Poland. He had a younger sister and a younger brother. His father's work was traveling for the textile business. While he was away, Jacques' mother would struggle to have sufficient money for food and education. Sometimes the father sent her items to sell. They lived in a small house with no electricity or indoor plumbing. It was a coal mining area but Jews were not hired for that business. When the war started, his father joined the Army and was captured by the Germans but was freed upon bribing a guard with his watch. The Germans occupied their town which was near the German border and had the citizens turn in their radios. Food was rationed and people were picked up for slave labor. His father became the mediator between the Germans and the Jewish community. The family was placed in one room in the ghetto which was gradually liquidated. Jacques saw people killed and corpses dead from starvation. His father hid in another town with one sister and the rest of the family was deported to Auschwitz. Jacques and his brother were given work and the rest were gassed.

Jacques continues his discussion about the 250 mile march from Blochammer (?) to Pros Rose (?) which took two or three weeks and in 2013 with his relatives 8 to 10 hours by van. They walked in the snow, sometimes slept in barns and the Germans shot some in their legs. Sometimes they were shot at by the Russians flying overhead. Jacques relates how he and his brother helped each other out. The prisoners mined marble in Gross Rosen and were taken by truck to Weimar and then by train, along with the marble, to Buchenwald. There he performed no work and after liberation got sick and went to the hospital. The prisoners were liberated in Buchenwald by the Americans and the children were sent all over the world. Jacques and his brother went to France for a year and then to the US on the SS Gripsholm from Sweden.

Summary

00:00 Jacques Ribons was born Jacob Ribstein on August 15, 1927 in Shenyshitza (?) outside of Bengin (?) in Western Poland. It was near Obershlavin (?), the East German border. Both parents had the same last name and they were related. Questions arose regarding his name so after he became a US citizen, he changed his name. One brother, Bernard or Berek Ribstein who changed his name to Revitz, recently died in the US. He was killed

by a car in LA. Jacques' 7-year-old sister was taken with his mother, Bayla Ribstein, grandma and niece. His mother was told to save her life but she could not live alone.

- 05:00 His father, Peretz Ribstein, was away most of the time so his mother took care of the family. His father was away due to the textile business. Jacques' father sent them money and things to sell in their neighborhood such as refrigerated butter. The family saw the father on holidays. It was not a good life as his mother struggled to send the children to school. Sometimes Jacques had no shoes and wore his mother's. They were isolated as there were mostly non-Jews in their neighborhood. Jews lived in the town. The family moved a couple of times. They lived near the textile industry near Lodz. The last place they lived in was a house with three rooms including a kitchen and an out-house.
- 10:00 They had no electricity, a kerosene lamp and a coal stove. His mother came from a family of 10 and his father had two sisters. Jacques' grandfather taught English and Russian and he did not know his other grandfather as he died young. He knew his grandma. His grandparents were poor. Since his father was not around much, his mother struggled to get them clothes. Jacques was close to her. She was loving. She bequeathed her values to him. She was very religious and sent them to Hebrew School. His mother was not educated like his father. She read and wrote Yiddish which was the language they spoke at home. Jacques spoke Polish as he attended a Polish school. His mother did not speak it well. She came from Zelet (?) near Lodz. His parents lived in the same town before they married. There was anti-Semitism in the neighborhood and in their Polish school.
- 15:00 Jacques' town was a big village with a big Jewish population and a big Polish population. There were three or four synagogues and a large Catholic church. There was little interaction with non-Jews as the parents and grandparents of the neighbor children hated Jews. The children called them Jews and that they should go to Palestine. They had a teacher who was German and would tell the Jewish children, "Wait for Hitler to come." People talked about Hitler. When the war started, the Germans brought in Jews from Czechoslovakia. These Jews had their nose up in the air. Coal mining was the basic economy. Non-Jews worked there. Jews were not hired.
- 20:00 Catholic children wore a collar attached to their shirt. Before the war, Jacques wore his mother's shoes. His brother, a year younger than him, attended school. They ate potatoes. They had enough basics. There were few chores as their house was small and his mother cleaned it. The children went out and played. The doctor in the town had a Mercedes. He was the only person with a car. They owned a radio until they had to hand it over to the Germans. Everyone had to turn it in. The radio could pick up London and the Germans did not want them to hear the news. Before the war, they heard the news. His parents were born close to the Czech border. They would listen to Radio Prague in German and Czech. There was a death penalty if they did not turn in their radios. His

father went through World War I as a child and spoke to friends about it. There was a consensus that World War II would not last long as now planes existed that could make major damage. They had no confidence that they would win. The Polish government had some Germans in office who dismantled the airport before the war.

- 25:00 Gemenshitza (?) was the last place that he lived. It was close to the German border and no one believed that war would last long as the police did not have enough force to fight. When the war broke out, the Polish government asked the people over the radio to join the Army so his father left. He had already been in the military but had to report to the military place to register. After his father left, the Germans arrived and his father came home later. His father was captured by the Germans and was about to be killed so he gave his gold Omega pocket watch to the guard and was released. Two days later the Germans rounded up the teachers, priests, rabbis and doctors. They were arrested and either killed or sent to Germany. From time-to-time Jacques was outside and saw violence but he usually stayed at home. After a few days he went out and listened to the Germans speaking as he understood a little. The Germans did not know who was German.
- 30:00 The Jews dressed the same as the others. Food was rationed and they did not get much. The German occupiers were ruthless as they picked up people in the street and took them for slave labor. He did not see fighting. The Germans did not enter his house. The Wehrmacht and SS came and the Polish soldiers were gone. They would have to stand in line for a loaf of bread. There was no sugar. Everything was rationed. There was no discrimination of Jews as they did not know who was Jewish. Jacques could go anywhere but he did not go near the Army installation. If the Germans saw religious garb or pais (sideburns), they knew you were Jewish. The German police and SS took over the police department. They killed the best people. Jacques saw many people beaten.
- 35:00 His father was gone for a while and Jacques did not know where until he returned home. His father spoke German, Polish and some Lithuanian and Russian. He started providing things. He went to the Germans and they established a Jewish city hall where he was the mediator between the Germans and the Jewish community. His father was not harsh. If you know people, you get preference. He knew people so obtained things and was given money by the Jewish community to buy things. His father did not talk much about the events happening. He brought home a suitcase full of money to buy off the Germans for someone's life.
- 40:00 His father continued this for 1 and ½ or 2 years before the ghetto. From 9/39 to 9/40 they lived in their own home. There were lots of killings taking place so they were aware of something happening. A lot of good people were taken out and disappeared. After the war, they found out they had been at a labor camp. Polish people turned in Jews who were rounded up and disappeared. Jewish Polish soldiers got killed. After a year, Poles

were removed from two streets and Jews were placed there to make a formal ghetto in the town. His family moved into one room. There was no indoor plumbing. School was suspended for Jewish children so they stayed home. There were schools for Polish children. His father was with them. They were five in one room which included a kitchen. The next year Jacques was put to work.

45:00 He became an electric welder and used a wheel barrow. All the Jews were placed in forced labor. They had to bring food from home. If they refused to work, they were killed. His father remained mediator until the ghetto ended. His mother tried to provide them with food. They left the ghetto under guard by Jewish Kapos and Germans who walked with them. The Kapos were their neighbors. The children did not realize the enormity of the situation so might get out of line and be pushed back. The ghetto was liquidated a little at a time. Jews were rounded up to be sent to the gas chamber or prison camps. Everyone would be called to go to the square and some were picked out.

50:00 Sometimes his father would be able to place them back in line. He was the only mediator. Both civilians and SS would beat up Jews. Jacques saw corpses in the ghetto who had died from starvation. Two Jewish Polish soldiers were brought in. The restaurant owner disappeared and never heard from again. Jacques saw people shot in town. He was hit across his back. Jews were only allowed to walk on one side of the street and Aryans walked on the other side. One Jewish man, wearing a yellow star, walked on the Aryan side and a child pushed him off and he pushed him back. He hid and they could not find him. The family depended on the father for food.

55:00 People who were called to the open place were never heard from again. A neighbor had a boyfriend who was not Jewish so Jacques and his family hid in his home. People who could not hide were taken to Auschwitz in '42. They did not know about the gas. The ghetto was closed and all the Jews who hid were shot if they were caught.

60:00 Jacques was 13 and decided it would be best to turn themselves in. His father took a sister and hid in a different town. Jacques felt there was no place to go and if he was caught, he would be shot. If they turned themselves in, there was a chance that some of them might survive. The family listened to him and entered the room in the ghetto with those who returned. In the middle of the night, a couple was taken outside and were killed with their son in front of them. In the morning others were shot. Jacques was taken to Benjin, a larger place with nuns and an abbey.

65:00 They went to Sosnowiec near the German border to a prison and taken to work. His mother, brother and sister were taken. Jacques did not want to leave his mother. She could not go with him as she could not let the grandmother, sister and niece die alone. They were taken to Auschwitz. He was placed in a different room with his brother and taken to Lechmere, a forced labor camp, where he did cement work.

70:00 He could have gone with his mother. His brother was little. He found people from his hometown in the prison. Some of the workers died. It was a crime to smoke and those who did so had to go outside to smoke and were hung. Jacques was there for two years. At first they extracted oil from coal. They were often bombed. They made shovels there. They had bunkers. He was in Auschwitz from '42 to '44 and lost track of time. They arrived there at harvest time when they would pick fruit at home.

75:00 They were given spinach with coal, soup that made you swell and two slices of bread a day. People died from hunger. Some ran away to Poland. They had no place to go so returned. The Germans told them to run and sent German Shepherds after them. That shows cruelty. Jacques was with his brother and they took care of each other. They ate what was given, walked to work and sometimes bread or a piece of candy was thrown at them. There was an old guard in his 60s from the Wehrmacht who was from Austria and gave them soup. He told them to hang in there as the war was almost over with the invasion of Normandy. They could not work as the camp was evacuated but they did not know where they were going. Recently Jacques returned to the camp with Lisa and saw part of Poland annexed by the Germans. The industry was the coal mines. It is Yiddish Amblaphgen (?).

80:00

Part 2 not included in the time-coded notes

Jacques Ribons

Part 3

June 10, 2014

RG-50.030*0752.03.03

Telephone Interviews

Abstract

Jacques continues his discussion about the 250 mile march from Blochammer (?) to Pros Rose (?) which took two or three weeks and in 2013 with his relatives 8 to 10 hours by van. They walked in the snow, sometimes slept in barns and the Germans shot some in their legs. Sometimes they were shot at by the Russians flying overhead. Jacques relates how he and his brother helped each other out. The prisoners mined marble in Gross Rosen and were taken by truck to Weimar and then by train, along with the marble, to Buchenwald. There he performed no work and after liberation got sick and went to the hospital. The prisoners were liberated in Buchenwald by the Americans and the children were sent all over the world. Jacques and his brother went to France for a year and then to the US on the SS Gripsholm from Sweden.

Summary

- 00:00 Jacques continues his discussion about the march from Blochhammer (?) to Pros Rose (?). The Russian Army took over Poland and they heard rifle shots. The Germans took out the whole camp except for the sick people. The prisoners walked to a farm and slept in a barn with the cows and the pigs. They had the opportunity to sleep about every other night. This was in January when there was snow on the ground so it was difficult to walk. They kept to the main streets. The German Army started retreating so they walked in the ravines. The Russians machine-gunned the area where the Germans and the prisoners were walking. The Russian Air Force was flying overhead and aiming their guns at the German guards who had their guns on the prisoners. Occasionally they killed a prisoner but seemed to aim at the Germans. They usually slept outside in the snow wearing only their prisoner uniforms. One Sunday they were in a church. Jacques owned a sweater so wore it and used empty cement bags under his uniform to keep warm.
- 05:00 He wore boots that did not have soles so his feet got wet. He wrapped his feet in cloth to prevent them freezing. They walked on the side of main roads and the Russians machine-gunned the guards who moved among the prisoners who might get killed. There were many German guards with machine guns. The roads were full of people going West with the Russians right behind them as they heard rifle shots. They reached a barn on Sunday and were given coffee and the Germans shot at the prisoners' legs and left. Those prisoners who got shot were left behind. They may have frozen to death. They walked on three Sundays. One Sunday he entered a barn with his brother and other children. They walked for two or three weeks. Many prisoners died. He fought for his life and he feels fortunate to have survived.
- 10:00 On the walk, Jacques tried to help Ribach Fishman (?) who he knew in prison for a while. Some prisoners escaped. They were in Germany and he did not know where to go. There were civilians with pushcarts trying to avoid the Russians. The Germans especially tried to get in front of them. Some Russian POWs walked with them. The road was wide. He tried to hide from the Russian bullets. They walked about 250 miles. It was chaos. Jacques took his son and granddaughter to Europe in 2013. They went by van from his hometown to Blochhammer (?), Gross Rosen (?) and Buchenwald. It is 250 miles from Blochhammer (?) to Gross Rosen (?) which took them eight to ten hours by van. The road changed from his walk when he did not pay much attention and food was scarce. When Jacques asked a farmer for bread, the Commandant asked him "What are you doing here?" and Jacques replied, "I want something to eat." The farmer gave him a loaf of bread and the Commandant hit him on his back with a cane. He gave his brother some of the bread.
- 15:00 Such things still happen today. Human beings are cruel and are like animals. He spent several days at Gross Rosen where they were packed like sardines. He was given a bowl of soup during the day and there were selections. They mined marble so the people on the outside could not see what was going on. The prisoners loaded the marble on a

freight train to take the marble to market. Each car had two guards with guns and the prisoners did not know where they were going. They arrived in Weimar which was bombed as the Allies made a mistake. The train full of guards and prisoners were bombed. They arrived in Buchenwald. The railroad tracks were bombed out so they were taken by truck from Weimar to Buchenwald. Jacques walked this distance after the war. He was in the children's barracks from January to April in Buchenwald. There were three or four barracks for Jewish children.

- 20:00 German political prisoners were there since the '30s. They protected the children. Some of the children were taken to Playplax (?). There were partisans in the munitions factory. The Germans were in control. They also worked in the munitions factory. The Germans who guarded the prisoners carried guns. The German political prisoners smuggled in arms from the Munitions Factory so when the Germans left, they took over. There were Swedes, Danes and prisoners from other countries. Jacques was hospitalized as he had extreme diarrhea. He did not work in Buchenwald. There were dead prisoners all over the camp. At night they heard the Americans battling in the mountains. The German Camp Commandant later got killed in a car crash.
- 25:00 He was in charge of the task unit that entered Buchenwald. Jacques peeked out and saw prisoners chasing the Germans from the towers and brought them to the prison and killed some. The American Army entered the camp and gave them food until the organization from West Europe arrived. The Germans crossed the mountains. The bunks were three high and he slept on top and looked out the window and saw tanks on the main road. There was shooting into the barracks so the prisoners lay on the ground. Those who were tortured were given two hours to beat up the Germans. He has a photo of General Eisenhower forcing the civilians to view the camp. The Army kept the prisoners away from the civilians to prevent revenge. The wires were torn down so there was no oil.
- 30:00 Jacques went to the village to get something to eat. He walked into Major Reinhardt's house to obtain a bike but the bikes were hidden so he did not get one. Some of the Russian prisoners were older and hurt the Germans. He was able to move out when the Americans came. He went to Weimar, wearing his prisoner's uniform as he had nothing else to wear. The civilians were fearful of them as some civilians were beaten up. The prisoners were given one-half hour to beat them up. About 90 German soldiers were shot. He was 18 when he saw dogs eating people and people being hung.
- 35:00 Jacques was under threat of being shot in the ghetto before he was let go. He remained in Buchenwald after the Americans came. The Rabbi was an American Chaplain who worked on getting the children out of Buchenwald. The children were sent to Cuba, Switzerland, France, and Belgium. He was taken to the Rothschild's summer home with other children. They were given food and education. Eli Wiesel and Jacques' friend were geniuses. Some were sent to trade school.

40:00 Jacques came to the US a year later. He went from France to Sweden and then took the SS Gripsholm, which was converted from a military to a passage ship, across the Atlantic to NY. There were Russians and other immigrants who went to NY. There was no Ellis Island by then. His uncle in New Jersey was supposed to pick him up but could not so HIAS did so. His ghetto had removed all the Jews including his mother, sister, cousins and grandma, and transported them to the next town by horse and buggy. March was important as 100 Jewish prisoners died in the march to Gross Rosen (?). Some were shot in their legs and could not walk and then were shot to death. Many children his age had frozen legs. There were no girls with them, only women used as prostitutes marched along.

45:00 When he came to Paris, he roamed the streets and ran into a young girl who looked familiar. Mr. Riback (?), the guy he tried to drag, showed him a photo of his wife and children. She was the guy's daughter. He recognized her and they had the same last name and he told her that her father was alive and went to his home and saw him. Jacques never saw him again as he was busy with his own life. He was drafted into the Army.

50:00 At the hospital in Buchenwald, Jacques got two slices of bread a day in the barracks before he got sick. His brother saved his own ration for him and made a loaf of bread out of it. He shared it with him later. When his brother passed away, Jacques mentioned this incident to his friends. He spoke about Korea.

52:23