

## JACQUES ALTMANN

Jacques Altmann's youth and physical strength helped him to survive concentration camps including Auschwitz.

*"In France, there was a little of everything, courageous people and those who did nothing. One can't condemn everyone. I knew French people who were wonderful and who helped me a great deal. But it was hard to know whom to trust."*

Jacques Altmann was born in Paris and lived with his parents and four brothers in the suburb of Romainville. In 1940, when he was 17, Jacques stopped attending school. It was during the following year that he was arrested for hitting a French collaborator. Jacques escaped by stealing a bicycle and riding to another town. The second time, in 1943, he was less lucky. By then he was working with the Resistance, using false papers that disguised his Jewish identity. He assumed that someone had denounced him to the Gestapo. But because Jacques spoke German fluently—his mother was a German Jew—the Germans wanted to use him to catch other Resistance members.

His parents and brothers were deported in 1944, and Jacques never heard from them again. Three months after his family's arrest, Jacques's identity was discovered, and he was deported to Auschwitz. The trip lasted many days. The cattle cars were filled with the blind, the sick, pregnant women, children, and old people. Some died and some committed suicide. Escape was impossible. They were told that they were going to Poland, but nothing more. Jacques had heard on British radio that Jews were being burned in Poland, but he found the idea unthinkable.

Of some 1200 people who arrived in his transport, Jacques and only about 100 others, those who were strong and fit, escaped being immediately gassed. He was later transferred to other camps, ending up at Ohrdruf, a satellite of Buchenwald. The saddest moments for him were seeing his grandparents arrive in Theresienstadt and his friends starved or beaten to death by the SS. By the time that Jacques was liberated by the Americans in 1945, he had contracted malaria and typhus, and his weight had dropped from 65 to 29 kilos,

Jacques met his wife in 1956, and the two started rebuilding their lives. They live in Paris and are the parents of two daughters. Jacques is the flag bearer of the organization of Auschwitz survivors in Paris. He carries their flag, with which he was photographed, at all official occasions.

English Bio