



# Jack Adler: A Survivor's Story



[Home](#)

[About Jack](#)

[Contact](#)

[Links](#)

[Photos](#)

[Kid's  
Reactions](#)

## TEXT OF SPEECH GIVEN BY JACK ADLER TO WHITE HILL MIDDLE SCHOOL IN FAIRFAX, CALIFORNIA ON DECEMBER 5, 2003

First, I'd like to thank your school for allowing me to educate you first-hand what uncontrolled hatred did and can do to any group of people. That's why I volunteer to speak. I speak to thousands of students like you each year---because you represent the future of this great nation of ours and you should know what happens if we tolerate racism and bigotry. You have to make sure that it never happens again to any group of people. I speak to you as an eyewitness to the darkest pages in human history. It is the best---or maybe I should say the worst---example of man's inhumanity to man. I speak to you as a child survivor of the Holocaust who spent ages 10 to 16 under Nazi occupation in various places.

No child is born hating anyone. Hate is a learned experience. We learn it from our home and our social environment. When a child is raised in a hateful environment, he accepts the teachings of that environment. Rarely will a young child ask, "why hate someone who's never done anything to me"? It usually has to do with the target of hate being different---subscribing to a different religion or being a member of a different race. However, in Europe, that hatred was reinforced---to children and adults---by those they looked up to, including the Church and the State. So many at that time accepted it---that it was okay to hate certain people. And Adolph Hitler took it to the next level, preaching that those people have no right to live. After all, they are different than we are.

The climate for the Holocaust began to develop long before Hitler came to power. The Jewish people had been persecuted for many centuries in Europe. They were subjected to pogroms. Many were killed. Their property was destroyed. In 1492, **King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella** of Spain ordered the people of the Jewish faith to convert to Christianity. If they didn't convert, they could be expelled from the country. This period was known as the **Spanish Inquisition**. In 1520, **Martin Luther**, the founder of the Lutheran Church, after leaving the Catholic Church, wrote the most hateful things about the people of the Jewish faith. His writings demonized, dehumanized and stereotyped the Jewish people. All the ills in the world were blamed on the Jewish people. Related to this, **Adolph Hitler**, prior to gaining power, was briefly imprisoned at the Landsberg Am Lech prison in Germany where he wrote his book **Mein Kampf**. His expression of hatred toward the Jewish people, in the book, was based on the writings of Martin Luther. Also, **Joseph Goebbels**, the Nazi propaganda minister, justified the Holocaust, based on those writings.

Prior to becoming pope, **Pope Pius XII**, was a Papal Nuncio from the Vatican to Germany. That was kind of like being an ambassador. And when Adolph Hitler sought power in Germany, he and the future Pope made an agreement. The agreement was that, if the Rightest Party in Germany (which was the Catholic political party in



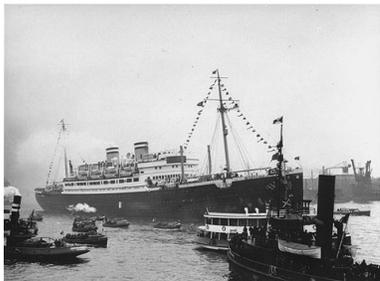
Germany) would vote for him, once he gained power he would allow the Catholic Church to establish parochial schools throughout Germany. And when the ambassador became Pope in 1939, and all during the Holocaust years, not once did he denounce the atrocities that were being committed against the Jewish people.



Pope Pius XII

Not only this, but when the war ended in 1945, many Nazi mass murderers were able to escape to South America by being provided false documentation from the Vatican and the International Red Cross. This is unlike what happened to the United States on September 11th, 2001, when more than 3,000 innocent Americans lost their lives. The United States, rightfully so, formed a coalition with other nations and pursued those evil beings to Afghanistan and other parts of the world. And the United States, not so long ago, removed the Hitler of the Middle East—**Saddam Hussein**, who was responsible for thousands of deaths of his own people. So far, we have found more than 240 mass graves in Iraq. Yes, once again, the United States did the right thing. However, when the Jewish people were being slaughtered during the Holocaust—six million—a million and a half of whom were children, the world, for the most part, was sic, S-I-C. Silent. Indifferent. Complacent. That includes our nation, the United States of America.

I'm very proud to be an American. I served my nation in war and in peace. However, sixty some years ago when the United States could have saved innocent lives, they refused to do so. Let me cite you some documented facts. When Mrs. **Eleanor Roosevelt**, the wife of then **President Franklin Delano Roosevelt**, heard what was happening to the Jewish people in Europe, under Nazi Occupation, she convinced the President (and she really had to convince him) to allow twenty-some thousand Jewish children to enter the United States. Mrs. Roosevelt wanted her husband to show the world that we cared. However, President Roosevelt gave the assignment to a known anti-Semite in the Department of State. His name was **Breckenridge Long**. Mr. Long immediately notified the various US Embassies in Europe, telling them not to do anything about it until he gave the go-ahead. He never did. And all those children perished in the gas chambers.

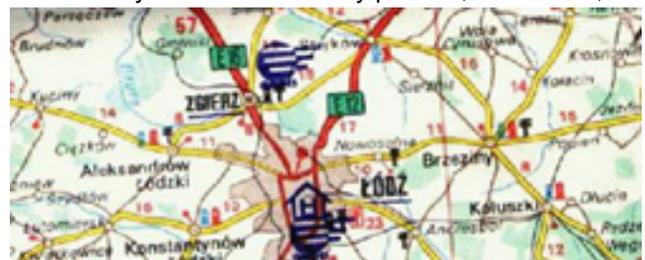


The SS St. Louis

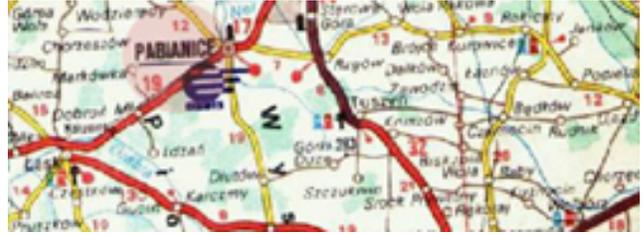
At about the same time, a ship by the name of the **SS St. Louis** sailed from Hamburg, Germany for Havana, Cuba with more than 1,000 German Jews aboard. They received a promise from the Cuban government that they'd be allowed to enter Cuba. However, when the ship arrived in Havana, only a handful were allowed to enter. So, out of desperation, the ship sailed for the United States of America. The ship entered in Miami, Florida. The people on board pled with the United States officials, explaining what was happening to the Jewish people in Europe. Their pleas fell on deaf ears. Having no other choice, the ship returned to Europe where most of the Jews on board perished in the Holocaust.

However, in my opinion, the most inexcusable act committed, occurred when the United States and British Air Forces were bombing Germany around the clock—Germany and its occupied lands—in 1943 and 1944, up until the end of the war in 1945. They were getting bombed five miles outside of the **Auschwitz and Birkenau** extermination and selection camps. The allies were asked—begged—to bomb the gas chambers in Birkenau, the crematorium and the railroad tracks leading into Auschwitz/Birkenau. (By the way, Auschwitz was the concentration camp and Birkenau was the extermination and selection camp. They were side by side.) The request was taken under consideration by an Assistant Secretary of State under Secretary of State Stinson. The assistant's name was **John McCloy**. He came back a couple of days later stating, "I'm sorry we cannot help you because we cannot divert the Air Force from their assignments." Ironically, accidentally once, the allies dropped a bomb into Auschwitz. If, as late as the beginning of 1944, we would have bombed just the railroad tracks, more than a million innocent lives would have been saved. So, as you can see, there is plenty of blame to go around.

I was born in the city of **Pabienice, Poland**. My immediate family numbered six—my parents, two sisters, a brother and me. We also had a large extended family—grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins. When the Nazi's occupied my hometown in the first week of September, 1939, my family numbered 83. As a 10-year old boy, I remember watching the occupation taking place in my hometown. I watched with excitement because I saw the local population embracing the German soldiers, handing them flowers, food, drinks. Not



in my wildest imagination could I ever envision what was in store for us. However, I didn't have to wait too long. For, within hours after the Occupation took place, notices were posted throughout the city, directed to the Jewish population, which numbered about 8,000. The notices told us that, effective immediately, no Jewish person is allowed to step outdoors unless he or she wears two yellow Stars of David attached to their clothing---one in the front and one in the back.



Effective immediately, no Jewish child is allowed to attend any public schools. Effective immediately, all Jewish houses of worship are to be shut down. I remember watching the destruction of the synagogue my family and I used to attend. It was destroyed primarily by the local population---people who used to be our neighbors---stripped completely of its interior and converted into a stable for horses.

And the beatings began. At random, Nazi soldiers would enter Jewish neighborhoods and select men and women, chasing us as if we were animals, with whips and dogs, forcing us into the town square. Once in the town square, the Jews were beaten---humiliated. If anyone objected to his or her treatment, they were shot on the spot. And those were daily occurrences. Within a couple months after the Nazis occupied my hometown, we were moved into a ghetto. The ghetto was an open ghetto in the old part of the city---meaning there was no barbed wire surrounding it. However, we had to obey a very strict curfew. We could only move within the ghetto during daylight hours. There was a main street that divided the ghetto in half, and we were allowed to cross the street only twice a day---once in the morning and once in the afternoon. Within the ghetto, the Nazis formed a Jewish Committee. Its primary functions were to provide the Nazis with slave laborers to work outside the ghetto. The selected Jews also distributed food to the ghetto residents. Our daily food ration was one slice of bread and a bowl of soup. Within months after moving into the ghetto, people were dying of malnutrition and disease. I lost my mother and my older brother in the ghetto of Pabienice.

In May of 1942, we were notified by the German Authority that our ghetto was being liquidated. They divided the inhabitants of the ghetto into two groups---A and B. We were told to be in front of our buildings on May 10th at 2 p.m. sharp. At 2 p.m. sharp, dozens of Nazi soldiers and officers arrived and marched us to the soccer field. When we arrived there, the field was divided in half, right down the middle. Group A was told to move to the left of the field, Group B to the right. Only then did we realize why we were divided into those two groups. In Group A, you found the old, the young and the sick. In Group B, you found those who the Nazis viewed as "able-bodied" men and women, who could perform slave labor. My little sister, who was then about 9 and-a-half years old, was in Group A. My father, older sister and I were in group B. About 7:00 in the evening, it was very dark---most of the lighting came from the headlights of the trucks as they moved in and out of the field. They started moving out people from Group A. About an hour or so later a couple Nazi officers walked up to Group B and asked for volunteers to pick up the debris that was left behind from those who were moved out from Group A. Things like articles of clothing, pieces of paper and so on. Hoping to see my little sister again, I volunteered. Each volunteer was given a baby carriage. In those days, they had those deep baby carriages. So, I slowly moved, bending down, picking up articles of clothing, pieces of paper---not to attract any attention towards Group A. And when I got close

enough and trucks were moving out and it was dark in the field, I called her name out. People who were still in Group A also called for her, trying to help me find her. To my surprise, she was still there---frightened, crying. I told her not to stand still, to move back and forth. And I told her when it gets dark again to jump into the baby carriage. And she did so. I slowly moved back to Group B where my father and older sister were waiting to hear from me, bending down again picking up pieces of paper and so on, not to attract any attention. When I got close enough, and the trucks moved out so it got dark, my father pulled her out from the carriage. The next day, we found out what happened to those who were in Group A. All of them were killed in the gas chambers of **Majdanek** and **Treblinka**. Many of them were our friends from the neighborhood and synagogue.



[Home](#)

[About Jack](#)

[Contact](#)

[Links](#)

[Photos](#)

[Kid's Reactions](#)



The Lodz Ghetto

In the meantime, Group B was moved to the **Ghetto of Lodz**. The Nazis called it **Litzmantschater Ghetto**. The Ghetto of Lodz was huge. The population exceeded 300,000 people. The ghetto was surrounded by barbed wire. Every ten or twelve feet, there was a tower in which a Nazi guard was stationed with a submachine gun to make sure that no one escaped. People tried to escape every day. They were killed on the spot. Within the ghetto, the Nazis created all kinds of factories to make war machinery. I was assigned to work in a straw factory where the Nazis ordered us to manufacture straw shoes to be worn by the Nazi soldiers who were then fighting the Russian Army on the Eastern Front. The shoes were designed to keep their feet warm in the frigid temperatures. And once again, the average daily food ration in the ghetto of Lodz consisted of a slice of bread and a bowl of soup. The bowl of soup, however, was given to us at work. So, many people who were sick and too weak to work, forced themselves to go to work so they could receive the second half of their daily food ration—the bowl of soup. People were dying in the ghetto, being killed in the ghetto, taken out of the ghetto by the thousands. When the ghetto was being liquidated in the summer of 1944, there were fewer than 68,000 left in the ghetto of Lodz. Remember, there used to be more than 300,000.

Those remaining 68,000 people were, once again, informed by the Nazi Authorities that the ghetto was being liquidated. We were told to report to the railroad station, approximately 5,000 people per day. Once we arrived at the railroad station, we were herded into cattle cars and boxcars, packed like sardines in a can. We could only stand. There was no room to lie down or to sit. No water or food was provided. Once a boxcar was filled to its maximum capacity and the doors were shut, we traveled to an unknown destination. It took about two days. When we finally arrived at that unknown destination and doors to the boxcar opened, we were greeted by Nazi soldiers and officers shouting at us to disembark at once, line up five across and march forward. Men in one place, women in another. Other prisoners greeted us. Their job was to take away whatever personal belongings one brought along. They whispered to us, "look strong, if you want to live. You've just arrived at the Auschwitz/Birkenau Extermination and Selection Camp".

[Home](#)

[About Jack](#)

[Contact](#)

[Links](#)

[Photos](#)

[Kid's  
Reactions](#)



The entrance to Auschwitz. The sign translates to:  
"Work will make you free"

We marched forward to the selection process—which was being conducted by **Dr. Joseph Mengele** and his henchmen. Mengele was known as the "Angel of Death." When you approached them they looked you over. If you looked strong enough to be able to perform some slave labor, you were ordered to move to the left. The old, the sick and the young were ordered to move to the right. That included my little sister, who I was able to protect for

two years. Those who were ordered to move to the right were told they would be taking a shower. As they were ordered to remove all their clothing, they were told to remember the hook number on which they hung their clothing. That way, when they returned from the shower, they would be able to retrieve their own clothing. They were herded into a huge room. It had shower heads throughout the ceiling. Once the room was filled, the doors shut. But, instead of water, **Zyclon B** gas came out. Within minutes they were all dead. Then the bodies were taken to the crematoriums where they were all burned.

Many women who arrived at Auschwitz/Birkenau, were deemed strong enough to do slave labor for the Nazis. However, they held infants in their arms and would not part with their children. A Nazi officer would walk up to such a woman, tear the baby out of her arms. The mother would plead to the soldier to not harm the infant. And in front of her very eyes, he would throw the baby up in the air and use it for target practice. Those were the "heroes" of the Third Reich. The irony of it is, a person who could commit such evil was also able to go home on leave, play with his own children, go to church and pray, and then return to Auschwitz to continue the very same thing.

I was 15 when I arrived at Auschwitz/Birkenau and, along with a group of other boys about my same age, was selected by Dr. Joseph Mengele. He was actually a medical doctor. But he loved to perform all kinds of experiments, medical and other, on the prisoners—especially young adults and children. The first night in camp, when I went to the latrine, I heard someone call out my name. As I turned around, I recognized a friend of my father's. He walked up to me and told me my father was looking for me. He asked me what barrack I was in. And when I told him, he knew exactly what would happen to the children in that barrack. He took my hand and led me to my father's barracks. The routine in Birkenau was to fall out in front of the barracks early every morning to be counted and to go through a selection process where the Nazis would choose prisoners to go to work at various concentration camps. After being counted the next morning, there was one too many prisoners in my father's barracks. The officer who had done the counting said, "Whoever doesn't belong here, step forward at once or you'll be shot". My father whispered to me to not move. So they had to count all the barracks. After a couple of hours, word came that there was a young boy missing from my barracks. Fortunately for me, the commanding officer was a little tired. He didn't want to waste any more time. So, he walked up and down the row of prisoners and just pulled out the youngest-looking face and sent him in my place. After the war, at the **Nuremberg Trials**, we found out what happened to those unfortunate boys in my barracks. They were selected for experiments, conducted on behalf of the German Luftwaffe, the German Air Force. The German Air Force wanted to know how much pressure the human body could withstand. Each boy was placed into a pressure chamber. Once inside, the pressure was gradually increased until their eardrums and eyeballs popped out and they died.

My father and I remained at Birkenau for two weeks. Every day we had to go through a selection process through which the Nazi officers sent prisoners to various concentration camps. After two weeks we were sent to the concentration camp of Kaufering, in Germany. Even though, by 1944, the Nazis knew they were losing the war, in Kaufering they built eleven new camps. My father and I were sent to Camp #4. The camp was small in comparison to Auschwitz or Birkenau. Each camp accommodated approximately 10,000 prisoners. The barracks were very small. What you could see of the barracks from the outside was like a "V"-shaped roof on which grass grew. You stepped down into the barrack about three steps. There was a walkway in the center and a window at the other end. And there were two shelves with straw on each side, where 50 prisoners would sleep. The routine in **Kaufering**. We had to get up at 5:00 in the morning, straighten out the barracks and fall out in front of the barracks. At 6:00 they would march us in four groups of 500 each to work. As we left camp we received half of our daily food ration—a slice of bread. We marched for about an hour. We worked from 7:00 in the morning until 7:00 in the evening. At noon, we received a 15-minute lunch break. And that's when we received the second half of our daily food ration—a bowl of soup. My father and I were assigned to work at a construction site where the Nazis were building underground hangars for airplanes. Our assignment was to carry bags of cement as they arrived by rail, from the trains to the actual construction site, back and forth, twelve hours a day, seven days a week. And if you didn't move fast enough to the likings of the guards, they would beat you. One particular guard had a broomstick with a nail on the end. If you didn't move fast enough, he would jab you in the neck with the pointed end of the nail. I still have a scar on my neck from it.

Six months after we arrived at the Kaufering concentration camp, half of the prisoners had either been killed or had died. So, as they reorganized the camps, I was separated from my father and was sent to the concentration camp of **Dachau**. In Dachau, I would say more than 90% of the prisoners were not Jewish. You could find every European nationality in Dachau, including many Germans who were political prisoners, gypsies, homosexuals and convicts. However, I continued to work at the same construction site. And by then, I also worked for the commanding officer at Dachau. He was an SS Colonel. He used me as a clean-up boy for his office. My duties including making sure there was enough wood for his wood-burning stove, sweeping the floor, dusting the furniture and so on. Daily, the first thing I would do was sit on the floor and empty the ashes from his stove. And daily, within the ashes, I would find pieces of bread and bacon, neatly wrapped in wax paper. The colonel

purposely would throw it into the stove for me to find. I believe that saved my life.

In March of 1945, the Nazis allowed the **International Red Cross** to enter Dachau to distribute food packages to the non-Jewish prisoners. However, some of the non-Jews did have some food left over and they gave it to the young Jewish prisoners. I received one of those food packages. I immediately opened it up, took all of its contents out and hid the food above my belt line. I hid it on my body so no one would steal any of it from me. Even though the Nazis didn't tolerate that, it still happened occasionally. And as I stated, we marched to and from work in groups of 500, guarded front, back and sides by Nazi soldiers. The day after I received my leftovers, one of the Nazi guards approached me and asked me if I received a food package yesterday. I said, "Yes, Sir." "Do you still have the sugar?" he asked. There was usually a small bag of sugar in the package—maybe a pound or a pound and a half. When I said I still had it, he opened the duffel bag he was carrying over his shoulder and took out a slice of bread, and showing it to me he said, "If you give me the sugar, every day I will give you a slice of bread like this". I gladly turned the sugar over to him, because the bread, to me, was far more important. So, the following day I made sure, as we marched to work, that I was on the outside where he was guarding us. I wanted him to see me so he could give me the slice of bread. After marching about 15 or 20 minutes, he passed me by. I looked at him and he looked at me and he asked me, in German, "What do you want?" I thought maybe he didn't recognize me. So I told him, "I'm the one that gave you the sugar yesterday. You promised me a slice of bread every day." But instead of giving me the bread, he took the rifle that he was carrying and he hit me with the butt of the rifle, in my rib cage. I collapsed. Two other prisoners had to help me get to work.

When I came into the commanding officer's office later that day, as I stated, the first thing I used to do was sit down on the floor and clean the ashes from his wood stove. After I finished doing so, I couldn't stand up because I was in so much pain. I started to cry. And the colonel—an SS Colonel, the Commanding Officer—got up from behind his desk, walked up to me and spoke to me. It was the first time an officer, especially a Nazi officer, spoke to me like I was a human being. He asked me, "What is wrong my boy?" Even though I realized that informing on a Nazi soldier—especially informing on him to his superior officer—could lead to some very bad consequences for me, I was in so much pain I didn't care anymore. I wouldn't have cared if he killed me. So, I told the colonel what had happened. To my surprise, he said to me, "Tonight when we fall in for the march back to camp, point out the guard to me." I said to myself, he just asked me to sign my own death certificate. So, I hid to the rear of the group. After being counted, and getting ready to march back to camp, the colonel ordered the group to halt. When he saw me, he motioned me to come forward. Then, he ordered me to point out the guard. Reluctantly, I did so. So, marching back to camp, I'm hiding in the middle of the group of 500 prisoners so the guard wouldn't see me. Nothing happened. The following day, the same thing. I'm hiding in the middle of the 500 prisoners, and after marching for a while I could see this guard pacing up and down looking into each row of prisoners. I said to

myself, "uh-oh, here comes another beating." Maybe he would even kill me. And nobody would do anything to him. After all, I was not considered a human being. However, to my surprise, as he passed me, he handed me a slice of bread. I couldn't believe it! When I went back into the Commanding Officer's office—at practically the moment I opened the door—he approached me and asked me, "Did the guard give you any bread today?" I said, "Yes, Sir". He said, "every day he is to give you a slice of bread, as he promised you. If he fails to do so, for even one day, you let me know. I will deal with him." Now, this was a decent human being. Yes, he was an SS Colonel. And I'm sure there were many others like him who got caught up in something over their heads. When they had the opportunity to do something decent, they did not hesitate to do so. And maybe this colonel knew the war was coming to an end and what he had done as a soldier was wrong.

We remained at the Dachau concentration camp until April 27th, 1945. That day, 10,000 of us were marched out of Dachau, 2,000 at a time. The procession has since been documented as the "**Death March**." The Nazi guarded us as we marched all day long. At night, they would chase us into the woods and cut off a tail end from each group of 2,000. They would chase those who were cut-off to the other side of the woods. That group was given shovels and ordered to dig a huge ditch. When the ditch was completed, they were all machine-gunned to death. We were liberated early in the morning on May 1st, 1945 by the United States Army. There were less than 4,000 of us left. I was 16. I weighed 66 pounds and I was sick with what turned out to be double pneumonia. I was immediately hospitalized in a newly established DP Camp, a Displaced Person's Camp, in the city of Fierenwald, Germany. During my hospitalization, which lasted about three months, the International Red Cross along with the **UNRRA**, the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, conducted surveys of survivors throughout Europe and compiled lists of survivors. Those lists were given to the various DP Camps. It was then that I found out that I was the sole survivor of my immediate family of six, and one of only five survivors of my extended family of 83.

I was brought to the United States as a war orphan in 1946, and placed in a foster home in Chicago, Illinois. Soon, I attended night school, I finished high school, then attended college. I served in the United States Army during the

[Home](#)

[About Jack](#)

[Contact](#)

[Links](#)

[Photos](#)

[Kid's](#)

[Reactions](#)

Korean conflict. I have two wonderful children. My son lives here in San Francisco and happens to be in the audience tonight. My son has two children, a son and a daughter. Both of them attended this middle school. The son now attends Drake High School, where I spoke yesterday. The daughter attends the University of Colorado in Boulder. I also have a daughter who lives in Denver, Colorado. She is married and has two boys, both of whom are in high school. You know, the war ended so many years ago and many people ask why we should continue to talk about the Holocaust.

Well, there have been many recent holocausts and there are still some going on in this world. In Yugoslavia, the Christians were killing the Muslims. In Africa---Rwanda, Somalia, Zaire---millions have died. In Ireland---Irish Catholics are killing Irish Protestants and vice versa. In the Middle East, the Israelis and the Arabs have been killing each other since the formation of the State of Israel in 1948. And in spite of the overwhelming evidence documenting the Holocaust, there are still quite a few people in the world today---including people in the United State---who deny that it ever happened. To me, those are ignorant, bitter, evil beings masquerading as human beings. They are hate mongers who, if given the opportunity, would like to do the same thing the Nazis did. America is not perfect, but it is the greatest nation in the history of civilization---the greatest democracy ever.

We number more than 280 million people, represented by every race, ethnicity and religious group. It's a diversity we ought to be proud of---we ought to embrace. It's diversity that built and is continuing to build this great nation of ours. However, we also have within our nation hate groups who are ready and willing to tear this great nation apart---hate groups like the Ku Klux Klan, the Aryan Nation, the Nation of Islam, skinheads and many others. It's up to you to make sure they are never able to do so. Living in a diverse society such as ours, it would be nice if we loved or even liked everyone. We don't. And we really don't have to. It would be nice if we did. However, in order for us to survive as a nation, in order for humanity to survive, we need to learn to respect one another. You don't have to love me. You don't have to like me. Just respect me as a human being. Mutual respect is the glue that holds civility together. Mutual respect is the key to co-existence. Unless humanity is willing to co-exist, I'm afraid we will gradually cease to exist. As a guiding light, live by the Golden Rule. To paraphrase it, "Don't do to others that you don't like to have done to you". I wish you all a bright, safe and successful future---free from hatred. Thank you.

*"My revenge to Hitler and the Nazi's is my family"*

--Jack Adler

[Home](#)

[About Jack](#)

[Links](#)



[Photos](#)

[Kid's Reactions](#)

[Contact](#)