

Good afternoon. And welcome to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. My name is Bill Benson. I am the host of the museum's public program, First Person. This is our fourth season of First Person. And our First Person today is Mrs. Regina Spiegel. And we shall meet Regina, shortly.

First Person is a series of weekly conversations, with survivors of the Holocaust, who share with us, firsthand, their own personal accounts of their time during the Holocaust and during World War II. Each First Person guest presently serves as a volunteer, here, at the museum. Each Wednesday, until August 27th, we will have a First Person guest.

The museum's website, at www.ushmm.org, that's www.ushmm.org, provides a list of those who will be the First Person guests in the coming weeks.

This 2003 season of First Person is made possible through the generosity of the Woldenberg Foundation to whom we are grateful for sponsoring this year's program.

Regina Spiegel will share her First Person account, of her experience during the Holocaust and as a survivor, for about 40 minutes. We will follow that with an opportunity for you to ask Regina some questions. Before you are introduced to Regina, I have a couple of requests for you.

First, we hope that you will stay in your seats throughout this one-hour program. That will minimize any disruptions while Regina is speaking. And second, during the question and answer period, if you have a question, and we sure hope that you will, please make your question as brief as you can. And then I will repeat the question before Regina answers. By repeating it, that ensures that everybody, in the room, hears the question, including Regina.

I'd also like to let those of you who may be holding passes for the permanent exhibition, at either 1:30 or 1:45, know they are good for the balance of the afternoon. So you have no reason to think that you're going to miss the permanent exhibition if you stay till the end of the First Person program.

The Holocaust was the state-sponsored systematic persecution and annihilation of European Jewry, by Nazi Germany and its collaborators, between 1933 and 1945. Jews were the primary victims. Six million were murdered. Gypsies, the handicapped, and Poles were also targeted, for destruction or decimation, for racial, ethnic, or national reasons. Millions more, including homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, Soviet prisoners-of-war, and political dissidents also suffered grievous oppression and death under Nazi tyranny.

As you will learn, today, Regina was just 13 years old when Germany invaded Poland, where she lived in the city of Radom. Regina was later forced into slave labor, before eventually being sent to Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen, and then liberated.

We've prepared a brief slide presentation to help with Regina's introduction. And our first photo is of Regina. Regina Gutman was her family name, who was born May 12th, 1926, in Radom, Poland. Radom was a vibrant, Jewish community of some 30,000 people.

We next have a map of Europe, of course, showing Germany and then an arrow pointing to Poland and a more detailed map of Poland, with our arrow pointing to the location of Radom, in central Poland. On September 1, 1939, Germany invaded Poland. And 7 days later, Radom was occupied.

In this photograph, Adolf Hitler, in the lower-right, gives the Nazi salute as he reviews victorious German troops in Warsaw, Poland, on October 5, 1939. In 1941, German authorities ordered all Jews in Radom to move into the newly created ghetto. And here, we have a map of the ghettos in occupied Poland.

The Gutman family was forced to live in one small room. And conditions inside the ghetto were very poor. Regina's parents decided to smuggle her out of the ghetto by bribing one of the guards. She escaped to Pionki, where her older sister lived. In this photo, we have Regina's other sister, Chanka.

Regina's soon was conscripted, however, for forced labor in the town's munitions factory. And there she formed a close relationship with Sam Spiegel, a fellow inmate. In the fall of 1944, Regina was deported to Auschwitz. And here, we have the deportation routes, out of the ghettos, to Auschwitz. This photo and our next photo is a view of the kitchen barracks, the electrified fence, and the gate at the main camp of Auschwitz-Birkenau.

In the foreground, in the lower-left, is the sign, "Arbeit Macht Frei," or "work makes one free." After being transferred to several other camps, Regina was liberated by Soviet troops in April 1945. She went to the Foehrenwald displaced persons camp in Bavaria, which the arrow points to. And this is a map of the Jewish displaced persons camps, the major camps in Europe.

Regina was reunited with her boyfriend, Sam Spiegel. And they were married in the camp. And our next two pictures are from their wedding.

Today, Regina lives here, in Washington DC, with her husband, Sam. And Sam is with us, today. Sam, you might raise your hand if you don't mind. Regina volunteers, here, at the museum, at the membership and donors desk. She speaks about her experience during the Holocaust, frequently, to a wide variety of groups, such as an annual talk that she does to students at Georgetown Prep. She's also spoken at my daughter's high school. Regina and Sam have three daughters and 9 grandchildren, the most recent of whom was born this past year.

And with that, I'd like to ask you to join me in welcoming our First Person, Ms Regina Spiegel.

[APPLAUSE]

Yeah? Good. Thank you.

Regina, thank you for joining us and for your willingness to be our First Person today. In September 1939, just a few days after the Germans invaded Poland, they came into your city, of Radom. Perhaps we could begin today by you sharing with us a little about your community, your life, your family in those years before the German occupation and invasion of Poland.

Thank you, Bill. I'd love to do that. Because I know we always talk about six million Jews that perished during the Holocaust and five million others, but I always think-- because numbers, big numbers, I, even myself, even though I lived there, it's very hard to comprehend.

I always think back of my family, of my wonderful parents, my sisters, one of which you saw. I was lucky, by chance, I got this picture from somebody-- a granddaughter of my uncle's, who moved to California. And she was looking through some boxes and didn't know who that picture belonged to. But luckily, the picture had the name, Radom. And she figured, Radom? Regina might know who it is. And it turned out, it was one of my sisters. So you can imagine how I felt.

I had a wonderful family. I had three more sisters. I had two brothers, of which, actually, my oldest brother did survive. Because he never was, during the Holocaust, in Poland. He happened to be-- he was the oldest one in my family. He happened to be on a vacation in England and decided not to come back home. But he couldn't stay in England.

So what did he do? He apparently was very-- he was kind an entrepreneur. And he managed to join the coast guard. And went-- made sure that they traveling to New York. And when the ship docked in New York, he jumped out of the ship. And he escaped.

He managed to kind of hide out till the United States declared war. And he joined the American Army. They of course, didn't ask him, are you a citizen or Not and that's how he actually became a citizen. And that's how he survived. So I always can pride myself that I actually had a brother who maybe helped, in some small, little way, trying to win the war.

And I have to go back to the rest of my family. We lived in Radom. I went to school and had a pretty good childhood. Or I thought, actually, that was a wonderful childhood. I had wonderful friends. Went to school. But as soon as the

Germans came in, into our town, would you believe that the first order of business they managed to do is say, Jewish children are not allowed to go back to school.

Now, you know it was September 1st, the war broke out. They came in September 8. Just like in the United States, in September, you start back school. We, the Jewish children, were not allowed to go to school. So of course, the older people in our community, what they tried to do is take the kids, take them into, like, cellars, and teach them a little bit how to read. Because, after all, I was 13 years old. I already knew how to read and write. But there were kids that actually was the first year for them.

So they were so worried that, if they open the schools, these kids won't be able to keep up with their work. But of course, they didn't have to worry about that. Because they never reopened the schools for the children. Because, first of all, Hitler and the henchmen really had no use-- and especially for Jewish children. Because most of these kids never even had a chance.

So life was going on. I was going. I actually had just finished seventh grade. I also attended a Jewish day school, where they taught me about religion. Most of my family was fairly religious, as it was, but taught me about the holidays.

And I happen to have been one of those kids that really loved that school. And to this day, I think that probably, through the years in the camps, that little bit of learning, about your Jewish background, helped me kind of take the abuse a little bit more. Because I think that I managed to ignore a lot of the abuse. Because I felt that, hey, this is not what Judaism teaches you. You're not supposed to be like that. So I actually think that, to a certain degree, it helped me a lot.

But of course, this wasn't enough for them. Because the minute they came in, not only these orders, just like you saw on the video a little bit, they started ghettos. All the Jews, in our town, had to wear an armband. Because, when you walked out in the street, they wanted to make sure that you were identifiable. Because, when I walked out in the street, nobody knew whether I was Jewish or not, unless somebody pointed it out to the SS. But otherwise, they didn't know.

So what did they do? They made you wear the armband. Now, of course, a lot of times, you didn't always wear it. But, if they stopped you in the street, and you didn't wear your armband, you were beaten or your family could have been punished. So you made pretty sure, when you walked out, to wear that armband.

Regina?

Yeah?

If you don't mind my asking, you also told me that one of the first things that happened was that your father lost his job, almost immediately. Tell us a little bit about what your father's occupation was, and then, when he lost his ability to work, how did the family-- how did they feed you? How did you make ends meet?

You know, that's a very interesting question. Because most people don't realize what was happening to the Jewish population. Because the minute-- even before the Germans even walked in, your accounts in the banks were closed up. And know your livelihood-- my father lost his livelihood. And hadn't it been for my older sister, who lived like 30 kilometers away from our place, probably my family would have starved even before they even pushed us into the ghettos.

And what my father did? He had a job. And to tell you the truth, all these years, I have never been able to find out what it's called. But it was something. Radom was a city where it was-- it had a lot-- they made a lot of shoe manufacturing. It was a lot there. They made a lot of shoes, because they had a lot of tanneries, where they had a lot of factories from that.

And my father was involved with that. He was cutting the soft part of the leather. And I don't know what it's called here. At home, it was called [NON-ENGLISH]. He was cutting the soft part. He had two partners, where they would take that cut up leather and put together the top of your shoes. And then was sent to somebody else, where they would put the whole thing together. And it became a shoe. So that's how much I know about my father.

He had a wonderful job, took care of all of us. We never lacked for anything. We were not rich people. But there was always stress on education, always stress on charity. Because my mother always used to say, there is always somebody who has a little bit less than you have. So you always have to be charitable.

Regina, then, of course, as you started to tell us that, quickly, you were forced into a ghetto in Radom. Tell us what life was like, for you and your family, in the ghetto, in Radom.

Well, you see, once they got us in the ghettos, they had us. And by the way, the ghetto, in our town, started in 1940. So it didn't take them too long to get us. Because what was happening? And once you were in the ghetto, you were isolated from the rest of the population. Because till then, you were able to barter a little bit, whatever you had. You had to give up jewelry or fur coat. But you kept a little bit back. You gave up some. You kept back. So you were able to barter a little bit, with the Polish population, that you were able to get a little bit extra food.

But once we got into the ghettos, we were isolated from the rest of the population. We had no access anymore to this. And that's where things got, at the time, that my sister came in. Because she was a dentist. And she worked in a small town with another woman, a dentist. And she was actually working and making money. And she managed to supply us with food.

And in the ghetto, it became really horrible. Because I always say that, especially for the children of the ghetto, because being-- I think older people manage a little bit hunger, a little bit better than, I think, children. And when you always have kids begging, some food, some food, that's what makes it very hard for the parents.

And I think that what was happening, also, that when they were actually getting the people out from the ghettos, people were leaving willingly. Because why? You say, they let you out? You just went? Because they figured-- they told them. They didn't tell you that they're going to ship you to a place called Treblinka, which was actually like a death factory.

What they told you? We're going to ship you east. You're going to have a job. You're going to be able to feed your families. So once they heard that, hey, we're going to work. How much worse can it get? So actually, they went, willingly, into these trains, where they shipped them. Of course, now, we know where they went. There was no coming back from a place like Treblinka.

I, while in the ghetto, because when the things were getting so bad, I remember, one time, while we were trying to figure out how maybe one of us should get out of there, it was decided, because I was the youngest one-- and probably any child that is here, that is the youngest one will know they always pick on the youngest one.

Because I actually had the biggest fight with my parents when it was decided that I should leave the ghetto. Because, no matter how bad the things were, you still wanted to be with your family. You have the love of your family. But once your parents told you, you do it, you did.

As a matter of fact, to tell you the truth, when I got out from the ghetto and the guard was bribed, I actually didn't take off my armband till I got to the ghetto gate. Because I actually wanted the guard to send me back. I didn't want to go. But he turned his head away, and I had no choice. I took off my armband. And I got to my sister's.

And once I got to Pionki, unlike Radom, which had like about 30,000 Jews. It was a city of about 125,000 of which 30,000 were Jews. Pionki had a very small Jewish population, only about 30 families. So they didn't make a ghetto there. They just restricted the Jews to be, in a certain area, in one street. But like my sister was able to go out, from there, to work. And I, myself, started roaming around the streets. I felt like a free bird, all of a sudden, even though I still had to wear my armband. But I felt like a free bird.

Regina, I'm going to take you back, just a minute, if I might.

Yeah.

As you've explained to us, your family gathered around, essentially, and said, we're going to get you, the youngest child,

out of here and send you to the oldest daughter living in the town of Pionki. The guard was bribed at the gate. And you were able to walk out.

Yeah.

Tell us about getting from Radom to Pionki.

Oh, that was interesting. Because I got on a train. And I remember, many years ago, when the airlines used to have the ads, where, if you fly with an adult, the kid flies free or your companion flies free. I didn't have any money with me. When I got to the train station and I got on the train, what I did? I sat down next a woman. And of course, I was a kid. I still liked to talk a lot, as you can see.

[LAUGHTER]

And I started talking to the woman. So when the conductor came by, asking for the tickets, he ignored me, completely, because he figured I probably was with this woman. So that's how I was able even to get. I know. You see, the problem is, when you have to start giving all the details, we would have to stay here a couple of weeks. So I usually--

[LAUGHTER]

--start skipping. But really, all these things are very interesting-- to know how one managed to get from one place to the other. And I was lucky, because, if somebody would have said to them-- because there were always SS around. And if somebody-- that's all they had to do is point out, hey, this is a Jude. They didn't have to take a risk. Because, if I wasn't a Jew, I had nothing to worry. But if I am a Jew, I had to show papers. And on our papers, it said, right away, Jude, right away. So there was no such thing hiding.

But anyhow, I got to that city. And that little Pionki, I used to go there before the war, even, on the summer vacations. I used to go there, quite often. But I never realized what a important little town it was. It had one of the largest munitions factories in Poland. And therefore, it became really a great factor in my survival and the survival of many others.

And I remember, I told you, I was roaming around the streets. My sister had a very good friend, who happened to be, actually, the engineer of this particular factory. And he came to my sister and said, you know, I saw your sister roaming around the streets. I don't think it's a very good idea. I think you should take her in and get her in, for a job, into that factory. Because I don't know where they're being taken. But, usually, they pick up people, and they disappear. We don't know where they're taking them, but they just disappear. And we don't hear from them.

So, of course, my sister listens to him and marches, with me, into this factory. And she wants to register me to work. And guess what? They have strict labor laws. You know, it's a wonderful thing, strict labor laws but not always. Because they wouldn't take me. Because I don't qualify. Because in Pionki, you had to be 16 years old. To this day, I can't figure them out. Because they were killing people for nothing. And here, they tried to keep everybody-- should be, you were under 16, you can't go to work.

But of course, this same man, who was not Jewish, he made my papers over to show that I was 16. And I was able to get in, later on. As a matter of fact, to this day, I wish my sister had given me his name, so I could put his name on the Righteous Gentiles.

Why? Because he actually helped save my life. And he made papers over not only for me. Apparently, he made other papers for a lot of other people. Because, later on, he was picked up. And he was sent, I think, to this wonderful place, Auschwitz. And he never came back.

Regina, you were in Pionki working, as a slave laborer, until 1944.

Yeah.

Before we talk about your life after Pionki, tell us about your sister, a little bit more about your sister.

Well, my sister, also, later on, went into that camp. But I told you, in that camp, no children. So my sister had a little baby, who was 18 months old. And she gave him away to a Polish family. And she figured, eventually-- because, actually, she was promised that they would take in the baby later on. But they couldn't in the beginning. But the woman kept the baby for about six months. And she gave him, brought him into the Gestapo, and told them where my sister was.

It's a matter of fact, after the war, I went to see her. I was still a young-- youngish, you know, I was under 20. And I didn't realize what it meant. Because what I asked her? I said, if you were afraid to keep the baby, why didn't you just give him away and didn't tell them where my sister was? She said, she couldn't do that.

And another thing, what she told me, that she actually was not afraid of the Germans coming in, into her little street, to her house. She was actually afraid of her neighbors that they would denounce her, that she is harboring a Jewish child.

And in Poland, unlike some other countries, if you harbored a Jewish child and you were found out, your fate was almost the same as that of the Jews. So she was afraid. And they took my sister out.

And later on, I found out, when my sister saw how they were shoveling people into these cattle trains, she figured that she, as an adult, has a chance. But a baby, who was then about two years old, would never make it. She grabbed the baby. And she tried to run away. And she and the baby were shot. Without any questions, what's your reason for the escape or anything, just shot them. So, of course, it was a bleak day for me when I found out.

But life goes on. And I stayed in this camp. And of course, I also met a friend in this camp. Like Mr Benson said, I had the good fortune of-- this was one of the few camps, slave labor camps, in Poland, that men and women actually worked together. And I happened to meet a young man.

And we fell in love. So it goes to show you, that no matter how bad circumstances are, sometimes, if young people get the chance to meet, something happens. They fall in love. And luckily, I was lucky that he managed to survive, too. So after the war, I didn't have to go looking for a husband. I had one ready-made waiting for me.

Although there's a lot more to that story. It wasn't just simply having them ready there at the end.

Absolutely.

Regina, in 1944, you were forced out of Pionki. And tell us, then, what happened to you.

Well, Pionki was a slave labor camp. It was hard work. But also, the war-- you see, as I'm talking to you, this is already 1944. Time doesn't stay still. And the Germans decide that maybe the Russians were moving in, that these people have to be gotten rid of. And they had a really wonderful place for us.

In 1944, they give order to stop the factory. And they give orders that all of us have to go on these cattle trains. Didn't tell us where they are resettling us. During the Holocaust, resettlement was a very big word. They used it quite a bit. Resettled where?

Well, by the time they pushed us into these cattle trains, by the time they brought us to that place, when they opened these cattle trains, half of our transport was practically dead. The SS, with the dogs, standing and chasing us out, yelling, raus, raus, macht schnell.

And my boyfriend was with me in the same cattle car. And he managed to say-- because he looked around, and he saw that this place was a little bit different than the slave labor camp. He said, if we ever get out from this place, meet me in my hometown. And I wanted to say-- of course, I didn't know about women's lib then. I wanted to say, why your town? Why not my town?

[LAUGHTER]

But we managed. But anyhow, they took us on these trains. When we got there, I want to tell you, when we got out, when we looked around, it looked like this was a different world. It didn't look real. The whole place, like what you saw there, you saw that sign, Arbeit Macht Frei. Don't you ever believe it. It doesn't make you free. Because this place was without description.

I always like to quote this wonderful, wonderful writer, that he was in Auschwitz nine months. And probably, I always think, anybody that was in this place and came out, being nine months, can't live with themselves. He was Primo Levi. And he always used to say that, in order to describe the concentration camps and the ghetto, during that time, the whole English language will have to be revised. Because there is no description.

That place was really-- like I always think when Dante wrote *The Inferno*, that he probably-- how in the heck he could have this place in mind. Because that place, as you looked around, it was like wasteland, electric barbed wire, not single, double, with guards standing around. And the minors infraction that you made, they were ready to shoot.

They told us to strip naked, pushed us into showers. In our case, we were lucky, because we actually came out from these showers wet, especially the women, minus our hair. Because women and men were separated there. Then, they gave us a number.

This is one of the few camps. Most camps had numbers. Every haftling had a number. They either had it written out or sewn up. But in Auschwitz-Birkenau they tattooed on you this number. My number became 14641. And from then on, all of a sudden, I wasn't anymore Regina. I was this number. If they called you and you didn't answer it, you were practically beaten to death. We saw that we were in a lot of trouble when we came out from there.

So what happened to us there? As we walked out from the showers, whoever happened to be next to me became like your buddy. And we like would take care of one another. And that's what helped us a little bit, also, how to survive.

Because I will never forget, one time standing, on an Appell, which means counting. They were constantly counting you. Obsessed with it, as if you had a chance to escape. I don't know, have you been up already in the permanent exhibit?

No, not yet? The wonderful clothing that they gave you, you'll probably see it. And I happen to have a picture of this. This is the clothing that they put it on. That's all we had. And they gave us some clogs, which was wooden clogs. And that's what we were walking around in. Cold, snow, rain, it didn't make any difference. This was our outfit. Luckily, they gave us a little, like a blanket, so we always carried that around with it.

Food? Minimal. And one day, we were lucky, because when the buyers were coming around to look us over, how great we look without food? How great can you look? They were looking around to see whether maybe we are still fit for work. I actually was picked with my body. We were picked to be taken out of there. And that's what I think saved our lives.

Because I say, this place, if you stay longer-- I stayed in that place six weeks. To this day, I think had I been one week longer, I wouldn't have been here. Because it was almost impossible. You had-- it was so degrading, constantly. You had time. I didn't work, really, in that place. What we did is carry stones from one side to the other. The next day, we would take the same stones, carry it to the other place. So all of a sudden, you had a little bit time to think what was happening to you and no end to it, like sometimes.

But we felt like somebody has to live through. Because, actually, it was very easy to commit suicide over there. And they actually sometimes encouraged you, because that's all you had to do is touch the electric barbed wire, and you were finished. But we said to one another, hey, somebody has to manage to stay alive. Because we thought that the whole world didn't know anything what was going on. Because how could a world stand by, silently, and do nothing and let something like this happen to innocent people?

Regina, when you were taken from Birkenau, to go into various slave labor camps from there yet, did Sam go at the same time?

I really didn't know. Because, once we were separated, I already didn't know what was happening to him. As it turned out, he didn't stay there quite as long as I did. They took him out, to a factory, to work right away. But with us--

And you had no idea?

No. We had no-- the newspapers didn't flow around us. And they never told us what they are going to do with us. So till the last minute, we really didn't know. Till we got out of this place, that's when we came to another place. It was called-- oh boy, now I don't remember-- Bomlitz, excuse me. These kind of get--

Bomlitz was also a factory. I came to the conclusion they probably knew more about us than we knew about ourselves. Because they took us out to a factory. Again, it was all to do with munitions, constantly. Apparently, they thought of us, that we became experts in munition. In this factory, where we came out, I would just mention it, it was, again, a slave labor camp.

But I want to mention the fact that, in this particular factory, in Bomlitz, people of other nationalities worked with us. They were from Holland. They came to Germany to look for work. And they worked there where we were slave laborers. They were not allowed to talk to us.

But I will never forget, one day, I found, in the side, there was a piece of bread and an apple. And I looked at that. And I'm thinking to myself, are they playing games with me? Because they like to do that sometimes. But I figured, what the heck? What difference does it make? I'm so hungry. I almost forgot what an apple looked like.

You know, I come from Poland. And Poland, that's one thing they had plentiful of, in fruits, was apples. We had apples all year round, really. So I almost forgot what an apple looks like. But I figured, eh, I'm going to take it, anyhow. I ate it up, because I was afraid that somebody will see me. And the next day, this guy passes by me, didn't say a word to me. He just winked, with his eye, as if to say, you got my message. Every day, while I was in this camp, I found a piece of bread and an apple or a pear, in that same corner, that I was able to share with my buddy.

My buddy, after she survived, she settled in Canada. And any time we talk to one another, we always used to talk about him. Because sometimes we think of heroes as somebody walking around with like arms. You know, you have to shoot something. This is a hero. No, to me a hero? This guy was a hero. Just a little bit of kindness, that sometimes is a hero.

And we didn't stay. As a matter of fact, when they took us out from there, I was almost sorry to leave there. Because I felt, where would I find such a benefactor? Because really, in order to have an extra piece of bread-- I know, a lot of times we think, oh, I'm so hungry. Forget it. You're not hungry. Because you really don't know what hunger really means. Because we were really that very hungry.

And then they took us to Bergen-Belsen which I also didn't stay they shipped us from one place to the other. But Bergen-Belsen was another one of those camps. And they're going to have, actually, an exhibit on Anne Frank here. She was brought to Bergen-Belsen. And she died on sickness just before the war was over. Because that place was really like no food, nothing, no sanitary conditions, no place to wash. It was unbelievable. Sickness was rampant there.

So we were, again, lucky that we were-- maybe we looked a little bit, with this extra little bit nourishment, we looked good enough, so when these buyers were coming, factories, we're working for them. And they took us to the last camp.

Regina, may I just interrupt for a second.

Yes.

You've used the word "buyers" a couple of times. So these were representatives, of these factories, that would come to these camps and select those individuals, who they thought had a little bit of strength left in them, to do their labor for

them?

That's what happened to you.

Exactly. These were actually people that were coming to look us over, to see whether we were still fit to work. And we wind up in the last factory. Was Elsnig by Torgau. And believe me, again, they didn't tell us, hey, we're taking you, now, to Elsnig by Torgau. You know how we found out? When the trains would stop, we would lift up the next person that was near the little window. And they would read out, on the train station, the name of the little town. And that's what we named the factory. And as it turned out, actually, a lot of these factories were named after the little towns.

Because when you talk about Auschwitz, there is a Polish town, Oswiecim. That's in Polish, Auschwitz is Oswiecim. Or Birkenau is Brzezinka. And so, as I say, we are not-- so Dachau? There is a city of Dachau. So all these towns, they named the camps the same what they were, the little towns. So that's how we knew.

We stayed there. And we worked, again, in munition. And that was a slave labor camp. We worked very hard. But at least the death didn't loom at us, constantly, in the camp, per se, unless they took us out from there. So again, the war is going on.

And the Germans decide that these haflinge have to be gotten rid of. And this is already in 1945. And I guess, the Allies pushing from the west and the Russians from the east. And we are on the trains. And why we're on these trains deep in Germany? Guess what? In Germany, unlike in Poland, where the trains were moving without any problems, in Germany, the railroad tracks were bombed.

And we had to stop for repairs. And they couldn't take us that much farther. So while we staying to fix up the railroad tracks, that SS has this beautiful speech to us. You haflinge ought to be very happy today. Because today is Hitler's birthday. And we think to ourselves, why should we be happy that it's Hitler's birthday? What did he do for us? But they said, because it's his birthday, we will give you an extra piece of bread. You see, in their diabolical way, they knew how hungry we were, that we might be even happy that it's Hitler's birthday.

And as soon as he finished, as the whole sky became like black, I guess the Allies figured it's Hitler's birthday, hmm, maybe we ought to give him a birthday party.

[LAUGHTER]

And we were, actually, on the trucks that take, too. Because we were going to be taken to Oranienburg. And this one was going to be, like, towards Berlin. And we were on the trucks. And I presume they didn't know who was there. And they dropped a couple bombs. Thanks God, too accurate they weren't.

So what happened? The bombs fell near our trains. But from the explosion, the trains, split open. They turned over, and they split open. And we ran like rabbits. There was a little bit of woods, nearby. We ran to hide. Had we stopped and looked around, we probably didn't have to run.

They knew that the war was over. We didn't. Because the SS ran out, too. And we stayed in the woods for about three days. Too long, guess what, we couldn't stay. Because they never gave us this extra piece of bread. So we didn't have that much.

So we, little by little, inched ourselves out of the woods. And lo and behold, as I go out, and, in the background, I see this guy that wore a uniform, but I recognize it was not a German uniform. Honestly, he looked almost like a god to me. And I ran over. And it turned out he was a colonel in the Russian Army.

And he said, your free. The war is over. Go into the woods and tell everybody else to come out. Because they heard that there was some kind of movements in the woods. But they were afraid to go in there. They thought there were German snipers. So we got everybody out.

And this how we survived. That was our liberation. So we were liberated from the fear of death. But what do we do with our lives? Because, little by little, we found out that most of our families are dead.

Now, when I agree to come and speak and to tell my experiences, I don't look for sympathy. Because you're actually too late for it. Just forget it. But especially, when I see young people, I'd like you to be aware that, especially you're in a generation who may regard the Holocaust as remote and difficult to understand.

Because you want to know something? I can't understand the Holocaust. Nobody has yet explained to me why I was number 14641 and why I lost my whole family. This, no one. But I want you to pose a challenge and be our witnesses. So when we are gone-- remember, I was 13 years at one time? I just celebrated my 77th birthday. So I should say, we are going on. That you can pass on to a new generation the memory of the Holocaust.

And what is that? That the bigotry and hatred must never be part of our lives, to remind all others to treat all human beings, regardless of their looks, beliefs, with kindness. And remember, I particularly stress kindness. Because somebody was really kind to me, at one time, during most horrible times. And life was reborn, because, like Mr Benson said, you just heard I had my ninth grandchild.

We have a wonderful family. We have three daughters. And so life goes on. And treat them with kindness and teach others to do the same. And on that, I thank you. Because I'm hoping that you have lots and lots of questions.

Thank you, Regina.

[APPLAUSE]

We do have time for a few questions. So why don't we go right to our questions, right now. So don't be bashful. Somebody must have a question. Yes, ma'am.

Did she find her oldest brother?

The question is, did you find your oldest brother?

Yes. It's a matter of fact. You saw that picture, the wedding picture? And there was an American soldier. Actually, I didn't want to get married, too, because I heard he was coming to Germany. And yes, I found him. But he has passed away. And as sad as this is, but I know where his grave is. I don't know where the graves of the rest of my family is.

I mean I know my family was taken to Treblinka, because they took him from there. And actually, my husband and I go every two years. We take young people to these places. And I go to visit that place, Treblinka. But it's nothing there. It's not like a grave. It's a grave of practically a million of Jewish men, women, and children.

OK, do we? Yes, the young lady, here.

You spoke about [PERSONAL NAME] I'm sorry, about Primo Levi. And another man who was in Auschwitz, about the same time, but was there a little longer, was Viktor Frankl. And I don't know if you're familiar [? with his book, ?] his work, that is on theology and psychology, together. I was wondering, with your family being religious Orthodox, do you feel that you were able to create your own personal faith during the war? And were you able to-- just you seem to be extremely optimistic in your life and good-hearted. And I was wondering if you also felt that way?

If I could paraphrase that, if I can, the question really is-- I can try-- that during all that you went through, how were you able to maintain your faith, keep your spirit up, to have the display of the kind-heartedness that you are? Is that capturing the question?

Well, as I said, I think it was, to a certain degree, my background. During the war, I always say that to think-- and you think, when you talk about this kind of thing, it is usually a luxury of free people. Now, this is my own thing.

The way we were, we didn't even have time to think about it. We didn't have time to sit down and really think about, well, what's helping me to do this or that. We just did it. But later on, when I became free, I was able to put this package together and say, yes, this helped me. This helped me. And of course, through the years, with me finding my boyfriend, my husband, that helped also, that I was able to reconcile.

And I think that, actually, you describe me, that I am a very optimistic person. At one time, they used to call me the "Pollyanna." Because besides this, you see, in the camps, because I was youngish, and I think a lot of inmates in camp would take-- I don't know. Like I always say, if anybody's Jewish, [NON-ENGLISH], have pity.

And let's say, when I came to the kitchen, to get my soup, you know what? And I still meet with the woman that was in the kitchen. And every time I walk into her place, I say, Bella, why don't you put-- she would bend down into that kettle to grab, so I should be able to have a little piece of potato. Of course, the next person probably their soup was practically like water. But even one inmate tried, to a certain degree, help another one, when they saw you looked a little bit not in such a good-- in good way. So this probably.

But I always say, that to think is really only a luxury of free people not when you are an inmate. Yeah.

We are at the end of our time, unfortunately. I regret that. Obviously, we've just gotten just a mere glimpse into what Regina experienced, a period during the Holocaust that consumed her entire teenage years, ages 13 through 19. Before I do turn back to Regina, to close our program, I would like to remind you that First Person is a program that we do every Wednesday, at 1:00, until August 27.

And next week, we have I guess a special treat, in a sense, in light of having Regina this week, in that our First Person guest next week is none other than Mr. Sam Spiegel. And so I hope those of you who are local, or even if you're not, we hope you come back and join us.

Take a trip.

Make another trip, come back next week. The weather should be nicer, for June 11th, so that you can hear Sam Spiegel, who is also, obviously, from Poland. And one of the things that we didn't get to is the very remarkable story of how the two of them reunited. So maybe, if you come back next week, you can ask about that.

It's our tradition, at First Person, that our First Person has the last word.

Uh-oh.

And so with that, I'd like to turn back to Regina and share any closing thoughts that she wishes to share with us.

I have two things to say. Maybe I'll finish with my poem, later. But since they're giving me a chance, I'll take advantage of it. , Well what I wanted to say, as Mr. Benson mentioned, I'm a volunteer at the museum as well as a lot of other survivors. And they sitting. I see some. And there's Nesse and David. My husband volunteers. There are a lot of survivors that volunteer.

And I want to say how, to the survivors, the museum is so important. And we hope that anybody that walks through this museum will ask a question, how would I have behaved during that time? Would I be willing to take a chance? And I'm asking that question of myself, too. And that's a lot.

And with us, survivors, we have almost this obsession. We feel like, if we don't talk about it, even though it's a little bit hard, that we betray the people that are dead and we left behind. So this, the remembrance is very important. And with this museum, we hope this building--

And we all have to think about it. In order to keep it going, it needs all our help, not just the survivor that speak, but all the help from you people, anybody that can afford it. The museum could use you.

And I thank you. And let me just-- you see, another question. When you ask, I'm going to take advantage of it.

[LAUGHTER]

Nice and quietly.

I am just in love with this particular poem, that I didn't write. But since it was written by a 13-year-old, and since I was 13 years old, the minute I saw it, I kind of felt like a bond. Of course, this poor kid wind up in Theresienstadt. I don't know whether you've all heard of this camp, Theresienstadt.

I always say, the Germans set it up like a make-believe camp. And this young girl, who probably, after writing this poem, was taken out and sent to Auschwitz, because Auschwitz was so conveniently located. And it was so easy to kill people there. Because practically two and half million people, of which a half a million were children, were killed there.

And I want to read this little poem to you. And her name was Franka Beth, who wrote the following words of defiance and hope.

"I am a Jew and will be a Jew forever. Even if I should die from hunger, never will I submit. I will always fight for my people. On my honor, I will never be ashamed of them. I give my word. I am proud of my people, how dignified they are. Even though I am suppressed, I will always come back to life."

And in our case, we did come back to life. Because this is our greatest-- when people ask me, did you feel like revenge? I don't need revenge, because our families, that are here, are revenge on Hitler. And I thank you for that.

[APPLAUSE]

Thank you.

[APPLAUSE]