

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

First Person is a series of weekly conversations with survivors of the Holocaust who share with us their firsthand accounts of their experience during the Holocaust and World War II. Each First Person guest presently serves as a volunteer here at the museum. We have a new First Person program each Wednesday through August 25. The museum's website at www.ushmm.org, that's www.ushmm.org, provides a preview of upcoming First Person guests.

This 2004 season of First Person is made possible through the generosity of both the William Goldring and Woldenberg Foundation and the Helena Rubenstein Foundation, to whom we are grateful for sponsoring this year's program. Regina Spiegel will share with us 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 some questions of Regina.

Before you are introduced to her, I have a couple of requests of you. First, we ask that if it's possible, please stay seated throughout the one-hour program. That will minimize any disruptions for Regina or the audience as Regina speaks. And second, if you have a question during the question and answer period, please make your question as brief as you can. I will repeat the question so all in the room, including Regina, can hear the question. And then she will respond to your question.

I'd also like to let those of you who may be holding passes for the permanent exhibition today know they are good for the balance of the afternoon. So no need to feel that if you're not out of here by 2 o'clock, you will miss the permanent exhibition, because that's not the case.

The Holocaust was the state sponsored systematic persecution and annihilation of European Jewry by Nazi Germany's collaborators between 1933 and 1945. Jews were the primary victims. 6 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.

What you are about to hear from Regina Spiegel is one individual's account of the Holocaust. She 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 have prepared a brief slide presentation to help with Regina's introduction. Regina Gutman was born May 12, 1926 in Radom, Poland. Radom was a vibrant Jewish community of some 30,000 people. In our map of Europe, the arrow points to Poland. The second map is of Poland, and the arrow points to Radom, located in Central Poland.

On September 1, 1939, Germany invaded Poland. And seven days later, Radom was occupied. In this photograph, Adolf Hitler in the lower right-hand corner, gives the Nazi salute as he reviews victorious German troops in Warsaw, Poland, October 5, 1939.

In 1941, German authorities ordered all Jews in Radom to move into the newly created ghetto. The Gutmans were forced to live in one small room. Conditions inside the ghetto were poor. This is a map of ghettos in occupied Poland between 1939 and 1941, and our arrow points to Radom.

This photo is of Chanka, one of Regina's three sisters. 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, Rozia, lived. But soon she was conscripted for forced labor in the town's munitions factory. There she formed a close friendship with Sam Spiegel, a fellow inmate.

In the fall of 1944, Regina was deported to Auschwitz, and the arrow points to the location of Auschwitz on this map. The photo is a view of the kitchen barracks, the electrified fence, and the gate at the main camp of Auschwitz-Birkenau. In the foreground on the left-hand side, 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 of 1945. She went to the Fohrenwald displaced persons camp in Bavaria, which the arrow points to on this map.

Regina was reunited with her boyfriend, Sam Spiegel, and they were married in the Fohrenwald displaced persons camp. And our final two photos are from their wedding.

Today, Regina lives here in the Washington DC area with her husband, Sam. And Sam is with us today. Sam, if you will raise your hand, so we know you're here.

[APPLAUSE]

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, including an annual talk to students at Georgetown Prep. She's also spoken at my daughter's former high school. Regina and Sam have three daughters, and nine grandchildren, with the youngest being two years old.

Every other year, Regina and Sam participate in the March of the Living which takes them to Auschwitz and Birkenau, and other major camps, as well as to Israel and most years. They have been on eight marches of the living. With that, I'd like to ask you to join me in welcoming our First Person, Mrs. Regina Spiegel.

[APPLAUSE]

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 bit about your family, your community, yourself, in those years before the German invasion.

Yeah. Good afternoon from me. And yes, I'd love to talk a little bit about my family. Because I always feel that people think of us as Holocaust survivors. But most of us had another life before that. We had families. And I had, like you saw, one of the pictures of my sister, I had three more sisters, two brothers, and my parents of which I am practically the only survivor, except my oldest brother, who happened to be also-- I've noticed on this picture. He was a soldier in the American army too. That was my brother, if you saw the soldier there.

But anyhow, I had as a kid, I was 13 years old when the Germans came into our town. And as a kid, I knew I had a wonderful life. I had parents who loved us. We always never thought what's coming. And I went to school. I even went to a Jewish day school every day, just to learn about the holidays. I learned Hebrew to be able to pray when I went to the synagogue. And on the whole, my life was pretty good.

I didn't know much about politics. But I knew as long as my parents were around, I had nothing to worry about. They are there to take care of us. So what's there to worry? But of course, things changed. My father lost his job right away.

Regina, before you go to that, tell us about your father's job. What was his occupation? And tell us a little bit about Radom itself.

OK, my father's job was, he was-- Radom had a very big business in shoe manufacturing. And he was working for this place where he used to be a cutter of the leather shoe on top, and then whatever he cut, he had two partners. And they were sewing it together. I don't even know what this is called in English. But in Polish you would call him a [POLISH]. It's somebody who worked just with this soft part of the leather, had nothing to do with it.

So these partners would put together the top, and then send it to people that we're putting the hard leather. And later on, they were selling it all over, actually, all over the country. And Radom itself was a wonderful town, had a vibrant Jewish community. Before the war we had a population of about 125,000, of which about 25% were Jews. So we were a fairly nice size of the community.

We had a wonderful synagogue that I was going to that Jewish day school. Practically at least once a month we used to walk there to have these special services there for us. And I used to love that. I always to this day, I always think that going to that Jewish day school for every day for an hour helped me through the war. Because I somehow never felt that even though I was being abused as a Jew, I never felt ashamed of it.

And this gave me-- the reason I mention it, because I always feel that everybody should have this kind of experience. And no matter what kind of religion you are, because it gives you something that you feel to be proud of.

Regina, you began to tell us then of course that all that changed so dramatically and quickly once the Germans arrived.

The minute the Germans came in, of course, the first order of business was Jewish children are not allowed to go to school. And the school was stopped for us. So at the age of 13, there wasn't anymore. But like my sisters formed classes for the younger kids in the neighborhoods, because there were a lot of kids who were much younger than I was. This was supposed to have been their first year that they were starting school.

So there were always so afraid that maybe they might not have a chance to keep up with the work. So they tried to teach them the ABCs. But of course, now we know they needn't have bothered. Because that's one thing apparently Hitler never appreciated was children. Because to them, especially Jewish children, were of no use whatsoever. Because they were probably the first victims during that time.

And of course also, we had to wear from the age 10 and up, we had to wear in our city armbands. They have orders. Because when we walked out in the street, just like here, they couldn't tell whether I was Jewish or not. So by putting on us the armband, and then ours was a white armband with a blue Star of the David. And in the middle said Jew. So you should be identified right away as a Jew.

And, of course, we had to wear it. Of course, you could sometimes skip it, just like sometimes you forget here to take your driver's license maybe. But if you were caught, it wasn't only the consequences that you could have gotten hurt. But what they used to do is punish the rest of the family. So as a kid of 13, this was the foremost of my mind when I walked out of the house. Don't forget that armband.

Regina, you mentioned that your father lost his business right away. When he lost his business, how was the family able to survive and make ends meet? How did you eat at that point? That was very sad, because all of a sudden, we found ourselves without a way to make a living. But most of the time, because we were still with our neighbors, our Polish neighbors. So whatever you had, there were orders had to give up anything of value.

Like if you had some jewelry, you gave up. But because it was small things, so you hid some of it. And these things we used to barter. We gave it to our neighbors to bring us some flour or potatoes. And of course with my sister being in another place, she worked. My sister, I had one sister who was a dentist. And she worked with a Polish family. And she, with a Polish woman dentist, and she was able to work. So she kept on supplying our household even then with something, that otherwise we probably would have starved to death.

If I remember correctly, Regina, this is Rozia, right?

Yes.

Your sister Rozia, who was in Pionki. She would, as a dentist, instead of asking people to pay her, she would ask them for food that she would then send on to your family. Yeah. You see Pionki, this small town, which was about 30 kilometers away from Radom, Pionki had only about 30 Jewish families. And so they didn't make a ghetto right away. But my sister, by working, I want to tell you in Poland before the war, usually farmers didn't go to a dentist.

Let's face it. It costs money. So they didn't use too much of a dentist. But during the war, the main commodity what is during the war? And I bet you the young kids know it. Because it's food. And the farmers, all of a sudden found himself with a lot of money. So they, all of a sudden they decided, hey, my teeth need fixing. So that's when they would come to my sister.

They would say, could you fix my teeth? And she would say, of course. The only thing I won't even charge you a nickel. The only thing, deliver a sack of potatoes, or whatever needed to be done. That's how she, 30 kilometers away, kept up the family.

Regina, once your family was forced into the ghetto in Radom, at that point, of course, conditions became even worse. Tell us what it was like in the ghetto, and again, how you were able to survive once you were inside the ghetto.

Again, the ghetto it was my sister. She was like our guardian angel through the time. But the ghetto in Radom, what was it? I told you we had approximately about 30,000 Jews in our town. So to get us in one place was very hard.

As a matter of fact, they had two ghettos in our place. They called one the smaller ghetto, and one the big one. We happened to have gone into the big ghetto. And I know and they gave orders within like three days that you had to vacate your place and go into this little, little place. What they did, they used a section of the city which before the war, you might have called it that there was a Jewish neighborhood. But there were other people. So they made the other people, the Poles, move out from there, and it became just for the Jews.

And I know, especially when I speak to young people, they would say big deal. So they gave orders. Orders are made to be broken. And I always tell them, you're right. And you know what? There were a lot of people that did that. But of course, they were found. It didn't take him too long. And not only did they kill him, but they hung him so we should be aware what happens to people that don't obey what they say you should do.

And they pushed us into that ghetto. And then it became really a horror. Why? Because all of a sudden, we lost our Polish neighbors. We couldn't barter with them. And they closed up the gate. And the gates were actually, that's why my sister was able to manipulate a little bit. Because the gates were actually-- they were guarded by Poles that were working with the Germans.

So that's how she was able to manipulate. And things became horrible. Because all of a sudden, you take probably now a ghetto, I don't know exactly. But they must have put in a very, very small area about over 20,000 people into a place. It became crowded, and no food. So sickness set in. And it became really so bad that I remember one evening, while we were trying maybe to figure out how maybe one of us could get out, it was decided that I, being the youngest one in the family, I should take off my armband and leave the ghetto.

And I always say, I'd like to tell you that I was such a brave kid. I crushed through the ghetto gate. No way. I wasn't that way at all. It's a matter of fact, my sister also bribed the guard. And when I actually didn't want to take off my armband, because I was hoping that he would push me back and send me back to my family. Because no matter how bad things were, I didn't want to leave my family.

And it took me years to forgive my mother for making me leave the ghetto, even after I was liberated. And when I found out that most of my family didn't make it, I really resented her for it. Because she was the one that pushed me to it. And in those years, no matter how much you fought with your parents, if they told you to do something, you did it. Things have changed a little bit.

So Regina just so we all understand, your family decided because you were the youngest, they were going to send you away from them out of the ghetto to your sister in Pionki.

Exactly.

And so you were able to get out because your sister arranged it. And then you went to Pionki. What happened when you got there?

Well, as I said, Pionki, unlike Radom, which had a large Jewish population, Pionki had only about 30 Jewish families. So they didn't really make a ghetto. What they did, everybody had to live on one street. And in order to move around, you had to have special papers, which my sister had. But I never realized what an important little town this was.

Before the war, I used to go there. But I never realized, because it had one of the largest powder munition factories in Poland. And therefore, it became a great factor in my survival and survival actually of many others. Because when I got there, they formed a slave labor camp. And I went into that factory to work. It wasn't that easy, because all of a sudden, it amazes me with their laws.

Because they were killing children. But in this particular factory, they had strict labor laws. Would you believe this? You had to be 16, or you couldn't get in. But my papers, my sister had a very good friend. He made over my papers to show that I was 16, and I was able to go in to work there. And of course, my sister also later on went in there, worked in the hospital with her husband. But she had a little baby. He was 18 months old at that time. And he couldn't go in.

We couldn't make his papers over to show that he was 16. So she gave him to a Polish family who promised to keep him. But the woman kept him for about six months, and she turned him in to the Gestapo, and told them where my sister was.

Now, I want you to know. I know everybody. I went to see that woman. What is more amazing what she told me that I said, oh. Because actually what she told me that she had to give up the baby not because she was afraid of the Germans coming in into her little street. She was afraid of her neighbors that they would denounce her because they figured that she must have gotten money for it. And she was getting rich on it.

And it was nothing of the kind. It's true, my sister might have given her some money, because a baby, no matter how little they are, they need food. And sometimes they need shoes. So therefore, this kind of stuff that she gave her money. But actually, there was no money of this kind. And she was afraid because in Poland, unlike a lot of other countries where if they caught a Polish family holding a Jewish child, their fate would have been probably the same as that of the Jews. And she was afraid.

So of course, they took my sister. As a matter of fact, they were very nice. Because they gave my sister a choice. They told her that there was actually a crazy woman in the Gestapo office. And she said she has your baby. But we know that you don't have a baby. They wanted to give her a way out.

But of course, she wouldn't take it, and she took the baby. And later on I found out when she saw how they were stuffing the people into these cattle trains, she realized that she as an adult maybe might make it. But the baby, he was at that time already two years old, will never make it. And she and the baby were shot, because she tried to escape.

So when that happened, of course, you've now lost your sister in Pionki, and you're working in this munitions factory as a slave laborer. Were you in contact at all with your family still in Radom?

No, my not when we were in Pionki. Once in the camp, we lost completely contact. But there were rumors that the Radom ghetto was moved. And we assumed that they were sent, because during the Holocaust, there was this thing about resettlement. They never told you where you're going. They always told you we're resettling you, because when they came like to the ghettos, and they said we're going to move you out East. You're complaining you don't have food. You're going to be working in factories. We're going to give you food.

And so they willingly went on these cattle trains. Of course, now we know where they were taken. Because actually in 1942, they came, I think it was about August 1942. They came and they cleared out practically the whole Radom ghetto. They left about 5,000 people, which later on they brought them to work to Pionki, and shipped them to a place called Treblinka.

I don't even refer to Treblinka as a slave labor camp or a concentration camp. It's strictly a death factory. Because they were bringing in people there day in and day out. Trains were coming in loaded with people, and came back empty. And that's how actually I lost practically my whole family. Because apparently that day when they came in, two of my sisters and my brother, something they didn't feel so good, or maybe they decided to take a day off from work. And they cleared them all out. And that's how I lost practically my whole family. It was in Treblinka.

Regina, tell us about meeting Sam in Pionki.

Well, I always, I never skip that. Because like we always talk about camps, how horrible they were, and they were horrible. But especially young people get a kick out of it, because I would tell you if you have a chance when young people are there, love flourishes even in the most miserable places. And one day, this guy approaches me. It was one of the few places where men and women actually work together.

And this guy approaches me. And he gives me this kind of line that he knows me. And of course and I questioned him. I even asked him to describe my coat, what I was wearing. And he goes and describes it in detail.

So I figured if somebody would have asked me, I wouldn't have been able to describe my coat. So this guy is legit. So we got to know. And you know, it was wonderful because you see after they took my sister out, it was so nice to have somebody who cared about you. And it was a nice feeling. That's what I always say out of this whole deal, that's the best deal was that I met my husband there. That after the war, I didn't have to go around looking for somebody.

Regina, you continued as a slave laborer in the munitions factory in Pionki until 1944. At that point, you were taken out of Pionki. Tell us how that happened and where you were taken.

Well, apparently, we were working in these factories. But we still didn't know what was going on in the world. We didn't know is the war going in our favor, and the Germans where we were always praying it should be in our favor. But one day, they decided to close up this factory. And of course, the same thing. They're taking us for a settlement.

And this wonderful resettlement, when after maybe three days being in the closed up cattle trains, I don't know how many of you had a chance to visit the museum already. But if you don't-- you might, if you go up to the permanent exhibit, you will get a chance to see these cattle trains. They put us on those cattle trains, and lo and behold, three days. Now, I know a trip from our place to which is Krakow, near Krakow, takes about six hours at the most. It took us like about three days, no facilities, nothing.

Well luckily my boyfriend and I were in the same train. Of course, when they opened finally the cattle trains, and they opened that place, with the SS waiting there for us with their dogs, yelling Raus! Raus! Macht Schnell! Macht Schnell! Which in our case really we understood, because we knew a little bit German, because it's close to Jewish. So we made out what we knew what they wanted from us.

But I understand people that came from different countries didn't even understand this. And they practically were beaten to death right there. But we could see, the minute we came out there, the way this chaos that was. And right away, men to one side, women to the other side. And the SS with the whips, staying. You couldn't make a wrong move. And my boyfriend says to me, because I guess he realized too that we're in trouble. He says to me, Regina, if you ever live through this, meet me in my town. But of course, being Regina, I said, why your town? Why not mine?

He says that I haven't changed. And when I looked around, I've been already a camper for years, and looked around. This place didn't look like anything I've ever imagined. It looked like this wasteland with barbed wire, chimneys, barbed wire, electric barbed wire, not single, double. As if you had a chance to escape from there, God forbid you should manage to go through one wire.

The guards were standing around with machine guns, watching every move we were making. They stripped us naked, and they pushed us into showers. Well, later on we found out, actually in our case, we came out alive, the women minus, I came out with minus my hair, because they shaved our hair.

They put a number on us. In this particular place, all I understand, all other camps had numbers too. But this particular camp, they tattooed a number on you. I was telling somebody this morning that wanted to see my tattoo. I said, you know, I don't get old. My skin isn't actually wrinkling. It's the tattoo that is getting wrinkled. So this became your name.

All of a sudden, you didn't have a name. But we realized that we are in trouble with this place. And actually, whoever was with us, when we came out from our showers, whoever stayed next to us, became your buddy. And we started to

watch out because we figured, if we want to stay alive, we need to have somebody to encourage us. And it helped us in a lot of ways.

Because I had this friend, this is my buddy, that the minute we will stay on appeal, and they called 14641, and I'm standing. And this buddy already, she already remembered my number. She says, Regina I think they're talking about you. And I yelled out, jawohl! Because a minor little thing, you didn't have to do something significant. It needed just a little something that they didn't think, because right away they thought that you are disobeying them, that you are not following their orders.

So of course I yelled out, jawohl, and it saved me. And we were talking. My buddy turned out to be a girl who came from my husband's-- my boyfriend's town. And it's a funny thing. I think we became buddies also a lot due to that. Because all of a sudden, we had like a certain kinship also. So that place was without description.

There was a wonderful writer, Primo Levi, that was in this camp, Auschwitz-Birkenau nine months. And he wrote, to describe the concentration camps or the ghettos, the English language would have to be revised. Because there is no describing them. And believe me, I know it. Because I go back to there, because I take young people to visit. It's still there. People go to see it.

And I go back, and to this day every time I see it, I turn around to my husband, really we're there. Did we really get out of there? How in the world? Because when Dante probably wrote *The Inferno*, and this I don't know how in the world. But I think good writers have this vision. How in the world he could envision something like this. Because I often was thinking that that's the place he had in mind.

Because I've been to lots of camps. But this never, never goes out from my mind.

Regina, you of course just said that Primo Levi was there for nine months. You weren't there that long. You were taken from there. Tell us where you went next, and to do what?

OK. Mostly I went to different camps. I was taken. I was lucky. I was only there six weeks. Can you imagine over there spending a day was like an eternity. But six weeks, you consider yourself lucky. Because had I been there probably another week, I would have never made it. But I was taken to another camp. And it was also basically we always worked. I know with me, something to do with munition.

Because all of a sudden, I became an expert on munitions. If you give a handgun, a gun, I wouldn't know which side shoots. But in their eyes, I was an expert in munition because apparently every time they took me to other camps, it was always this type of work, had to do with munition. The one that we took was after Auschwitz, it was Bomlitz. They were making something like Panzerfauste. And I don't even know how to describe it.

But it was a pour thing. It had something to do with the atoms, because it was very, I remember anybody, my hands gotten eaten up from the gases that we were working with.

To make this explosive?

Exactly. And then I luckily I didn't stay there also too long, because you couldn't stay too long there. Because I don't think your lungs would have been able to take it. But in that camp, we work with foreign nationalities, mainly from Holland. And I like to mention it because on account of the young kids, to realize that there were some people that were kind also. They weren't allowed to talk to us.

But I remember one time, in the side I saw an apple on a piece of bread. And I was wondering, should I take this. Because sometimes they didn't have to play games with you. Because they had what do they call it? Carte blanche. They could do anything with you they wanted. But I was so hungry, and apple. I would tell you Poland, that's one thing we might have not had a lot of fancy fruits, but plenty of apples. This was always plentiful in Poland. I almost forgot what an apple looked like.

And I'm thinking to myself, should I or shouldn't I? And I decided, what the heck. Whatever happens, happens. And I grabbed this piece of bread and apple, and I gobbled it down. Of course, I felt guilty because my buddy wasn't on the same shift with me. And I couldn't bring it back to the camp. But every day I had a piece of bread, and an apple or a pear all the time that I was in that camp. That later on I was able to share it with my buddy. And when we used to reminisce in between one and another, she used to live in Canada. Thank you.

And we used to reminisce. And she would say, I bet you that guy in Holland runs around, probably never realizes that this piece of bread and apple actually helped save two girls from starvation. Because you see later on, when they took us to another camp, I almost was sorry that they were taking us out from this camp, because I figured I ain't going to get another benefactor like this ever.

And the other camp was Bergen-Belsen. And of course, Bergen-Belsen was the type of camp that people were just dropping like flies there. Because there was no food, no way to keep yourself a little bit clean or whatever. It was just awful. And again, I guess we used to always attribute it that when they needed workers, and you know what they used to do. They used to make an appell. And they look you over.

And an appell was to line up?

To line up to meet them. Anyway, always used to I like to talk with my hands. It helps my English. So we would always talk about it. Because that place, how awful it was. There was nothing. But my friend would always say to me, because when we had to stay in front of them, we were stripped naked. And we would get our cheeks to look a little bit reddish, because we wanted to get out of this place.

And they did. They took us to this last camp, and we attributed our diet of this piece of little bread with this apple to that we looked a little bit in a better shape than other people did. So they took us. And the last camp was Elsnig by Torgau. And we named it like this. I don't know whether a camp like this existed. We worked there, but we named the camp Elsnig. Why?

Because when the cattle trains would stop, we would lift somebody up and through this little window, they would read out the name to us. They would say E-L-S-N-I-G. So we read it out.

[AUDIO OUT]

Town of Auschwitz. There is a town of Auschwitz. There is a town of Dachau. There was a camp Dachau. So a lot of the things, and even Bergen-Belsen was a town of Bergen-Belsen. So maybe we were right by naming it that way. And the same thing, the war wasn't going their way anymore. And they figured these haftlinge, what they called us, have to be gotten rid of. Because from the papers that were found after the war, we were going to be shipped to a place, Ohrdruf, which was a subcamp of I think Buchenwald.

However, in Germany when they put us in on these cattle trains, unlike Poland, in Germany the railroad tracks were bombed and we had to stop for repairs. And I will never forget the day. It was April 20, 1945, and you will say to yourself, how in the world did you know it was the day? Believe me, we didn't know what it was. We knew it was summer or winter by the type of weather we had. But we didn't know the days, or what month it was.

But the SS had this speech to us. He said you haftlinge, which means you prisoners, ought to be very happy today, because today is Hitler's birthday. And we were thinking to ourselves, they would think that we have become imbeciles. What do they think? Why should we be happy? But they had a little thing. We will give you an extra piece of bread. You see? In their diabolical way they knew that we might be even happy that it's Hitler's birthday, as long as we get another piece of bread.

Because believe me, we were always, always hungry. Now I mean hungry. I know a lot of you maybe didn't have lunch, and maybe you are hungry too. But you're not hungry. Forget it. We were hungry.

But no sooner did he finish with this speech, as the whole sky became like black. I guess the Allies decided we didn't

know that the war was almost over, but the Allies decided it's Hitler's birthday. We will give him maybe a birthday present or something like that. And they were flying towards Berlin. But on the way, they spotted our trains. They didn't know who it was there, I assume. Because they dropped a couple bombs.

And I always say, thanks God too accurate they weren't. But however, where the bombs fell, our trains from the explosion, turned over and split open. And the minute they split open, we just ran like rabbits into the woods. Had we stopped a minute and looked around, we would have seen that the SS ran away too. Because you see, they knew that the war was over. We didn't. And after being like about three days in these woods, you see, we never got this piece of bread. And of course it was April 20, so the snow had melted so we didn't even have any water.

And we, little by little, figured we have to inch ourselves out. And as I walked out, lo and behold, in the background I see this soldier. But I recognize that it wasn't a German soldier, because the uniform looked a little bit different. And we ran out and it turned out it was a Russian colonel in the army. And tells us, you are free. The war is over. Go back to the woods. Get everybody else out.

Because they heard that there was things going on in these woods. But they didn't know who it was. Because we were like about almost actually from the train some of the people got killed too. But there were about 4,000 of us women on those trains. So there were a lot of women there. And you stay for three days, you make a little bit of noise. So they knew something. But they thought it was German snipers, they told us later. And they didn't want to go in.

But then they told us everybody should come out. And we got everybody out from there. And this was our liberation. We got liberated.

Regina.

Yeah.

At that point, as you just said, you're liberated just after the 20th of April, 1945. I do want to turn to our audience in just a couple of minutes for some questions. So in the little bit of time we have left, tell us, of course you had so many struggles after liberation. Sure, you were free. Then what do you do?

But do tell us before we turn to the audience for a moment or two about-- did you go to Sam's town.

I was trying. I was trying. We had to walk. We did. I tried to go. But actually, I went to my town. But I didn't. Actually, I didn't because what had happened, you saw one picture of my sisters. That's all I-- little by little, we found out that most of our families were dead. And you see, when I came into Auschwitz, I still had some pictures of my family. And as a matter of fact, I remember distinctly when they told us to leave everything which we didn't have that much. I came already from a camp. I didn't come from home.

But I had these pictures from my family, and my little nephew. And I begged them. These are my personal pictures. And they just hit me. And say, you leave those. And I had to leave all the pictures. So actually, my first thought was since I survived, maybe somebody of my family survived, and maybe if I go into my home I will find some of the pictures. Because I was sure that my mother couldn't take everything. Because we were going to such a small quarters.

Not that we had such tremendous quarters before, but this was the way, like an oversized closet. So, I knew she didn't take too much. So I figured she must have left some pictures. I figured that's where I'm going to go. However, when I got in Germany, we had to travel by whatever we got a hold of. When there were no trains running or anything. But by the time we reached Poland, the city Poznan, it was the city right on the border of Poland and Germany. And we stopped there. And we see the trains are running.

And I'm just about to jump on this train. The train, I say always I wished I had some pictures even of that train because, it was unbelievable. People were hanging outside from the trains and I was just about to jump on that train. And somebody notices me from the other side of the tracks. And yells out to me, hey Reginka. This was Polish. If you're not married you're not Regina. You're a Reginka.

So they yelled, hey Reginka, your boyfriend is alive. I said, where is he? And he said, in Kozienice, where else? So of course, but so at least I felt a little bit better. Because I knew maybe, maybe he promised that he's going to wait. Maybe he's going to wait. So at least I felt a little bit better knowing the idea that I'm going to come and at least somebody is there. But we couldn't stay too long.

And we later on went back into Germany. And from there, we went into-- you see after the war that's one thing the Russians didn't do what the Americans did. Not because they didn't want to do it. It's because they didn't have it. Because the Russians, believe me, if the Americans wouldn't have helped them, they would have been in a lot of trouble too. But the Americans right away take care of refugees. And they had a lot of them.

So they established displaced persons camps. Right after, when people were coming out from the camps, there was no place where to go. So we went back to one, and we were in Foehrenwald and that's where I was.

I wish we had more time.

So do I.

I'm going to--

I'm enjoying talking. And you know, and it's so wonderful. I don't know how you guys are feeling about it. But you know, I feel like-- not that I forget my parents. But I feel like as if they were alive, that they didn't go into oblivion. Because I feel like I'm talking about them, and about my friends, and about all the people, all of a town full of people, friends, people that I even didn't know. But--

Regina, we do have time for a couple of questions from the audience.

Good.

So let's see who would like to start us off. And ask Regina some questions about both what she's described or what happened to her after the war, and after the displaced persons camps. Yes sir, right there.

I was wondering when you talk about going into the showers.

Yeah.

The girls would go into one and the guys went into the other. And we heard about the showers and killing people.

The question is to explain a little bit about when you said you went into the showers at Auschwitz, and of course, the audience has heard about showers in the context of using it to kill people. Can you explain a little bit about that?

Yes, definitely. It's a matter of fact, when it was my time to go into the showers, by then when I got to Auschwitz, till Auschwitz I was really a very-- I didn't realize what was happening. But that place really all of a sudden, like a puzzle comes into place. All of a sudden, it hit me. So actually, I was the first one. That's the first time that I ever pushed myself to get in the first.

Because I figured, I didn't want to hear anybody else screaming. Because actually, these showers that we came out with-- I came out minus my hair-- these showers were used instead of the water. That's where they had put in Zyklon B, the gas. And that's how they killed. A place like Auschwitz, Auschwitz-Birkenau, basically Birkenau, because there were two camps. Birkenau was really the camp of destruction. Because Auschwitz, they were also killing people, but not to the degree. Because Auschwitz was used as a jail.

If you were not Jewish and you did something that displeased them, they sent you to Auschwitz. Like the guy who made over my papers went to Auschwitz, because he was not Jewish. But most Jews went to Birkenau. We didn't know at the

time. And that's where they killed practically 2.5 million Jews by sending them to these showers, of which a half a million at least were children. Because families used to come with their children.

And they just took them out there. So this was the place. So basically, that's why I always say, did you see that picture of me? Actually, that picture was taken in 1946. And I want you to know that I myself am amazed. That's why I always tell people. If the head is there, their hair will grow. Because I was shaved, it's a matter of fact this buddy of mine thought that I was actually a little boy.

She thought I must be a little boy, the way I look. And it grew back. So I'm amazed myself that in 1944 my head was shaved. In '46, I had a bit more hair than I have now.

Regina, will you be available to chat with people afterwards for a few minutes?

Absolutely, absolutely.

We're just about at the end of the program. We're going to hear from Regina again in just a moment. I want to first thank all of you for being here for this First Person program. And of course, as is evident, we've only just gotten a glimpse of what was experienced by Regina both during the Holocaust and certainly afterwards. And I wish we had many more hours, and unfortunately we don't.

I do want to remind you that we have a First Person program every Wednesday until August 25. So again, next Wednesday on July 14, at 1:00 PM we will present another first person. And how about this? Our First Person guest next week is Mr. Sam Spiegel.

[APPLAUSE]

And of course, next week then we will hear Sam's account of surviving Auschwitz-Birkenau labor camps, escape from a death march, and of course his version of meeting Regina. For those of you can, who are here in town, sure hope you come back next week to get a little bit more if we can of the story of Regina and Sam.

It's our tradition at First Person that our First Person has the last word. And with that, I'd like to turn it back to Regina to close our program today.

OK. Since I have the last word, I made it very short, so I'm going to just add to let you know how I came to the United States. Because once in camp, in the displaced persons camp, when I got sick somebody found my uncle for me who lived in New York. My mother had a brother here. And he sent me papers. And he figured the same thing. If he knew me as the youngest one, and it was very hard in those years to make out papers.

It was probably he went through a lot of trouble. So rather than just sending papers just for me, he made papers whoever is with me, figuring that if I had a sister or brother that survive, he won't have to do papers again. So I turned around to this guy, I said you marry me, and you have a ticket to go to the United States.

[LAUGHTER, APPLAUSE]

And nobody-- any nobody that has brains, nobody refuses an offer like this. OK? And now, OK, let me tell you just a little bit since I have the last word. Pardon. We survivors take really great pride in this museum because it stands as a memorial to all people who have been murdered. And I specify murdered because this was not dead or anything. This was strictly murder.

And we hope when you visit the museum you will remember and become our witness. Like the black wall in the museum says, you are my witness. You are becoming now, you have a responsibility. You are becoming now my witness. We who have survived have to give some kind of meaning to their deaths, to the people that didn't make it. From now till the end of time, we all must strive that bigotry and hatred should never be part of our lives.

And maybe then we can make sure that such evil will never happen to anybody again ever. And I always try to put this in. I always have the last word. Be kind. Kindness, because somebody was kind to me in a small way, we don't have to do any heroic thing. In a small way, but help actually two girls to survive the Holocaust. And I thank you.

[APPLAUSE]

Thank you.

You made me good today because I was--