

One who had the-- had your sister's baby.

Yeah. They came and the woman told me that she was afraid of her neighbors because-- I just couldn't believe that she gave up the baby. But when they came, she dropped off the baby at the SS headquarters. So but they-- and they didn't want my sister to leave, actually, because by this time, most of the Jewish doctors and dentists or whatever were dead. So they figured, where are we going to get another one to fill the place.

But as a result, when they-- so they gave her a choice. They said, you know, there is a crazy woman there, and she's telling us that she has your baby. But we know that you don't have the baby. You don't have a baby. Otherwise, they wanted to give her a way out, that she should agree with them. She says, no, the woman is not crazy. The baby is mine.

And she-- it's not her baby. She was just keeping that baby for me because, originally, before my sister even went into the camp, they promised her that eventually they were going to be able to take in that baby. But because they did have some children in that particular camp that survived even the war, because that's a completely different story because we had gotten in somebody who was taking care of that camp before going to Auschwitz, that he made sure that these people that were there with the kids got them a place to go, to a farmer, that they were--

He was with the Wehrmacht. So he was looking out more to keep us alive. Let's put it this way. Because we were very useful to them, in a way. But my sister wouldn't take this. And she took the baby. And later on, when she saw-- that's what somebody told me that happened to be with the same place, because they didn't just send out one person. They took you to another camp, where they kept you till they had enough people to send out another transport.

So that's what they did with my sister and this young boy who was there. And he escaped, and he told me that he saw when my sister, when they were pushing them in into the cattle trains, I guess she grabbed the baby because she knew because they were shoveling in the people, so many in these cattle trains that she was afraid that the baby of two years will never make it. So as a result-- which was probably true-- she grabbed the baby. She tried to run away. And she and the baby were shot right on the spot.

Regina, you met Sam, who would become your future husband. Tell us a little bit about how you were able to meet Sam at Pionki and, in a way, get to know each other there.

Well, it was very easy, you know, too because men and women worked together. And even young people, no matter where they are, they fall in love. You know? And Sam came in, and one time he turned around to me and says, I knew you. And I said, you do? Are you from Radom? He said, no. I am from Kozienice.

I said, I've never been to Kozienice, so how come you say you knew me? He said, I saw you once here walking around with some friends. And I remember you. And then I said to him, yes? So tell me, what did I wear?

[LAUGHTER]

And really, he goes to describe my coat. If somebody would have asked me to describe my coat, I wouldn't have been able to do it. And since then we really became friends. You know? And over there, it was good to have a friend anyway because it was very easy to become friends with somebody, somebody to care for you and love you. It really was nice. So we just made a couple.

Regina, as the Russians began to get closer, the Nazis shut down Pionki and sent you and the remaining slave laborers away to Auschwitz.

Yes. That's when we got set up to go into Auschwitz. After that-- it's a matter of fact, the same man, he was the caregiver of that camp. Because as I say, there were thousands and thousands of people. So it was a lot of taking care of. And he, supposedly-- I mean, that was the story that was going around after the war-- that he, supposedly, went with us to Auschwitz to tell him don't kill them. They're good. We need people to-- by then they already started-- they weren't in-- they didn't share with the Russian.

They had the Russian front. They had to go to Russia, a lot of Germans. So they needed us, in a way, for the work. And he actually told them. He said, there is coming here transport from Pionki. Be sure don't kill them indiscriminately because that's what they did. You could walk in there, and they wouldn't care. You might have been 16, 18 years old. If they didn't like something on you, maybe you had a scratch someplace or something, because that place was very-- do I have to talk about this? Yes.

A little bit.

OK.

Just a little bit.

So anyhow, we get into Auschwitz. Of course, men and women are right away separated. And actually, my husband, which was then my boyfriend, managed to still kind of run away from his group and come over to me. He said, Regina, if we ever get out of here-- you see, Sam was a little bit older than I was, so I think he realized the trouble we are in better than I did. And he said to me, if we get out of here, you meet me in my hometown. And I turned around to him, why yours? Why not mine?

Because I was still working to see my mother. You see. I didn't know anything that my mother. But anyhow, when we got to Auschwitz, men to one side, the women to the other side. You had to strip naked. By then I was already about 16 years old. You know, I grew older. And believe me, by the time we stripped our clothing, you didn't know which part of nakedness. You had only two hands to cover it because I have never stood in front of a man naked, really, never.

Even at home when we used to bathe, my father never saw us running around naked. And here I'm naked. And I'm holding on to some pictures that-- because this was like my Bible. Wherever I went, I always would grasp the couple pictures that I had of my little nephew, of myself, even, as a child, or of my parents because we always-- my sister had a very good friend who was a photographer. And she used to come and take pictures.

If I got a good card from school, I would get a picture. If I got a bad one, I would get a picture. No matter for what reason, she always used to take pictures. So I had some. So this SS man comes around to me, and he said, [GERMAN] you know, like what do you have here? And I said, nothing. I forget.

These pictures won't interest him. It's only for me. And he said, [GERMAN]. Otherwise, you have to put it right, right there. They didn't care-- right there. And they-- I would tell you-- put a number on you. Till then, my name-- my friends used to know me as Regina-- Regina, I'm Polish, which about spelled the same way. And all of a sudden, we get a number. Mine was a A14641. And I don't know what's this number for. But it turned out, this was our name.

From now on, if they called you this number-- if they called out, you better answer. Well, the place was without description. You know, you could feel that you are in trouble because the chimneys, it was all over. And you could smell it in the air. You could smell the air. That was something was happening there that we didn't know till now in Pionki, really, to tell you the truth.

And the whole place was surrounded by electric barbed wire, not single, double electric barbed wire. Just in case if you manage to scrunch through through one, you had another one. All the clothing was taken away, whatever you had. As I say, we were naked.

There was a famous Italian writer. And he actually wind up in Auschwitz too. And his name was Primo Levi. And he said, in order to describe Auschwitz, a new language would have to be designed because there are no words for that place to describe. It's impossible.

We had-- I mean, the food was practically zilch. If you were lucky, you got to the kitchen, and you got-- maybe the girl that gave you the little bit of soup, would bend down in the kettle a little bit more, and maybe you would get a little potato in it, maybe. Most of it was water, nothing. It was like starvation.

I know a lot of people think that lots of times we-- I'm so hungry. And I always told them that, I said, you're not really that hungry. There is no such thing, that you're only hungry if you don't eat for-- they were basically-- we hardly had any food. How they manage to keep us working, I don't know. But that was the place.

I stayed there, I think, till about-- because you really don't know exactly the dates because every day when you were there it seemed like a year. I know when I sit in the museum on the first floor, and we have these, the ceiling, if you look out, up, you see the sun. I remember one day-- and believe me, the guy that made this museum, that designed this museum never spoke to me.

But I remember this one time that my friend, who we became friends. She happened to be right next to me when we came out from the showers, supposedly, which they did-- we came alive, where most people that went into the showers were gassed. We did come out alive, minus our hair. They shaved our heads. But if the head is there, I found out that hair grows eventually. So this shouldn't have been our worry.

But I remember this girl standing next to me. And she's laughing. I said, what's so funny? She said, Regina, you should take a look at you, the way you look. You look like a little boy. I said, have you looked how you look?

[LAUGHTER]

She just saw me. We didn't have a mirror. But that place, it was really like unbelievable.

Regina, from Auschwitz you were, of course, selected to do slave labor. And you were sent to other camps.

Yes, definitely, because you couldn't stay around and just get fed and not do work. We did, after approximately-- I think we were there for six weeks. I figured this out. I don't know. One of these days maybe I will get some papers on me that will tell me how long I was there. But so far I haven't been able to find it. But they did take us out. And we went to another camp, which also was-- anything to get rid of Auschwitz was, all of a sudden, unbelievable.

Because it was-- we actually were under the soldiers, under the military, which was a little bit kinder. But all of a sudden, they walked in there because the-- I was able over there to go to a dentist. And he told me that I need to have vitamin. You know? I said, where can I get it? He said, I don't know. We don't have it either. [LAUGHTER]

This was the soldiers. So he told me, at least we had some people. And they had a little bit more-- they weren't so-- because if you were under the SS or the Nazi party, you were constantly afraid. But if you were, they usually, the soldiers, were a little bit kinder.

So anyhow, we are in this camp and we're working. We worked with people from Holland. They came to Germany because they were looking for work, and Germany had a lot of work to give out. So they came. They got paid for it. But we were the slaves. So one day, in this particular camp, I turned around, and there I saw an apple and a piece of bread. And I'm thinking to myself, are they playing games? Because sometimes they like to do that just to amuse themselves.

And I grabbed the apple and the piece of bread. And I gobbled it down so fast, how I didn't choke I don't know. But you know what? I got it, and I felt-- the only thing, I felt so bad because my buddy that was with me, because we used to share everything, and I didn't. I couldn't give her anything. So the next time, the next day I see this guy walking around. And all of a sudden, he blinks at me as if to say, you got my message.

And do you know, every day in that camp, I found in the same place an apple or a pear and a piece of bread that I was able to share with my buddy. I couldn't share with the whole camp, but I could share with my buddy that for years-- she survived also. And she used to say to me, that guy probably roams around some place in Holland and doesn't even know that he helped, really without knowing, two girls to save-- practically like saving a life because a little bit extra food.

And this thing what I wanted also to say-- so my friend, when we were still in Auschwitz, and you know, propoda-- that thing what I started saying in the museum. They have this open thing on top. The sky is open. And it happened to be,

actually, a nice day that day in some-- once in a while we had a very nice day. The sun was shining, and I could see my friend was thinking of something. And she says to me-- I tell her-- her name was Estusia. I said, Estusia, whatever you think of doing, don't do it because, you know what? Maybe he is not-- as meaning Hitler-- he is not as powerful as he is.

Look at, it's such a beautiful day. The sun is shining. We can get dry off because if it rained and the clothing that we were wearing, it dried on us. What we wore, we didn't change like we change here. You come home, you're wet, you take-- and you change your clothing. We didn't have this luxury. So whatever we had-- I said, look, it's such a beautiful day.

And she says, Regina, how did you know what I had in mind? I said, I don't know. I had this feeling. You know why? Because I told you, I went to the Jewish day school. And sometimes they gave you such a, like, little-- they told you little miracles. So I figured, maybe this is a little miracle for her because I still wanted her to be alive. But now, from this camp we went to another camp.

Regina, I know our time is getting short.

Yes, that's why--

You were sent to a number of camps. You went to Gleiwitz. You went to Bergen-Belsen. Tell us now-- and I know we're moving ahead.

Bergen-Belsen was no picnic either.

No. But tell us now, though, about the events that led up to your liberation and your liberation.

Oh, OK. They finally-- it was ordered, the-- don't ask me the date because, really, we didn't know. You know how we judged summer or winter? By the type of weather it was. We never had a paper to read. Or sometimes we would find a piece of paper, and we read it or whatever. But we didn't have these kind of luxuries.

So what happened, that time, when the Germans apparently-- we didn't know that they were fighting with the Russians. And of course, because we knew that they came to Poland, because that's why they shifted us from the first camp. But what's happening now, they were going-- they wouldn't give up. They were going still to send us to another place, to, I guess, to get rid of us. But then, miracle of miracles-- you know, sometimes they do happen.

We happened to be in the cattle trains. And in Germany, unlike anyplace in Poland, the railroad tracks were never bombed. In Germany they were bombed. So we had to stop there for repairs. And I will never forget the date was April-- let me take a look because you know what? The date gets a little bit mixed up. And I might not remember. Do you have me with my date? Let me see.

Yeah. And this was, yes, April 20. I should remember because they told us it was Hitler's birthday. And they're going to give us an extra piece of bread. You see, in their diabolical way, they figured we might be even happy that it's Hitler's birthday. But all of a sudden, the skies became dark, and the Allies decided to send a couple of bombs. And of course, when you are in closed cattle trains, you have no place to run till they drop the bombs.

When they dropped the bombs, from the explosion our trains turned over. And the minute we had a chance, we saw some kind of opening. We ran. We saw some woods in the background. And we ran as fast as we could. Had we stopped and looked around, we would have seen that the Germans ran away too. They knew that they lost the war.

We were still fighting the war. And we are in these woods. And no, they never gave us the piece of bread, no water. The snow had melted-- no water. We figured we're going to drop that right there. And we decided, let's take a chance. We're going to walk out from there. And as I walk out and I see my friend standing there-- you should have saved a little bit farther away.

And honest to goodness, I looked around, and there was the soldier that, honest to goodness, he looked like a god to me.

I couldn't recognize the uniform he wore. I knew it wasn't a German uniform. So I ran over to him. And I said-- turned out he was a Russian, tovarisch, you know, something, because I knew Polish. So a couple words I threw in. And I use him because the officer was also very tall, just like this guy here.

[LAUGHTER]

But he wasn't there.

[LAUGHTER]

But anyhow-- and they told us, go home. You're free. Go back in the woods. Tell everybody to come out because, you see, they knew that there was people. But they thought maybe they are German soldiers. So I guess I don't blame them. They knew the war was over. They didn't want to get killed. But he said, go in and tell everybody to come out. And because we were a lot--