

## REGINA OPPENHEIMER

Regina Oppenheimer survived Theresienstadt, Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen.

“During the day it is out of my mind, but at night it comes back to me in dreams. I see everything, and I say to myself in these dreams, this time I am smarter. This time I will not go through it. This time I will hide.”

Regina Oppenheimer was born in 1922, in the village of Krasnovce, Czechoslovakia. Her mother died when Regina was two-and-a-half years old, and she went to live with her grandmother. After a year, her father remarried. Because he traveled a great deal, she was left with her stepmother, who treated Regina and her brothers very cruelly. When she was twelve her father died, and her brothers soon left for Palestine. Regina was alone. In 1930, she was sent to live in a children’s home in Prague where she remained until she was twenty.

The Germans marched into Prague in March 1939 and Regina remembered seeing soldiers everywhere. She was sent to Theresienstadt, where she lived in a room with forty-two other women and worked in the fields outside the ghetto.

After two years, Regina and a group of others were jammed into cattle cars. They were in Auschwitz. The Nazis divided the old people from young ones: the smell of burning hair and bones was everywhere and Regina was sure that they would all be selected to die when they had to march naked before German soldiers.

She remained in Auschwitz for six months and was put on a transport of young people to work in a bomb factory near Berlin. Soon afterwards, they were sent on six-week death march in the snow to Bergen-Belsen. She had never saw so many dead people as there were at Bergen-Belsen. Weak and hungry, Regina contracted typhus and wondered how long it would take until she was the next to die.

On April 14, 1945, the prisoners were kept awake by constant bombing. The next morning, they got up as usual and lined up outside in formation to be counted. But after many hours no Germans appeared, and they were free.

After liberation, Regina recuperated in a hospital in Sweden. She was sponsored by relatives in the United States and eventually settled in San Francisco where she married a fellow survivor who had lost his family in the camps. Joining many others, they bought a chicken farm in rural Petaluma where they raised a family.