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Interview with Halina Peabody
June 3, 2002

Beginning Tape One, Side A

Question: This is **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with **Halina Peabody**, conducted by **Esther Finder**, on June 3rd, 2002, in **Rockville, Maryland.** This interview is part of the museum's project to interview Holocaust survivors and witnesses who are also volunteers with the museum. This is a follow-up interview that will focus on **Halina Peabody's** post-Holocaust experiences. In preparation for this interview, I listened to the interview conducted with the Survivor's of the **Shoah** Visual History Foundation on October 25th, 1996. I will not ask you to repeat everything you said in that interview. Instead, I will use this interview as an opportunity to follow up on that interview and focus on your post-Holocaust experiences. This is tape number one, side **A.** What was your name at birth?

Answer: **Halina Janna Litman**, **L-i-t-m-a-n.**

Q: And when were you born?

A: I was born in **Kraków** on December 12th, 1932.

Q: Were you known by any other names during the war?

A: Yes, I had to assume a name, a Catholic name by the name of **Halina Litinska**.

Q: And how old were you at the end of the war?

A: I was 13.

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Q: What can you tell me about the day that you realized that you were no longer under Nazi control?

A: That day was a very difficult day in our lives because my mother, who was working for the German army, got up in the morning and thought -- it was very quiet out there, we were -- we knew that the -- the Russians were coming closer. We didn't know where they were and the quiet was just eerie. And she didn't know whether to go to -- to her job or not. And we were standing talking about it and suddenly a hand grenade split over the -- the house, which I didn't know at the time, and I s -- hit my hand. I didn't know what happened, I started screaming like Mother, Mother, my hand. And she realized that I was wounded, and everything went black, we didn't know what was happening. The house sort of was coming down. And she grabbed my sister, who was only a few years old, and took her in the arms and grabbed me by the hand and we got out of the house. And my hand was bleeding and there was not a soul in the street. She tried to get somebody to pick us up, but nobody would. So I just had to hold her hand and we walked to the hospital, which was at the end of the street. At that time somebody came out of the hospital, picked me up and dragged me off -- took me to the hospital. And -- where they examined my hand. My thumb was cut off, was hanging on a piece of skin, and my little finger was ha -- half cut. My inside of the hand was a complete mess, it was

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just completely open. And they -- there was no penicillin, so they had to sort of clean it as best as they could. They told my mother my ha -- my arm might have to be cut off because of the infection that they expected. And they just put us all up in one bed in the hospital. So that was my day of liberation.

Q: When was this? Do you happen to know the date?

A: I don't know, but it was spring or summer because we -- it was warm. We walked on the streets and I remember the sun was shining.

Q: Was this 1945?

A: I believe it was.

Q: And where were you?

A: We were in **Jaroslaw,** which is not too far from **Kraków**, which is not our hometown, but where we went as Catholics because nobody knew us there and it was sort of on the way to **Kraków**. I guess my mother was trying to be close, but not too close, in case she needed to look up somebody, or -- I don't know why, really, but that's where we -- we spent the war.

Q: Can you tell me the names of your mother and your sister and how old your sister was?

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A: My mother's name was **Olga**. My sister's name was **Eva**, which she kept even as a Catholic. And she was born in June 30, 1939. So she must have been like almost six years old.

Q: Who were your liberators?

A: Well, they had to have been Russian, which my mother referred to as not liberators, but occupiers, again. But at least they weren't killing us any more. Although there was a pogrom she told me, and she refused to let me speak my name. I still had to use the Catholic name because she said they're going to kill us.

Q: Did you see any other Jewish survivors at the end of the war?

A: Not at that point. Not -- not til much later.

Q: What did being free of the Germans mean to you?

A: Well, it meant a great frustration because I wanted to say who I was and I couldn't. And there I was with my hand in a -- on the -- on the railing for two months, and my mother in the meantime -- well, they had to put it on a rail because they -- the hand was -- was going to grow in such a way that I wouldn't be able to straighten it. It -- it -- it bent like that. If you -- if -- the nuns really saved my hand, because they kept on stretching and stretching. And my mother, in the meantime, was diagnosed with cancer. And so -- they didn't -- they weren't even sure a hundred percent if it was cancer, but there was a lump. And they felt that, you

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know, they didn't want us to be orphans, they said, and they told me to go and convince her to have the -- the breast off. So on top of everything else, she had to have her breast off and she had this operation. And we discovered that the lady with whom we had been living during the war was killed by the same hand grenade that -- that hit me. So we had no -- no room, no place to go, although the neighbor next door took us in. So my mother spent th-the -- sort of the d-days before she got the operation between the hospital and home and with my sister. And then after she was operated on, she was also in the hospital. I guess my sister was with the lady sometime and sometimes with us in the hospital.

Q: Were you a witness to any acts of retaliation or retribution against people who had helped the Nazis?

A: Not personally, but when we already lived in **London**, we had a couple living in the house, we used to rent out hou -- rooms. And one of the guys was all broken up and beaten up and my father said that it was because he was a collaborator, that he -- he got beaten up. But not of my own eyes or experience.

Q: Did you yourself, even though you were a child, want revenge?

A: I don't know what I wanted. I was too miserable and too weak to think about anything. My hand was occupying my -- my thoughts. Re-Reuniting with my father after so many years and not knowing him and not knowing, you know, how to

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behave. It was a strange world all of a sudden. I really didn't think about it, I remember Mother saying that no matter what they will -- what kind of sentences they'll give the Germans is not enough and there is just no kind of punishment that could punish them for what they've done.

Q: You mentioned a reunion with your father. Did that come immediately after the war?

A: No. After the war we knew he was alive because my mother got a Red Cross telegram. That is, she didn't get it directly, the people who never survived to tell us anything about what went on, but were killed by the Germans, sent us a letter that there was a communication from my father through the Red Cross that he was alive in **Palestine** with his sister. So we knew he was alive. We had no idea where exactly he was, but after the war there were announcements all over the place, and my mother put announcements in the radio. And they found him in **Palestine**. And that's why he contacted us. He sent my cousin, his nephew who was in the British army in **Palestine** to **Poland** to get us out and to put us in touch with the Jewish agency, and that's how we reunited. We reunited with him somewhere near **Munich**, after we crossed the **Brenner Pass.** He came to get us.

Q: Do you know when that was?

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A: I'm not sure, but it was somewhere -- probably before April 1946. Probably March. March, April '46 because by April I was in the -- in -- in the **DP** camp in -- in **Italy**, and I know he didn't stay very long because he had to report back to the army.

Q: What was he doing in the army?

A: Well, he was part of the General **Anders**, the Polish army that fought along with the British army against the Germans. And apparently **Stalin** made this agreement at **Yalta** that they would let out the prisoners, all the prisoners out. However, he tells us that he had to run away and -- and found -- find a way to get out with the Polish army. He was in **Siberia**.

Q: Did you make any attempts to find other relatives or friends?

A: Yes, we did. My mother went to **Kraków** and found that there was no sign of our grandparents. We did find that my uncle, my father's brother survived **Auschwitz**. And we kept missing him. We kept trying to find him and we didn't know where he was exactly, but we knew he was alive. He lost his wife and daughter, who was exactly my age. And he was the only one that survived in **Poland**. The others -- whoever -- whoever else was in **Poland** did not survive, in my family, but my aunt, uncle and cousin who were taken to **Russia**, to **Siberia**,

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also survived. My uncle died in **[indecipherable]** on the way out already of **Russia**, but my aunt and cousin lived in **England** with us afterwards.

Q: Did you go back to your pre-war home?

A: I could not. It's in **Russia** -- it's -- it's in **Ukraine** now, it's in **Zaleszczyki,** which is on the frontier of **Romania**. At the time, it was **Poland**. Now it's **Ukraine** and they tell me it's much too dangerous. They still would like to kill us all.

Q: When did you realize the full extent of the genocide? When did -- you know, it -- when did it all come together for you?

A: Strangely enough it came to me when I was watching "**World at War"** with **Lawrence Olivier.** I had never really thought about it. I guess I was too young and too concentrated on my own problems. But when I saw that program, it struck me and it really hit me very, very hard.

Q: When was that?

A: I think I was already -- I don't know, it has to be in **England**, or maybe even in the **States**. It was a -- much, much later.

Q: After your liberation, when you st-started moving to different places, did you have much contact with other survivors?

A: Personally, no. My mother went to **Kraków** and tried to track, as I said, everybody down. There was no room for us in **Kraków,** so she found a -- a small

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place to live in, very close to one of the village near **Kraków**. Again they asked her directly if she was Polish, meaning was she Jewish and she had to say she was Polish. So again we were under the assumed names, and again we had to cover up. I went to school there. It was very strange, I was the only one who could read and write. And my mother went to the Jewish agency, and strangely enough, I don't know why it is, but she only registered herself as being alive, never put the children down. They were very surprised that she had two children, that she managed to survive with two children. I never went to the Jewish com -- agency, as far as I remember, I think she went by herself, but I may have forgotten. Very -- something very strange happened there because an old friend of hers who was remarried to a Catholic man and had big cross on her breast, said to her that my hand happened because I became a Catholic without being baptized. I've never -- never forgotten that, my mother was absolutely infuriated and sort of stuck in my mind that some of us were not perfect.

Q: How long was it before you were able to -- to freely admit that you were really Jewish, and use your own name?

A: Well, it was when we manage -- when we finally got into the Jewish agency groups and everybody was Jewish. However, there was another little wrinkle. They thought we were not Jewish and they tried to say that my mother was trying to get

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out of **Poland** under the guise of being Jewish and that she really wasn't, and we were not. So she had to try to convince them that she really was Jewish. And there we were, you know, trying to convince them we are Jewish. And finally -- all she would say was that my -- her husband's name was **Isaac**. And finally some people who knew us from **Kraków** did sign that -- sign off on us, that we were legitimate.

Q: You said you were with the Jewish agency groups. Where were you exactly? Can you clarify that?

A: Yes, we were in sort of group homes, they -- they had us in groups and they were going to transport us out one -- one group at a time. It was somewhere near **Kraków**, I -- I don't know, is closer to the German border. And what happens was -- was that they took one group after a time, they took pregnant and old -- elderly people first. The Russians had a sort of agreement that they would let us through, but they liked to be paid on the border, so they always had prepared money and there was a Polish guy, then a Russian guy, then they kind of closed their eyes to us, but -- but you had to still pay your way through. The first lorry that went out got caught, and apparently they were put back into some other camp and then they were let go. They didn't really want to keep us, but the second one went through and the problem was that before we got onto the truck, they attacked us at night, the Polish militia. And they wanted t-to -- to probably rape an-and steal from us, I don't know.

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We had to stand there and scream on top of our lungs in order for them to go away. We were lucky that they in -- in the end they went. In the morning they turned up and said, oh, what was the problem, we heard there were noises. But we knew exactly what it was, so we were just looking forward to getting out. It was a very strange, very strange time. Strange time. The last -- the -- when we ca -- got out, we -- they put us out wha -- three kilometers past the frontier. Once my mother gave up her watch because the Russians wanted watches in addition to whatever they got. And then another guy gave his watch up. So we got through and then the German refused to sell us tickets. We were supposed to buy tickets in the train and then get to **Berlin** on our own accord. And the leaders went to buy tickets and the Germans didn't want to sell them to us because we were Jews. I don't know what they did in the end, but we did get on the train and we did get to **Berlin**. We were in the Russian sector first and they tried to also establish that we were Jewish. They took two or three people and had them sign their name in Hebrew. And the -- then they came back and it was okay. We went from there to the British section and then to the American section, we were kind of carted around. And in the end they sent us on to **DP** camp in **Italy**.

Q: Do you remember the name of the **DP** camp?

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A: Yes, it was -- there were two near **Ancona,** there was **Trani** and **Barletta.** And we did not spend much time there, but have quite nice memories. I remember the music. And well, I -- as I said, we were young and we wanted -- we were happy to be alive. It was a -- it was a better time. The weather was beautiful, we had food, and my father told them explicitly to keep us there as long as possible, to have us recover in the nice weather and the good food. My father, who was a dentist, had privilege in the hospital there and so we used to go and have our meals at the hospital. My mother taught us to swim there in the -- in the gorgeous sea, you know, and we had a very pleasant time. The food was marvelous, the -- the -- the cherries particularly, just absolutely wonderful. And the ice cream, I've never tasted -- maybe because it was after the war and we were so hungry, but never tasted anything like it. And it was -- it was very pleasant pastime. Unfortunately, because my father asked them to send us late -- last, they sent us first to **England**, because we chose -- my father and my mother decided that out of the choices, **Palestine** or **England**, we should go to **England**. So they sent us in a very cold time to **England**. It was not -- not a very happy experience to begin with.

Q: Stay with me for just a minute in the **DP** camp. Can you tell me a little bit about the conditions there with respect to housing and work and education opportunities. Can you talk a little bit about that?

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A: We were there only two months, and we -- we were just there, I think, for sleeping, because we spent most of that time in the hos -- near the hospital and -- and on the beach. We didn't have much education, no there was no education, I mean, there was nothing going on. At the time it was not organized for that yet. Very early, I think.

Q: Do you know when?

A: I don't, I'm afraid. But as I said, I found that we were there in 19 -- in -- in April 1946, so that -- that's the date that I have because I found some document that states April '46, we were there.

Q: Did you have any trouble letting go of some of the behaviors you had to use to survive during the war, like you know, did you have any trouble with your name or with anything else?

A: I didn't have any na -- trouble with my name. I do remember when we first found Father and we -- he ha -- he brought a -- a chauffeur and a **Mercedes** and we traveled through -- through part of **Italy** and at one point we got off and went into some side -- side -- what do they call it, the gardens. And we found these beautiful red cherries and we picked up some and we came -- came to -- back to the car and he almost killed us. I mean, he was furious. He told us no more stealing. We were

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so used to do that during the war in order to survive. So that stands out in my mind. What was the other question?

Q: Do you have any trouble, you know, just identifying yourself as a Jew at this point?

A: No, not I, but my sister. My sister, who did not know she was Jewish, because we couldn't tell her, she was too young. When my cousin from **Palestine** came, even though he didn't look that Jewish, she immediately recognized that he had a long nose, and she said, **Arayed**, you're Jewish, but you're nice. And he said, but you're Jewish too. And she said absolutely not. She would not believe him. And it took her quite awhile before she accepted it, but I had no trouble, no. I just kept going to church, though. I was so used to it, I kept going to church until they stopped me.

Q: What did going to church give you?

A: Oh, just being with friends on Sunday. I mean, that was the only recreation we had during the war, you know, the only time that you dressed a little bit, whatever you had and it was a social occasion, so it was very hard to -- you know, not to do it. Everybody else was Catholic. Most of the people we were with was -- are, you know, officer's families. So that was something that I -- I missed.

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Q: Can you remember the very first time after the war that you felt free enough to admit that you're a Jew to somebody in public?

A: Not until we left **Poland**. Not in **Poland**, but once we left **Poland,** then yes. And I was very -- I was very happy about be-being able to admit it, but I wasn't proud of it until I lived in **Israel**.

Q: What steps did you and your family take to rebuild your life? For example, were you able to get any rehabilitation for your hand?

A: There was no such thing as rehabilitation for anything in those days as far as I know. What I did get was some help from the teachers, who tried to accommodate my -- both the lack of no -- knowing English and my lack of thumb, to do subjects that would make it easier for me. And that's why they immediately switched me to commercial subjects like shorthand, which meant that I didn't have to spell, and typing, which means I learned how to spell by copying. And then also arranged for me -- showed me how to use my fingers so that I wouldn't need the thumb or the little finger, so that I could type. And I did type over a hundred words a minute at one point, so I -- I did pretty well on that. And I also found that I could knit, which I could before the war, before I lost my thumb. And whatever I could do before, including even cutting my cuticles, I found I could do. At one point they decided they wanted to help me and they got me to a doctor and the doctor was going to try

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to do something with my hand, they wanted to adjust my -- one of my fingers so that I could use it as a thumb. I don't know, it was -- it was a very difficult situation. My mother didn't know what to tell me cause she was in such pain about this, and w -- I ended up being in the hospital and already the -- getting the first shot before the anesthesia and I said no, I don't want to do it, and I just got out. And I said I -- you know, I just got off the bed and -- and thanked them and -- and never tried that one again. I felt that it was just too difficult and I'm glad I did because my instinct just told me not to. But other than that my rehabilitation was mainly my own doing. The other thing I did was play table tennis, which meant that I was easier with the company I was in. I liked the company of boys, which was easier **[indecipherable]** to play table tennis. And plus, when you play a -- a sport like table tennis or any other sport, you have no time to think of your hand. You know, I used to stand with my hand in the back so that it doesn't show. But when you play, you know, you have to serve, you have to put your ball up and -- and you -- you have to look at the ball, so you don't have time for the hand. And that, I think, is my cure. That was my cure.

Q: Where were you that they were teaching you English?

A: I was in **England**. Yeah, my father, as I said, decided to go to **England**, and after spending about a year in **Liverpool** in a camp, we -- also they taught -- tried to

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teach us English there. They taught us and -- and I was sent to a school in **Ulverston**, which was a little way away -- away, and I was surprised how well I was doing until I learned it was a technical school. But anyway, my English started getting slowly better, you know, you're like -- 13 and a half I was by then. My sister had no problem whatsoever, but I had troubles. I was reading Polish books and knitting in school, but they didn't mind. They let me -- they let me do what I needed to and I did math. So that's how I started learning English.

Q: You mentioned a camp in **Liverpool**, can you elaborate?|

A: I -- it was a military -- I mean, it was for m -- for officer's families. The English were very nice to us, but it was such a hard time at the time because they were so worn out themselves that r-rationed food was very scarce. They gave us what they gave to th -- to their own, but it was -- we were always hungry. And, as I said, we had heating only a -- a couple of hours a day. We were in barracks, you know, it was beds, stacked beds, and did our best that we could. We go to **Liverpool** with our ration cards and get some bit of clothing here and there, but mainly we lived on kippers, because you know, we were hungry for meat and meat was very scarce. So the kippers were the only ones that you could get without rationing. I don't think I've ever seen a kipper since, because I can't stand it. But mainly that's wh-what we ate as -- as protein.

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Q: During that period of time, were you aware of the events that were unfolding in **Palestine?**

A: No, not at all. I -- I hardly knew what **Palestine** was all about. I had very little knowledge about that. It was not until they declared the state of **Israel** that I remember my father coming in with absolutely shining eyes and saying, we have a country. And that was when I really paid attention.

Q: Did you follow the **Nuremberg** Trials?

A: Not really. I guess I was too busy with my own problems again, but I remember my mother tell -- saying that there was no punishment that she could think of that would be enough for them, so there was a lot anger. But as I said, I -- I was too busy with doing other things and I was just too young to -- to think about it.

Q: Did you experience any anti-Semitism in **England**?

A: Some. Not very overt, but I'll never forget when I applied for a job at the automobile association in **London**. The personnel officer asked me what religion I was, she said I didn't have to say. But I wanted to, at that time I felt I needed to say who I was, so I said Jewish. And she said to me, we don't ma -- mind Jews, but you can't have Jewish holidays off. And I was so stung by it. Now, I'm not religious, but it stung me, I've never forgotten it. I did get the job. I did very well there, too, but I've never forgotten that.

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Q: Did the people in **England** ask you about your wartime experiences? And if they did, what did you tell them?

A: Not really. Not -- people were not very interested. There were a lot of refugees and nobody was really curious about u -- me as far as I knew. They were very helpful. The English are very -- how can I put it? They don't -- they don't question you, they don't ask you things like that. They were very quiet about it and they knew, but they didn't really know. But they didn't want to. So they were very nice, as I said, they put themselves out, they tried to help me in school. They gave me secondhand clothing which they said would be for somebody in the camp, which they meant for me. But other than that, no.

Q: I think we're going to pause, and I'm going to change the tape.

End of Tape One, Side A

Beginning Tape One, Side B

Q: -- the interview with **Halina Peabody**. This is tape number one, side **B.** And I was asking you about your time in **England** and you said that this -- the British didn't ask you much about your wartime experiences. Did anybody ask you about your hand?

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A: Not really, they didn't. They were too polite. The British are like that. They just don't ask you. But as I said, they were very nice and helped me a lot in other ways, but never asked me anything about my hand.

Q: Were you happy there?

A: No. No, I was very miserable. Look, I didn't know the language, I had my hand to cover up all the time. That was before I was playing table tennis, and it -- it was a miserable time. The weather is miserable in **England**. It was cold, I was always cold, and rainy. I didn't have enough clothes really and it was hard getting used to being a family with Father again. We were so used to being with just Mother and plus, during the war I was the -- the s -- the second partner, you know, and then after the war I was a child again. It was very uncomfortable. And we struggled, because when they decided to come to **London**, we bought a house. The way you bought a house that time, all the refugees wanted a house to have roots, but you lived in a -- one level and you rented out the rooms at the top so that you could pay the mortgage. So it was a hard life. And my mother didn't realize that by law I had to go to school, so before we came to **London**, she and my sister went first to look for the house and she broke down in one of the schools because they said that they had no room for me. And -- and th-the director took pity on her and said he s -- he'll send her to another school in **Fulham**, which is southwest **London**, where they did

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accept me. It was a very nice -- it was actually a girls' school. And the headmistress, Dr. **Toms,** I'll never forget. She was a very -- very lovely lady. And so they accepted me there, but when they moved to the house -- when we went to **[indecipherable] London**, she insisted I continue going to s -- to **Fulham**, which meant about an hour on the underground every day, cause she was so afraid that they -- I wouldn't get education. So it was a hard time. I liked school, and they weren't having any -- any excuses there, you know. I said I didn't know enough English to do my homework and they said never mind, just keep trying. So I ended up really doing just as well as any other, and as I said, because I was on commercial subjects, I did pretty well. In fact, I did -- I think I was one of the first pupils in -- in school that passed the shorthand test. So I was happy in that, from that point of view, but living at home was difficult. We -- as I said, we struggled every week, there was not enough money for anything. My father was able to practice dentistry in -- in the army, but not in **England**. He wasn't -- his -- his education wasn't a-a-apparently sufficient, so he was a difficult situation too. So it was not -- not an easy time at all. My mother was miserable. She felt very much an incomplete person because of her operation for cancer. And she was very, very unhappy and that made me unhappy because, you know, I loved my mother very much. I did realize what

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she did for us during the war, I mean, she just absolutely used up every inch of her strength and I think she didn't have much strength left in her to fight.

Q: How long did you stay in **England?**

A: About 11 years. I stayed from when we arrived to 1957 and my mother died in 1954 and -- ’53 - ’54 -- 1953 was the first time that I went to **Israel** for the **Maccabiah** with my table tennis. I joined the **Maccabee** club in **London** and became very good at it and we represented **England** in the **Maccabiah** games. That was the happiest trip in time I’ve ever had, I -- you know the ship, the old, old ship that was horrible, that was such -- I had such a wonderful time and we stood on the -- on the ship all night coming through to **Haifa** and I’ll never forget that experience. So in 1953 was my first trip to **Israel**. And unfortunately my mother came down with cancer when I got back and in 1957, I left **England** for good, but until then I lived in **England**.

Q: And where did you go when you left **England**?

A: To **Israel,** to the second **Maccabiah**, where there was some family. We had the family that emigrated to -- to **Palestine** in 1932, my father’s sister and her four children. There were just grandchildren there by then already, and I had friends. The one couple that survived that we knew from before the war in **Haifa**. And I had the most wonderful time there. And there was another woman who was my age, whose

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parents knew my parents. And we were in touch, so I had friends in both **Haifa** and **Tel Aviv**, and it -- I felt so much at home. I mean, it was just wonderful.

Q: When you moved to **Israel**, what were your expectations as to what you would do there?

A: I was hoping to get a job, just to be able to stay and that was my primary concern, and I knew I couldn't just stay with my friends forever, and my aunt, so I start looking for a job. And because I spoke and -- and -- and was educated in **England**, I found a job in **Haifa**, which was near **Haifa**, actually. **Haifa** refineries, which belonged to British petroleum, and they grabbed me because I was British educated. So I had no problem and I got into a -- a hostel, there were lovely youth hostels there. And started working there and lived there for many years, until they sold the refineries. And then they tried to teach us Hebrew, I didn't do very well. I did speak, but I didn't write or read and I couldn't work in the language. So I started looking in **Tel Aviv**, and I had two offers. One was from the **Wisotsky** tea; they would have taught me better Hebrew, and then there was the American embassy in **Tel Aviv**, and that was more glamorous. Even though the-they offered a lower salary, I decided that that was the place for me. So I took the job at the American embassy and moved to **Tel Aviv**.

Q: And what was your social life like?

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A: Well, my social life was -- was good. I had lots of different boyfriends and I was trying very hard to settle down, but it wasn't easy. Never easy. I was not so young any more, I was in my late 20's. For me I thought that was very late. I missed my boat. So I -- I had some friends in **Haifa** and lots of girlfriends, that was easy. And we had a good time. And -- and then in the embassy there was some very interesting and attractive young men, so that's how my social life was pretty good there.

Q: Did the Israelis ask you about your wartime experiences, and -- and what did you tell them?

A: Not really. I don't recall them. I tried to tell them about my hand, I was always warning people about my hand because I was still at the point where I thought I had to warn them so that people wouldn't get a shock. And I remember one young man who tried to grab my hand, and I said don't, you'll be sorry. And he insisted and then I could see him going absolutely stiff and -- and -- and -- and surprised. And that was a terrible experience. And so I -- I tried to warn people about that, but not -- not -- about the rest of the experiences, nobody really wanted to know. They all be -- they were busy themselves, you know, building up the country and my family would not speak any Polish, they said that that was not the language that they wanted to use. And so we spoke English actually **[indecipherable]** until I learned enough Hebrew to speak with them.

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Q: Did you get a sense from the Israelis that you socialized with and spent time with of what their reaction to the Holocaust was? Did they ever speak about that with you?

A: Not then, but later on I've heard remarks like, you know, we got to get on with our lives, you know, this was then, this is now, we've got a new fight on our hands. They really didn't want to get involved. Of course, the **Eichmann** trial came afterwards and that really became a big, big thing in **Israel** and a lot of people -- well, a lot of people fainted, a lot of people had heart attacks, because it all brought it back and there were witnesses that had to appear. And I remember then that there was some more interest in it, and most of the people didn't want to know, tried not to think about it, but you could not help it, it just floated back and flooded you with memories.

Q: Did you ever serve in the army or were you ever asked to serve?

A: I was about to be asked and then I got married. So as a married person I did not have to go into the army. I have a feeling that if had gone, because of my hand I would not have been on the front lines anyway, but I was afraid. I didn't want to go into the army. I didn't get married for that reason, but I did -- I did li -- like the idea not having to go into the army.

Q: So tell me about getting married and who you married.

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A: Well, I married a guy who worked for the **U.S.** Information Agency, and who was Bulgarian and was very, very -- how can I put it? Very important in the **USIS**, he was the head of the local people and he did a very good job, spoke beautiful English, so I had no problem, but he was a Sephardic Jew. So that was a little problem for my family, they didn't like the idea very much, but well it was, as I said, it was a different time in -- in everybody's life and everybody was mingling by then. And his mother was very, very lovely, I remember that. And his father was a little bit strange, was very autocratic. I didn't like that, but I wasn't marrying the family. And I met him at the embassy and we got married at the em -- well, actually, at the embassy.

Q: When you think back on your time in **Israel**, what come to mind?

A: It comes -- what comes to mind in mainly that I loved **Israel** and I still do. It's my place, it's my country and even though I don't live there, it's the most important thing in my life is that **Israel** survives. It's something that I'm so proud of, and I'm -- I'm just so worried about all the time, and there's always been problems there, as you know. So it's so difficult to now accept the fact that we're still again at war, and more and more killings and more killings and I feel haunted -- ho-hounded. It's like it's never ends. I was just go -- getting over the Holocaust and here we are again, another Holocaust. And it's frightening what's written in the papers, that they

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want to demolish us again and that the Arabs are against us and that we may not survive. I just hope not to live that long to see that. But I do believe it will survive, and I think that the spirit of the people and the strength of **Israel** is such that there's just no way that they can finish them off.

Q: When did you leave **Israel** and why?

A: I left **Israel** in 1968, and the reason for that was that my husband was, as I said in the **U.S.** Information Agency, and he wanted, for his own career development, wanted to go and expand a little. **Israel** is a small country. He felt that in his profession, he needed a little more air. So we thought we'd come for a year, at least that was the plan. We rented our apartment and came with the best hope. He also wanted to go to school if possible, and I was supposed to go to work. My son was then five and a half, so he was going to go to kindergarten. And that's how we planned it. We got to **Washington**, but by the time we got to **Washington** he got an offer from the **Hoover** Institute, which is near **Stamford** University in **California**. So in the end we went out to **Palo Alto** and that's where we spent two and a half years and -- and he actually did some very good work at the **Hoover** Institute. He was the first Israeli to work there and the local Jewish community was very nice to us and very interested in what we were about and wanted to know more about us. This was part of the Jewish community that was never very much involved with

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Israel and that was a time that they suddenly awa -- awoke to the fact that **Israel** was something that would be of interest to them. And so we had a very, very nice social life there. And he did very well. He did very well, but then he changed, he went to work for **San Francisco Examiner**, and after awhile he felt that the only way to complete his rise in the -- in the profession, he had to come east. So that's -- after two and a half years we moved back to **Washington** and he went to work for Voice of **America.**

Q: You said your husband was from **Bulgaria**, is he also a survivor?

A: Yes, but Bulgarian Jewry was not killed, only -- only the other areas, I think the -- the **Bulgaria** proper, the king would not let anybody be killed. They put them in camps, they told them to give up all their goods, gold, silver, money, whatever, property. But they never killed anybody. And so they survived as a -- as a community and the whole community after the war, immigrated to **Israel.**

Q: Can you tell me your husband's name and also your son's name?

A: My husband's name is **Norbert Yasharoff,** and I have two sons. One is **Dov Yasharoff** and one is **Joe**, or **Yosi Yasharoff.**

Q: Before you came to the **United States**, what were your expectations of **America**?

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A: Well, I was a little worried. I was happy that they spoke English. I thought they were supposed to speak English anyway. It didn't turn out completely correct, but -- and I was a little concerned, I -- you know, it -- I heard about the **United States** for the first time in more detail when I worked for the American embassy where I also worked. I forgot to tell you. Oh yes, I did tell you. And it was frightening, was a long way away. It was a long, long way away and I thought that it was going to be strange, but I saw the **Hollywood** films and I thought that couldn't be like that. Turned out it was, almost, you know, and people had three cars in the family, I thought they were lying, but that's how it is, they do. We do. And the thing that struck me about the **United States** was how beautiful it was. And they never -- Americans who travel abroad never tell you how beautiful **America** is, they just complain. And the vastness of it. Th-The -- the size, th-the width and th-the breadth of it, it's just amazing because we come from **Europe**, small countries, you know, you go for a few ki-kilometers and you're at the border of one country and another country. And in the **States** you can travel for days and days and days and you can still be in the same country. And also the fact that whether it's pal -- **Palo Alto** or **Washington,** you can go to a store and get the same product, which is -- as I said, it was kind of strange for me, I d -- not -- not expected that. Life was very nice, all the machines that I never would have thought of. Never dreamt I would have a car, that

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my most valued possession. And altogether the Americans are much nicer than the British, they're much friendlier. And it's easy to make yourself a little niche and to live happily in your corner. It's true there's a lot of other problems in the **States**, but you don't have to be involved. In the smaller country I think you -- you -- you -- willy nilly you've got to be involved. But in the **United States**, you live in beautiful **Bethesda** or beautiful **Palo Alto** and you can forget about the other parts. Not nice maybe, but after what we've been through we felt very -- I felt very relieved and -- and I needed the rest from all the problems. So that was nice. We had other struggles because we had, obviously, to make a living, and my son went to school, and that was alright. He learned English very, very fast, so that was not a problem. But life was not easy, but it was more comfortable.

Q: Did any Americans ask you about your Holocaust experiences, or your hand, or anything else, and what did you tell them?

A: Yeah, the Americans did, especially, you know, when I first got to **Palo Alto** they did. I told them my story, they want to know about my hand, yes. And I told them. In fact, in **Palo Alto** our group of friends were -- were doctors and one of them was a plastic surgeon. And that was the other time when they -- he offered to do something on my hand. And it was going to be a very interesting project, he was going to do it for free. He was going to si -- take my little -- what was left of my

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little finger and transplant it to make a thumb out of it, and then cover my -- all the inside of the hand, the palm. It was going to take a couple of years to do it because I had to -- it was grafting -- grafting was going to take all this time and I was not going to be able to do anything at home. My husband was not at all for it. But even I felt that I -- I said to him, if he could give me back my hand as it was, I would do it, but not if it's going to give me something else new to -- to get used to and to learn how to use. It's been too long that I've known how to use my hand as it is. I'm not suffering. I probably can't play the piano, but that's about all I can think that I can't do. So at that point in my -- in my life, was not worth it and I backed out. But he did try. And I did tell people. They listened to the story, they weren't -- it wasn't goi -- a big deal, but -- but I did tell them the story, yes.

Q: Were you able to get any additional education in the **United States**?

A: Not really, I went to work. I had to work. I did learn a lot on the jobs. I really learned a lot on the jobs and I went -- got better and better jobs in the office, and yes -- and I -- I -- I did very well, I got to be administration director and hired and fired people, and that was good, I just wished that I'd gone back to school, but I had a child and I had to babysit him, sort of thing and my husband just didn't want to do that for me so I missed out -- out on that a little bit.

Q: How many children do you have?

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A: I have two sons.

Q: And the second one's name is?

A: **Dov. Dov** and **Joseph.**

Q: Wa -- one was born in **Israel** and the other one was born in the **States**, am I understanding it?

A: No. I mean, my first child **Dov** was born in **Israel** and he has **Down's** syndrome. And he is the one who is now in a -- in a special school, it's a special place in **England**. And my second son was born in **Reading, England** because mainly, my husband had an offer to go to try for the **BBC** job at the time I was pregnant, and I was only too pleased to get out because I was still worried about my birth, because of the first experience, that I wanted to be everything different and every -- somewhere else. So we agreed to go for a year to **England** and that's where I gave birth to **Joe**, in **Reading, England.**

Q: Have you spoken to your son about your experiences during the war?

A: Oh yes. Never, never kept it from him. It wasn't much of interest to him perhaps to begin with, but then he started when he was in school, he did a paper, he interviewed me and did a paper on me, so he was always aware of -- of my experiences. And asked them questions definitely, but it was never a secret, so I don't think he ever felt that he had to pry things out of me. If he asked I answered. I

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had nothing really dramatic to tell him except the horror of the whole thing, but I wasn't in a camp, I wasn't tortured. My hand happened, but it happened, it didn't -- wasn't somebody, you know, cutting me up. So my -- I always felt that my story was not too horrifying for anybody to listen to.

Q: Can you tell me a little bit about his education, what he does today?

A: **Joe** was -- well, he was kindergarten age when he came here and he went straight to school, through school and he got a Bachelor's from **Maryland,** University of **Maryland.** Took him a little longer than he should have, but he did it having a job already. He worked for **Fox** sports for 15 years, I think. And now he's with **Comcast**. He does producing and he's a -- what's called assignment management for **Comcast** in **Washington, D.C.**.

Q: You haven't said much about your sister. Can you tell me a little about her?

A: Oh yes, my sister, my sweet little sister, she was a baby two months old when the war broke out and my mother and I always took care of her. And she was very, very ill during the war. In fact, my mother thought she would not survive even after the war, because she was -- she was like skin and bones. The doctor said that she wouldn't live, but thank God, she's a very healthy girl now. She's had five children. She is a lovely lady, bit of a flirt. She lives in **London**, and -- with her husband. She -- unfortunately her firstborn son was killed when he was about 12 and a half years

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old, he fell under a car, it was a freak accident. Terrible, terrible accident. But she -- she went ahead and had another one, and it was another boy, so she has two girls and two boys and got a little granddaughter now. Wonderful to have a sister. And all -- all through the war we -- we took care of her, and well, she turned out okay. And very, very pro-Jewish now, and spend time in **Israel**, and -- both her husband and she -- she -- there's no problem being Jewish any more.

Q: Are you more religiously Jewish now than your family was before the war?

A: My family was not religious at all before the war. That's the problem and I really never -- we never had any holidays at home, we never did anything like that, but I did know I was Jewish. And it was very upsetting to me to have to say that I wasn't, and I was very happy to come back to it, but I am not religious. And having lived in **Israel**, I feel I have somehow become Jewish and I can -- I don't have to feel guilty about that any more. But I do not like rituals. And I do feel very close to the Jews, to my brethren. I don't mind going to the synagogue, but I don't like preaching and I don't like rituals, so it's a bit of a tug of war within me.

Q: During your time in this country, the **United States** has gone through some changes, let's put it that way. What were your thoughts, given your background, when **United States** was in conflict with the **Soviet Union?**

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Interview with Halina Peabody
June 3, 2002

A: Well, we were all afraid. We were afraid of the **Soviet Union.** We knew that they wouldn't le-leave voluntarily, wouldn't give up places voluntarily. When they walked into **Poland** my mother said, they are not leaving. She knew. I mean, again I have to quote her because I was too young to understand. And we were afraid when **Kennedy** gave the ultimatum about removing the missiles in **Cuba.** My husband said it was a terrible thing. I didn't know what to think. I know I was afraid. I didn't expect the outcome as it -- it was when the wa -- **Berlin** wall fell down. And the only thing I have to say about that is I was afraid about **Germany** getting too strong again, when the wa-wa-wall came down. That was -- I knew definitely that I was afraid. And I was afraid of **Russia**, yes. I'm -- I'm a -- still afraid, because they are not in a very good situation and there's too much crime there. The world is a very, very shaky place, an-and -- and every way you look, it's not safe.

Q: Were you aware of some of the events in the Civil Rights movement when you first came here?

A: Not really. The only one if I have is that the Jews helped the Civil Rights, I do know that. And then we got kicked in the teeth and they didn't really appreciate it and there was a lot of anti-Semitism coming from the black community, which hurt, because they're always trying to help others who are in the bad situation and

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unfortunately don't get any thanks for it. And so I'm not too keen on -- on that black community for that reason.

Q: The **United States** was also involved in a war in **Vietnam**. Do you have any recollections on -- on what that meant to you, having gone through a war yourself?

A: The recolatio -- recollections I have is because we both worked with American embassy. The Americans were trying to -- to promote and to present the side on **Vietnam** war to the Israelis. And I believed what I heard. I did not really have my own opinion since I wasn't living in the **States** at the time. And later on I understood, but at the time I was all for what the American was doing -- what the Americans were doing and I thought communism was a great, great threat. So at the time yes, I did believe that, but now I realize that it wasn't so, that there was a different way to deal with it, that it should have been. And they lied to much, and they -- as usual, they didn't tell the truth. And the mothers who marched deserve -- deserved a -- a -- a prize.

Q: I-I'm going to pause now and change the tape **[indecipherable]**

End of Tape One, Side B

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Interview with Halina Peabody
June 3, 2002

Beginning Tape Two, Side A

Q: This is a continuation of the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with **Halina Peabody**. This is tape number two, side **A**, and you were telling me about some of the experiences in this country, and we had talked about **Vietnam.** I wanted to ask you if you had any experience with any anti-Semitism in the **United States**?

A: Not really. I am quite aware of the fact that Jews are not loved everywhere, but not really. I have not come across anybody specifically not liking me because I was Jewish. I had a couple experiences -- well, I had a very cute experiences at work where a lady was mad, a -- a colleague was mad at somebody because they was -- kept bugging her on the phone and she slammed the phone down saying, that Jew. And then looked at me and, oh **Halina**, I didn't mean it, I didn't mean it. And then two weeks later she said, you know, I've got to go have an operation, I have a wonderful Jewish doctor. So that was -- but from then on, you know, I understood where -- she was a redneck, so I -- I -- I guess that that was part of it. I know there are people who are not particularly keen on Jews, but we have lots of friends who are not Jewish and who like us, so n-n-no -- no other problems.

Q: I'm going to try and ask this discreetly, but your name is now Mrs. **Peabody.** Can you take me from being Mrs. **Yasharoff** to being Mrs. **Peabody**?

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A: Yes. I got divorced in 1972, I believe. We had problems for awhile, and hoping that the **United States** will help us, but -- moving away from families, but it didn't work. So when my husband decided to go abroad on a mission, he went -- he went into the foreign service. And that was the time when we really broke up, because he was going to **Yugoslavia** then, and there was no American school in **Yugoslavia**, so it would have meant that I had to send my son to an American school in **Italy** or in **Israel** and I would have to go to **Yugoslavia** with him and I certainly couldn't -- couldn't have done that. So that was the breaking point, and so we divorced. And he went off to **Yugoslavia** and I stayed here with my son, and eventually met somebody very nice, name of **Richard Peabody**, whose mother happens to be Jewish, in fact. And so I wasn't so worried, because being from **Poland** and having heard that you should not marry out of your religion even if you're not religious, I figured he couldn't call me a dirty Jew anyway, because he was one, technically anyway. And we've been married for the last 20 years, very happily and I hope we continue for another 20.

Q: Please tell me about the work that you do for the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum.

A: Well, I do whatever they need. I am working mostly in the office because they didn't -- they were supposed to put me on Polish translations, but they don't happen

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to need any work there. So I work in **Martin Goldman's** office, who is the Director of Survivor Affairs, and I also joined the circle for -- writer's circle there, I'm trying to put my story down from the war, which is very, very difficult for me, but I like the people there and I feel very comfortable. And when I came to the point where I felt I wanted to volunteer somewhere, I went around and I thought, where would I do best? And I thought, well where would I do best, th-the only place I could so is the **U.S.** Holocaust Museum cause that's where I belong. And I do anything they ask me for and I'm enjoying just being there and I'm on my own.

Q: What's your reaction to the resurgence of interest in the Holocaust in recent years?

A: Surprise. I never thought it was -- I -- I've never thought it was important enough for people to know, I didn't realize people wanted to know. And I'm -- I'm pleased to tell my story. It does hurt, and it does exhaust me, but I feel very much obligated any time I'm asked, to tell it. And I do keep telling it. I've got a button, if you push it'll just come out. I've talked to a couple of schools here and there and I always feel that perhaps my story is not sufficiently big to -- to -- to -- just for the whole lecture, so I always like to take somebody else with me, and -- but I have no problem in telling it, and -- and I do. And if they help me to tell it better, perhaps I would do better job at it. So maybe the museum can do that for me.

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Q: In your opinion, do you think the American Jewish community might ever be in danger because of skinheads or neo-Nazis?

A: Yes. I think that we are all always in danger. We always have to watch and we always have to worry. I think that the ameri -- **America** is the safest place for Jews right now, but I certainly don't feel completely safe anywhere in the world, especially now.

Q: Would you like to elaborate on that?

A: Well, because the Arabs are attacking **Israel** and because the Moslems **[indecipherable]** I do believe that the whole world is in danger, but I don't think people understand that they're starting with the Jews just like **Hitler** did. **Hitler** wasn't going to just kill the Jews, he was going to kill Slavs, and whoever else, to make a perfect race. The Moslem wants every -- want everybody to be Moslem, and be an -- just like the **Al-Qaida** in **Afghanistan.** So I don't think people realize the danger, but I do, because we've been through it and we know what it -- what it can create. And if **America** backs off, it's going to be very, very bad for the world. I just hope that they're strong enough and that they will continue rooting them out and somehow manage to turn the world around, keep the democracies.

Q: **Israel** has fought in several wars. I'd like to know what your thoughts were during these times when **Israel** was in danger.

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A: Well, I had nightmares. I was running with my son, I was hiding and -- and -- and trying to find a safe place. Mainly, I couldn't tell you how proud I was that they've always won, tha -- how strong they were. And that gives me courage to think that they will survive no matter what. There'll be pain, there are killings, there are murders, we lose people. But we manage to recreate and somehow continue, and I hope that that will continue forever, so that my children can also see **Israel** and -- and -- and grad -- great-grandchildren and great-great-grandchildren.

Q: Have you ever regretted having left **Israel**?

A: Yes, I have. I -- I loved living in **Israel**. I've -- I've regretted it many, many ways, but I find life so much easier here. I a -- you know, I -- I suppose in my old age, I would be -- find it rather hard to go back -- especially I wouldn't go back cause my son is here an-and his life is here, that I -- that I would never go back to **Israel** for that reason, but when we left, yes, I do regret. I've never felt as happy and as free and at home as I felt in **Israel**. But again, you know, for selfish reasons I guess I'm -- I'm comfortable here. So one has to make accommodations.

Q: How do you think your Holocaust experience influenced the choices that you made over the years?

A: I think my main reason, my main choice was to take care of th -- my kids. I think that this is what my mother taught me by doing what she did during the war, by

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putting herself out and letting anything happen just as long as she could save her kids, transferred it to me. So I would do the same for my kids and my grandchild and those are the choices I've made, always whatever's goos -- good for my children. Other than that, I have enjoyed having a lot of things that I was not allowed to have during childhood. I missed a lot of things by -- by being during the war and running for my life and wanted to give it to my grandchildren as much as possible. I think that was -- that's my main -- my main outcome of the -- of the experiences.

Q: You mentioned that during the time that **Israel** was at war you had nightmares. Have you had any other recurring nightmares since -- since the **Shoah**?

A: Not really. I -- I've not had many nightmares, no. I happen to be quite healthy, I think, in that respect. I don't dream, I sleep very well. So perhaps I did the right things. I didn't -- I don't feel guilty about anything. I -- I -- I've often wondered why I don't feel guilty like some people, that others didn't survive and we did. I am asking the question why I survived and the others didn't, but I don't feel guilty. I think that everybody tried their best and luck was with us and God was with us. That's -- I don't know what else I can think about that, but that's my reaction.

Q: Are you involved with any survivor groups?

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A: Oh yes, very much so. I have been coordinator and now I'm a treasurer for the Association of Child Survivors. And that's another group that I love dearly and everybody there is my best friend and -- and I wouldn't never leave that group. This is my -- this is my -- how can I say it? My home away from home.

Q: Are you also involved with any hidden children's groups?

A: That is the group. The Association of Child Survivors.

Q: Oh, they're also hidden children?

A: They are called hidden children, yes.

Q: Thank you for clarifying that. What has been your best surprise about life in **America**?

A: The comforts, the ease of living, the fact that if you work hard anybody can really have a wonderful life here. And that's what I'm finally getting to, a wonderful life, and I'm hoping it'll last for a very long time. There are problems here with the governments and other things, which bother me a little bit, worry me. But overall, personally, I have a very, very nice life and I'm enjoying it. I'm hoping that I can achieve all the little things, all my little dreams. Practical things, you know. Making a nice home, having practical and -- and -- and material things, because that's all I -- I can do now. I am -- you know, almost 70 years old, so I want to travel a little bit, and as long as I can see my family in **London,** my son, my

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sister, her kids. My children here, my grand -- my granddaughter. I -- I love living in **America**. I would like to spend a little more time in **Israel**, but I have really no complaints, knock on wood, right now.

Q: Do you have any special memories of your experiences at the Holocaust Museum that you'd like to share? Any interesting experience, anything special happen to you during the time that you've been either visiting there or a volunteer there?

A: I don't have any experiences, special experiences. I love the **Szyk** expe -- the **Szyk** ec -- exhibition. I haven't worked there very long, so I don't have too many. I do know that I feel very comfortable there and I like the people there. I hope to have some more experiences there, but not anything that stands out, except that, as I said, I enjoy being there and I hope to do more work there.

Q: What would you like your family and friends, or anybody who might be listening to this tape to know about you that they may not already know?

A: I -- I suppose I want them to know that it's all very genuine what I do. I never -- I never -- try to never pretend and I like them to know that I like everybody. I'm not sure what else I can tell them, I don't have any secrets, really. And the secrets I have I'm not willing to tell. Th-They're not many, though. I really don't have much

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to say on that score, cause I -- I've always tried to say what I feel, so there's not much I think people don't know about me.

Q: Tell me about your reaction to what happened in this country on September 11th, 2001.

A: Oh, that was very traumatic, that brought me right back to where I came from, from the Holocaust. That ruined my -- my -- my quiet. I was feeling very comfortable and quiet and I'm no longer so. Since then I have been in turmoil. And the longer it goes on after, the aftermath, the worse it gets. And I don't know if I'll ever see peaceful world again, as long as I live.

Q: Is there anything that I haven't asked you that you would like to mention? Anything you'd like to add before we conclude?

A: No, I think I am -- I've told you everything I -- I -- I could. I think that I would like my kids to know that I love them very much and that they're my life.

Q: Thank you very much for speaking with us today. And this concludes the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with **Halina Peabody.** Thank you.

A: You're welcome.

End of Tape Two, Side A

Conclusion of Interview

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