

## Halina Yasharoff Peabody (Litman)



### Born December 12, 1932, Krakow, Poland

Halina was born to a liberal Jewish family in Krakow, Poland. Her father, Izak Litman, was a dentist; and her mother, Olga Schreiber, was a champion swimmer. Halina also had a younger sister, Ewa. When the Soviet Union invaded Poland in the autumn of 1939 Halina was living in Zaleszczyki which came under Russian occupation. Fearing conscription into the Russian army Izak crossed the open border into Romania. When he tried to return to his family, the border had been sealed and he was caught by the Soviets and accused of being a spy. Izak was sentenced to twenty years hard labor and deported to Siberia. In 1941, Germany discarded the German-Soviet Pact by taking over the part of Poland previously occupied by the Soviets.

**First Person**  
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Halina was nine years old when the Germans carried out their first aktion, or violent operation against Jewish civilians in her town. The Germans requested a group of volunteers consisting of young Polish Jews to bind trees with burlap for the winter. One girl managed to escape and reported back to the community that the group was forced to dig a ditch, line up alongside it, and then were shot. Following subsequent similar events the remaining Jewish community in and around Zaleszczyki was moved to Tluste which eventually became a ghetto. Halina's mother realized the dangers she and her daughters were facing and bought documents from a Catholic priest which allowed them to assume non-Jewish identities. With the new documents they boarded a train to Jaroslaw, Poland. A man on the train pressured Olga into admitting they were Jewish and he stated that he would have to take them to the Gestapo when they reached Jaroslaw. On the way to the Gestapo Olga persuaded the man to let them go.

Olga, Halina, and Ewa lived as Catholics in Jaroslaw with a woman who took in boarders, but were in constant fear of being caught. Olga found a job in a German military camp kitchen in order to obtain a German identification card which offered greater protection. Shortly before the Soviets liberated Jaroslaw, a bomb fell on the house where they were staying. Their landlady was killed and Halina's hand was permanently injured.

Jaroslaw was liberated by the Soviet forces in July, 1944. Having learned in a letter from the Red Cross that Izak had escaped Russia, and was with his sister in Palestine, Olga placed radio announcements in hopes of finding him. A friend of Izak's heard the announcement and the family was reunited and settled in London, England. In the 1953 and 1957 Maccabiah Games in Israel, Halina represented England in table tennis. She immigrated to the United States in 1968 and currently volunteers at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

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