

UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM

FIRST PERSON SERIES

Halina Yasharoff Peabody

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Suzy Snyder: We have five seats up here right in the front. If anyone wants to come up here, if there's five of you. Actually there's six.

Good morning. I'm Suzy Snyder and I'm a curator here at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Thank you for joining us for *First Person*. I'm the host of today's public program. We are in our 18th season of *First Person* and today it will be Halina Peabody whom we shall meet shortly.

This 2017 season of *First Person* is made possible by the generosity of the Louis Franklin Smith Foundation, with additional funding from the Helena -- Arlene and Daniel Fisher foundation. We're grateful for their sponsorship and today we're lucky enough to have Louis with us. Can you please stand? Thank you.

(Applause)

First Person is a series of conversations with survivors of the Holocaust who share with us their firsthand accounts of their experience during the Holocaust. Each of our *First Person* guests serves as a volunteer here at the museum. Our program will continue through mid-August. The museum's website, at www.ushmm.org provides information about each of our upcoming *First Person* guests.

Today's program will be live streamed on the museum's website. This means people will be joining the program via a link from the museum's website and watching with us today across the country. And around the world.

First Person program is every Wednesday and Thursday until the middle of August. It's our tradition that at the end of *First Person* our *First Person* has the last word. So when we are done here and we have answered our questions, I would ask you to remain in your seats for just another minute. But before we do that, let's -- let me introduce Halina in a brief narrative. This features Halina, her mother and aunt in approximately 1938. This is a map of Europe and a detailed map of Poland. Halina was born in Krakow, December 12, 1932. She was the daughter of Ignacy and Olga Litman. Halina, her mother, and sister survived the war in Jaroslaw under false papers identifying the family as Catholics. On the way to Jaroslaw the

family encountered a man who threatened to reveal their identity. Halina's mother struck a bargain with the man for their tickets and luggage and all the money she had and the coats they were wearing. This is the house where they were staying. This photograph shows Halina and Eva celebrate Christmas in hiding. Halina's mother decided the safest place to hide was in plain sight. So she found a job in German headquarters peeling the potatoes for German troops. This is a photograph of the headquarters where she worked. After the war Halina and her family immigrated to England. Please welcome Halina Peabody.

(Applause)

Suzy Snyder: Thank you, very much, Halina. Can you hear me? Can you hear me up there? Okay. Thank you so much for being here today. Halina is -- I've known Halina a very long time, so -- but I always find out new things every time I go over your history, which is actually very nice for me. But I wanted to have you start off by talking about what your childhood was like in the mid to late '30s, before 1938?

Halina Peabody: Well, I can't remember that --

Suzy Snyder: What you can remember.

Halina Peabody: Before 1938 I was very, very young. As I said, as you told, my -- I was about six and a half when the war broke out. We were living in a small town called Zaleszczyki and my father was a dentist so he had a surgery in the front of the house. We were living in the back. The beautiful town with a river almost completely surrounding it. My mother had been a champion swimmer, so she loved the water and she would do water-skiing and we used to -- we used to paddle around on the water there from -- there were two beaches. We would go from one to the other, a sunny beach and a shady beach. And as I said, life was good. The weather was fantastic. My mother was an all-around sportswoman, so she taught me to skate when I was five. My father, who decided that before kindergarten I had to learn to read the paper because I was the first so I had to be the good pupil. So I -- I never -- I never remember anything that, you know -- knowing how to read Polish or write Polish because he taught me so early so as I said I don't remember any of it. In addition to that, my mother taught me to embroider and to knit and crochet. So as a young child I was very lucky. I had toys, I had bicycles and tricycles. So my mother took wonderful care of us. She knitted everything I had on. So we had a wonderful life. And I was just about to go to kindergarten when the war broke out.

Suzy Snyder: So let me back up a little bit and ask, were your parents practicing Jews?

Halina Peabody: No, they were liberal. My father came from a religious family. My mother came from a liberal family. That's why she and all her siblings went to Polish schools and she --

Suzy Snyder: As opposed to Jewish schools.

Halina Peabody: Not Jewish, just Polish general schools.

Suzy Snyder: Did they speak Yiddish in the home?

Halina Peabody: No, because my mother did not speak Yiddish. My father did but my mother did not.

Suzy Snyder: You said your father was a dentist. What was he like? What kind of person was he like?

Halina Peabody: He was fun. He was a great, great joker and was -- he was very, very fond of me and he didn't like it when my mother tried to discipline me.

(Laughter)

Suzy Snyder: Your sister was younger than you by six years, yes?

Halina Peabody: Six and a half, yes.

Suzy Snyder: What was it like when she was born, for you, what was that like, being the center of everyone's attention and then suddenly --

Halina Peabody: No, no, no, it wasn't like that at all. No, no, we waited for her. I was very anxious to have a brother or sister and remember my mother -- I said why she had this big tummy, and she said you're going to have a brother or sister. So she prepared me for that. My mother always told me the truth and there was never any -- any feeling that she would be taking my interest, no.

Suzy Snyder: Right.

Halina Peabody: I really was like a second mother to her. Basically through the rest of the war.

Suzy Snyder: But she was born right before the war broke out, right?

Halina Peabody: She was two months whether the war broke out, yes.

Suzy Snyder: So can you describe what that was like, what you remember about that?

Halina Peabody: Well, I remember that my mother had great troubles because there was some problem with feeding and she suffered a lot with that. She was -- my sister was very small and a little sickly, and the war was coming on then when -- when '39 came around, when we knew that the Russians were coming, we knew that the men would seem to be in greater danger than the women, at least that was the understanding. So my father with some other people, some with families, some without, went over to Romania because the river was a natural frontier with Romania. And the men were afraid of being conscripted into the rationed Army which is what they thought because of the first world war that's what they did. Never occurred to them that women and children would have any problem. So he just left.

Suzy Snyder: So it was really more about protecting your father than anything at that point.

Halina Peabody: Right. And then leaving my mother with the two of us. Yes.

Suzy Snyder: And you remember it being particularly difficult on your mother, having a newborn, having you?

Halina Peabody: I did. I did. And that's why I'm saying, you know, it was more taking care of the baby and my mother because she was -- I became her support.

Suzy Snyder: So what happened to your father, he tried to --

Halina Peabody: Well, after a few weeks, I know exactly how many, but everything was frozen over. The river was frozen over. So my father and some other people decided that the Russians had done all the bad things they were supposed to do, arrested people, took everything -- everything they could find of value and they felt they could just slip back quietly and just rejoin the families. And unfortunately the Russians had sealed the border at the time and they caught them all. And my father was put on trial and they said he was a spy. They gave him 20 years hard labor and sent him off to Siberia. And so we lost him. So just the three of us.

Suzy Snyder: Did he communicate at all, write, was he able to write?

Halina Peabody: For the first year, no. After the first year we got some communication and we knew he was in Siberia.

Suzy Snyder: So at first your town is -- becomes occupied but not by the Germans.

Halina Peabody: No, by the Russians. There was an agreement between Russia and

Germany in 1939 to split Poland in two. Half was -- the north part went to the Germans and the east part was Russia. And also because my father was given the sentence and he was a criminal, quote, unquote, we were supposed to be going to Russia as well. They were going to take us to Siberia. But for some reason, I don't know why, they did not take us. But they threw us out of our house because it was too good to have a house, a family of a criminal. So we were told to go to a little place called Tluste, just up the road. So we packed up and that's where we moved. And that's that picture of my mother -- that's the only picture of my sister as a young child that we have, in Tluste. And that was already there.

Suzy Snyder: How long did you stay in Tluste?

Halina Peabody: Until the end of the Russian occupation.

Suzy Snyder: Which was 1941.

Halina Peabody: Yes. And they -- they tried -- the Russians dropped everybody one class because they wanted to have more time to educate us or reeducate us. So I went not to kindergarten but pre-kindergarten. And luckily I knew how to read, so my mother kept me going that way. And I remember learning a little bit of Russian letters. Not that I remember much of that, but we did -- they did try.

Suzy Snyder: And do you remember anything about Tluste other than maybe school?

Halina Peabody: Not much.

Suzy Snyder: And how long were you there?

Halina Peabody: Until the -- suddenly the Russians disappeared and we understood that the Germans were coming.

Suzy Snyder: So then you went back to --

Halina Peabody: Then we went back to Zaleszczyki and to our house and settled back in and waited for the new occupiers.

Suzy Snyder: And the new occupiers were not German.

Halina Peabody: Yes, they were, the new ones were German.

Suzy Snyder: At one point, though, the town is occupied by Yugoslav, is that not correct?

Halina Peabody: I don't remember the Yugoslavs. I remember the Germans coming down the road on bicycles and, you know, and black uniforms and gold buttons. I don't remember --

Suzy Snyder: How did you feel when you saw them?

Halina Peabody: Scared. I was very scared because they came in a very loud way, you know, motorcycles, a big fat man in the front on a motorcycle. And the rest of them were all in black uniforms, shiny, you know. Very scary. Very scary.

Suzy Snyder: And how was your mother through all of this? Did she continue to have a good facade? Could you feel her fear?

Halina Peabody: My mother did her best to take care of us. And I know she was having a very hard time with my sister. But we stuck together. And this was the man who was a technician for my father finished a few jobs and that's how we were able to survive.

Suzy Snyder: So at one point your mother decides they can't -- you can't remain anymore in Zaleszczyki and --

Halina Peabody: No, no, no, no. Sorry. Sorry.

(Laughter)

Halina Peabody: No, no. What happened was when the Germans came, Germans came in, they gave us all new rules and regulations.

Suzy Snyder: That's right.

Halina Peabody: The kids had -- Jewish kids had no schools. We had to put yellow stars on the houses and on -- on our arms.

Suzy Snyder: Because they're occupying you, they're occupying the town. And you also mention in one of your oral histories that Aktions begin.

Halina Peabody: Yes, that's exactly what I was going to say. Every Jew had to be working for them, no matter whether there was a (inaudible), they used to make them clean the sidewalks. And my mother, because they had a list of everybody and what everybody could do and they knew my mother was a great knitter so they made her be the chief knitter for the German mayor of the town. And she knitted for his children. That was her job. And of course the two of us. And then they started, you know, by -- well, everybody had to work for them, and they had various jobs to do. They created a committee of Jewish leaders there to be able to demand groups and whatever they needed. They didn't want to go around looking for people. So they had these few people that were in charge of giving them whatever they needed. And they would take groups of young people to work out in the farms and out in the -- wherever they needed them to do some work.

Suzy Snyder: But you don't actually use the word "ghetto," but essentially it was a ghetto.

Halina Peabody: No, no, not in Zaleszczyki.

Suzy Snyder: But it function it is same way but it was open.

Halina Peabody: No, I'm sorry. We should have discussed this before.

(Laughter)

No, no, we should have discussed this before. No, it was not a ghetto. We were all spread out in the town. They -- a few -- a couple of times they took a group out and brought them back. We accepted that that was the -- the system.

Suzy Snyder: So people were leaving to go do slave labor or labor?

Halina Peabody: Well, they were slaves more or less. They said they demanded 200 people or 100 people or 50 people and they had to be in the morning and they took them out on a job and then they brought them back. And then the next thing they wanted a very big group of about -- it was about 600 plus people because they wanted to bind trees for the winter because winter was very, very severe in Zaleszczyki. And so people went. A lot of people even went voluntarily. Everybody wanted to help and, you know, to be cooperative. And they walked them up the road, as usual, and towards the afternoon nobody was coming back and everybody got very, very scared and not knowing what was happening. And nobody came back until late in the evening, one man came back and he had been shot in the arm. And he told us what happened. When they got to the woods where the trees were to be bound they found there was an open grave there with planks over it and they were told to undress and lay down over the planks and they were shot. As they were shot they dropped into the grave. And this man was one of the last ones to be shot. They missed his heart, and that's why he was -- and he was on top. So when the Germans left, not caring even if they covered them very much, when the Germans left he managed to scramble out of the grave and came and told us what -- what was happening. And then we understood then that we were in grave danger and we also knew there was nothing for us to do because we had nowhere to run, nowhere to go.

Suzy Snyder: You had said that you would -- that people would watch people leave every day and hope that they came back. You must have -- people must have known that

there was some kind of Aktions going on already before this big one, yes?

Halina Peabody: Not to my knowledge.

Suzy Snyder: But they had fear, right?

Halina Peabody: I --

Suzy Snyder: The fear of the unknown.

Halina Peabody: I was a child. I can't tell you what everybody thought.

Suzy Snyder: No, no, but --

Halina Peabody: But what I -- what I was saying is that this is what happened and then this was the big one. At this point everybody tried to look for a hiding place.

Suzy Snyder: Right.

Halina Peabody: And, you know, we all knew that this would happen again. And so the next time came a demand for people to go to work in Germany. Nobody believed them anymore. Everybody scattered around and hid. They managed to find the number of people they needed. They loaded them on the train, and after that, you see, there were not many Jews left in that town. A small town. So they decided to throw us all out, the rest of us, the rest of the Jews. They threw us out again to the little town of Tluste. That's where it eventually became a ghetto.

Suzy Snyder: I skipped a big chunk. Sorry.

Halina Peabody: But at that time it was still open. They just told us which area to go to. We just settling in. And we discovered that not only our little group of -- who remained in our little town was there but also small groups from the surrounding counties. And so we were all together there. And we -- the first thing my mother said to me, everybody was looking for hiding places. And she said it's not going to work because they're going to move us again. That was her understanding. And she started trying to get the children, my sister and I, out to Romania. It was only to cross the river, but it wasn't easy. And nothing worked. So the end when the demand came again for people to work in Germany, everybody hid in their places, wherever they could find. But my mother, because we had been there before, so we knew a few farmers there. So my mother decided to put me with one farmer and I was up in the loft, and she went and paid another farmer to keep her through the day. And we split up that way. And all day long --

Suzy Snyder: And she had your sister?

Halina Peabody: Oh, yes, she was with my sister. She took her. So I all day was thinking that she was caught.

Suzy Snyder: Right.

Halina Peabody: And my -- the lady who had me kept coming back saying that she had seen this one and this one, they would collect them and put them in the square until they had the right number. And -- but there were people I knew in the square. So I knew a lot of people were caught. And towards the end of the evening finally she did come back and to pick me up. And she said to me that she was in a terrible state because she thought I was caught. And so she said to me, we are never going to split up again. Whatever happens, the three of us will go together. And that was her decision, and of course I agreed. And after that --

Suzy Snyder: At some point she tries to secure papers.

Halina Peabody: That was the thing. We said before the next time it happens, she and her friends decided because we were all females they couldn't check, they decided to try and get false identities. So they went to a Catholic priest. You know, Poland is 99.999 Catholic so it had to be a Catholic priest and bought -- purchased some papers with -- for the three of us.

They --

Suzy Snyder: This is -- the war is going on, it's very hard times. What did she purchase the false papers with?

Halina Peabody: Her friends helped her. You know, we had good friends. People were helping each other.

Suzy Snyder: Right.

Halina Peabody: They wanted us to try. People understood there was not much hope.

Suzy Snyder: Right.

Halina Peabody: And so we got good names. Because my sister didn't know anything, she was a baby. So she sat me down and told me my new name, my new grandparents, birthplace, whatever I needed to know.

Suzy Snyder: So you memorized a whole new identity.

Halina Peabody: I had to memorize that. And our friends kindly took us to -- it was not closed yet, so I remember that we went to the train and they -- they told me we were going to a place called Jaroslaw, which was another town. It was halfway to Krakow, I don't know why, but anyhow that's where we were supposed to be going. And the -- as I said, there were no more Jews there officially. They helped us get on the train and we said good-bye to them. And as I said, all we had left was a suitcase of clothing and little money they collected for us. And we started traveling.

We were supposed to be traveling two days and two nights. You know, those trains were not today's trains. They remember old-fashioned, very old and not nice. But we were -- we were doing our best to run. We knew we were going to have to be -- be chased somewhere. I was very scared, you know, the train would stop, my mother would go down and I would be waiting. So it was a little scary.

As we were traveling, a young man attached himself to us and started chatting with my mother, being very nice and asking about the children. My mother was very nice to him and they were chatting away. But then he started asking more probing questions. And my mother finally told me look -- he pushed me so hard I could not -- I couldn't do anything. I told him. I actually told him that we were Jewish. And he said well, in that case, I am going to Jaroslaw as well. I will have to take you with me. And with we get to Jaroslaw I'm going to give you back. I will --

Suzy Snyder: Hand you in.

Halina Peabody: To the Gestapo. And so my mother understood that. She said -- she told me everything. She said she understood that that's what's going to happen. We were going to travel with him and when we get to Jaroslaw we were going to be handed over to the Gestapo.

Suzy Snyder: Do you think that he knew you were Jews before --

Halina Peabody: He was suspicious, you know. Mother and two children. He was suspicious. That's how he started, you know, pushing.

Suzy Snyder: Prying.

Halina Peabody: Yeah. And so that's how we traveled. And my mother, never giving up, started thinking what could we do. What could be done? Well, we couldn't run. There was nowhere to go. We knew that we had not many choices, if any. So finally, she came to a decision. She explained that to me too very carefully. She said that she made a deal with him. She said that she was giving him tickets for the luggage and any money she had and even promised the coats on our backs if he would do one thing for her. When we get to the Gestapo

to have us shot, all three of us, at once, because she understood that the -- the less suffering for all of us if we were going to be taken away. She knew the children would be killed, no matter what. She did not want to survive by herself because they might send her to a labor camp but she just did not want to do without the children. So that's what she asked him to do. And apparently he said yes. And that's how we traveled the rest of the way. She kept thinking but nothing else came to mind and we were kind of in a stupor almost. We were traveling four days and four nights on the train, it was really horrible and I was full of lice, our head and clothes and everything. And finally we get to Jaroslaw and when we get there and on the platform we start going down the platform. And I suddenly woke up and I said oh, my God. I'm going to die. And I started pulling at my mother. Mom, Mom, I don't want to die. I told Mother, as we were walking, she said to him well, you know, maybe you can let her go because she's blond and green-eyed and maybe she'll survive. And I said no, I'm not going without you. So we continue walking towards the Gestapo. And then she says to him, do you have any children of your own? And he said yes. So she said look, I gave you everything I had. Keep it. Why don't you just let us go and try our luck? I was walking and he's walking with us. And she said to him, and she added this, "Why do you want us on your conscience." I've given you everything I have. Why don't you just let us go, try. And something attached him and he said to her you don't have a chance. But he turned around and left us. And so there we were, the three of us, homeless and nothing because my mother holding the baby and me by the hand and standing in the middle of this town on the main road. She started looking around.

Suzy Snyder: He took everything, but not your false documents.

Halina Peabody: Pardon? Well, no, the documents, I think she had somewhere in her pocket. No, what would he do with the documents. No.

Suzy Snyder: Which was --

Halina Peabody: Never asked about that one. And my mother saw a little cafe. She walked in there and asked for a little milk for the baby. And the big baby by then, and then she started asking around, if there were any places that took lodgers in. It was very important for us to be inside, because the Germans were walking around, you know, with guns up and it was very easy to get shot or taken in or whatever. She didn't -- she didn't know about the papers. I don't know to this day if they were real or not. I gave them to the museum, but I don't know if they were good or not. There were no computers in those days, so they couldn't just check.

At any rate, we didn't want them examined, if possible. And the one man got up and said yes, I know a washer lady that takes people in and lodgers. He said I'll walk you over to them. So the three of us went with him, not too far from there, and saw the little house. There were three separate apartments, if you --

Halina Peabody: In that house. We were the middle one. There was this sweet lady, she saw the mother and three kids and she said Okay I'll take you. But the sons, they had three strapping sons, they said no, no, no, mom don't take them. I'm not surprised they said that. She said oh, no, this is a mother and two children. I have to take. And she D. she took her in. We got a bed. That's all we needed. My mother explained to her that we had no money but the next day she would go to work and whatever she earned she would bring for us and to keep us. And she did that. She took care -- she used to go to homes and help and change the jobs a few times. Me, as a Polish child, I could go to school for two hours a day. Now, I had no background in religion. My own, I hardly knew. I only knew I was Jewish. And I was going to a Hebrew school on Sunday when the time came and they taught me how to sign

my name in Hebrew. I don't know exactly why, but I still know how to sign my name in Hebrew. As far as religion, you know, I just knew I was Jewish, that's it. So I had no background in religion per se. And then Catholic religion, I knew even less. All I was told I have to cross myself with my right hand as you go in and as I come out. That's all I knew. But the good thing was that one of the hours of the two hours in school was a -- one was priest, there was a priest teaching religion and the other was more general. And the Catholic religion was being taught with a catechism and there was a little booklet with questions and answers. So I grabbed at that and I -- of course I could read, so I -- you know, I quickly read and that helped me a great deal. The priest was very nice, very sweet. And of course, they didn't know. But still, I did very well with him and the teacher and because I could read, I was a good pupil, so that was fine. I also helped by working for a neighbor. My mother thought it was good for us to be busy and to be working.

Suzy Snyder: Let me ask you a question, though, about the Catholicism. Did you -- did you embrace it as something new and knowledgeable that you were learning and --

Halina Peabody: Well, I knew that I had to pretend to be a Catholic.

Suzy Snyder: That's what I was wondering. Was it mostly pretending or --

Halina Peabody: It was pretending, but I must say I like Catholic religion and my mother realized that. At one point she quietly took me over and said we all pray to the same god but through different religions and you're Jewish. So that made me quite completely -- you know, I knew what I was doing and I -- as I said, I like the Catholic religion but I knew it wasn't mine, so that didn't give me any trouble.

Suzy Snyder: I just want to ask a question about you and your -- your relationship with your mother at this point. Are you -- is it a typical mother/daughter relationship? Did you give her a difficult time because that's just what it was like or did you -- were you aware that you needed to behave, do everything she said?

Halina Peabody: Well, I did anyway. I had a very good relationship with my mother. My mother was so nice and so fair always, even in her punishment. And we knew we were -- we were saving our lives.

Suzy Snyder: Right.

Halina Peabody: That was always in our minds as well. And I was -- we were partners. There was nobody else who knew who we were. My sister didn't know. Obviously she was too young.

Suzy Snyder: Right. You said she was -- you were partners. Did you miss having her as a mother or did you have her both as a mother and a partner?

Halina Peabody: No, she was still my mother but also partner.

Suzy Snyder: And you helped her.

Halina Peabody: I was her support. It was the two of us who knew who we were. So she used to sometimes chat with me and talk to me about her youth and what it was like when she was famous swimmer when she was very young and it was a very nice relationship.

Suzy Snyder: And during the day she -- she was at -- she worked.

Halina Peabody: Yes, she worked. And I went to school and I -- the woman who had -- the lady that had -- was very nice to me but she taught me a lot of things. I was helping around the house. She made sure that I -- see, she wanted to save my soul, I understand and appreciate that. So she sent me for classes. I went to communion. There's a picture of me in communion. And that was all right. Everything was -- everything was quite acceptable. I was just scared.

Suzy Snyder: You knew you needed to do it, right?

Halina Peabody: Yeah. As I said, there was nothing -- I did not feel bad about doing any of it. We were hungry. We kids used to go scramble, try to steal some food from the farmers, for instance, when they came in, they would have to check in a certain amount of product that they had to bring in. Once it was found they brought in the right amount, we kids used to jump over the back of the trucks and tractors with the carts and we used to just grab whatever we could to -- we had mainly barley. That's what I remember, which I did not like even before the war.

(Laughter)

Suzy Snyder: Did your -- did your mom work for the Germans then?

Halina Peabody: Well, at first she worked all over the place. She also -- she was very worried about security and one of the things she worried very much about was my sister's hair because she -- my sister has dark hair, curly hair. She has a little Afro.

(Laughter)

And this is terrible because for the -- for Poland because the Polish girls then, there were not that many other foreigners, there were just Polish girls, straight blond hair. And, you know -- and I had blond hair at least, wavy but they braided mine, but hers was impossible. And even today when she goes to the hairdresser she comes in with beautiful hair and then two drops of waterfall and then she goes --

(Laughter)

So she always had this problem. And she just shaved it off.

Suzy Snyder: Why was it a problem, explain why dark curly hair --

Halina Peabody: Because she was afraid of being recognized as Jewish. Of course, Jewish girls had curly hair.

Suzy Snyder: So she looked Jewish and you looked more --

Halina Peabody: She doesn't really look Jewish but the hair was a giveaway.

Suzy Snyder: So did she -- she shaved her hair off.

Halina Peabody: Not me, her.

Suzy Snyder: Your mother shaved her hair off.

Halina Peabody: Yes, completely.

Suzy Snyder: Did it work?

Halina Peabody: Well, it must have worked. She -- she said it was because if you shave it off it comes back thicker. So that was her excuse. She also tried to offer ourselves as Poles to go to work in Germany because, you know, she felt that the Polish people recognized Jews much easier than the Germans but they didn't take us because my sister was too young. So she tried all kinds of stuff in order to be more secure. And what -- what happened was that when -- by the time she applied for the job with the Germans was because she felt that if she had an ID card in case they could catch up with us and ask for papers that this might help.

Suzy Snyder: Right.

Halina Peabody: And it actually did. Because what happened was at one point they came to the house and they started screaming "get out," "get out," guns drawn in the middle of the night. Everybody got up and my mother showed the papers, she showed the ID card and they say all right, you stay. So only Jews stayed and the others were taken into the station to be checked out. What they wanted to know about the Poles, that they worked for them. If they were busy working for the Germans, they were fine. So they sent them back the next day. But we didn't have to go to the station. And that was one of those things that was just lucky that

she did that.

We had, during this time, one letter from the people we left behind, and they gave us some very good news and that was that my father had sent a letter through the Red Cross that he was with his sister in Palestine, now Israel. But at that time it was all under the British. It was under the British mandate. So we understood that he was free and he was out of Russia. We could not do anything because during the German occupation obviously we couldn't contact anybody outside, but we had that information so we hoped if anything things get a little bit somehow worked out, that maybe sometime in the future the war will be over and we might be able to get back to him, but we knew he was safe

Suzy Snyder: So getting back to the woman you were hiding with, just briefly, you said she had sons and were her sons ever suspicious? Did they ever question?

Halina Peabody: They could have been. I don't know. Frankly, I don't know.

Suzy Snyder: Just let it go.

Halina Peabody: They never checked. They never asked.

Suzy Snyder: So I just want to jump ahead a little to when you were -- I mean, it's not really liberation but suddenly the war ends but in a tragic way.

Halina Peabody: Well, yes sort of. Not quite. Because I'm here. Well, we did not know what was going on in the front. We had no papers, no radios. If you had a radio, that was a death penalty. So nobody had them. We didn't know what was going on. And so my mother kept working and as I said, we didn't know what was going on. But one morning, usually the horse and cart would go at 4:00 in the morning and this time, that morning, there was nothing. It was just loud sirens on the streets. My mother was on the bed with my sister. I was standing by the window by the bed. She was talk to go me and said maybe should I go to work or should I not? And suddenly there was a tremendous black and a bang and the one and only bomb that fell on that town fell on that house and split the top. And I started crying, my hand, my hand. And my mother grabbed my sister and me by the hand and we walked out. My hand was bleeding badly and she -- there was nobody to -- to pick me up either, so we just walked. We walked to the hospital. And that -- then we learned that the Russians were coming the second time. And they patched me up, they scared my mother. They said there were no -- there was no penicillin so I had a very big open wound on my hand and they said they might have to cut the hand off. They didn't. The nuns were wonderful nurses, and they saved my hand. In the meantime, my mother started knitting again a little bit to get some money to send requests for my mother. Everybody was looking for people. And she finally started writing those announcements and luckily we found my father. It took a while.

Suzy Snyder: The war is -- your --

Halina Peabody: The Russians are coming.

Suzy Snyder: Right. So there's still -- the war is still somewhat going on in different parts of Europe, for sure.

Halina Peabody: Well, my mother said to me, you know, they're not leaving. We understood.

Suzy Snyder: So you --

Halina Peabody: They were not killing the Jews.

Suzy Snyder: That's right.

Halina Peabody: And in some way they made some kind of a semi official agreement that they led the Jews out. Semi official, pay the guards on the front, but they did allow us out eventually.

Suzy Snyder: But your mother wasn't still open about the fact that you were Jewish, you didn't talk --

Halina Peabody: No, we couldn't because when I was in the hospital I said now I can say who I am. And she said no, there was a Pogrom and killed the few Jew that is came out of hiding.

Suzy Snyder: There was still anti-Semitism.

Halina Peabody: We had to keep that up until we left, got with a Jewish agency group, we had to keep that up, yes.

Suzy Snyder: So I'm sorry to --

Halina Peabody: No, that's all right. That's all right.

Suzy Snyder: So you were in contact with your dad, you were still living in Poland.

STUDENT: Right. My father -- it took a while. My mother also had -- was diagnosed with breast cancer, so she had to have the operation.

Suzy Snyder: Where did she have it? Where did she have the operation?

Halina Peabody: There, in Jaroslaw.

Suzy Snyder: We're still? Jaroslaw.

Halina Peabody: Oh, yeah, we were in Jaroslav. In the meantime, my father did not want to come himself, he was afraid of being taken by the Russians again so he sent his cousin and he came to get us. When my mother went back to the place we were living in the middle, she discover that had the lady died. It was the same bond. We came through the kitchen and the roof had come down and apparently she was underneath. So she died, unfortunately. Yes. And there was nothing in that -- that little place that we could salvage so the neighbor next door took us in. So when my cousin came, he put us in touch with the Jewish agency and finally we had to move to another place, closer to Krakow and we were finally transported out. We made it to Berlin.

Suzy Snyder: And when did you reunite with your father?

Halina Peabody: Pardon?

Suzy Snyder: When did you reunite with your father? When did you and your father --

Halina Peabody: Well, he came twice he missed us. You know, we were on the road somewhere. Everybody was moving around.

Suzy Snyder: Right. Of course.

Halina Peabody: So finally he caught up with us, and we were in Munich and we stayed. And there was a in Italy there was a DP camp called Trani, and we said there. He was in a Polish unit created with Stalin's agreement that they let them out to fight because they were worried about having more boots on the ground. So they let out the whole unit and the general who was also a prisoner there who created this unit was very kind and he would not take just the men. He said he's going to take families as well. And that's how my aunt and uncle and cousin came out and of course my father. And they were serving in the British Army. They were part of the British Army. And my father was actually stationed in Egypt. But his sister was in Tel Aviv.

Suzy Snyder: And did you -- eventually you moved to the United Kingdom.

Halina Peabody: Well, because he was part of the British Army, we had the right to go to England. So we -- we didn't have to wait for Visa.

Suzy Snyder: And what year was that, do you remember?

Halina Peabody: 1940-something, I think. I can't remember exactly. I can look it up.

Suzy Snyder: And you reestablished a life in the United Kingdom.

STUDENT: That's what we had to do. We were -- started in a new language and everything new, and eventually --

Suzy Snyder: How did you like England?

Halina Peabody: Well, I'm not sure I -- they were good to us, you know. We were not in danger of dying, but I didn't know the language and it was difficult. And my one outlet that I found for myself was table tennis because I played table tennis was everywhere and I liked tennis but there were no facilities for that, so I played a lot of table tennis.

Suzy Snyder: So you talk about it as if it's a hobby, but really you were this amazing table tennis person. You played -- you had a lot of success with it. You traveled around the world with it.

Halina Peabody: Well, what happened was when -- when we got to our house there was a Maccabiah Club, this was a Jewish club and I spent all my time, all my evenings there. And when Israel was created they also started having the Jewish Olympic games called Maccabiah Games. And I eventually they sent two guys and me to represent England and Israel. And that was when I traveled to Israel for the first time. And that was wonderful. I became back. I didn't want to come back but I did because my mother was not very well. So I came back. That was 1953. And my mother passed away 1956, unfortunately. So I went again to the next Maccabiah was 1956, and 1957, excuse me.

Suzy Snyder: So your mom was young, she was.

Halina Peabody: 48.

Suzy Snyder: In her 40s.

Halina Peabody: Very young.

Suzy Snyder: Where was your sister at this point, living in England?

Halina Peabody: She was in England. She was like -- she was very young, 17 1/2. I worried about her a lot. And in the end I brought her over to Israel for years of service, it's called (inaudible). She came and all the mascara came down. She came because they make you work, half a day you work and half the day you -- you learn Hebrew. She met her future husband there and he is English so they went back to London. So that's where she resides. She's in London.

Suzy Snyder: But you lived in Israel for some time.

Halina Peabody: Yes.

Suzy Snyder: How many years did you live in Israel.

Halina Peabody: 11.

Suzy Snyder: And you said something about living in Israel that I thought was interesting. It gave you back your Jewishness.

Halina Peabody: Absolutely. Gave me back my soul. What happened was you see when I started working in Israel, I had to have a job in English. So we got -- I got a job at the American Embassy in Tel Aviv, which was very glamorous. I liked that very much. And I met my husband. She was another survivor from Bulgaria. So the two of us were working for Americans, and my husband was sent over to the United States coast to coast. He was with US information agency. And therefore, he wanted -- they wanted him to know about America. He was presenting America's youth to the Vietnam War and he needed to know more about the States. So he fell in love with the United States, so he said why don't we go for a year to the United States. We had -- my son was already five years old by the time we got -- six so we ended up here. He got a job here, and that's -- was in 1968.

Suzy Snyder: And you've been here ever since. I've been here ever since. When I

retired, I said I must do some volunteer work. I didn't know what I wanted to do.

Suzy Snyder: What did you do for a living here?

Halina Peabody: I worked for -- for a lot of real estate offices. Not construction. I mean in the office.

Suzy Snyder: And you retired in, I'm sorry, I interrupted but you decided you needed to volunteer.

Halina Peabody: When I retired I was looking for something to do, and I found the Holocaust Museum of course and I missed the fact that when I got to Israel, how wonderful it was because that was my kind of important date in my life. I don't know how it is but I think being Jewish, going to Israel was something that a lot of people feel, and I felt immediately at home. And I felt that I was somebody. Because being a refugee is no fun. And in England, even though they legally gave me all the rights, they didn't -- they didn't love me like, you know, in Israel. In Israel everybody's open, everybody wanted to show me, to teach me, to do things for me. And I just really and truly felt a new person there. And I hope I'm still that though I left Israel. But I do go back often. And my trek is usually I go from here to Tel Aviv and then London and then back home.

Suzy Snyder: Which you're doing soon, yes? In June, I think?

Halina Peabody: Yes, in June.

Suzy Snyder: I wanted to take a few questions. And we have one right here in front, by way of the web.

>> Thank you very much. We have a couple of questions from students, we have a couple of classrooms in students from Iowa who are watching today online. So lots of great questions. Can you hear me?

Suzy Snyder: She just asked me to repeat it. She can't hear it. Speak up a little.

>> So we've got a couple of classrooms in Iowa watching today.

Suzy Snyder: People in Iowa are watching on the web.

Halina Peabody: Oh, I see.

>> They have lots of great questions. I'm just going to give you a couple quick and easy ones, I think. The first one is, do you remember what your name was on your false papers, and were you related to your sister and mother in the fake identity documents as well?

Suzy Snyder: Yes, I think do you remember what was your false name?

Halina Peabody: My first --

Suzy Snyder: Your false name.

Halina Peabody: Oh, Alina Latinska.

Suzy Snyder: And you really didn't have to change the first name.

Halina Peabody: No, I didn't and I don't know why they dropped the H.

(Laughter)

Suzy Snyder: The answer is yes.

>> And then we have another question about do you remember seeing any kind of German propaganda as a young child under occupation, posters or anything like that?

Suzy Snyder: Do you remember seeing any German propaganda, posters as a young child, the swastikas and posters, radio broadcasts?

Halina Peabody: I don't recall that. We didn't have a radio. No radio was allowed. But I had to have the yellow star, so that was -- that was the only thing that I remember. Yeah. By the time we got to Jaroslaw there were no -- there were no Jews. They had us all in slave-like way. They didn't need --

Suzy Snyder: They didn't need propaganda, they had already been through the town.

Halina Peabody: No, no.

Audience Member: When you were living with false papers, did you have any Polish friends or was that too risky?

Suzy Snyder: Did you have Polish friends when you were living in hiding on false papers?

Halina Peabody: I wasn't in hiding.

Suzy Snyder: Hiding in plain sight, I guess. Did you have friends who were Polish?

Halina Peabody: Oh, yes, we have great time. In fact, when we got to England, I remember still going to church with them.

Suzy Snyder: So in addition to that, I just wanted to also ask, do you remember ever wondering if these people that you encountered while you were on false papers were also Jews? Did that ever come up?

Halina Peabody: No, no, they were all Polish.

Suzy Snyder: All Polish.

Halina Peabody: No, the Jews that came out of hiding were really hiding somewhere.

Suzy Snyder: So your mom actually chose a good town for this, you were pretty safe.

Halina Peabody: Well, we don't know. You know, anything could have given us away. That's why my sister didn't know. And she was very upset.

Suzy Snyder: When she found out.

Halina Peabody: Uh-huh.

Suzy Snyder: Which I -- which I would imagine --

Halina Peabody: The Polish education is such unfortunately in small towns, you know, the lady who took us, the next-door neighbor that took us in, my sister told me that she said, she asked me, she said you know now you can tell me you're Jewish, right? And she -- my sister said look at me. Do I have horns? Do I have a tail?

Suzy Snyder: She was really indoctrinated.

Halina Peabody: Yes, exactly. So, you know, we had to explain to her.

Suzy Snyder: Yes, go ahead.

Audience Member: Do you ever travel back to Poland?

Suzy Snyder: Do you ever travel back to Poland?

Halina Peabody: I have been about four times, but with good reasons.

Commemoration of 50th anniversary of Warsaw Ghetto uprising and then to see if my house was still up and my house would have been -- it's now Ukraine, that part of Poland. And when they found my mother's other Jewish athletes details and they had a very nice exhibit in Krakow, so my sister and I went. And we also saw the new museum that they have.

Suzy Snyder: In Warsaw?

Halina Peabody: Yes, for the Jews. So that was another one. And I don't -- and I went once to see the Auschwitz with a group from here. But I don't normally go to Poland because I don't feel comfortable and there have been problems because a lot of people are still living in houses that belong to the Jews and they've been there for 70 years and they -- they don't want to give it back. I didn't because I didn't have any, but that was the feeling that, you know, you always worried. I was warned. I was warned to be very careful. So I don't go for pleasure. I would like to, but I -- I'm not comfortable.

Suzy Snyder: Yes.

Audience Member: So if you met a German who had killed people during the war, like

he was like sorry he did it and he came up to you right now, would you be angry or have hard feelings toward him?

Suzy Snyder: If you met a German who was -- who had murdered people during the war, would you be angry?

Halina Peabody: First of all, I can't meet a German through the war, he must be very, very old.

(Laughter)

I have met young Germans and we had a wonderful German ambassador here. They accept and admit that it was -- what they did was terrible. They I had Kate their children and, you know, they can't give us back the lives -- the people they killed. But hatred is not very useful because if you hate, you only hurt yourself. I do not hate them. I -- I would like to actually be friends with them and teach them and tell them my story. And they are very, very good. As far as I know Mrs. Merkel was -- took all these refugees because she said they didn't take Jews during the war, so that's why she was, you know, trying to help refugees. So I don't feel I hate the Germans. The German language makes me feel funny, but a lot of Jews speak German, too. So no. No, I don't feel bad about them.

Suzy Snyder: Yes.

Audience Member: Did you ever see the person that gave you the chance to make it on your own whenever you got off the train again?

Suzy Snyder: Did you ever see the Polish man that let you become free?

Halina Peabody: No, I haven't. I wish I could. He must be very old now, but I would have liked to -- I would have liked to thank him actually, yes.

Suzy Snyder: Yes.

Audience Member: Who did you keep as your closest allies?

Suzy Snyder: Who did you keep as your closest allies?

Halina Peabody: During the war? My mother. I couldn't -- I couldn't have allies. I mean, I had friends.

Suzy Snyder: You were each other's allies.

Halina Peabody: Yes. Because, you know, you had to be so very careful, you know. So I was mainly with my mother. It was very hard when we came out and I became a child again.

Suzy Snyder: We have time for one more. Right here.

Audience Member: Would you ever think of going back to like Germany? Like ever go to Germany and see what they did?

Suzy Snyder: Would you ever visit Germany?

Halina Peabody: Oh, yes. I have no reason not to visit Germany. I don't particularly want to. But I mean if there was a reason, I would go. Yeah.

Suzy Snyder: Jude, do you have any more? So it's our tradition in *First Person* to let you have the last word, so I'm turning it over to you.

Halina Peabody: Well, I would like to just say that there's a Hebrew saying, "tikkun olam," which means repairing the world, and feel like that's what I would like everybody help to do that because we all need to help each other and worry about the future and I'm old, so I can only talk about the past but the future belongs to the young people. And it's -- there's always time and there's always need to repair the world. So that was -- that's my -- my wish.

Suzy Snyder: Thank you so much, Halina.

(Applause).

