USHMM First Person Series
Mrs. Halina Peabody
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>> Ladies and gentlemen, our program will begin in just a moment. Please recall that all your cell phones and electronic devices need to be silenced. Thank you.
>> I got the thumbs up, it's time to start. Good morning and welcome to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. My name is Warren Marcus. I will be the host today of museum's public program, *First Person*. We are in our 20th year of *First Person*.
And I want to tell you that I'm always honored to support this program. The first year 20 years ago, my family endowed the program for one year in honor of my father who had passed away 20 years ago. And he was an American GI in Europe. Our first person today is **Mrs. Halina Peabody**, whom we shall meet shortly.
Ai few announcements.
This 2019 season of *First Person* is made possible by the generosity of the Louis Franklin Smith Foundation, with additional funding from the Arlene and Daniel Fisher Foundation. We are grateful for their sponsorship.
First Person is a series of twice-weekly conversations with Holocaust survivors who volunteer at our Museum and who share their firsthand accounts of their experience during the

Holocaust. If time allows,
following our conversation, you
will have an opportunity to ask
Halina a few questions. If we do
not get to your question, you
can ask one and tag the Museum
on Twitter, Facebook, and
Instagram using @holocaustmuseum
And the #askwhy. I hope you young people understand that because I don't. A recording of this program will be made available on the museum's YouTube page.
We have prepared a brief slide
presentation to help with
Halina's introduction.
We begin with this photo of
Halina, being held by her father
Izak. Her mother Olga is
directly behind baby Halina
while they are surrounded by
family members and friends.
Halina (Litman) Yasharoff
Peabody was born on December 12,
1932 in Krakow, Poland. Her
father was a dentist and her
mother was a champion swimmer.
Halina's hometown of
Zaleszczyki, today Ukraine, came
under Soviet occupation in 1939.
At the time of occupation,
Halina's sister, Eva, was only
2-months-old. Soviet officials
detained Izak and deported him
to Siberia.
Here we see a photo of Olga,
Halina, and Eva taken in 1940.
After Dad has been deported.
In 1941, Germany occupied all of
Poland. Realizing they were in
danger, Halina's mother bought
false documents from a priest
that identified them as
Roman Catholic.
Pictured here is the false
baptismal certificate issued
under a false name to Halina.
The document states that her

religion is Roman Catholic.
With their new documents, they
Traveled by train to Jaroslaw. A man on the train
threatened to hand them over to
And on the right is a photograph of them celebrating Christmas.
Following liberation, they were
reunited with Izak and settle in
London, England. Halina
immigrated to the United States
in 1968.
Halina lives in Bethesda,
Maryland. Her husband Richard
passed away in 2011. She has
two sons, one who lives in
England and the other “just ten
minutes away,” as she notes.
Halina has two granddaughters
Hannah and Olivia.
Halina speaks frequently about
her experience during the
Holocaust at schools and here at
the Holocaust Museum, as well as
in other settings. She also
engages with visitors at the
survivor desk, just upstairs, on
most Thursdays.
Halina is also a contributor to
the museum's publication, *Echoes
of Memory*, which features
writings by survivors. After
today's program, Halina will be
available to sign copies of
Echoes of Memory, which is also
available in the museum's
bookstore.
With that I would like you to
join me in welcoming our *First
Person*, Halina Peabody. Halina,
please join us.
[Applause]
All right. Which seat? You're the boss. This one? Good.
>> Thank you.
>> Okay. I'll take this one.
[Laughter]
good morning again, Halina. We're so happy to have you here, and I'm so
honored to be able to be the First Person interviewer.

>> Thank you very much and thank you for coming to hear my story.
>> Now, I'll tell you that we have about four hours of stories to tell -- share with you. We're going to do our best, maybe have time for questions.
>> Yes.
>> So I'd like to start right away. Can you tell us about your early life in your hometown? I already pronounced it once. I'm not going to risk it again. And just tell us about the community, your family, and I'm always interested in relationships between the Jews and non-Jews before the war. Tell us about your family and your town.
>> First of all, I was born, as you said, December 1932, so I was only 6 1/2 when the war started. So my idea about the relations between, I didn't have much.
>> Okay.
>> Information on that. I was about to go to kindergarten in 1939 when we knew that the Russians were coming and were going to take over our town. Everybody was very frightened. And what happened was that a lot of people wanted to run away, and we were right on the front of Romania. So Zaleszczyki was on the river. It was a natural frontier with Romania, and you could just go halfway because they have boys there, and you could go that far and no further. Now, when my mother and father got married, they looked for a smaller town where they all came from Krakow, which was a big city, and my father was a beginning dentist. So they looked for a smaller town which they found in Zaleszczyki. Zaleszczyki was a wonderful like ocean city here. It was a town where people came for summer holidays. And my mother, having been a champion swimmer, was very happy because it had water. So we used to go on a boat. We had lovely beaches there. One beach was shady beach, one was a sunny beach, and you could go with a boat from one to the other. And as a child, my mother also taught me skating. And when I was 5, I was skating. My mother liked all sports. So she was very good at swimming, but also she danced and skated, jumped on skis, rode horses. So anything that needed courage, that was my mother's sport. My mother was very, very brave, and she thought that sports develops courage, which she proved later on. So in 1939 then, when my father knew that there were Russians coming, they based themselves on the first world war where the men were conscripted into the Russian Army, and that was hard labor. So in that case, men were more scared than the women. They never imagined that there would be problems for the women and children. And in our case, because I had a 2-month-old sister, my father was worried to take us with him. So he decided to go cross over by himself. And there were other families that also joined him and went over. And so we stayed back. And when the Russians occupied us, they made various laws that at 6 1/2, I couldn't really appreciate. I didn't know much. Everybody was very scared, and of course my father had crossed over, so we didn't have my father with us. Slowly, slowly, things quieted down. They arrested people, I know, and they demanded gold and silver like all the occupation forces usually do. And we were just quiet and waiting what's going to happen. When the winter came, everything was frozen over. And this was the part of the world where you had very cold winters and very hot summers. So the river was frozen solid, and the people that had

crossed over, like my father, left family or left businesses, decided that perhaps the Russians had settled in and settled down, and maybe they can quietly cross back into -- back home. And without any trouble, and just blend back in. So they took white sheets, and they tried to cross the river under the guise of the white sheets. And unfortunately, the Russians had already sealed the border, and therefore they caught everybody. They put them in jail. And then in my father's case who was a dentist, they accused him of being a spy because he went over and came in. And they gave him 20 years hard labor, and they decided to send him off to the labor camp in Russia. And so we were, again, left alone. And in addition to under the Russian law, if you were a family of a criminal, my father the dentist, then you, too, were being sent to somewhere in Russia like the camps. So we were all packed and ready to go. They didn't take us. For some reason unknown to us. But what they did was throw us out of our house because it was too much, it was too rich for us to have a house. So we were thrown out to a place just up the road not very far. And we were told that's where we were supposed to be.
>> Let me just ask you something. So once Izak is sent away, do you hear from him at all, or a little bit?
>> Yeah. The first year we didn't hear anything. He was in prison, and he didn't actually want to talk about it. It was so terrible. I don't know what happened to him. So when we were -- that picture that was with my sister is the only picture I have of my little sister and my mother and me. That was where we stayed. We stayed there throughout the Russian occupation. And after a year, we heard from my father. My father wrote where he was and a little bit about the conditions. We were able to exchange a couple of times. My mother even sent a package with a pillow, I remember, to him.
>> So when you're 8 1/2, everything changes when the Nazis invade.
>> It took a long time. First of all, as I said, we were there whilst all this was happening. We went -- we went to school. What the Russians did was dropped everybody one class because they wanted to have the opportunity to educate us and coming this way. So we were there for about a year and a half. And then suddenly one day the Russians disappeared. And we heard that the Germans were going to take over. So we took our stuff and went back to my house, to our house in Zaleszczyki. We settled back in and waited for the German occupants. We had no idea what to expect. Everybody was anxious, as usual. We didn't know what the plan was. Eventually the Germans arrived with motorcycles and the SS was in shiny uniforms.
>> Black uniforms.
>> Yes. Very scary. They came down the road. I was just, you know, about that high. I was looking at them and it was just scary. And I remember my mother taking me and pulling me out and said, you know, stay inside. When the Germans settled in, every local job like the mayor of the town and everybody in charge was, of course, German. And they started putting in laws. The first law was that the Jewish kids, no school at all. We were also not allowed to go to parks. We were not allowed to go at night. We had curfew. Everything was rationed. And we had much worse rations than the others. They just made it

very much harder for us. Now, every Jewish person had to be working for the Germans. Not for pay, just had to be working for them. And so if there wasn't a particular job for anybody, they were told to clean the sidewalks. And my mother, who was known for other talents that she had, she was a fantastic knitter. And she would embroider as well, and they knew about everybody. And they knew that my mother was a good knitter, so they made her the chief knitter for the mayor, obviously German, because he had lots of children, so she was told she would be knitting for the children, which she did. And everybody else had to do some job, and they also used to pay groups of young people for various jobs on the farms. There were jobs that they would say, we need so many people, and they would get the young people, and they would march them out. And then after they did whatever jobs they were supposed to, they would be brought back. And there was a Jewish committee. They wanted not to go directly to the people, so the Jewish committee was tasked with getting the right number of people for whatever job they demanded. It went on a couple of times. And then they decided that they needed a big job to be done up the road. There was an old military camp. And as I said, the winters were very cold. And they said that they needed to bind the trunks of the trees for the winter. And so they needed many people. And they asked a certain number of people, like 600, I think, they asked for, and they were supposed to meet at the square in the morning. And they marched them up. And we, as usual, waited back for them to come back. And nobody was coming back. We didn't know what was happening. Everybody got very anxious.
>> And this was men and women and different age groups, or is it just young people?
>> They were the people who turned up for work.
>> Right.
>> So mostly young people.
>> Right.
>> There were some -- apparently some people actually joined in voluntarily just to help.
>> Right.
>> And nobody was coming back all day and all evening until late evening, the one person came back. It was a young man. And he was shot in the arm. And he told us what happened. And the story was that when they got to the camp, there was no job for them to do the trees. What there was was an open-air grave with sticks over it, and they were told to undress, lay down on the sticks, and they were shot. And as they were shot, they dropped into the grave. And this man was one of the last people who was shot and dropped in. They missed his heart. They hit his arm. So he managed, when the Russians -- sorry, the Germans left, managed to get himself out of there, scrambled out, and he came back and told us the story, at which point we realized that we were in great danger. And we lost all these people. And everybody, first thing was they were looking for hiding places.
>> Right. As I watch your testimony and read your story, I just want you folks to keep in mind the strength and resourcefulness of her mother as you go through

the rest of the story and also how old you are and all the responsibilities and choices you face at your age. So at the time of this first shooting when all of a sudden -- and there's no warning, and all of a sudden this happens and the news comes back, how old are you, roughly?
>> 9.
>> 9 years old.
>> Maybe.
>> And your mom -- and your sister is very young. And your mom's got to figure out what to do and the remaining Jews are trying to find places to hide. Who knows when the next action, as I will call it, can continue. So please continue.
>> Yes. So yes, we knew that we were in great danger, and everybody was looking for hiding places. And there was no room for children to not to know because we knew everything because we were part of it except for my sister who really didn't know what was going on. So my mother decided that she would take us to a lady who used to cook for us. The next time when they demanded a group of people, this time they said they wanted people to go to work in Germany. And of course, nobody believed anymore. We realized this was not true what they were saying, so everybody ran around and hid. And we stayed, my mother and my sister and I, we stayed with a lady that used to cook for us until the evening when they caught the right amount of people. They liked numbers. So it had to be a certain number. And they loaded on the train, and they took them away. And, you know, it was a small town. The community was -- Jewish community was not that big. So my mother thought that they would do something else that maybe, you know, how are they going to -- what's going to be the next step?
>> What's next? Right.
>> Yeah. And the Germans decided that they didn't want to go around looking for us again because there were fewer and fewer of us. So therefore they just threw us all out. And the town was cleared of any Jewish person, officially anyway, and we were told to go to another place, another small town just up the road not very far from Zaleszczyki. And we were told -- after it became a ghetto, but at that point it was just an area they told us to be in. And of course, everybody obeyed. And the first thing that they -- everybody started looking was for hiding places, again. And my mother explained to me that -- she said, it's not going to work because they're going to do it over and over. And there's not much hope for us. And there she was with two kids. Not only did they have our little group that remained alive in that area, they also did the same, exactly the same thing in the towns around this area. So they brought these little groups that remained, and they put us all together into this place. And as I said, the first thing was looking for hiding places. And my mother said that it's not going to work. They're going to move us again. And she was desperate. And everybody was looking for what could she do, where could they run? And there was not much to do. There was some night crossings into Romania on the river.
>> Right.
>> But I remember at one point she was hoping to do that to send the kids over, but nothing worked. And so the next time comes, and again, they are demanding

a certain group of people to go for work in Germany again. And again, nobody believed them by then. Because we were there during the Russian occupation, my mother knew some farmers there. So when the call came that they needed people from that group, they didn't -- I've lost my -- I'm sorry. So when they asked for people, so everybody obviously scattered and hid again, but in a different area. So not everybody knew anybody. But because we were there during the Russian occupation, my mother knew a few farmers quite well. So she split us up. And I was with one farmer up in the loft. And she and my sister, they were in another farm. They paid them in advance, and they were going to stay there until they stopped looking for people. And all day long, I sat there and waited for my mother, not knowing what's going to happen to her. I kept thinking that she was caught. The lady who had me would go into town and would come back and tell me oh, I saw this person caught this person, caught, and I kept thinking my mother, my mother, but it wasn't my mother. So as I said, I was very, very anxious to know, you know, what's happening and always thinking that my mother would be caught with my sister. I spent all day long waiting and being anxious. In the end towards the evening, they caught enough people, also loaded them on the train. And I wondered if my mother was coming back. But she did. She told me her story. When she came to meet me, she said, look, we are never going to do this again. We're not going to split up. Whatever happens to us, we're going together because I thought all through this time that you were caught. And she said, we're not going to do that again.
>> And she probably had the same fear of you because she had no idea about you in the loft.
>> That's what I'm saying, exactly. So because I thought you were caught, exactly. And so that was her, you know, decision. And of course, I agreed. And we, again, started thinking, what could be done? What could we do? Mother and two children. What can we do? And they came up with this idea that because we were all females, as you probably know, the men can be recognized, can be identified. But the women, they couldn't check. I was blonde and green-eyed. And they thought that we could pass as Catholics. And so they went to a priest, and they got those papers. So we left there, a friend put us on the train. And we had a couple of suitcases and just a little money they collected from my mother, and they -- we said good-bye. And my mother said that we were going to a place, for no reason that I know, but it was just sort of on the way to Krakow, about halfway to Krakow, and it was going to take four days and four nights. And we were going to go as Catholics. And so my mother sat me down and gave me a new name, a new religion. I had no idea about the Catholic religion. I knew very little about my own. All I knew was I was Jewish and I was going to Hebrew school on Sundays. That's all I knew. But my father taught me to read Polish because he wanted me, the first child, to read the newspaper going to kindergarten.
>> Kindergarten.
>> Yes, that's right.
>> Okay. So you're bilingual in kindergarten. Thank you.
[Laughter]

>> no, we did not speak it, by the way. My mother didn't speak it. Nobody spoke it. Knew clear Polish. My mother did go to a Polish school, so her accent which could give us away was not there. She was pure Polish. So they hoped that we had a chance, and we got on the train, said good-bye to our friends who did not survive, by the way, and went on the train. This was going to be a long trip and a hard trip. My mother carrying my sister, me by the hand. We settled in in the carriage, and we started on our trip. And now my mother had taught me exactly my new name, my grandparents, where I was born. That was all I had to learn.
>> That's all. That's all at 8 or 9. That's all you had to learn, right?
>> That's all I had to learn, yes.
>> Let me just ask you before we get to what happens on the train. So at this young age, you now have a new relationship with your mother in some ways because you have to work together to keep this charade up, and you have to remember all this.
>> Well, you grew up very quickly. Nobody wanted to die.
>> Right.
>> And whether you were young or old, you did not want to die. My sister was the lucky one. She didn't know. She did not.
>> So you were almost partners with your mother.
>> Absolutely. Oh, we were, definitely partners.
>> Right. So what happens on the train ride?
>> Well, as we were traveling, the young man sitting next to us started talking to my mother, chatting away, and I wasn't paying much attention. But after a while, my mother told me, you know, this young man, he kept asking me questions and pushing me and pushing me. And I had no choice. And I admitted to him that we were Jewish. And at that point, he said, well, in that case, I'm going to have to hand you over to the gestapo. I'm going to the same place, and I'm going to accompany you and the kids. And when we get there, I'm going to have to hand you over to the Gestapo.
>> And probably shot.
>> Pardon?
>> And probably shot. And you knew there was great danger if he turned you in.
>> Well, I understood very well because my mother said that the children did not survive. They had no use for children. A million and a half children were killed. So if you got caught and you were taken to a concentration camp, they separated the sick, the old, and the children. You had to be about 13 or 14.
>> Right.
>> They kept you for work. But other than that, you didn't have a chance. So my mother knew that. And she didn't want to survive without the children. So I knew that this was what was going in her mind. And so we had no choice. We were caught. And we traveled with him. He was very careful to keep us in his eyesight. But of course, we had nowhere to run. And my mother all the time was trying to think, what could we do? What could we do? And in the end, she decided there was not much we could do because we can't run. So she started talking to him about a deal. She gave him tickets for the suitcases. She gave him all the money she had. And she even promised him the coats on our backs.

One thing she asked him was when we get to the Gestapo, to have us shot quickly, all three of us. She explained to me, it's going to be less painful than being separated. She could not bear the thought of that because she knew that we had no choice. The children had no way of surviving. And as I said, she didn't want to survive by herself. So she only wanted it to be quick. And she said this way would be the quickest way. And so that's how we traveled. I had nothing to say about it except thinking that this is what's going to happen. So it took a long time. We were, you know, on this old-time train. We were tired and exhausted.
>> Four days, I recall.
>> Four days, four nights, exactly.
>> And you know what's coming very soon. You know what's possible, right.
>> We were so tired.
>> Right.
>> I don't think I thought about it much. But then when we finally arrived in Jaroslaw -- and this is so clear in my mind because as we were walking down the steps to the platform, I suddenly realized that now he's going to take us to the Gestapo, and we were going to be shot. I started pulling at my mother, "mama, I don't want to die." And we continued walking. And so my mother turns to him and says, you know, perhaps you could let her go, meaning me. She's blonde and green-eyed. Maybe she could survive. And I said, no, I'm not going without you. I don't know if he would say yes or no, but I wasn't -- I wasn't about to go. So we continued walking. And finally, she said this to him, she said, "look, I gave you everything we have. Keep it. Why don't you just let us go?"
And then she added, "why do you want us on your conscience?"
And something -- whether that -- something touched him. And he said to us, "you don't have a chance." It sounds very much better in Polish. And he said, "you don't have a chance." But he left us. He left us. So there we were in a strange town on a main road.
>> And I seem to recall your mother also said to him, "do you have children?"
>> Oh, that was before, yes. She did ask him.
>> Do you have children? And then she hit him up on the conscience.
>> That's right.
>> Remember what I said about her mother's resourcefulness and all these -- the wheels were always turning.
>> Yes.
>> Okay. So you got away from this guy.
>> Yes.
>> You've got nothing. What happens?
>> We're standing in the middle of the street, looking around, you know. The main thing my mother understood was we should not be found on the street because the Germans were wandering around, guns drawn. And, I mean, they were free to do whatever. So we must not be on the street through the night. We needed to get into someplace. So she spotted a little cafe where we were standing, and we walked in. She asked for a little milk for my sister. And then she started looking and asking around if there was anybody who knew of a place

where we could find lodging, because, as I said, it was dangerous to be on the street. As far as the papers we had, the false papers, we did not know if they were real or not. So the main thing was for us to be inside somewhere and find lodging.
>> And no one knows you're Jewish.
>> Absolutely not. Of course not. So a young man got up and said he knew, and he knew of a place, a lady was a washer woman, and she took lodgers in. And he said he would take us over there. So he walks us over there. This lady, very short, really, very nice, very nice, sweet old lady, looks at us. And my mother says, "look, I have no money. I have nothing. But tomorrow I go to work, and whatever I earn, I bring to you for keeping us." She said, "okay. I will take you." And then her sons came up and said "no, no, no, mom, don't take her," because I can imagine how we looked. Four days and four nights on the train.
>> She had four sons, right? She had a lot of sons.
>> Three, I think. Two or three. I know that there were at least two there, very tall and looming and said, "Mom, don't take her, don't take her." And she says, "oh, no, this is a mother and two children. I have to take her." And as I said, that was the most Christian thing that I've ever heard. And she took us. Okay. So she said -- she gave us a bed, which was good. We had one bed. I slept at the feet. She slept with my sister. The next day she went out. She did all kinds of household jobs, I guess, just helping around, whenever she earned. This was wartime, so, you know, we took a little bit of food from other people when you're working for them. Because everybody was hungry. The Poles were, too. So she started working and doing whatever she could to bring something home. My sister was very sickly. But she looked after her very nicely, the lady. And I as a Polish child was supposed to go to school. The schooling for the Polish children was two hours every day. One hour was for religion, and one hour was for just general studies. And my luck really was that I could read because all I knew was to cross myself going in and out of church with my right hand. So I was very worried. I mean, I was young. A lot of things probably could have been overlooked, but still, I was very scared. I didn't know what was going on. But the priest was extremely nice. He taught Catholic religion by a little booklet called the Catechism, which had questions and answers, questions and answers. So I was able to read right through it very quickly and to understand a little about the Catholic religion. I was very quick to learn because it was very necessary, so I knew that.
>> Do you think he had any clue you were Jewish?
>> Absolutely not. No. No. That was the thing. And so we really had to play, had to learn and be with other kids, but you could never, never tell because it was enough -- it was enough if they pointed at you.
>> Right.
>> The Germans had no compunction. They would just take you away.
>> So at this time your mother sort of is making a decision, we're going to hide in plain sight.
>> Well --
>> Tell us some of the jobs she got.

>> Well, she was working for her household, so she would do some jobs for that, I don't know exactly what. Even I was working because across the street was somebody who was partially German, and they had the right to have a Polish person work for them for nothing. I knew how to darn socks, which I hated.
[Laughter]
>> but in this case you gave it a shot.
>> My mother thought it was the right thing to do for me. You could do more if you were engaged more.
>> Right.
>> To do things. So the more you did, the more useful you were, the better it was. She was worried about the security very much from the very beginning. First of all, my sister had terribly curly hair. I say terribly because that was a no-no. That Polish girls had straight blonde hair. Not today but then, yes. And mine was blonde, wavy. They braided mine. But my sister was like an Afro. So my mother was very worried about that. So she told me -- she said to the lady who, you know, who took us in, she said, "she's going to shave it off completely to make it thicker," which was baloney, but it was just, you know, as an explanation. But what she was doing was taking hair so that it wouldn't be visible so much.
>> I imagine Eva was not excited about that.
>> Well, she was -- I don't remember if she was excited. I don't know if she knew what was happening.
>> Right, right.
>> She was so young, and she was not well all through that time.
>> She's getting sicker at that time, right.
>> She was very -- she had some kind of a problem. I don't know. She was very, very weak. And my mother was always worried about her. You know, there were not many doctors.
>> Right.
>> So she always worried about it. So then she thought maybe if we could offer ourselves for work in Germany. That was a legal and good thing to do for young people. And the Germans were not as good recognizing Jewish people as the Poles. The Poles were very good at it. And so that was another worry, that they might, you know, point at us and say, "who are they?"
So she decided to offer ourselves for work in Germany. And unfortunately -- fortunately or unfortunately, they wouldn't take my sister because she was too young. They were just taking the two of us. So therefore, of course, my mother said no. So we wouldn't go. She then decided hiding in plain sight is what you were referring to was if she could get to work for a German place and have the ID, if they were caught -- you know, if they would stop you, because they would stop you and ask for papers, if you showed that you were working for them, that's all they wanted to know. The Poles were slated to be the slave labor. So that's all they wanted to know was that you were working for the Germans. So she took the step which was dangerous. She applied for the German military camp for work. And they asked for papers. And in those days, there were no computers but, you know, giving papers was very dangerous for us because,

again, we didn't know if the papers are good or not. So -- but she took the step because she felt she had to because she felt very threatened by, you know, by the situation. And she thought if she had this, it would be some form of defense for her.
>> So a young mother with two young girls applying to the Nazis for a job.
>> Military. Anyway, it took some weeks, and yes, and they did prove it. She was working. The job was to peel potatoes for the troops in the kitchen. So that was the job. But she had the ID. And it came useful. At one point the Germans came in. The Nazis came in, middle of the night, screaming and yelling, "everybody out, rouse, rouse," cold winter night. And everybody came out. And my mother shows them the ID. And he said oh, no, you stay. So we were told to stay put. The others, they took to the Gestapo station and checked them out. They came back the next day because they were all working. As long as they were working, they were fine. But we never had to go to the Gestapo station. That's the kind of thing she was worried about. So those little things, you know, helped. And during this time we had one letter from the people we left behind. And they told us that there was a letter from my father who had written through the Red Cross that he was safe with his sister in Palestine. Now, I knew -- or my mother, at least, that there was family in Palestine. They went out to Palestine in the 1930s. And we never met them, but we knew there was -- there was family there, and we knew that because he was out of Russia, that he was free. We didn't know how he came out until later when we discovered that Churchill and Roosevelt met, and they decided they needed more people to fight on the front when they were not doing so well with the Germans. And they allowed political prisoners out. There was a General Anders who was also a political prisoner, and he was asked to create this unit. And he was a very good man because he said, I'm not only taking the men, I'm taking families, too. So my aunt and uncle and cousin came out that way as well. They were also in Russia. So they came out and they thought my father was actually fighting, later on, I learned. This I learned later. But at this point we were just -- we were just pleased to know that he was out of Russia. But we had no idea. We couldn't contact him in any way because during the German occupation, you couldn't contact anybody. If you listened to the BBC on the radio, somebody had a radio, that was the death penalty. There were newspapers. We did not know what was going on at all out in the war, on the front. And we just -- they lived day in and day out. And then one morning, suddenly it was a complete silence on the street. Sort of a loud silence where you didn't know what was happening, but there was just nothing moving. Now, the Polish farmers were working from 4:00 in the morning, and usually there were horses and carts going back and forth and back and forth.
>> Something's up.
>> Nothing. Nothing. I got up. My mother was still thinking whether she should go to work or not. And I was standing by the window. And suddenly there was a tremendous bang, and everything went dark. And what happened was there was a bomb that came and split over the roof. And unfortunately a shrapnel came through the window and hit my hand. And I started yell, "my hand! My hand!"

And my mother grabbed my sister and me by the hand, and we walked out into the street. My hand was bleeding badly. Now, this is not from that time.
[Laughter]
Unfortunately I fell on it, and it got a little bit hurt again. But it was bleeding badly. And there was not a soul in the street. So we just walked to the nearest hospital.
>> And you're bleeding profusely and trying to find some care.
>> Right. She was carrying my sister.
>> Right.
>> And me by the hand, so I just had to walk. And it was not too far. And they picked me up and they cleaned me up. They were very worried about my hand because they said that it could get infected. I had a very big wound. They said that the Russians were coming. That the Germans were leaving. And they kind of disappeared, the Germans, altogether. And so I was in the hospital for two months. In the meantime, my mother was trying to find -- everybody was trying to look for people. And my mother was knitting away and trying to earn some money to be able to put out announcements about looking for my father. Now, my father had absolutely no idea that we were alive because we were completely cut off. So after some time, we did find him. And he filled us in afterwards about what happened. But in the meantime, where we were, we were still Catholics, you know. So we couldn't -- it was a strange time.
>> I just want to mention two things. One is that this wonderful washer woman who had taken care of you, what happened to her with the bomb -- when the bomb hit?
>> Polish. Yes.
>> She died in the explosion?
>> No. What happened was, when my mother spent the night with me and my sister in the hospital, the next day she came back. And that little house that you saw was destroyed. The middle was completely destroyed. And the wonderful woman was under the roof of the kitchen that fell on her and killed, yeah.
>> Right.
>> We did not realize that anything like that happened.
>> And the care for your industry -- your injury was very primitive, right?
>> Well --
>> A few drugs and antibiotics.
>> -- they did the best they could. And the nuns were -- they were wonderful. They were the nurses. And they said -- because they said that if there was an infection, they might have to cut my hand off.
>> Cut it off.
>> Yeah. But luckily, as I said, those nuns were fantastic, and they cleaned me up. They had to --
>> Forgive me, we're a little short on time. I just want to ask you to clarify a couple things. Your mother didn't renounce her Catholic faith right away. She held on to that identity for some time. Why was that?

>> Because I asked her in the hospital, I said, I can say my name now, right? And she said no. She said, there were some people that came out, and they were killed by the Poles.
>> A program is an organized attack against Jews.
>> Unfortunately, there were some people that did not like the fact that the Germans didn't finish his job. That's what they said. So we had -- I was very upset, you know, that I had to keep up the -- yes. Now, my sister didn't know what was going on. And she was actually asked, you know, they said to her, now you can tell us, you're Jewish, right? And she said, "look at me. I have" --
>> Horns?
>> Horns, and I have a tail. That was her understanding of being Jewish. There were some primitive elements. These people were not very educated. But it was still a frightening thing to know that this is what happened. The neighbor that took us in told my mother that he was sorry that he didn't finish his job. My mother, all she wanted was to try and get us out as quickly as possible when we finally found my father. We found out he was patient. Actually, he was not in Palestine. He was stationed Egypt with the British Army. It took a while before he managed to send my cousin from Palestine to try to get us out of Poland.
>> What was it like to see your dad after all this and aging? How was that?
>> Very strange. Seven years. My sister was 2 months old when he was gone. It was very strange.
>> So you hadn't seen your dad for seven years?
>> Yeah. Well, we got ourselves together. We were told to go meet at Krakow. We had to be then transported out of Poland. Somehow there was some kind of an agreement between the Russian government and the Polish government, let the Holocaust survivors out. And we were in a group of people trying to get out of Poland. And they would take a few of us at a time and just throw us over the border into Germany.
>> I recall that it was ironic because some people accused you of pretending to be Jewish so you could get out. They thought you were really Poles because they weren't taking them, right?
>> What they said was -- yes. Well, you know, we have Polish names. Olga, Halina and Eva. We had no papers whatsoever. We had to leave every little thing out, away. So when we were in the group of these people coming out, they said at one point that we were Poles pretending to be Jewish because that's the only way we could get out of Poland.
>> And you'd been pretending to be Catholic.
>> Yes. And my mother was saying, but my husband's name was Izak. But finally somebody remembered that she was Polish champion in swimming, and her name was Olga Shriver at that time. So they accepted us. And it was really a reversal of fortune.
>> And unfortunately there's so much more about England and Israel has these Maccabiah games which are like the Jewish Olympics. And you represented England in what sport?
>> Table tennis.
>> Table tennis.

>> Yes.
>> Two times.
>> I wanted actually to play tennis, but there were no facilities. But there was a table everywhere. So I played table tennis and it did give me a lot of help because I represented England in the Maccabiah Games. This was after Israel was created. They since had, like, Jewish Olympics for youth from all over the world. And I was happy to do that.
>> Right. And like I told you at the beginning, four hours of stories to share. But previous and maybe this one, too, two previous interviews with Halina are on our website so you can hear the rest of her story about England, working at the American Embassy in Israel, meeting her husband and eventually coming to America in '68. Let me just make a few announcements, then we're going to wrap up. And I'm going to read the official close. It's our tradition at First Person to give the First Person the last word. But before that I want to tell you how this will go after Halina closes with us. Stick around for a few minutes and maybe chat with people individually, maybe a picture, maybe you have a particular question. And then like I told you, she's one of the authors of the Echoes of Memory, and if you're interested, you can have her sign her book up in the lobby so you can have more opportunities to get to know her a little more. Please share your thoughts to close today's program and thank you again. Go ahead.
>> Okay. I dedicate my story to my mother, her unbelievable courage and imagination and saved my sisters' and my life. It is important for us Holocaust survivors to tell our story so that future generations can better understand the horrors that befell humanity and particularly the Jews during Hitler's rampage through Europe. Volunteering at the museum gives me the opportunity to say thank you to her, my mother, in the best way I can and to pay respects and remember the 6 million who perished.
>> Thank you so much, Halina.
[Applause]