

Holocaust Memorial Museum First Person
Halena Yasharoff Peabody
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>> Ladies and gentlemen, we ask that you silence all cell phones. Our program will begin momentarily.

>> Bill Benson: Good morning and welcome to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. My name is Bill Benson. I am the host of the museum's public program First Person. Thank you for joining us. Today, we begin our 21st year of the First Person program. To start us off this year, our First Person today is Mrs. Halina Yasharoff Peabody, whom you shall meet shortly.

This 2020 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 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 this museum. Our program will continue through August 6th. The museum's website at www.ushmm.org provides information about each of our upcoming First Person guests.

Halina will share with us her First Person account of her experience during the Holocaust and as a survivor for about 45 minutes. If time allows we will have an opportunity for you to ask Halina a few questions.

If we do not get to your question today, please join us in our online conversation Never Stop Asking Why. The conversation aims to inspire individuals and new generations to ask the important questions that Holocaust history raises and what this history means for societies today.

To join the Never Stop Asking Why conversation, you can ask your question and tag the Museum on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram using @holocaustmuseum and the hashtag #AskWhy. You can find the hashtag on the back of your program as well.

Today's program will be livestreamed on the Museum's website, meaning people will be joining the program online and watching with us today from across the country and around the world. We invite everyone to watch our First Person programs live on the Museum's website each Wednesday and Thursday at 11:00 A.M. Eastern through the

end of May. A recording of this program will be made available on the Museum's YouTube page. Please visit the First Person website listed on the back of your program, for more details.

What you are about to hear from Halina is one individual's account of the Holocaust. We have prepared a brief slide presentation to help with her 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 and friends.

Halina Litman Yasharoff Peabody was born December 12, 1932, in Krakow, Poland. Her father was a dentist and her mother was a champion swimmer. On September 1, 1939, Germany and the Soviet Union each invaded half of Poland beginning World War II. Halina's hometown of Zaleszczyki, today Ukraine, came under Soviet occupation. 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. 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 Catholic. Here we see the forged baptismal certificate issued under a false name to Halina. The document states her religion as Roman Catholic.

With their new documents they traveled by train to Jaroslaw, Poland. Olga, Halina, and Eva found shelter with a woman who took boarders. On the left we see the house where they were sheltered in Jaroslaw.

On the right is a photo of Halina and Eva Celebrating Christmas while living under false identities.

Following liberation they were reunited with Izak and settled 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 is 22, and Olivia who is 16.

Halina frequently travels to England to see her son and her sister and her family. In April 2011, Halina and some of the other survivors from her hometown of Zaleszczyki in Poland -- and now in Ukraine -- went there to place a monument on an unmarked grave in which 800 Jews were buried during the first German action in that town.

She continues her keen interest in sports which, as you will hear later, have been of particular importance in her life because her mother was the Polish swimming Champion in 1925.

A few years ago, Halina and her sister Eve travelled to Poland to visit an exhibit of Jewish athletes in Krakow which included her mother. She will also visit her family in England and Israel this year, as she does every year with her son Joe.

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 Museum visitors at the survivor desk just upstairs on most Thursdays. Halina is a contributor to the Museum's writing project which produces editions of Echoes of Memory, a collection of writings by survivors associated with this museum. Following today's program, signed copies of Echoes of Memory will be available for sale in the foyer outside this theater.

With that I would like you to join me in welcoming our First Person, Halina Yasharoff

Peabody. Halina, please join us.

Halina, thank you so much for -- thank you so much for joining us and your willingness to be our First Person today. You have so much to share with us. We'll get started right away, if that's OK.

>> Halina Peabody: Lovely.

>> Bill Benson: Halina, you told me that for you, life was beautiful in the years before the war began in Poland in 1939. Let's start the conversation with you telling us a bit about your community, your family, and you in the years leading up to the beginning of the war.

>> Halina Peabody: Well, I was a very happy little girl. We were with our family. And we had a wonderful life in Zaleszczyki. Zaleszczyki is like Ocean City here. It has a very nice beach because on the river -- the river that almost completely surrounds the town. And in the middle there is a void because it's a natural front with Romania. At least it was in those days. And we liked living there very much. We used to go water skiing there. And my mother was very much into sports. She danced. She was -- anything that was a sport, my mother was into. And she taught me to skate when I was 5. So I remember that.

And also my father who was very anxious for me when I would go to first grade, I was supposed to be reading a newspaper. So he made me learn to read before I went to kindergarten so that I could read the newspaper before I came on the first day. So I had bicycles and tricycles. My grandparents were going to send me a piano for my next birthday. And it never arrived, unfortunately.

In 1939, in September, the war broke out, and everything really changed.

>> Bill Benson: Let's move to the events that began the war. In September 1939, you told us the Soviets invaded the part of Poland where you lived. It was initially thought that only the men were in danger, so many of them fled to Romania across the river Dniester. Your father had second thoughts and then tried to return. Tell us about that.

>> Halina Peabody: Well, my father, first of all, some people took families with them. But my father decided that it was too dangerous since we had a baby. My sister was 2 months old. So he thought there would be no facilities for babies, and he didn't think that women and children were in danger. So he decided to go by himself.

So he crossed the river. There was a nice bridge there. You could just walk over. In '39, it was open completely during that time when the Russians came, and so he just crossed over. He went there and he was very, very hot in the summer, and very cold in the winter. It was really different seasons then. So that was in September. In a couple of months, the river was completely frozen over. Of course my mother was devastated that my father was not with her. And then the Russians came in and took over completely. I was 6 1/2. So I just was kept at home. And my mother just looked after my sister and me, and I didn't know what was going on outside.

But apparently the people that crossed over, things were quiet now, they decided that maybe it would be OK if they could slip back in and just join the family. And my father was one of them. And they tried to cross back on the frozen river. They said it was open border usually. However, by this time already the Russians sealed the border. And the people that tried to get back in were caught and put in prison. And my father was

accused of being a spy. He was a dentist. And he was put on trial and given 20 years of hard labor and sent to Siberia. And we as the family of my father, the criminal, were told that we had to leave our house. You couldn't have a house. And we were thrown out of the house and told to go to a little town just up the road called Tluste. It was a little farm town. They told us what the area was to be. They also gave everybody one flat. So in kindergarten to prekindergarten, they tried to ration.

>> Bill Benson: Halina, let me ask you a couple of other questions related to your father going to Siberia. There was -- there was some possibility or worry that your mother would get sent to Siberia as I recall.

>> Halina Peabody: Yes. Because we were the family of a criminal, they were going to throw us out and we thought we would be taken to Russia as well.

>> Bill Benson: Were other family members sent to Siberia?

>> Halina Peabody: I don't know.

>> Bill Benson: Can you also explain to me that at that time some of your other relatives moved over to the Russian side. Tell us a little bit about that.

>> Halina Peabody: One was living in Krakow and one was living in Warsaw. The one in Warsaw didn't have any children. And the one in Krakow did have one child. They came rushing over there. And at one point the Russians offered them that they could go back to the German side without any penalty. And that was not unusual. The Russians did that all the time. And they took them to Russia. However, again, my aunt who was with her husband, were taken. They ended up in Russia. My mother's aunt was not feeling well. And the Russians were not -- she wasn't feeling well, and somehow the Russians did not take them. And they perished afterwards in Auschwitz.

>> Bill Benson: How did your mother manage?

>> Halina Peabody: Good question. We had very good friends. My mother was very much liked. And I know that other people were helping.

>> Bill Benson: You were 8 1/2 when the Nazis broke a pact with the Soviet Union and turned on the Soviets. Tell us what happened when the Germans occupied where you were.

>> Halina Peabody: Well, first of all, we had no contact with my father after the first year in Russia. He was put into a place where they were going to be doing the work. And he was able to communicate with us. So we knew where he was exactly, and we had an idea. But as soon as the Germans came, that stopped, of course. And we went back -- when we heard that they left, that the Germans were coming, we just went right back to our homes and waiting for the Germans. Once the Germans came, it was very noisy. Motorcycles. I remember I heard them coming down the road, and it was very frightening. I remember. And they had new laws. No school for Jewish children. We were not allowed to go to parks. And anybody who -- well, we all cooperated, hoping for the best.

And everyone was very willing to do whatever was asked. Every Jewish person had to be working for them. And my mother, because in addition to her exploits in sports, she was a wonderful knitter. And she would knit lace as well as woolen things. So they knew -- they had a list of the Jewish people there. It was a small Jewish community. And they put my mother in charge of knitting for the mayor of the town who had a lot of children. And that was my mother's job.

But every Jewish person had to be working for them. And if there was no job, they would tell them to clean the sidewalk. But that was what we were doing.

>> Bill Benson: You shared with me -- you told me about an incident soon after the Germans came to town.

>> Halina Peabody: Well, according to the law, you know, they would demand everybody was working for them. But in addition to that, they would demand a group of young people to come and do whatever job was to be done. And they would take them, the good people, to do the job. And then bring them back in the afternoon. And at this point there was a very big job. It was in a military camp. And there was, you know, it was winter and very, very cold. But they said there were some young trees that needed to be covered for the winter. And they needed a lot of people. A lot of people to go up to this place to do it for that job. And they asked for a certain number. And then people just joined in just to help, to be helpful. They walked these people out, all the young people, and we waited for them to come back in the afternoon. And nobody was coming back. We didn't know what to think. We didn't know what happened. We waited and waited. Nobody came back. Nobody came back.

Finally, it was the evening. And one man managed to come back. And he told us what happened. He said that when they got to the place, there was no job. There was an open grave. But it was open, and they were told to undress, kneel down, and they were shot. When they were shot, they dropped into the grave.

And this man was one of the last to be killed. And they missed his heart. So when they left, he managed to drag himself out and came back and told us what happened. And at this point we realized -- we never knew what the plan was, but at that moment we knew. And the first thing everybody did was look for hiding places. Because we knew that the next time they demanded to take people, we needed to try and hide.

>> Bill Benson: So you were trying to find hiding places. And you decided to try to get false identities and were able to do so.

>> Halina Peabody: That was a little later. What happened was they didn't have -- so next time that they demanded a group of people to go work in Germany, and everybody hid. And my mother took me and my sister to a lady who used to cook for us. And she kept us through the day. And after that, the community, after they found enough people to take away again, there was not many Jewish people left. The community was not that big. So they threw the rest of us out to the same town that we went to with the Russian occupation, Tluste. And again the first thing that happened was we started to look for hiding places. And my mother said to me, you know, they're going to move us again. That was her understanding.

And the next man that came, again, we had already found places. And there was a group of people that remained of the Jewish community from around there. And the next time this happened before we had any chance to do anything my mother made the deal with two farmers. She had a relationship, and she knew a couple of people. And I was put at one, and my mother went with my sister to another farmer in the other direction. And they agreed to keep them during the day while they were looking for people to take away.

>> Bill Benson: What was that like to be hidden away from your mother? Do you remember that?

>> Halina Peabody: It was terrible. The lady who kept me kept coming back and telling me who was caught, who was in the square. That's what they used to do with people until they had the right number. So all the time I was asking, you know, did you see my mother? Did you see my mother? And all through the day she didn't. But I was terrified all day, yes. And at the end of the day, when they did find the numbers -- my mother would come. She did come to collect me, and she said the same thing. She was worried that I would be caught. And she said that never after that we will split up. It will never happen. We will all go together.

>> Bill Benson: No matter what.

>> Halina Peabody: No matter what. That's right. And again, you know, people were looking for how to escape and get away. There was not really anything to do. And some friends -- we had very good friends that helped us through that time. And they suggested that maybe because we were -- there were no men in that group. It was just females because men they took. Women, no. So they thought that perhaps there was a chance for us to get away pretending to be Catholic, you know. That's the only option. And they knew to go -- well, my mother. I wasn't involved in that.

My mother went with some friends to a priest and bought us some papers for all three of us. And a friend helped her to get to the station and we had a little money that they collected for us. And we were going to a place, to another town that we had never heard of before. That's where we were going. We said goodbye to our friends. Apparently they did not survive. And we started on our journey.

>> Bill Benson: You went to Jaroslaw?

>> Halina Peabody: Yes. My mother told me the new name, the new name, new place and everything that she could remember, you know, according to the papers.

>> Bill Benson: And you had to be trained to --

>> Halina Peabody: Yes. Well, we were not -- we didn't know anything about the religion. But since I was so young, they taught me only that I have to cross myself when I go in and out of church. That's all I knew. Yeah.

>> Bill Benson: On your way to Jaroslaw, you had a terrifying close call. Can you tell us about that?

>> Halina Peabody: When we started, some young man was chatting with my mother, asking about the children. And I wasn't paying much attention. And finally, my mother tells me, you know, I'm sorry to tell you that this young man is German, he's a Folkdeutsch. And he pushed me very, very hard and he asked me lots of questions and pushed me and pushed me. And so I had no choice. So I admitted to him that we were Jewish. And he said, well, he's going to Jaroslaw as well. But he's going to accompany us. And then he's going to turn us over to the Gestapo when we get to Jaroslaw. And that's where we are. So he looked after us very carefully.

And as we neared the station, she had one thought. She asked him for one favor. She gave him everything we had, the ticket, all the money she had. And she asked him for just one thing. When we get to the camp, to have us shot quickly, all three of us. Because she explained to me that would be less painful and it's going to be quick. And either way she knew that the children would not survive. Children -- they had no use for children anyway. So she knew that. She did not want to survive by herself anyway. And she just wasn't ready to let go of the children. So that's what she came up with.

Because as I said, there was no way to run. No place to run.

>> Bill Benson: And --

>> Halina Peabody: As I said, we were very tired. And as we get to the platform, and we start coming down the steps, and I said, Mama, I don't want to die. And I said -- my mother didn't reply. Didn't say anything. And we continued to walk towards the town center.

>> Bill Benson: So you think you are on your way to the Gestapo.

>> Halina Peabody: We were. And as we were walking, I must have pushed my mother a little bit. So she said to him, look, I gave you everything I have. Keep it. Why don't you let us go and then she added, why do you want this on your conscience? And somehow, something touched him, and he said, you don't have a chance. But he took everything and he left.

But there we were in the middle of this strange little town. And my mother holding my sister by the hand.

>> Bill Benson: You gave him everything you had.

>> Halina Peabody: Absolutely everything, yeah.

>> Bill Benson: So what did your mother do then? Here you are in this strange town.

>> Halina Peabody: She looked around, and there was a little cafe. And so we walked in there. She asked for a little something for my sister. And then she started looking around asking if anybody knew of any place where they take lodgers. It was very important for us to be inside because the Germans were running around with, you know, guns and they could do anything they wanted. So we knew that it was very dangerous to be in the street. Also the paper, which I gave to the Museum --

>> Bill Benson: We saw that earlier.

>> Halina Peabody: Yes. They were just papers. And so she was always trying not to have them looked at. The first thing the Germans would ask for was the papers. And some young man came up and said, oh, I know a washer lady who takes lodgers. So I'll take you there. And she walked -- he walked us over there, and there was this very lovely lady, very short, very sweet looking. And she looked at us, and I don't know. She must have -- we must have looked very poor. But still she looked and she said, I'll take you. And my mother said, I don't have any money, but tomorrow I will go to work and I will give you money for keeping us.

And then someone came up and said, don't take her. Don't take her. And she said, no, no, no, it's a mother and two children. I have to take them. It's the most Christian lady I have ever met. And she did take us.

And my mother went the next day and started working. And she would go from house to house and offer to help and do whatever she could. And she would bring it in. My sister was very sickly, but I was healthy. And I had to go to school. For the Polish kids, there were two hours. And the first hour was very religion. And it was very nice priest who taught us. And they taught the religion with a little booklet called the Catechism. And that was what saved me really because I knew all of the questions and answers. You could learn so much about it. I didn't know anything. But that was wonderful. And I could read. I could just read up on it immediately. And that really helped me.

I was in the first row. Had a very lovely relationship with the priest. And he was really a very nice man. And so that's, you know, that was very important. I was very careful to do the right things. And eventually I had to go to communion. And that was a problem

for me. I didn't have any friends to ask. So I just kind of went. I made up things and got away with it, I think. I was a young kid, so --

>> Bill Benson: Your mother thought it was best to hide in plain sight.

>> Halina Peabody: That's right. And that's what we would do. We were doing that, yes. I was out and everybody was out. We didn't hide. My sister didn't know. She had no idea.

>> Bill Benson: She was so young.

>> Halina Peabody: She was a baby, yeah. She didn't know anything.

>> Bill Benson: How did your mother manage to feed you?

>> Halina Peabody: Well, she went and worked at various -- she was always looking for security. She was always worried about the security. My sister had terribly curly hair. The Polish girls in those days had straight blonde hair. My sister was brown and curly. That's a sign of being Jewish, no matter which way you look at it. I had blonde hair and wavy, so they braided my hair. So my mother -- with my sister, my mother shaved her head both times giving the excuse that it would grow thicker.

So she looked and she wanted to find a place of work where she would be less likely to be recognized and also have an I.D. because that would be helpful when the Germans would stop her in the street. So the first thing she tried was to offer herself for work in Germany. They were always happy to have the Polish people go to work in Germany. They always needed workers. So that would have been helpful because the German people were not as good as at recognizing Jews as the Polish people. And they would have taken us. But they couldn't take my sister. She was too young. So that didn't work.

So then she decided that if she had an I.D. card, meaning she is working for the Germans, that that might be helpful. So she went into the German military camp and asked for a job. And they asked for the papers, of course. And we spent quite a few weeks terrified that, you know, those papers were not good. But there were no computers in those days. So whether they looked them over carefully or not, I don't know. But after a few weeks, they gave her a job. And she had the job peeling potatoes for the troops.

>> Bill Benson: So her philosophy of hiding in plain sight, she went to work for the German military. So you and your sister and your mom somehow came through. You were able to remain undetected for the rest of the war. As the Russians advanced on Jaroslaw, you were literally caught in the middle of fierce fighting between the Russians and the Germans. And as a result of that you were seriously injured. Tell us about that time and what happened, what happened to you.

>> Halina Peabody: Well, first of all, we had no idea what was going on the front. We had no idea where the war was going, because anything to do with the BBC or newspapers was not allowed. It was the death penalty if you were caught. So nobody knew what was happening.

>> Bill Benson: You couldn't listen to the radio.

>> Halina Peabody: No. We didn't have one, but people did get killed over that because they didn't want us to know anything. So we didn't know what was going on.

And we -- one morning we woke up, and there was complete silence in the street. And this is a street where there were always bringing food and horses and carts. And we were not at all used to the silence. So my mother was still in bed with my

sister. I was standing by the bed in front of the window. And we were thinking it over. My mother was wondering whether she should go to work or not. We knew something was going on but didn't know whether it was an imminent thing or not. So we were thinking about it. And a sudden terrible noise. A bomb exploded over our house. And the shrapnel hit my hand. And I started screaming, my hand, my hand!

And my mother grabbed my sister and me and walked out into the street. And there was not a soul. My mother -- there was no help, so we walked to the hospital with my bleeding hand. And there they told us that the Russians were coming back, and the Germans are have disappeared.

And they hospitalized me with my hand. And my mother went back to the other place in that house that she saw. And it was completely destroyed. And the neighbor took her in. And the meantime my mother kept going back and forth. And she started to think that the Russians will come, looking forward to it, trying to find my father again.

>> Bill Benson: Tell us about your injury and the treatment that you got for it.

>> Halina Peabody: Well, my treatment was just to hopefully not get infection. There was no penicillin. So they had to cauterize it. And it was an open wound. And there was -- the nurses were nuns. And they were very, very kind. But it was very painful because, you know, they had no way to help me with the pain. So the lovely ladies, the lovely nuns, said to me, put your head in my habit and just scream. And I did.

>> Bill Benson: There were no painkillers they could use for you.

>> Halina Peabody: They had like spirits and everything. But that's it. But they saved my hand. So that was a big deal.

>> Bill Benson: This essentially for you is the end of the war at this point. The fighting. And so now, of course, you -- the Nazis have retreated, and your part of Poland is liberated, but for you the dangers are not over.

>> Halina Peabody: That's right. The first thing I said to my mother, mom, can I say my real name now? And she said, no, no, because there was a -- the Jewish people that came out of hiding were killed by the Poles. I know not all Poles are bad, but that was my experience. We had to keep this identity for quite a while because we were afraid of being killed.

>> Bill Benson: So the fighting ended. You're still living under the identities. What did your -- your house had been destroyed. What did your mom do with you and your sister at that point?

>> Halina Peabody: Well, the neighbor -- the strange thing is that the neighbor said to my mother that she is sorry about one thing, that Hitler didn't finish his job. I don't know how to explain that because she was very kind and she took my mother and my sister and me in. My mother started knitting very quickly to earn some money and to start sending, you know, all kinds of --

>> Bill Benson: Searching?

>> Halina Peabody: Looking for my father.

>> Bill Benson: Looking for your father.

>> Halina Peabody: Yes. She went to the radios and the newspapers, and she -- you know, everybody was looking for people. And my mother -- because we knew that there was family in Palestine, now Israel. And so my mother tried to find him that way. She knew that it would be in Tel Aviv or Haifa. She didn't know which town because we had

never been to Palestine, but she knew it was one of those towns. That's where my father was found.

>> Bill Benson: And once he was found, was he able to communicate with you?

>> Halina Peabody: Yes. We had communication. And eventually he sent my cousin, who was living in Palestine. He was also with the underground there.

>> Bill Benson: Once your father knew where you were and you knew where he was, when did your mother feel that it was safe to drop the false identity and leave?

>> Halina Peabody: Well, we couldn't because we couldn't until we got to Krakow. But still we had to keep the identity because we couldn't get a room. And until we got out and there was a group of survivors that were allowed to leave. To leave officially. So we were in a group home where they took a few of us, and ever so often, and just threw us out into Germany.

>> Bill Benson: If I remember correctly, at one point, once your mom felt it was safe to drop the identity, you had this incredibly ironic situation, right? Share that with us.

>> Halina Peabody: Well, because when we first came to this place, they thought that we were Poles pretending to be Jews in order to be able to get out of Poland. And my mother, we had no papers whatsoever, and so we couldn't prove anything. And my mother kept saying my husband's name was Izak.

>> Bill Benson: So they thought you were posing as Jews.

>> Halina Peabody: That's right. Yes. That was quite ironic, yes. But somebody realized that my mother was a famous swimmer and they recognized her name finally and signed off on it and we were able to leave.

>> Bill Benson: At what point did your mother become ill?

>> Halina Peabody: She was ill just after that.

>> Bill Benson: It was at that same time.

>> Halina Peabody: And she had her first operation. And the doctor called me in and said, you know, we're not sure if it's a cancer or not. But it's better to be safe. So my mother had breast cancer surgery.

>> Bill Benson: It just compounded the trauma that you were going through.

>> Halina Peabody: Well, I think she got the cancer because of being upset about my hand.

>> Bill Benson: You were able to get out of Poland and eventually reunite with your father, which then made it possible for you to move to England. Tell us about that time. Tell us about reuniting with your father, what that was like for you, and then making the trip to England and starting a new life.

>> Halina Peabody: Well, we finally met up in Italy with my father. And because he was a dentist, he was keen for us to stay a little bit longer because we had a very nice place to stay. And we could eat at the hospital. And we were signed up to go to England. We had the choice to go to Palestine or to England. And my parents chose England. And we were told that we would be taken over by the whatever the people were that were going to take us. In the meantime we were going to be in Italy for a while.

But as it

happened in most cases they took us very quickly. And so we ended up going into England very early. And we ended up going to a place called Liverpool.

Probably a famous place of the Beatles. We were in a very nice camp. The British were very kind to us. They had very little left, as you probably know. But they really shared

everything. And we stayed in the camp for a while. My father was needed. And we came eventually, and eventually everybody made way to London, almost everybody. Because the first thing we wanted was a home, a house, because we had been homeless for so long. Everybody wanted a house. And we started trying to live the British life, which wasn't easy.

But that was the way -- I wanted to go to Polish school which existed but my mother said, oh, no. You're in England now. You've got to speak English.

>> Bill Benson: Tell us, how did your father get from Siberia to Palestine, which is where you were able to find him?

>> Halina Peabody: They came through --

>> Bill Benson: Through Iran

>> Halina Peabody: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: When the Germans turned on the Soviets, the Soviets allowed a number of the prisoners to be released.

>> Halina Peabody: There was a famous meeting between Stalin, Churchill, and Roosevelt. And they finally allowed some of the prisoners to get out. And that's how my father and some others and General Anders who was also a prisoner. He was a very nice man. And he said that he would not take just the men. He took the family. And that's when my aunt came. My cousin joined the army. And they all came out to Iran. And in fact my uncle died on the way, and he is buried there.

>> Bill Benson: In Iran.

>> Halina Peabody: Yes. And my aunt ended up coming and living with us in London eventually. And my cousin became a doctor actually.

>> Bill Benson: If you don't mind my asking you, Halina, you have been through so much. And now you have been with a father that you have not seen in a very long time.

>> Halina Peabody: Seven years.

>> Bill Benson: How was that for you?

>> Halina Peabody: Difficult and complicated.

>> Bill Benson: Complicated.

>> Halina Peabody: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: But you managed.

>> Halina Peabody: We managed.

>> Bill Benson: And I know there's so much more I'd like to ask you, but I want to make sure we have time for our audience. But I do want you to tell us, you would eventually make your way to Israel.

>> Halina Peabody: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: And you know I want you to tell us what really took you to Israel and tell us about it.

>> Halina Peabody: Well, I was visiting with family in Israel. And I didn't know -- I had never been to Israel or never knew much about it. But I was going there. I was very interested in tennis. I was not a swimmer. My mother -- it probably disappointed my mother. My sister was the swimmer. I was not. I wanted tennis. But tennis was not available because, you know, there were no facilities. So I picked up the next best thing, which was table tennis.

Table tennis was everywhere. It was in school, in college. And then I discovered that there was a Jewish youth club right around the corner from where we lived, and so I started playing there. And that was my -- really the only thing that I enjoyed and felt comfortable with in the beginning living in England.

So in the end, you know, Israel

created -- was created and they had the Maccabiah Games. It's like the Jewish Olympic games. All the Jewish youth from all over the world. This was the very beginnings of when we finally -- so I was eligible. So they sent me with the British flag.

>> Bill Benson: You were the British champion.

>> Halina Peabody: No, not the British. Israel.

>> Bill Benson: You were the champion, nonetheless.

>> Halina Peabody: In 1949. So it was wonderful to go on my first trip to Israel. And that trip was unforgettable. I met -- I never knew much about Israel, but when we arrived in Israel I felt as if I was coming home. I don't know how it happened. But that's what a lot of people say, you know, when they come to Israel. And we were in the Maccabiah village. It was just like a little Olympics. And then I met my aunt and my cousins there. I had four cousins. And it was wonderful. And I had two girlfriends who also were there. So I fell in love with Israel. And I would have liked to stay longer but my mother was not well, so I came back. That was 1953. And my mother unfortunately passed away in 1956. So in 1957, there was another Maccabiah. It's every four years. And I went back again.

>> Bill Benson: To play table tennis.

>> Halina Peabody: Yes. And also I wanted to know if I could find a job in English. I'd want to stay a year or maybe. And it happened. I brought my sister over. And enjoyed it very, very much.

>> Bill Benson: And the job that you ended up landing was working in the U.S. Embassy, is that right?

>> Halina Peabody: The Embassy, yes.

>> Bill Benson: One more question for you before we go to our audience. You have now been back to the site of your former hometown, first with your husband Richard and then more recently with other survivors. Those trips were remarkable for you. Tell us a little bit about it. What was that like?

>> Halina Peabody: Well, the most remarkable thing is there were some old ladies who remembered us. There was a couple of them. One came after me, and said, you know, your dad fixed my teeth. Yes. And another one said to me, you know, I remember seeing your mom teaching the skiing. That was very touching.

And the place looked so, so much different. Our house was destroyed completely. There was nothing there. But I remembered the other side. It was a big place as I remembered. But it was just a little place. It was a very interesting place.

By the

way, that town was very nice to us. I know Ukraine doesn't usually have a good reputation, but they were very nice to us. And they hosted us. And we had a -- well, the Cantor who came when we put the monument on the grave. And they apparently are keeping the grave very nicely and with flowers on it. You know, there were almost 800 people that were buried there and it was unmarked.

>> Bill Benson: So we can turn to our audience for a few questions, if that's okay we do

have time for a few questions from you. We have as you can see two microphones in the aisle. We are being live-streamed. And the audience who are watching them on the computers will be able to hear your questions. So if you're brave enough to ask a question, please do. Make your question as brief as you can, and then I'll repeat it just to make sure we hear it correctly and then Halina will respond to it. But if you -- if nobody feels brave enough to jump out -- here we go. I knew that would do it. Here we have our first question for you, Halina.

>> Halina, how are you not angry about anything that happened? You don't seem like an angry person.

>> Bill Benson: How are you not angry? You don't seem like an angry person. How are you not angry in light of all that you went through and experienced?

>> Halina Peabody: Well, I would consider -- I say always, you know, when the German students come to us and I say, we're not here to hate you. We are here to educate you. All we can do is to educate people so that they know what could happen when you're not careful. And you have to work very hard to make this world a much better place. Kindness. Kindness is the way. Not anger. Anger doesn't help anybody. And so I definitely am not angry. I remember my mother said, what good -- what could we have done? There's no way you can do anything with anger. The only thing is to educate the young people and to help everybody understand that it happened. There's still people who don't believe it. Well, we are the last survivors, and we are hopeful that we will leave enough evidence for people to understand that this can happen. It can happen, and there's a lot of hate in this world. And we'd like that to stop.

>> Bill Benson: I'm going to turn back to Halina in just a moment to close our program. I want to thank all of you for being with us. And remind you that we have a program each Wednesday and Thursday until August 6. For all of our programs until the end of May, they will be live-streamed so they'll be available and you can watch them live. And then of course all of our programs, including today's, are recorded, and they'll be available on the Museum's YouTube channel.

When I turn back to Halina to close the program, when she is finished, I'm going to ask you to stay with us for just a couple more minutes because our photographer, Joel, right here, Joel is going to come up on the stage and take a photograph of Halina with you as a backdrop. And it's just a terrific photograph to have. So I'd ask you to stay with us for that, if you would. If you still have questions that you were not able to ask, please do go through our online conversation Never Stop Asking Why. You can ask your question and tag the Museum with the #askwhy and I think that's also in your program.

As I mentioned earlier Halina has signed copies of "Echoes of Memory" and they will be available in the foyer.

It's our tradition at First Person that our First Person gets the last word. And so with that, I'd like to turn to Halina to close today's program.

>> Halina Peabody: So this is a word to explain why I am here at this Museum. As I said, it is important for us Holocaust survivors to tell our stories so that future generations can better understand the horrors that befell humanity and particularly the Jews during Hitler's rampage through Europe.

I dedicate my story to my mother, whose unbelievable courage, imagination and

selflessness saved my sister's and my life. Appearing at the Museum gives me an opportunity to say thank you to her in the best way I can, and to pay respect and remember the six million who perished. Thank you.