

>> Interviewer: Okay. Would you please tell us your name and where you were born and your birth date?

>> Popowski: My name is Paula Kornblum Popowski. I was born in Kaluszyn, Poland, January 29, 1923.

>> Interviewer: And tell us what life was like in Kaluszyn.

>> Popowski: It was a small city 36 miles east of Warsaw. When I was growing up, it was predominantly a Jewish city. Eighty percent people were Jewish there. The first thing what I remember is going to kindergarten. We had a Hebrew kindergarten. And then public school, I went to public school. And we had a pretty good life because it so happens that my parents were well-off. We had a family business, which was a flour mill. My grandfather built it, and some of the children were involved in that business. And I went to school there, finished school.

>> Interviewer: Tell me about school. What was school like?

>> Popowski: I went to a Polish school, but we had to separate the Jewish children from the Gentile children because there was no separation of state and religion. In other words, religion was taught in school too, and the Jewish people didn't want them to teach Catholic religion to the Jewish children, and neither did the Catholic children want the Jewish religion. So what they did is they made a school number one and school number two, so they separated the children. But the curriculum was the same, and a matter of fact, most of the teachers what taught me were Gentile teachers.

And school was very hard in Europe. We started, for instance, geography and history in the third grade. I enjoyed school very

much. And then -- but there was no secondary school. For secondary school, you had to go to Warsaw, which I didn't go, but my sister did, and my brother did. But I think that after we went through the seventh grade, we were pretty much informed at that school. And after I finished school -- most of the girls, you know -- for instance, I had a hobby of needlepoint and sewing, and most of the women didn't work -- which I mean "didn't work," they worked, but they were mostly housewives. I know now business -- what I can mostly refer to, in my family, is most of the men took care of the business, and the women took care of the household.

>> Interviewer: I see. Tell me what your family's life was like. Was there a synagogue that you went to? Were there many synagogues in Kaluszyn?

>> Popowski: There was a synagogue, and there were also a lot of the Hasidic place of worship. Now, I come from a very Orthodox family, very Orthodox. And it... For instance, when it came Saturday or a Jewish holiday, everything closed up. We enjoyed it very much. And there was a synagogue. There was smaller synagogues. And even the nonobservant didn't have a choice and had to observe it because the stores were closed. All the businesses shut up.

But also, by the same token, we had a lot of secular organizations, like Zionist organizations, which were not so religious, and also left-wing organizations. In other words, what I see, looking back on that time when I was a teenager, it was a vibrant city.

>> Interviewer: Tell me about your family, your family life. Your mother was at home, and how many children were there in your family?

>> Popowski: We had three children in our home, three children: my sister -- a younger sister, older brother. My brother would've been now 72 years old. He was born in June 1920.

>> Interviewer: And you had uncles and cousins and aunts?

>> Popowski: Like I said, we had -- my grandmother lived downstairs. We lived upstairs. My aunt lived in the other part of the house. And then across the street, we had an uncle and the cousins, and overall I had, in the neighborhood, 13 cousins.

>> Interviewer: Had your family lived in Kaluszyń for several generations?

>> Popowski: I think what I know, that my grandfather was born there, and he was born in 1867. And my grandmother's mother was not from Kaluszyń. Now, my father was from Warsaw. He had his parents in Warsaw and his brothers and sisters in Warsaw. After he married my mother, he -- at first, he stayed in Warsaw, and then he came to Kaluszyń and got involved in the mill business.

>> Interviewer: Do you have any recollections, from when you were a little girl, of feeling different because you were Jewish or any of the Gentile children or Gentile adults making an issue of it?

>> Popowski: We had some sneers from people, you know, and some -- what happened over there was that we intermingled with a lot of Gentiles, and we had a lot of Gentile neighbors, next-door neighbors. But we went our separate ways in socializing. We did very little socializing.

>> Interviewer: So even as a child, all your friends were Jewish?

>> Popowski: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. You didn't see any -- very little, and even if would've been socializing, it would probably be in hiding.

>> Interviewer: Because it wasn't socially --

>> Popowski: Accepted, acceptable.

>> Interviewer: So when you were ten years old, that was 1930 --

>> Popowski: Three.

>> Interviewer: Okay, 1933, '34, were things starting to change at that point?

>> Popowski: At that time, when Hitler came to power, this I remember. I still was going to school at that time. When Hitler came to power, Gentile children used to sometimes throw rocks at us and say, "wait, wait till Hitler's gonna come for you," or "Jews, go to Palestine; it's no place for you."

>> Interviewer: Did your family consider leaving?

>> Popowski: We didn't consider leaving because our livelihood was there and we were so rooted there.

>> Interviewer: Did anybody in your family leave?

>> Popowski: My aunt left.

>> Interviewer: Your aunt left.

>> Popowski: My aunt left, not for the reason, for the reason -- because she fell in love with a man, and he went there, and after he lived there for about two years, he came back to Poland and married her, and she left in 1936. But then she came to

visit in 1938, and she left about a half a year before the war broke out.

>> Interviewer: So things got very difficult how soon after Hitler came to power? How did they change?

>> Popowski: Also, what it was difficult -- what was difficult is also that even the government, the Polish government, was anti-Semitic.

>> Interviewer: Tell me about that.

>> Popowski: Because I remember that there was once a pogrom not too far from us, and then there was another pogrom in south of Poland, and they killed a couple of Jews, and the Jews were afraid. The prime minister came out with a saying. Roughly translated, he said, "Don't be the Jews, but you can work at their business."

>> Interviewer: And this was in the '30s?

>> Popowski: In the '30s. I think about '37, '38.

>> Interviewer: So tell me how things started to change. You're a schoolgirl, and, for example, did your school shut down, or did you have to wear identification that you were Jewish?

>> Popowski: Not when -- before the war. Before the war, that was -- it's supposed to have been a democratic country.

>> Interviewer: So all the way through the '30s, everything was normal.

>> Popowski: [indistinct] was normal. Business, you know, sometimes was better; sometimes was worse. But we were pretty much secure in our livelihood.

>> Interviewer: Was there a lot of news from Germany?

>> Popowski: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. We had a couple of newspapers coming every day.

>> Interviewer: But was there a sense in the community in Kaluszyn that things were changing or that bad things were happening?

>> Popowski: We saw it happening to German Jews. And then in 1938, Germany started -- there were a couple thousand -- I don't know exactly how many -- Polish Jews who lived in Germany and never became citizens. And one day, the Germans put them all together, brought them to the Polish border, and just dropped them off there. And then when we came aware and everybody was trying, you know, to help the refugees, then we became really aware what's going on, because we always considered that the German Jews...more sophisticated, and that's when we really came aware what can happen. But still we had illusions that it's not gonna happen, that war is not gonna break out, that the world is not gonna let it do it. And then in 1939, on September the 1st, it all started.

>> Interviewer: So tell me how things changed.

>> Popowski: It changed dramatically, drastically, and overnight. When the war broke out, the Germans were supposed to come from the west because we were east of Warsaw. But little did we know that they're gonna come from Prussia, from north, and they came to us before they even came to Warsaw. And when they came in, first of all, they martyred our city. Ninety percent of the city was burned out. People became instant refugees. They lost everything. Luckily, our house wasn't burned, and the mill wasn't burned. But I can still see myself laying on that field and seeing the city going up in flames. And

the Polish people tried to put on opposition to the Germans, and the Germans came in with tanks and with such a gusto that they killed over a thousand from the civilian population. Now, that was not exclusively Jewish people.

>> Interviewer: It was all kinds of people.

>> Popowski: All kinds of people. And as they came in, they ran us all out from the house, and they put us all in the church. And when we were all in the church, they said that the Gentiles can go home, but the Jews have to stay there. And we thought that they're gonna burn us all alive. But then it came an order for the women and children to go home and the men to stay there in the church.

>> Interviewer: Now, what made you think they were gonna burn you alive in the church?

>> Popowski: Because the whole city was burning.

>> Interviewer: Okay.

>> Popowski: And when we went home, I still can see myself going with my mother and my sister home, over dead bodies, over dead horses, and making all kind -- and shooting just in the air. And then, like a miracle, two days later, they let the men out.

>> Interviewer: And your father had been in there and your brother.

>> Popowski: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

>> Interviewer: And they came home.

>> Popowski: And they came home two days later.

>> Interviewer: And what happened to the business and the family?

>> Popowski: Okay. Now, the business, they allowed us to keep the business at the beginning. But little by little, they put all kinds of restrictions. Every day were new orders. Then came other order that we had to wear Stars of David. But we didn't wear the yellow stars, but we wore arm bands and the Star of David on it, everybody from age 12 up. Then in 1940, almost at the end of 1940, they came in, and they took away our business, our livelihood.

>> Interviewer: If you could back up just a little bit, when they imposed restrictions on the company, on the flour mill, what kind of restrictions?

>> Popowski: Not only on the flour mill. On everybody.

>> Interviewer: On everybody, but on your family business, what did they say you could do and you couldn't do?

>> Popowski: what kind of restrictions? If you went down in the street, they could grab you for work, for the dirtiest work, or beat you up. My father's father -- my grandmother died right after the war broke out in Warsaw, my father's family. I remember one time I went to Warsaw. The only time I went was in the end of 1939, the beginning of 1940. My grandfather was a very religious Jew, and he always wore a beard. He never shaved his face in his life. A German soldier came over to him and cut off half of his beard with scissors. And when I saw my grandfather, he cried like a baby. He said, "You see me? I'm an old man now, and I never shaved in my life." He was so ashamed that he put a bandana over his face.

That what I mean. Restriction, it didn't only -- not us personally but on everybody. It was not on us personally. It was

on everybody. And then they -- for instance, they could come in and take away from us. If we had grains in the mill or something, they just came in and took it away without any compensation. And finally, we knew it's gonna be coming because they started, little by little, to take away the bigger enterprises. Jews were not allowed to have anything. And we had so many refugees in Kaluszyn. And on top of this, they send in, from the western part of Poland, from two cities, they send in some more people. And to tell you literally, in some rooms, three families were living together. And then when they took away our business, I can still see my father in the yard, and they came in and took away the keys.

>> Interviewer: They just showed up?

>> Popowski: And they showed up, and they put in a German trustee to run the mill because they needed the mill for their own purposes. And on top of this, we lived on the premises of the mill, and they said that we had to evacuate the house. And like I said, we were in a little bit -- in a better position, so we tried to bribe whoever we could, "At least let us stay in the house." So they made us put up so much money and make a fence to separate the mill from the house. And to give you a little illustration of how bad it was, I had to sleep with my grandmother, and I remember her every night, she said, "Please, God, don't take away my bed."

>> Interviewer: And your grandmother -- I mean, this was a prosperous family.

>> Popowski: Definitely, that was a very pro -- a prominent --

>> Interviewer: But she was that scared.

>> Popowski: That scared, "Please, don't take away my bed," 'cause we saw so many refugees.

>> Interviewer: With no place.

>> Popowski: No place to go. And on top of this, there was an epidemic of typhus fever, and typhus fever spreads like fire, and people living one on top of the other. I myself was sick with typhus fever. But like I said, I was lucky that they could put me in a hospital. I was 17 years old, and they cut off my hair because, otherwise, it would fall out anyway. And luckily, I survived that epidemic, and I was a healthy girl later on.

>> Interviewer: Now, tell me about that. As a Jewish person, was it difficult to get medical care toward the end?

>> Popowski: Very difficult. First of all, we couldn't get any medicines because the pharmacy -- we had one pharmacy in Kaluszyn. They put out -- the Jews --

>> Interviewer: That you had one pharmacy --

>> Popowski: For everybody.

>> Interviewer: Okay.

>> Popowski: The Jews were not allowed to go inside the pharmacy. What they did, they made a little window at the door, and if the pharmacist wanted to come to serve the Jews, it was on his discretion.

>> Interviewer: And did the pharmacist choose to do that?

>> Popowski: Sometimes. If there was a lot of people in the pharm -- he never came to the door. And medicine was very difficult to get, and the priority was for the German army. They were the priority. They took all the medicines. They were -- what is that? We could get shots against typhus fever, but they

didn't give it to us. That was everything for the German army, and the Germans were marching every day through the city.

>> Interviewer: So now it's 1940.

>> Popowski: 1940, when they took away our business. They took away our livelihood. And the food -- let me put it this way. I didn't go hungry, *but* it was very...like, bread and a little cheese. Meat was very scarce, very scarce. I don't remember -- you know, it could pass by months that we get a piece of meat. And, also, you had to share. That what was so -- which sometimes I feel very proud of, little that everybody had, we shared with the people who didn't have it.

>> Interviewer: And how did you get food? Did you have to line up somewhere?

>> Popowski: First of all, we got ration cards. But there was not enough to live and not enough to die. So everybody tried -- oh, I had somebody who knew a farmer who knew somebody. So that's how we tried to get a little bit more than was allowed to us.

>> Interviewer: In those days, '39 and '40, did you get any assistance from the Gentile population at all?

>> Popowski: Assistance -- if we could buy something, that was already assistance.

>> Interviewer: So some people wouldn't even sell to you?

>> Popowski: No, but if -- but for money, you could have get -- you got something. I would say that assistance, in a way, that they would sell it to us. Okay, now, at the end of then, '41, like I said, the epidemic of typhus, people were dying right and left. I don't remember much about '41. I just remember that my

grandfather in Warsaw died in the ghetto, and then when they put the ghetto in Warsaw, I remember my father was very, very sad, 'cause he said, "Oh, no, my whole family is there." And even though we didn't have much, we tried to send them some, because we were also in a ghetto, but we didn't have any fences around us.

>> Interviewer: How was your family living at that point with no business anymore? You just --

>> Popowski: Lived, whatever we had saved up.

>> Interviewer: I see. So you had access to your money?

>> Popowski: Money was not money in a bank. Money was in gold or -- it was not money in the bank then.

>> Interviewer: So if you had jewelry or silver, you would sell it.

>> Popowski: That's right, or fur. Then when the Germans declared war on the Russians, they probably marched -- a half an army marched through Kaluszyn. They made us give up all the fur, even if you had a little fur collar, because they need it for their soldiers on the Russian front. So everybody had to take out the furs from coats, whatever it was, or take off the collars from the coats, and bring it to a point.

My mother had a -- that was so tragic. It was not as tragic as before, but it was really sad. When my parents got married, my grandfather gave her a Persian lamb coat, and she treasured it very much, and she said, "I'm not gonna give it to them." So she took her Persian lamb coat and put it in the oven and burned it. But everybody -- we were not allowed to have any fur, even a piece of fur on a coat. And was -- I, I -- honestly, 1941 is --

we lived to survive from day to day, from day to day, and hope was probably running out of us. So isolated.

>> Interviewer: Were there rumors about what was going to happen? What did you all --

>> Popowski: What, what, what we had -- the rumors started in '42. We knew that they were shooting people. They were taking hostages. For instance, if for some reason, a German soldier got killed, they used to take 50, 60 people and kill. Especially in Warsaw, the Jews. Even if the Jews weren't guilty in it, they used to take hostages, Jews, and kill them without any, any -- I'm not gonna say a judge and jury, but without any explanation.

And in '42, we heard the rumors that there is Auschwitz. And I can still remember, a friend of my father's came, and he said, "Did you hear they're putting people in the gas chambers and they burn them?" We said, "Oh, no, this can't be happening. How is the world gonna allow to do something like this?" Then in July '42, we heard that they starting taking out, little by little, the Jews from Warsaw ghetto to Treblinka. And it also happened that Treblinka was not too far from Kaluszn. It was about 60 miles, and the trains were going day and night, day and night.

>> Interviewer: And did people know?

>> Popowski: Oh, yes, they did know it. They knew it that in Treblinka that is...finish.

>> Interviewer: The end.

>> Popowski: The end of it. And we tried -- I still remember, we tried to call on the telephone our uncle, my father's brother in Warsaw, and we couldn't get an answer. And my father's family all perished.

>> Interviewer: And how many people was that?

>> Popowski: Roughly about 25 people. I'm just saying cousins and uncles and aunts. And then we lost all con -- that was in July of '42.

>> Interviewer: Now, let me back you up just a little bit. During this period, how were you personally surviving? Was this when you had your false identity?

>> Popowski: No.

>> Interviewer: This was before?

>> Popowski: That was all before. The false identity didn't start till in September 19 -- in, in, in Oct -- in November 1942.

>> Interviewer: Okay.

>> Popowski: Anyway, they started -- we used to say that they taking out cities. What they did is they used to surround the city so nobody could get out and take all the Jews in a place like a marketplace or something and then right to the trains and on to Treblinka, mostly to Treblinka. And they worked with such a system that -- for instance, they used to take out one city, which was a neighboring city, from one side to the next side and leave the other city intact. So the people who were hiding -- be it in a barn, be it in a field or something, the Jews -- will come to that city, and then they used to take out -- and that what happened to Kaluszyn.

And when finally, we knew it's gonna happen any day -- I didn't intend to go into a labor camp, but I had a friend from Lodz, and she was living in Kaluszyn at that time, and I was in her

house two days before, and she said, "You know, my father has a permission for me to go into a labor camp." We had to have a permission to go to the labor camp. And we were renting a horse and buggy, and, "would you like to go?" I said, "How many people going?" She said a couple of people.

>> Interviewer: What did you think the labor camp was about?

>> Popowski: I know the labor, digging ditches, living in the barracks, but it was a salvation.

>> Interviewer: It was supposed to be safe.

>> Popowski: Safe.

>> Interviewer: Okay.

>> Popowski: When I came up to the house, I asked my father, "Should I go?" He said, "You know, I don't know what to tell you." But my mother said, "Go." And I remember, she gave me a bag and a pillowcase, and she said, "where you could be, you can put a little straw in the pillowcase to sleep." And a blanket and a bread and some money. I had sewn in money, gold pieces, in my dress. And...and some apples, I remember, and she said, "Put on one" -- I had a light coat and a heavy coat. She said, "Put on the heavy coat over the light coat so you can cover yourself with the heavy coat, and put on the ski shoes so they can last you longer."

Now, I tried -- I will back up a little bit, about a couple weeks before. We had some people living. A Pole came from a neighboring city, Minsk, near Warsaw. And my sister had that idea. She said, "Whenever it's gonna happen, something, I might go on false papers." We knew already about false papers, false identity papers. And my father talked to that Pole. He said, "You know what? I have a brother in Warsaw. Maybe I'll take her

there.” And he supposed to come for her. But meanwhile -- that was a day after I went to the camp.

Now I'm going to tell you what the camp was. When I went to that place where I supposed to go on the horse and buggy and go to the camp -- it was about 5 miles from our city -- the man who was supposed to take us there, a Jewish man whom I knew very well, he looked over that permission to go, and he said my name is not there. I said, “You know, I am not going back.” I saw a space between two names. I said, “Write in my name.” And as I was talking, I saw my father coming -- and that was on the outskirts of the city -- with my sister, and my sister said, “You know, Mr. Wozniak is gonna come for me tomorrow.” And my father said, “I came to tell you good-bye and we're not gonna see each other anymore.” And I don't remember what he said more, but I remember -- I can still see his face, his -- not the face, but his back walking away from me. He gave me a kiss and walked away.

Mr. Wozniak, unfortunately, didn't come on time, and my sister had to run away. And she ran to a neighboring labor camp. I didn't know it. But then the following Sunday, for some reason, the Germans allowed us to walk from one camp to the other, and my sister came, and she told me that he didn't come for her. But she had the idea, she said, “I'll do whatever is in my power, and I'm gonna run away,” 'cause we were not under fences. And anyway, the Jews didn't want to run, and a matter of fact, they tried to get into the camp. And she said, “And I'm going.” And she did. She knew where he lived, and she went to his house, and he took her to Warsaw.

A couple days later, he came for me. He was -- he -- he was not afraid of anything. He came to the camp. But unfortunately, he came on Sunday when we didn't work, and I couldn't just walk away from there because everybody was walking around and the German guards. So I said, “I can't go.” He said, “Maybe it will

be too late." I said, "I can't go because they're gonna shoot me, they're gonna shoot you, and they may torture you, and they might ask you who sent you for me." Finally, two days later, he came back, but on a workday, and I said, "I'm going with you," and I said -- there were some friends of mine, three friends and a cousin, and we went out behind the barrack on a night it was raining and cold in November. And I went to his house. He took me to the train station, from the train station to his house.

>> Interviewer: Now, this man was a Polish man? He was a Catholic?

>> Popowski: A Polish man. He was more left -- he was born Catholic, but he not a practicing Catholic.

>> Interviewer: But he certainly wasn't Jewish.

>> Popowski: No, no. Oh, no, no, no. And he took me to his house to stay overnight in his house, and I remember I had a real hot meal in his house that night.

>> Interviewer: It was the first hot meal you'd had --

>> Popowski: In a long time. And the following day, he took me, and I was reunited with my sister. Now, my parents had some gold pieces hidden near the house on the premises of the mill, and we knew we have to get it out. We knew where they were. And we told him about it, and we said, for some reason, "You've got to go and get it out." He said, "I'll go." Of course he thought it was no problem. "I'll go." And we knew exact -- we said, "It's gonna take you two minutes, but go at night." He said -- and he said, "Okay, I'll go." The following day, he was so nice that, when he got it out, he didn't want to stop in his house because he didn't want to tell his wife in case, he told us, that she's gonna be so greedy and she would want some or she would say he didn't find it. So he came straight to Warsaw. And I asked him,

"How did you get into there?" He said, "You know what? They went for lunch, and when I saw them going out all for lunch, I jumped through the fence, and in two minutes, I had it out," and he brought us back.

And it's such a paradox that my parents saved all that money during the First World War for the children, for education, for marrying them off. Little did they know that that money is gonna help us. I'm not gonna say it saved because we were lucky, but it was a tremendous help. We could pay off. We could make -- at that time, I had to make -- in order for me to be on the Polish side, I had to have a Polish identification card.

>> Interviewer: So that's when you decided.

>> Popowski: That's when I had to have this identification card, which that picture's mine, the handwriting is mine, the fingerprints are mine, but the name is not mine, and it's not my religion.

>> Interviewer: But tell me about the nickname, how you picked the name Apolonia.

>> Popowski: Because my name was Paula, and shortened, Apolonia is called Paula in Poland. So I said, "At least let me keep one name," and it would've been easier if we were not confused. In the beginning, it was plenty confusion because I was afraid if I could blabber out, whatever can happen, and I could say my real name. But this one -- when the Germans gave the order that every Pole had to have identification card -- it was in German and in Polish -- the Jews were not allowed. That's how they knew who was Jewish. And it was very difficult. I don't remember how much, but I know it cost us a lot of money to have made that card.

>> Interviewer: How did you know who to ask?

>> Popowski: There was an administrator of a house. See, it usually went through administrators of a house. And we developed a little network, like an underground network: people who can trust, people who can be bribed, people who wouldn't be bribed, who just we couldn't trust, and people who did it just from the good heart of it.

>> Interviewer: And so that's how -- is that one way you met some of the Polish Catholics?

>> Popowski: Yeah. And then when we -- and even being in Warsaw, when Mr. Wozniak took us in his brother's house, it was just like -- when they find -- I said people find out -- it just was one room, like a train station. The Jewish people had a hiding place there. Sometimes used to sleep on the floor five, six people, and he didn't take any money. But we used to call it -- it used to get hot. What we meant, "hot," that somebody's on our footsteps. So we had to go from place to place, from place to place. And that was about six months.

The final place, we lived with a widow, who her husband was in the Polish army. And at that time, the uprising in Warsaw ghetto broke out. And we were not too far from the Warsaw ghetto. We heard the fights and the shootings and the fires and everything. And we decided -- we said, "We've got to get away from there." So we discussed it with that lady. I said, "Where can we go?" She said, "You know what? I had one time a girl living with me who was from Czestochowa. I know her name, but I don't know her address, and I know she's married now, and her husband's father made coaches," for the horse and buggies.

>> Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

>> Popowski: So we said, "Let's go there." And, you know, we had a good excuse because Czestochowa, they had a shrine there, and people used to go on pilgrimages there.

>> Interviewer: Even during the war?

>> Popowski: Less during the war, more before the war, but everybody knew that if you're going to Czestochowa, you're going to see Black Madonna. So we asked her, "We gonna pay you. Come with us." She said, "Okay, I'll go with you."

So the first thing we did when we came to Czestochowa, we had to find out who that lady is, but it was not so easy to find out 'cause she didn't have the married name. So we went to a restaurant and had lunch. When we had lunch, we asked the waiter, "Do you know -- we came as pilgrims. Do you know where we can stay overnight?" He said, "Yes, there is two nuns, private nuns" -- not in an order -- "who have a boardinghouse. I'll take you there." And sure enough, he took us there, and she stayed with us for a couple days.

But somehow, for some reason, that one nun -- there were two nuns -- she recognized us, that we are Jewish. And one day, she called us. She said, "Tell me truth. You are Jewish. You see that boy who lives here? He's Jewish too." Somebody put him there. "If you can tell me the truth, I'll try to get you somebody who will give you employment. And if you could get employment, maybe you'll be able to live here." Little did I know that she was trying to exploit us. And the way that -- she found out that we had some money, gold pieces, and she took it away from us.

But to go back a couple of days, I said, "What we gonna do?" She said, "That man has a glass factory, and he's supposed to come here this evening." And he came, and he looked us over. He said, "You come tomorrow to my factory." We didn't know that she'd

told him that we are Jewish girls. And we went. We learned what to do. And matter of fact, we were top-notch workers for him. But I still -- we always used to -- when we used to have a free time, my sister and I, and we were able to discuss something, we said, "Does he know, or doesn't he know? Does he know, or doesn't he know?" But one time, he said something to me. He said, "Now you're under my wings." And as we walked home from work, I said, "Hannah, he knows." And then he came out; he said he knows. So I asked him, "what motivates you to do it?" He said, "You see, I have two daughters, and if they would be in any trouble, I would like somebody to give them a helping hand."

And our money was start running out, so at least we had employment, and we earned some money. And then we established ourselves. We made friends in the factory. We went together to church. We went Sunday out together. And that made us more part of the community.

>> Interviewer: Now, this started in early 1943?

>> Popowski: In '43. In May '43, we came to Czestochowa.

>> Interviewer: And you stayed there --

>> Popowski: Till the liberation.

>> Interviewer: Well, tell me about the liberation.

>> Popowski: Now, I wanted to back off of the -- before the liberation, one more thing that I wanted to tell you. We had to go away from those nuns. And then when we talked to our boss about it, he said that, "My priest" -- he was a very devout Catholic, my boss. He said, "I would like you to talk to him." And the nun said, "I think somebody's suspecting you on that block, and I don't know if I'll be able to keep you." That's when we start talking with our boss. Maybe we could find another

place. And he told me, "You know what? You go and talk to that priest, but I want you to tell him the truth." So I went and talked to him. I said, "We don't need any financial help. We need moral help. We need to save our lives." He said, "Okay, I'll go, and I'll see what I can do."

He went to some -- also to nuns because there were so many nuns in Czestochowa, to another order, and at first, she accepted us. But the following day, when we came back from work, she said, "I don't want you even to stay here overnight." We said, "It's almost curfew, 8:00." After 8:00, you couldn't stay on the street. "They're gonna shoot us." She said, "You know what? Here is, not too far, a boardinghouse also operated by nuns. Go there." And she gave us the address. And we came just in time before the curfew. And when we knocked on the door, they asked us what we want, and I said we wanted to sleep overnight. And in the morning, we went to work.

And we told our boss what happened. And as we were talk -- as I was going through the hallway, I saw a picture of that priest, and I said to our boss, to Mr. Rylski, I said, "You know what? I saw a picture of that priest." He said, "Talk to the nun." And I went back to talk that priest, and he told me, "I think this one will take you in." And we came back from work, and I met the Mother Superior in the hallway, and she had such an angelic face. And I said, "Mother Superior, we wanted to talk to you, but confidentially." She was shocked. She said, "What do the girls want to talk to me confidentially?" I said, "Let's go on in the office." And there was a girl ironing something in the office. She told the girl to get out, and we said, "Mother Superior, we are Jewish girls. We need your help. We want you to take us in." She asked very few questions. But we said, "Please take us under your wings because we feel like we're gonna be safe here." She said, "What you doing?" We said, "We are working. We are earning money." We told her how much. We said, "We're gonna give you all the money, what we earn." She said,

“No, you’re not gonna give it to me all. You’ve got to keep some for yourself too.” And that’s where we stayed till the liberation there.

Now, the liberation came to us -- we knew that the Germans are having one defeat after the other because we used to buy, every day, the paper. Even it was under censorship from the German army, we could figure out between the lines that they were defeated on each front. On the day of the liberation -- we didn’t know it’s gonna happen so quick -- we went to the factory, and all of a sudden, in the middle of the day, the lights went out and everything stopped. The boss went home for lunch. He couldn’t come back.

And then we heard shootings and tanks coming in, and here we are stuck in the factory, and the shootings were going on. So another girl and my sister and myself, we said, for some reason, “We have to get back to the house!” And we went through, oh, through dead people and through dead horses and through Russians and through Germans, and finally, we reached the house, through broken glass, through broken... We reached the house where the nuns were, and when we came in, the Mother Superior saw us, and like any mother, she said, “Come in the kitchen. Let’s get something to eat.” And after we came back and we sat down on the bed, and the first time, we had a really big cry. And I guess the people around us, they didn’t realize why we’re crying. But that is the first time the realization came to us, what now?

>> Interviewer: Could you tell me when you found out what happened to your parents?

>> Popowski: When I was in labor camp, a Pole came, and he said that 18 people were taken out from the building near the mill, and I knew they were hiding there because we prepared them for hiding there. And he said they took ‘em all out in the cemetery and shot them. And then I had a confirmation a couple of years

ago. Our janitor's son, who became a doctor, was in the United States, and he came to visit me in Charleston, and he told me how exactly. I am more relaxed now than I was when he told me that story. He said, "I looked through binoculars when they killed. They disappeared on the cemetery."

>> Interviewer: And this was your mother and your father and your brother?

>> Popowski: My brother wasn't there. My brother was on the way to Treblinka. He jumped from the train, and he was in the woods with the partisans. And he had a girlfriend there. And he, he was -- they shot him. They found him about four months before they liberated that place. Our hope was always, when we were talking, when we go back -- we knew that he was somewhere hiding with the partisans, and we said, "Oh, our brother is probably gonna survive." Because we knew how geographically when the Rus -- that Kaluszyn was liberated in July '44. Because it was east of Warsaw, the Russians came there first. And Czestochowa, it was south of Warsaw, so they came a couple months later. And we hooked up with a family who was liberated also in hiding, and they came to Kaluszyn in July 1944.

And when we came back -- and one little story I wanted to tell you about the liberation too. We got a letter -- I'm gonna make it short now. We got a letter. One person knew where we were. And that person was liberated before we did -- before we were. And he wrote to us. He said, "I'm in Kaluszyn," and he told us that there was a family, Berman.

But we couldn't get it. He sent it registered letter. The factory wasn't working. Nobody was there. But we tried to come to the factory to see maybe they could start working. So the secretary told us, "There was the mailman with a registered letter to you, and he didn't want to leave it." On my assumed name. So we said, "What time was he?" And she said, "Oh, I don't

remember, but at a certain time." So we said, "We're gonna be here at that time. Maybe he'll come back the following day." And when we went back the following day, he said he was already here, and he still didn't want to leave it. So I said to my sister, "You know what? I'm going to the post office the following day, and whoever -- each mailman who come out from the post office with the letters, I'm gonna stop him and ask him if he got a letter for me."

And sure enough -- I didn't open the letter, but I just turned the envelope -- over there, it used to be where "from," they used to put it on the back of the envelope. I turned the envelope, and when I saw Bermans in Kaluszyn, I jumped, and I ran as -- it took 45 minutes -- used to count -- to take from the post office to the house. I must be ran in 15 minutes to my sister. And when we opened the letter, right away we made arrangements to go back. The following day, we made arrangements to go back. And at Czestochowa, we could make it by -- normal circumstances, it should have taken us about three hours' trip. It took us three days. We traveled by horse and buggy, by train, with wounded Russian soldiers, by foot.

>> Interviewer: And when you got back there, what did you find?

>> Popowski: That family who was there, who was liberated, and we hooked up with them. We stayed. All the remnants, really remnants, hooked up together, under one roof and one bed and one kitchen. And we couldn't stay long in Kaluszyn because, for some reason, some Pole came and killed two Jews. So we just packed. Didn't have much to pack up. Didn't have many possessions. And we went to Warsaw, and then from Warsaw to Lodz, and from Lodz to Germany.

>> Interviewer: And then here?

>> Popowski: And then here.

>> Interviewer: If you could, if you have one last thing you'd like to say that you think is important or sums up the essence of your experience --

>> Popowski: The most important thing I have to say, not to judge the people what religion they belong to, what nationality they belong to. Judge them by their deeds. Don't single out because they are different, they have a different accent. I know I never gonna lose my accent, and maybe I'm not so proficient in English, but please let them judge by their deeds and not where they came from and not generalize. That's the most important, not generalize: because he looks different, he must be bad. So that is -- and I told that to my children. was lucky here. we established a family, and the children are very successful here. And that is, I think, my biggest achievement here.

>> Interviewer: Thank you so much.

>> Popowski: Thank you too. Thank you.

00:57:10