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Begin Tape 1, Side A

MG: Maybe we can start, just for the record, with some simple questions. If you could just tell me your name and when and where you were born, and then we'll move on to the other stuff, so we'll have it on the tape.

PP: I was born in Kaluszyn, Poland. My name was Paula Kornblum, K-O-R-N-B-L-U-M. And now my present name is Popowski.

MG: What year were you born?

PP: 1923.

MG: Your birthday is—

PP: It's January 29.

MG: We can move on to—after the war began in 1942, you were with your sister—

PP: The war began in Poland in 1939 and I was with the family until 1942, until September 1942.

MG: At which point you lost your family and went with your sister?

PP: Yeah.

MG: What was your sister's name?

PP: Her name is Hannah. Just give the first name. She doesn't want to have her name in the recording. Just give the first name.

MG: Is she still alive?

PP: Yeah. She lives in New York.

MG: You are still in contact with her?

PP: Oh, yeah.

MG: How far apart are you in age?

PP: Three years.

MG: Three years? She's older, or—

PP: I'm older.

MG: When you and your sister were having to make a life for yourselves, to survive in Poland—

PP: To survive, we met a Pole who took us to Warsaw. She went first, and then he came and got me to Warsaw, and in Warsaw we had to get the Polish identification cards,

because all the Poles had to have identification cards. The Jews were not allowed to have it. That's why, if you didn't have it, they knew that you were Jewish. So we assumed other names and other identity and we were hiding in Warsaw. It started to get really bad when the Warsaw uprising, the Warsaw ghetto—that was in April 1943.

MG: At that point you were already living under a false identity—

PP: Under false identity.

MG: What was your name? You showed it to me earlier.

PP: Apolnia, A-P-O-L-N-I-A, Borkowski, B-O-R-K-O-W-S-K-I. [Ed.: spelling on the identification card is Apolonia Borkowska.]

MG: How were you able to get the identification cards?

PP: Everything we had to—like a network was—and for money— The people who originally—the Polish people didn't have to pay for it. They just went to the office and got it. Where we, to get false documents, we had to pay for it, and we had a little money, like the buttons in the dresses.

MG: How much did they cost? Do you remember?

PP: In zlotys, in Polish money, I really don't remember, but I remember that we had to pay some money.

MG: Probably a pretty penny.

PP: Yeah. And when the uprising in the Warsaw ghetto—and it was burning, the ghetto—so we decided that we should leave Warsaw. When we left Warsaw, the lady who we stayed with—she was a widow—of course we paid her for just letting us sleep in her house, about ten times as much as she would get regular from another boarder.

MG: This is a Catholic woman?

PP: A Catholic woman, a Polish woman, who had an apartment.

MG: You spoke both Polish and Yiddish?

PP: Yeah. I went to Polish schools and that was a plus, that we spoke good Polish. Very good, without an accent.

MG: Yes, the Polish people that I've talked to said that in a lot of the other shtetls the Jewish people spoke Yiddish very well and didn't speak a very good Polish.

PP: Right.

MG: Which made it hard during the war to communicate, because they would know you were Jewish.

PP: Right.

MG: They spoke a broken Polish.

PP: We spoke very good Polish.

MG: That you learned in the public schools?

PP: Public—it was mandatory. In my time, it was mandatory to go to school.

MG: Was it a free public school?

PP: Free public schools. They didn't have any higher education, but they tried to squeeze in as much as they could in those seven years when we went to school in Kaluszyn.

MG: You went to high school for seven years then?

PP: Yeah. Seven years. There was no high school. They started at seven. Before that I went to a Hebrew kindergarten, and then I went to Polish schools. I was always bilingual.

MG: And now you're trilingual.

PP: Essentially trilingual. Always bilingual.

MG: Your Hebrew kindergarten, was that coed? Were there both boys and girls there?

PP: Yeah. It was sponsored by the Zionist organizations. It was called Gan Yeladim. It means kindergarten in Hebrew. At that time the Zionists were very well organized.

MG: Were there other organized political groups?

PP: Oh, yeah. There were Orthodox, and there were Socialists. There were all kinds of groups.

MG: Your family was Orthodox?

PP: Yes. My family was Orthodox.

MG: As most of the Polish Jews were.

PP: Most of them. Either you were Orthodox or you were secular. They didn't have any choice in between.

MG: Amazing. When you were in Warsaw, before you left in 1943 during the uprising, how old were you at this point?

PP: Twenty.

MG: Your sister was seventeen?

PP: Huh?

MG: Hannah was seventeen. Your sister was seventeen and you were twenty.

PP: Right.

MG: Did you have any contact with people in the ghetto at all when you were living in Warsaw? Did you speak to Jews at all?

PP: Only in hiding. We had a network. There were a couple of Jews who were hiding, and we had—of course it was martial law. You couldn't go out after eight o'clock any place. Nobody could. But during the winter we used to go sometimes, sneak out in the evening and go to see somebody, and we had a few contacts with people in hiding, Jewish people.

MG: Other Jewish people.

PP: Yeah.

MG: Who organized this whole network? Who was behind it? Jews, or—

PP: One found somebody who was willing to help, and then that Pole said, "Maybe I could go talk to some of my neighbors. Maybe I'll talk to this one who was willing." Some of them were willing, but they were afraid.

MG: Sure.

PP: They were really afraid. They couldn't sleep at night. I know of one example, that of a friend of mine, and they said, "Okay, I'll take you in. I need the money and I'll do it." Then a couple of days later they said, "I can't keep you any more because I can't sleep at night."

MG: It scared them.

PP: Yeah.

MG: Not as scared as the Jewish people.

PP: Yeah. But if they would find somebody living there, they would kill them just like

they killed the Jews. There always were warnings, “Don't hide any Jews.”

MG: These were written warnings?

PP: Oh, they had posters all over.

MG: How long were you in Warsaw before you left? Do you remember?

PP: Half a year. I left Warsaw in April, half a year. Almost half a year.

MG: September to April. September '42 to April of '43?

PP: I came to Warsaw a little later—in the beginning of November—and stayed until almost the end of April of '43.

MG: You left in the midst of the uprising?

PP: Yeah, in the midst. The uprising didn't finish until May the 8th.

MG: What had you heard about the uprising?

PP: I saw them taking out the Jews from the ghetto while I was on the Polish side. I saw the trucks, and the shootings were going on day and night, and the fires, and—

MG: You heard—

PP: Oh, yeah. I heard the first shot. We discussed with that lady [with] whom we lived, and she said, “You know I had one time a boarder who was from Częstochowa.” Częstochowa, to give you an example, it's a nice-sized city. It's a metropolitan area. It's also a place where pilgrims used to go, because they have a famous monastery there, with the “Black Madonna,” what they call it. A lot of pilgrims, just like to the Lourdes, they come in there. They used to walk for hundreds of miles to get there. So she said, “Let's go there.” I don't remember her exactly because I know she got married—her name—but we'll find out.” And that's how we got to Częstochowa.

When we got to Częstochowa someone recommended us to stay in a place, and then we met a man who had a shop, a glass factory, and we had to tell her that we are Jewish. So she said, “If you go find work and get work permission, I can keep you here.” We stayed there for a couple of months, and then she said “I can't keep you any more because the people, they're talking about the two girls, what are they doing here?”

Then, when somebody, my boss as a matter of fact—it was the boss who we worked for—he said through his connections we got to those nuns in the home. That's when the Mother Superior—we had to tell her that we are Jewish, and she kept us until the end of the war. And we worked in the factory. Every morning we went out to work, came back in the afternoon. We had to walk. It was about forty-five minutes walk there. At seven o'clock, start to work. In order for other people to get home before martial law started, they finished at four o'clock, because everybody had a distance to walk.

MG: What time was martial law?

PP: Eight o'clock.

MG: Eight o'clock. Were you paying people off along the way with these coins the whole time?

PP: When we started to work at the factory, that's when we stopped paying off, because we earned money every week and that's how much we earned. It was enough—was not completely enough—but it was enough for us, to sustain us. Because the money ran out. When we were in Warsaw we had to pay off *every time, every time*. But then the money ran out.

MG: Did you have to pay off the nuns, as well?

PP: No, the nuns we didn't have—we paid them for the room and board as any other Pole would pay. But not exorbitant money like we had to pay off because we were Jewish.

MG: So they were fair.

PP: *Very* fair. The Mother Superior was like an angel.

MG: What was her name?

PP: They didn't go by—they just went by the first names. Her name was Sister Vita.

MG: V-I-T-A?

PP: Yeah.

MG: It means life?

PP: Yeah. Because once they stepped into the monastery—when they become nuns—they assume names different than they are outside, what they call outside, in the world.

MG: They called it outside.

PP: That's what they called it. Outside in the world.

MG: So she assumed the Latin name Vita.

PP: Yeah. Life. That's right.

MG: I just wanted to talk a little about your experience at the church.

PP: Of course, we had to go to church every Sunday, and we learned the catechism.

We wouldn't know what it was all about, even though we lived in a Polish country between Catholics. As a matter of fact our neighbors in Kaluszyn were all Catholics. Our workers were Catholic. We had a flour mill. All our workers were Catholic, but we didn't do much socializing with them, and we didn't know any details. We know that they go Sunday to church, but the details of their religion was not familiar to us. So we had to learn it.

MG: And you learned all the prayers and—

PP: The *whole* thing.

MG: Did you maintain any sense of your Jewish identity through this, or—

PP: No, we couldn't, we couldn't. We were so afraid for any slip of the tongue, very much afraid of a slip of the tongue. Because we concocted stories that our parents got killed during a bombardment and we pretended that we had family; we used to write letters, fictional letters.

MG: You'd send letters off to—?

PP: We just said we were writing letters, that we keep in touch with them and that some distant relatives—and we said our parents are dead, that we were orphans—

MG: Who else at the church knew you were Jewish besides—

PP: Only Mother Superior.

MG: So the story in the book about Magdalena, is that not true? [Ed.: The book referred to is Pat Conroy's *Beach Music*.]

PP: The story is a lot fiction. For instance, he says in the story that my grandfather gave the coins, which was not true. It was my father, my mother, my father gave. It was not my grandfather. But he incorporated that the buttons was made of it, which is true. We had a dress with buttons covered with the gold pieces. That was true.

MG: And did you actually hide it under a statue?

PP: What he did—because we told him we were with nuns—to make it look better. Like I said, this is fiction.

MG: Of course, I know. I'm just curious to see where he kept to the line and where he didn't.

PP: Yeah.

MG: They weren't under a statue of the Virgin Mary?

PP: No, no.

MG: So, *you* really were the lady of the coins?

PP: That's right.

MG: There was no Mary that you were praying to.

PP: No, it was really—because he saw that coin one time. We were in Atlanta. We went out to dinner. He saw that coin about ten years ago or more than that and he said, "One day I'm going to write a book." And he said he's going to use this story, some of it.

MG: And he did. Where did you keep the dress?

PP: Wore it all the time. Wore it all the time. It was so heavy. [Laughs] From the coins. You take a regular button and it's light, and a coin is heavy.

MG: How many coins did you have?

PP: I had—the dress—I had about seven, I think, and I had them in ski shoes. We had a lot of those coins.

MG: Did your sister have coins?

PP: My sister, yeah. After the war there were three left. Because when we worked we didn't have to use— If not, we probably would have run out in 1943 of money. If we would not have had a job, we would probably have run out of money.

MG: So, you got to keep some money because you were making money.

PP: Yeah, right.

MG: Was the story about the SS man who came, was that a true story?

PP: Yeah, that was a true story. He came to the nuns and he asked about us.

MG: Just you and your sister?

PP: At first the Sisters sent somebody to the shop to tell us what's happening, that the SS man is going to come back later on. It was not really an SS man. It was a Pole who was serving the Germans with a swastika on his—and we were debating what to do. So we decided that we will go there and tell him what we told everybody. For some reason he believed us, and they never bothered us again.

MG: He never asked you in Yiddish what you—

PP: He never did ask us anything. He just asked me questions, and he asked my sister, and we already had made up between us stories.

MG: So you had it all set?

PP: All set. Because we figured if we were going to run away—first of all there was no place where to run. Secondly, we had a chance by going to him and convincing him that we're not Jewish. We had a chance to have a job and have a place where to stay.

MG: If he believed you, it confirmed your identity.

PP: Yeah. So, that's where we went and told him, and he believed us. Since then, he didn't bother us, and that probably was—I don't remember what day it was—either the beginning of 1944, because we were with the nuns until January '45, actually February, because we stayed a couple of weeks after the liberation there. When the liberation came and the Russians came in to Częstochowa, we thought we are the only ones left. We didn't have any contact with any Jewish people at that time, and we thought we are the only ones left. The Mother Superior said to us, "Now you are free," but free for what? And that's the first time we really cried. The whole time we never cried. That's the first time we really sat down and cried, because we said, "What's now?"

It so happened that geographically, we were on the west side of the Vistula, the main river in Poland. The east side of the Vistula was liberated in '44. Some people who got out of hiding—there was one particular person who knew where we were. So we got a letter from him, and when we got that letter we said, "We are going back to Kaluszyn." And Kaluszyn was about two hundred miles from the place where we were. It took us three days to walk, to get there. We went by train. We went by horse and buggy. We went by foot. We went with wounded soldiers from the front, because the war was still going on. And finally, we walked the rails with the train, because we were afraid the train wouldn't stop at that station. Until we got to Kaluszyn. Three days.

MG: It's amazing.

PP: And we came, and there was a family also—[ed.: sounds like "remnants"], you know, they stayed together in Kaluszyn.

MG: Jewish people?

PP: Jewish people who got out from hiding. We thought we were the only ones who were hiding; they thought they were the only ones in hiding.

MG: They hid in Kaluszyn?

PP: Kaluszyn. They lived in Kaluszyn before the war. They came back. They came back from hiding. They were *really* in hiding. The whole time.

MG: Now you're calling it Ka-lu-SHEEN, rather than—

PP: Ka-LU-shin.

MG: Ka-LU-shin. So you go back and forth yourself too, sometimes.

PP: Yeah. Ka LU shin. We came back there and we stayed there for about two months. Then the Poles killed two Jews. I don't know if you are familiar, they had also a pogrom in Kielce.

MG: I heard of it, right after the war.

PP: Yeah, in '46.

MG: Yes. I know about that.

PP: They killed two Jews. So we ran again.

MG: Did you see that?

PP: I knew those people who they killed, and so the same day we ran away. We were afraid to stay any longer. We didn't have any protection.

MG: Was that during a pogrom?

PP: No, it was not a pogrom. They just came in and killed. We went to Warsaw. Warsaw was practically destroyed. Warsaw had two uprisings. They had the uprising from the Warsaw ghetto, and then they had the uprising from the Poles in '44, so Warsaw was practically destroyed. While we were in Warsaw we went back to Kaluszyn, just because we were trying to get our flour mill back, which the Germans took, and then they [ed.: the Russians] nationalized it.

MG: That was your family's business?

PP: That was the family business.

MG: Was your home still there?

PP: The home was torn apart, but the mill was operating. We tried to get it back. We said, "Let's go into the post office and see maybe, maybe someone wrote a letter." Then we got a letter. The postman who knew us from before the war said there was a letter from the United States, and we didn't know who that was. My mother had a sister who went to Palestine before the war, in 1936. She married somebody who came from [what] at that time was Palestine, and she married, she went there. And she knew about the address of the Zuckers in Charleston. So she wrote to them and they wrote right to us—

MG: In Kaluszyn.

PP: To Kaluszyn. They wrote to us and said that if you need any help, or whatever—we didn't even know them. They left before I was even born. But we made contact. Then they said, "If you wanted to come to the United States, we would help you; if you wanted to go to Palestine—" And Palestine was at that time very poor, and we knew that. But we couldn't stay in Poland either, later. They didn't want to give us back our property. We went to court. They didn't want to give us back—

MG: You went to court for it?

PP: Yeah, we went to court.

MG: You had a lawyer?

PP: We had a lawyer.

MG: A Jewish lawyer?

PP: A Jewish lawyer who also was in hiding and he came out and he tried to get back the properties. Properties which did employ less than ten workers, you could get back. But it so happened that our mill was employing more than ten workers.

MG: About how many people?

PP: Oh, I would say about fifteen, and so they nationalized it, and they also considered it very vital to their economy, the Russians. It was a Communist takeover of the country. Poland went Communist.

MG: So when you went to the court, how were the court systems run? Who were they run by?

PP: They were run by Polish people. All we had to establish [was] that we are our mother's daughters, because that came from my mother's side of the family. But then when the court already had decided that, the government came in and said, "No, you can't get it back because it's too big, we've got to nationalize it."

MG: Is it still in operation?

PP: No, it's torn apart. They took out the machineries. There were a lot of machineries. When my son was there, there was no more flour mill.

MG: Did they ever pay any kind of reparations?

PP: No, nothing. So then we decided that we would go—in order to go to the United States—that we would go to Germany. First I went to a DP [ed.: Displaced Persons] camp in Berlin, smuggled through the border from Poland to Germany.

MG: How were you smuggled into the border?

PP: Russian soldiers. They took us on a truck, a covered truck, like a Studebaker. It was covered with a canvas. They were sitting in the front and we were sitting in the back. When they came to the border they showed their cards and we went to Berlin. And once in Berlin we went to the American zone. And we stayed—I stayed in Berlin for three months.

MG: How was it being in Germany, this country that was the enemy?

PP: We were numb. We were numb. Can you imagine young people without anything in their possessions? Literally! I'm not talking that you have a lot of possessions, but we didn't have *anything*. We were supported by the UNRRA, the United Nations rehabilitation organization in the DP camp. [ed.: United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration.] They wanted to liquidate the DP camp. So, they said they wanted to take us to West Germany proper, so we had to go through the Russian zone to get from Berlin. It so happened that my husband, who was liberated, he never went back to Poland, because he was in a concentration camp.

MG: In Mauthausen?

PP: Mauthausen. And he came to Bavaria, and that's when we made a little gathering, also from Kaluszyn people, in a city near Munich, Landshut.

MG: This is a reunion of people from Kaluszyn?

PP: It was people who didn't know each other even, in Kaluszyn. But after the war, everybody was sisters and brothers. Because there were so few of us.

MG: Sure. This is in Bavaria, outside of Munich? How did you happen to get together, to organize yourselves to meet each other?

PP: Every day they started publishing papers. Newspapers? Yiddish, and Polish, and half of the paper always was somebody's looking for somebody. Maybe somebody's going to show up. Maybe somebody knows about somebody. So that's how we got to know.

MG: So the papers, the people from Kaluszyn—

PP: Also, if you met somebody for instance, and you said, "Oh, I'm from Kaluszyn," or a city near Kaluszyn—there were some cities around—"Do you know somebody who's there? Who is left?" That is how we got to—

MG: Was there anybody that you did know from Kaluszyn that showed up there?

PP: A lot of people I didn't know in Kaluszyn. There were eight thousand Jews there. It was a small city, but it was a primarily Jewish city.

MG: But when you were outside Munich and you met these people, were there any that you had known?

PP: I didn't know my husband, but I knew his brother.

MG: Oh really.

PP: I knew his brother because his brother was closer to my age than my husband was, so I knew his brother.

MG: They were from Kaluszyn?

PP: Yeah. He also is from Kaluszyn. And his brother I knew when he was a schoolboy.

MG: That's fascinating. Is that how you happened to meet Henry?

PP: No. When I came *there*, he was there, and that's when I met Henry.

MG: So you met this person you knew from school—

PP: His brother was in Russia. But I said, "Who is he?" I knew the name Popowski. There were a lot of Popowskis in Kaluszyn. "Who is he? Oh, I know his brother." So that's how we met and we got married in 1947. It took a long time to get a visa to come to the United States, but then when President Truman passed the DP law to allow, without waiting, because we had to wait for the quota—

MG: DPs to come—

PP: —to come to the United States. At that time I already had a child, too.

MG: You were married outside of Munich?

PP: I was married in Ulm, Germany.

MG: Is that outside Munich?

PP: Yeah, Stuttgart. It is a famous city because Albert Einstein was born there.

MG: In Stuttgart?

PP: In Ulm.

MG: Had you heard of him at this point?

PP: Oh, who didn't hear about Albert Einstein?

MG: Can I back up for a minute? What was the name of the town that the church was in, exactly?

PP: Where I lived with the nuns?

MG: Yeah.

PP: It's called Częstochowa. I'm going to give you the closest spelling. C-Z-E-S-T-O-C-H-O-W-A, Częstochowa. That's in Polish. Every Catholic—I mean priest—knows where Częstochowa is because they have a favorite shrine there.

MG: What is the shrine?

PP: The Black Madonna.

MG: The Black Madonna, right. Is it actually a black Madonna?

PP: Yeah. It's a picture of a black Madonna. It's a monastery there, called the Black Madonna.

MG: Is it like a Moorish Madonna?

PP: I don't know. It's all legends.

MG: All legend, I see. That makes sense. When you were in Warsaw and in Częstochowa, how much did you know about what the Germans were actually doing to Jewish people?

PP: We knew that the Jewish people were exterminated. We didn't know—as a matter of fact we knew very little that some Jews were in Auschwitz. We thought they were all exterminated already. While we were in Częstochowa, we saw some Jews—let me back up. We saw some Jews. As a matter of fact, Pincus Kolender's wife was liberated at Częstochowa. She was working as a Jew in an ammunition factory.

We used to walk to work in the morning, for instance, or in the afternoon walking back from work. Sometimes we used to walk on the sidewalk. There was a wide sidewalk. They were walking Jews from one place to the other, and they walked them on the middle of the street, with the yellow stars. And we walked by. We were so afraid that we just walked by; we didn't pay attention. We said, "What are the Jews doing here?" But then one co-worker in the glass factory told us that her father works in the ammunition factory and she said, "You know what? There are still Jewish people there." That's how we found out. But we didn't have any contact.

MG: That's how you found out that—

PP: That those Jews we saw on the street, they were from that ammunition factory.

MG: So they were still working?

PP: Yeah. They worked them until—whatever they could get any energy out of them.

MG: But before that, as far as you knew, most Jews had died by this point.

PP: Most of them. We knew it from in hiding, but we didn't know that there were some Jews in Auschwitz still, or Mauthausen, or—

MG: How much did the Polish people you were in contact with know about it?

PP: They saw it. They used to see it.

MG: What did they say?

PP: You know, different reactions. [Those who were] anti-Semitic said, “Oh, it’s long coming.” Some felt sorry.

MG: Did they know about the camps, though? Did people talk about the camps?

PP: They didn't talk much about it. They really didn't. We knew about Polish people in the underground; that they were partisans in the underground.

MG: Had you met any of them?

PP: No, I didn't meet them, but we knew that a lot of them sabotaged the railroads. They used to put dynamite on the railroads. That was 1944, during the war.

MG: Was there a name to the church, by the way?

PP: It was not a church. It was a house. The nuns had a house.

MG: Was there a name for the house?

PP: No, there was no name. It was just a street number.

MG: Roman Catholic—

PP: Yeah. Roman Catholic.

MG: Is the church still there?

PP: The home. I don't know. After we left I tried to write them, but they don't keep contact with what they call the outside world.

MG: Do you remember the address? The street number?

PP: The street number was—in Polish was W-E-S-O-L-A, Wesola.

MG: That was the name of the street?

PP: Yeah.

MG: Do you remember the number?

PP: Fourteen.

MG: If I happen to go to Poland at any time maybe I'll—

PP: I did write to them, but I never did get an answer.

MG: Can you tell me briefly about when the Russians came into Częstochowa and what you remember about that?

PP: We knew that something was going to happen soon because we knew the offensive started, and when the Russians came in they caught us in the shop. In the morning when we went to work we saw the soldiers marching, the German soldiers. And all of a sudden the electricity went off and the shooting started and we tried to get home. We went [ed.: sounds like “through dead”] people, through the Russian soldiers, German soldiers, and finally back to the house, and then they had dogfights in the air. About two days later we went out on the streets, and the Germans were POWs at that time.

MG: Were you in a bomb shelter?

PP: You went to a cellar.

MG: And you stayed there for two days?

PP: We stayed there. We tried to get a little water. We tried to get something, but it was not that serious, because the Germans, they capitulated right away, over there.

MG: What was your mindset at this point?

PP: The mindset was, “What’s now?” That’s all.

MG: It was all connected to the moment at hand.

PP: Yes. “What’s now?” First, “Let’s get liberated,” and then, “What’s now?”

MG: Did you and your sister share a room at the house?

PP: A room? We shared one bed. One bed, with ten other people. One single bed.

MG: Ten people slept in a bed together?

PP: In the room were ten beds, but the other ladies, they were elderly. They had slept in one bed, and my sister and I slept in another bed.

MG: Were there other children there?

PP: No, there were no—there were young people, a couple of young people.

MG: So, what Mr. Conroy discusses in his book, about all these Jewish children being there as well—

PP: That he took from another person. See, he compiled it. He compiled it because he interviewed a lot of people in Atlanta that are survivors. He didn't do it himself; he had a research person who did it for him.

MG: Yes. The loyal lackey. Now, tell me about your relation to the Zucker family and how your sister—how you are related to them in the first place?

PP: I wouldn't even attempt to tell you, but it so happens that the older Zuckers—they passed away already—they knew my parents, they knew my grandparents.

MG: How did they know them? They just knew them?

PP: Because they were from the same city, Kaluszyn.

MG: Which Zuckers are you talking about? What were their names?

PP: Joseph and Rachel Zucker.

MG: So your sister wrote to them when she was in Palestine?

PP: No, my aunt.

MG: Right. Your aunt, your mother's sister. I'm sorry, I got confused.

PP: That's how they wrote to Kaluszyn, because we didn't know them.

MG: You mentioned earlier that you got another letter from the east side of Poland, the east side of the Vistula River—

PP: Yeah.

MG: Who was that letter from?

PP: From my friend who was in hiding, and we confided in him. We were even afraid

to tell anybody, even the Poles from Warsaw, that we are in Częstochowa hiding. But he was a good friend of ours and he was in hiding. He lives in Israel.

MG: A Jewish friend?

PP: A Jewish friend. He came one time to Częstochowa. He enrolled in the Red Cross. We did all kinds of things. [Laughs] He came and he said in case something happens, let me have your address, and he wrote to us.

MG: He was the one that helped you get back—

PP: Once we saw in the letter that some people [were] in Kaluszyn, the following day we went.

MG: What was it like being back in the town?

PP: It was a dead city, a dead city. Of course, I saw a lot of Polish people who knew me before. It was only three years before they saw me.

MG: Did you ask them what—

PP: Oh, we knew. There was the janitor who used to work for us, our janitor, who lived still on the premises, and they all told us what happened. My parents were killed in Kaluszyn. My grandmother, my aunt and uncles, my cousins, everybody.

MG: And everyone in the village knew—

PP: It was not really a village. There was a city hall, a fire department. In Poland it was not considered a village.

MG: It was not a shtetl.

PP: In Yiddish, a shtetl means a city, but a village— It was a city, with a city hall, with a mayor, councilmen—a vibrant city. And also, I guess, the proximity to Warsaw, the capital city— My father was from Warsaw. My father was born and raised in Warsaw. We used to go Warsaw just like somebody here goes to Summerville.

MG: How many synagogues were there?

PP: There were shtibls, and there was a big synagogue, and there were Hasidic shtibls. There were houses of prayer. There was a vibrant Zionist organization.

MG: Shtibls are similar to what we have as minyan houses now?

PP: More for Hasidics. You belong to a certain rabbi, whom you follow. They had special rooms to get a minyan and daven.

MG: And they had the same quorum for a minyan back then?

PP: Yeah, always the same people.

MG: Some people in Kaluszyn knew what had happened?

PP: Oh, yeah.

MG: Were you bitter when you came back?

PP: We knew we weren't going to stay there [inaudible]. We had to take the wandering stick again. For seven years I didn't own my own bed, until I came to the United States. Even in Germany, we slept in the German peoples' bed. And when we came to the United States, we came to New York by boat, twelve days.

MG: Just you and your sister?

PP: No, no. I didn't come with my sister. My sister came earlier. Because I had to wait until my son, my baby would be six months old. They wouldn't let him on the boat until he was six months old. And I had a husband.

MG: Which son was this?

PP: Mark. I don't know if you know him; he lives in Atlanta. He's much older. He's forty-eight years old.

End Side A, Tape 1
Begin Side B, Tape 1

MG: How old is David?

PP: David is forty-seven. David was born seven months after I came to the United States. [Showing picture] That's Mark, with his son with the Braves hat.

MG: So, tell me how the Zuckers brought you over.

PP: So then when we corresponded with them, while we were in Germany, they sent us an affidavit that we were not going to be a burden to the government. We went with the process, but it took *long*, until what they called the "DP law" passed. It was not only Jewish DPs, but there were Russian DPs, Lithuanian DPs, Latvian DPs. At that time we didn't have to wait in line for the quota, so we wrote the Zuckers and we came to New York. Mr. Zucker was living, at that time, in New York, Mr. Joseph Zucker. He came to the boat to meet us.

MG: You went through Ellis Island?

PP: No, they unloaded us on a pier in New York City and straight from there— We came in the morning and in the late afternoon they took us to Penn Station and straight to Charleston.

MG: Wow. So Joseph—who are his relatives in Charleston? How did he know to send you to Charleston? Why Charleston?

PP: Because Joseph Zucker was living in Charleston. He was living in New York just temporarily. But, his family, his daughter—do you know Henry Rittenberg? Henry Rittenberg's wife is a Zucker. Sarah Rittenberg. She is a [ed.: sounds like “cousin”]. Her parents brought us over.

MG: Oh, Sarah's parents are Joseph—I didn't know that. I interviewed Henry for this project, but he didn't say anything to me about that.

PP: They are very dear people.

MG: And, you really weren't very close at all, as far as—

PP: We were blood relatives, but Mrs. Zucker, who has been dead twenty years, she explained what it was: I think she was my mother's second cousin, something like this. But the reason I think what had also prompted them is because they knew the family. At that time, when they were living in Poland, before they came to the United States—Mrs. Zucker's parents—*they* were very close to our family.

MG: When you got there had they known what had happened to your family?

PP: Oh, yeah. They knew that we were the only ones left in the family.

MG: Because you had corresponded with them?

PP: Yeah, we had corresponded with them and also, at that time, it became common knowledge already, in 1949. We started in '46, actually. We corresponded in 1945, but in '46 we tried to get a visa to come to the United States, before I even was married. Because the first affidavit went only to myself and to my sister.

MG: Did your sister come over later?

PP: No, she came before I did, because she was single.

MG: And she went straight to New York and stayed there.

PP: Yeah. She stayed a short while in Charleston and then she went to New York.

MG: So you get on the train at Penn Station and all of a sudden you're in the United States of America. You don't speak the language.

PP: Nothing. With a small baby.

MG: And a husband.

PP: And we came to Charleston, and Mrs. Zucker's brother—he passed away, they are all gone now—he came on a Saturday. Some of the people were very religious, they didn't drive on Shabbos. So he came to the station with my sister—my sister at that time was already here—and before we came they rented us a place. And we started a new life! Difficult? *Very* difficult. We didn't even know how to count the money. First we were used to Polish money, then to German money. Now all of a sudden, quarters and nickels and dimes. We didn't know what it is! And in English. English was the worst part. With writing I got used to it more because the Polish alphabet is the same as the English alphabet. It's not the Cyrillic alphabet.

MG: How did you learn it?

PP: Just from reading and from listening and from—

MG: No classes?

PP: Just a few classes, but then I kept having children. David was born, and then two years later I had a daughter, and then a couple of years later I had another daughter. In Charleston it was easier for us because very few people spoke Yiddish. Although some of the old timers spoke Yiddish.

MG: Who could you speak Yiddish with when you came here?

PP: The Zuckers spoke Yiddish. Some others—the Kirshsteins.

MG: So, you could communicate with them?

PP: Yeah. Until they died, I spoke to them in Yiddish.

MG: Not English?

PP: No, I never spoke to them in English.

MG: To Joseph and Rachel?

PP: Rachel, and you said Sammy Kirshtein's father, and Max Kirshstein's mother. All the people, they spoke Yiddish. They never learned to speak proper English.

MG: Did you know Mr. Kirshtein's father, Sammy Kirshtein's father?

PP: Yeah, sure.

MG: Did you ever hear him read the megillah?

PP: I didn't read the megillah, but I knew him very well.

MG: Sammy still has the scroll that his father used to read every year. From his own megillah scroll he used to read every year.

PP: Then my husband started to peddle. It was difficult for him. He couldn't understand people. First he worked. When he came here they tried to get him a job with Goer Manufacturing because he was a carpenter before the war. Before the war he was already twenty-something years old. But Goer couldn't understand him. Not that Goer couldn't understand him; *he* couldn't understand *Goer*. With the instructions he gave him, or something. So he let him go. And that was just before I had David. Here with a small child and another on the way. So, finally he said, "I'm going to start to peddle." He talked it over with the family and they said, "Okay, we will try to support you. Not financially, but to give you ideas, and things like this." And little by little he just took a hold on it and then we opened a store, just a small store, a mom & pop store on King Street.

MG: What was that store called?

PP: Henry's Furniture. While he was peddling, he was selling furniture, too.

MG: Who was the wholesaler that supplied him with the goods?

PP: At first, he was peddling for the famous Sam Solomon Company. That was the famous Sam Solomon Company. They had on King Street a store. They supplied *all* the peddlers.

MG: The famous Sam Solomon. Do you know any good stories about the Solomons?

PP: I don't know.

MG: So it is true that he helped out all these peddlers?

PP: Yeah, he gave them credit, a credit line. You go and make a living and you pay me after you sell. First of all you've got to get a credit line. He did a lot of that, Sam Solomon. We came on Thanksgiving Day in 1949. We had our first Thanksgiving dinner on the boat, because we came on Wednesday to New York. We were supposed to come Wednesday morning. The seas were so rough. Twelve days on the boat. The seas were so rough. It was November, in the fall, and they didn't come until late in the evening. I'll never forget. I was very seasick and pregnant, and with a small child. It was an army transport boat, so they had wards for the men. The women with the children, they gave

the cabins. So, he came into the cabin and said, "Come on the deck. Let me show you something." And we came on the deck and saw the panorama of New York. After so many days, sea and sky, sea and sky, we saw the panorama of New York. But it was too late to unload us. Thursday was Thanksgiving so they couldn't unload—it was a holiday. So they gave us the first dinner Thanksgiving Day on the boat.

MG: What did you think when you first saw New York from the boat?

PP: Ahhh. What a relief. First of all, everybody started feeling good because the boat stopped. It was not shaking like this. And the dinner was so delicious, but we didn't know why they—we thought because they are welcoming us to New York. We didn't know that it was Thanksgiving! [Laughing.] Then on Friday they unloaded us in the morning and Saturday we were in Charleston.

MG: That's very fast. You didn't get to see much of New York.

PP: No, we just saw the Penn Station.

MG: So, you had been corresponding with the Zuckers for about four years by this point?

PP: At that time we were corresponding from—the first letter was in—'45 to '49.

MG: Did you save any of these letters?

PP: No, we didn't bring them in from Germany.

MG: Did you have anything left from your family, like photographs?

PP: I got some that my aunt had saved when she went to Palestine, from before the war.

MG: Do you have those pictures?

PP: Yeah, I have them in the living room.

MG: I'd love to see them. And so you came here—did the Zuckers pay for your trip over?

PP: No, they didn't have to pay. The International Refugee Organization paid.

MG: HIAS? [ed.: Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society.]

PP: The United Nations.

MG: The United Nations paid for it. It wasn't the Hebrew—

PP: They didn't have to pay. No, we didn't go through the HIAS. The only thing they did was they came to greet us at the boat—the Jewish Organization.

MG: HIAS?

PP: HIAS. I don't know if it was HIAS or the Joint Distribution Committee. They came and greeted us. For instance, when we had to wait at the Penn Station for the train—because we had to wait a couple hours—they came out, volunteers, from different organizations. For the Poles came people who spoke Polish, for the Jews came people who spoke Yiddish to help us to go to the store and buy something. They gave us twenty dollars each.

MG: That was a lot of money back then.

PP: Yeah, twenty dollars—you know, a family—twenty dollars. We had to buy milk for the baby, we had to buy bread. The paper money, was not so bad. But the coins! This is a dime and this is a quarter, and four quarters makes a dollar. It was just like a learning experience.

MG: It's a confusing monetary system.

PP: It was confusing. I never saw a black woman until I came to New York. I saw black soldiers in the army in Germany, but I never saw a black woman. And Mark, my son, when I used to take him out on the street and he used to see black people, he used to scream his head off.

MG: How did you react to that?

PP: Believe me, you learn quick. If you have to, you learn quick.

MG: But the Zuckers did rent a house for you when you got here?

PP: They rented an apartment. They paid the rent for it.

MG: Where was this at?

PP: Downtown on Warren Street. Eighty-seven Warren Street.

MG: It's still there?

PP: It's still there. Then after five years, we bought our house. We used to live on Thomas Street. We had a house on Thomas Street. We built this one in '65.

MG: But the first house you bought was after Henry had started peddling?

PP: Yeah, right. After he made—it is funny that immigrants—after we saved up the first few dollars, we bought a house. It was rental property, too.

MG: I want to ask you a little bit about the Jewish community's reaction to the refugees coming in here.

PP: When we came, there was a stream of people coming to see us because we were from Kaluszyn, and there were so many descendants, people who remembered, who said "Ah, you are this one's granddaughter." Because they remembered. Every day somebody else used to walk in the apartment [and say], "I'm from Kaluszyn, too." I really didn't know them, but I was grateful that we got so many landsmen! [Ed.: Landsmen are people from the same town in the Old Country.] [Laughing.]

MG: That's amazing. Were they curious about what had happened over there?

PP: They were curious about all kinds of things. They were curious that I knew how to read and write Polish, because they didn't have schools when they left. [Laughing.] They were curious how we survived. They were curious how many changes had happened in the city since they left. When I told them that we had electricity—we had electricity before the city did, because on our farm we had our own generators.

MG: So your family was fairly well-off, it sounds like.

PP: My grandfather [ed.: maternal grandfather, David Roza] was a very enterprising man. He built the mill.

MG: It was a corn mill?

PP: No, it was a flour mill.

MG: Flour mill. Did it have a name? What was it called?

PP: It was the only flour mill in Kaluszyn. We supplied all the bakers in the surrounding areas with flour.

MG: Wow, that's incredible. That was on your father's side?

PP: My mother's side. My grandfather let the business [be] run by his two son-in-laws, himself, and another son. He had ten children. But the business was running only by four [people].

MG: What was their name; what was your mother's family name?

PP: Roza. R-O-Z-A.

MG: So all these people from Kaluszyn—

PP: They all knew Roza. When they came, they said “Are you David Roza’s granddaughter?” David was named after him.

MG: R-O-Z-A?

PP: Yeah. You know in Polish, the vowels have dots, but you don’t have any—that is as close as I can get—Roza.

MG: Roza. Does that mean rose?

PP: Yeah, Roza means a rose, a flower.

MG: So, when these people came over, you had to rehash your entire story?

PP: I didn’t talk about it. They knew that only—I don’t think that people could comprehend it. They knew that people got slaughtered there.

MG: They knew terrible things had happened.

PP: At that time, you know, we didn’t talk about it for twenty years. Now there’s more interest in it than there was in the beginning. Because the survivors didn’t talk so much about it. Everybody tried just to make a living, and to get accommodated here.

MG: Why do you think it is that people are talking about it so much, or are more interested in it now, all of a sudden?

PP: Because the survivors are dying out. It’s the truth. I had so many friends who are gone now—

MG: Who were survivors?

PP: Who were survivors.

MG: When was the first time that you were able to retell this?

PP: I really don’t know. I really don’t know when I started even to tell the children. They only know that they don’t have a grandmother, they don’t have grandparents, they don’t have anybody.

MG: Just you and Henry. And a great aunt.

PP: Well, that’s why they got so close to the Zuckers. Max Kirshstein’s mother lived next door to us. And she’s also in some way related, I don’t know how. So they always called her Aunt Sarah.

MG: Max Kirshstein’s mother was Sarah Kirshstein?

PP: Sarah Kirshstein.

MG: How do you think it affected them, growing up?

PP: I don't know. If it affected them, I don't know. But I know only that they always used to talk about the family that was left. Everybody had somebody lost, even the people who were here already for a long time, they had families left there.

MG: It's good that you *can* talk about it now. Was Shoah the first time you had really gone through the whole thing all at once like that?

PP: I did go through it when I was interviewed. I went to Columbia for ETV.

MG: They went through the entire thing?

PP: They had a program. They had a questionnaire. And they asked questions.

MG: I usually have one too, but they're different questions. We have a list of questions for Jewish people, but this is a totally different experience; we're starting from a different point. How did the southern community appear to you here? What did you think of it when you got here?

PP: At that time, when we came, almost 48 years ago, Jews lived mostly in the peninsular city. There was no suburban areas, there was no South Windermere, there was no Confederate Circle, there was nothing. So we were in contact with a lot [of Jews], and we joined Brith Sholom Beth Israel. At that time it was Beth Israel, before the merger.

MG: What led you to join that rather than Brith Sholom?

PP: Because that was the closest to our upbringing.

MG: In what way?

PP: Well, it was Orthodox. The only time we were in contact with a Reform rabbi was when we met a chaplain in the army in Bavaria. We were so struck that he came on Friday night with his jeep, and then after the services he smoked a cigarette. That was, to us, strange. And we called him rabbi. [Laughs.]

MG: Was your father really a rabbi?

PP: No, my father was not a rabbi, but he was very religious. I grew up in a very Orthodox home.

MG: From what I've heard, that wasn't uncommon.

PP: No, and my father was also a Talmudic scholar.

MG: He studied the Talmud during the day?

PP: That was his relaxation. After the day's work in the business, he used to come up—we lived upstairs in the family house—and take out his Talmud books and study.

MG: Just read and study?

PP: Yeah. But he spoke a couple languages, because of the situation in Poland. It was under Russian rule; it was under German rule; it was under Polish rule, and then he started to [ed.: sounds like "die"]. I'll show you. I've got it here, right here.

MG: What is it?

PP: That is the signatures. My aunt had it in Israel. That was my father's signature, in Polish. And that is my grandfather, David. It's called, in Polish, David Roza. See, you can see here the stamp, David.

MG: What was this document from?

PP: That was the stamp from—it says Kaluszyn. If you come to the light, you can see it.

MG: Is this preserved?

PP: It's not preserved, I just did it.

MG: You should get it preserved.

PP: Yeah, and that's my uncles. That's the four people who operated the mill. Rappaport Roza. See how Roza is spelled? It's the dots on the top, one over the O and one over the Z. That is the vowels.

MG: Similar to Hebrew.

PP: Yeah, the vowels.

MG: You should really do something, make sure this stays—

PP: And it says here a number. My grandfather had the first telephone in Kaluszyn, and the number was eighteen. I never know why he chose eighteen. Because in Jewish, life is eighteen, or it was the number eighteen because he got that telephone number.

MG: Maybe. Is the building that the flour mill was in—?

PP: It does not exist anymore. Because Mark was there, and my daughter was there. They took it apart, took out the machinery, and—

MG: The building was torn down?

PP: Yeah, torn down.

MG: Is your home still there?

PP: No—everything—it's just empty lot.

MG: Is the town still in existence?

PP: Yeah, the town's still existing.

MG: It's east of Warsaw?

PP: It is east of Warsaw.

MG: How far east?

PP: Thirty-five miles.

MG: You used to take a train?

PP: We used to take buses. The buses used to run.

MG: But you can take a train now?

PP: You can take a train. The train station is about two miles from Kaluszyn.

MG: Tell me briefly about the Jewish community's reaction. Were they welcoming to the refugees here?

PP: Yeah, they were, here in Charleston. Not too many survivors came to Charleston. And mostly they were sponsored by the Jewish Community Center. Joe Engel had family. Pincus's wife had family, but he [Pincus] didn't have a family here.

MG: Right. He told me his story about coming to the train—

PP: Yeah, nobody was waiting for him. [Laughs]

MG: He must have been relieved when [inaudible] showed up.

PP: Let me tell you, those stories—sometimes I'm by myself, and some story pops to my mind, and [I think] how did we do it?

MG: It really is almost unbelievable.

PP: Here we complain if anything is not so right, and I'm guilty of that too. If the air conditioning doesn't work right, I get upset. If this one doesn't work right, I get upset. But then I say to myself, how did we live through those—not inconveniences—they took away *everything* from us. For seven years I didn't have a bed, from '42 till '49, until I came to the United States. Slept on the floor; slept in the Germans' beds; slept whatever, but I couldn't call it my own.

MG: Did you become a Southerner when you came here?

PP: I didn't become a Southerner, but let me tell you, I became a citizen. The first day I was eligible, I applied for citizenship. I told my husband, as soon as the five years were up, I went to the immigration department, and applied for citizenship. It took us about, oh I don't know, five months, until they had the whole group of citizens to swear in. And when I went to the immigration department—it used to be in the custom house—and I asked the immigration officer, "You think I'm going to pass?" Because they ask you some questions. So he asked me, "Lady, who filled out the application?" I said, "I did." He said, "If you could fill out the application, you'll pass." [Laughing.]

MG: That's a relief.

PP: They ask you minor questions. Who are the senators from South Carolina? Write down a sentence.

MG: I don't know if I could tell you all that now. [Laughs.]

PP: Because they wanted to know if you were literate.

MG: And you could speak English by this point?

PP: Oh yeah, at this point I could speak English.

MG: How long had that taken you?

PP: I really don't know. I know one thing that I was trying to tell you before. In a way, here in Charleston, in order to be able to function, you *had* to learn. Take people in New York—they live in a place where a lot of Jews speak Yiddish. They didn't learn as quick. But here, in order to be able to function, you had to learn.

MG: Did you keep up with any Yiddish publications? Did you get the *Forward*? [Ed.: *The Jewish Daily Forward*.]

PP: Yes I do, I still do.

MG: You get the English *Forward*?

PP: No, I don't get the English *Forward*. I get the *Forward*, the Yiddish *Forward*. But I was just telling my sister today, I think I'm going to stop taking it, because they don't have many subscribers now anymore. I was just taking it in order to support them. But I read Yiddish.

MG: So you always read it in English. Did you get it when you came to the country?

PP: Yeah. When I came to this country I did. My husband [ed.: sounds like "didn't"], mostly, because I read quicker English than he did. And now if I get something in Polish—I started to read the *Reader's Digest* in Germany, and got fascinated with it. I was reading German. And I got fascinated with it, because they had a German edition. So then I used to buy it on the street, in the kiosks. Is it called kiosk, where you sell newspapers?

MG: Right.

PP: I used to buy it every month. When I came to the United States and I first learned how to read English a little bit, I wanted to subscribe to it.

MG: *Reader's Digest*?

PP: *Reader's Digest*. At that time it was two dollars a year. And I started to subscribe to *Reader's Digest*. I still do. Then about last year, I saw in the *Reader's Digest* that they also publish it in Polish. So I called them, and I said, "I don't want to subscribe in Polish, but I just want one complimentary copy of it to see—I know I'm able to read it—how Polish language evolved since I left Poland fifty years ago. So they sent me one. I could read it, but a lot of things, especially technical things—

MG: Punctuation, that sort of thing?

PP: No, technical things like computers, televisions, I had to figure out what they mean.

MG: Because they're new words.

PP: New words! Since I left. The basics I still know. And as a matter of fact, the easiest for me to write is still in Polish.

MG: Really? So were you just as comfortable speaking Yiddish back then as you were speaking Polish?

PP: Yeah.

MG: Fairly evenly?

PP: Pretty much so. Home was always Yiddish. Some of it Polish, but mostly Yiddish. But school was strictly Polish.

MG: The non-Jewish world was Polish.

PP: Polish, all Polish. Even when I used to go to visit my family in Warsaw, my cousins, we all spoke Polish. Like I said, that helped me survive, because I spoke good Polish.

MG: We just always ask people about the *Forward*, because so many people subscribed to it back then, and reading the "Bintel Briefs," for example, helped a lot of people understand things, figure out what was going on in the city. Did you read the "Bintel Briefs?" Do you have any stories about the "Bintel Briefs," or reading the *Forward*? [Ed.: The "Bintel Briefs" is an advice column in *The Jewish Daily Forward*. Bintel briefs is Yiddish for "bundle of letters."]

PP: I used to read it, but it didn't help me.

MG: Can I ask you a few questions about the memorial itself, and what it means to you? [Ed.: He is referring to the Holocaust Memorial in Charleston's Marion Square.]

PP: You know how much David is involved in it. I think it means more to him, because in my head it is a memorial. I see the people, I see the faces. But the only hope with the memorial for me is that people are going to stop and think [about] what human beings can do to other human beings, and that it will never happen again.

MG: And it's also, for you, a personal memorial for the people you knew.

PP: Yeah. To tell you something, whenever I go in the cemetery, I'm envious sometimes, because people can go and see the graves. I don't know where my graves are. I had an older brother, who at the last time I saw him he was twenty-two years old, he would have been seventy-seven now. I don't know where his bones are. I don't know where my parents' bones are.

MG: There's no closure to it.

PP: No. So when my husband died, and we were planning to put the tombstone on it, I said, "Children, in a way you're lucky. You can go in the cemetery. You *know* where your father is buried. I don't know where."

MG: So you think this will help provide this for you?

PP: That's what the memorials are for. Because their bones are scattered all over Poland, mostly in Poland.

MG: So do you think this is important for non-Jewish people [inaudible]?

PP: For Jewish people too, for the children, for the—

MG: I think that's about all I have. I'm sorry if I've been too—

PP: That was okay. I just didn't go into the gory things.

MG: Sometimes it's just not necessary to do that.

PP: But one thing I think we should realize. It's not perfect. The United States are not perfect, and people are not perfect. But opportunities that are open for my children here, I don't think they would have achieved in any other country.

MG: Tell me briefly about who your kids and—

PP: Mark is the oldest one. He's a CPA in Atlanta. But he doesn't practice CPA now, because one company who he used to do CPA work for, they liked him so much they made him vice president of finance, distributing beer and liquor and wine, called United Distributing Company in Atlanta. Very good job. He has a family, a wife and two children. Then there's David. He's a lawyer. Then there's Sarah. She lives in Atlanta. Unfortunately she's divorced, but she is coordinator of human resources at Scottish Rite Hospital in Atlanta, a children's hospital. Now Martha is the head of the research and marketing department in a television station, WSB, in Atlanta.

MG: So they've all done very well for themselves.

PP: Martha got a master's in broadcast management, and Sarah's going for a master's now. As far as education, there are tremendous opportunities here. Even if we didn't have much money. We had three children at the same time in college.

MG: As far as your story goes, have you told everything to your kids before? Do they know everything?

PP: Like what?

MG: Everything that has happened; the hard parts to talk about.

PP: Yeah, we talked, and they have the tapes that I made from the Shoah, and they also have what I did for the ETV.

MG: So they've seen that?

PP: Yeah, they saw it. But even if you can speak and you can tell stories, how can you express the feelings that we felt at that time? It's very difficult.

MG: If not impossible.

PP: The fear, the fear.

MG: Is the fear still there at all?

PP: I don't have so much. What would I fear now here? I've got a security system. [Laughs] I'm not fearful now, but at that time, my gosh, you were fearful if you got sick, because there was no—you couldn't take a doctor. The only thing I had to go to a doctor was when I was working in Częstochowa. I was enrolled in an insurance company, with insurance from the work. That's when I could go to a doctor, if I needed.

MG: Do you still have dreams about it at all?

PP: Sometimes I have dreams. Sometimes I see people. And it's funny, those people probably would be almost hundred years old. I see them as young people. In the beginning I had more dreams. And then little by little they went away. And sometimes they just come back, like nightmares.

MG: Have you had to have therapy or anything like that?

PP: No. Oh, therapy—here for instance, I'm not saying that it's wrong. It's helpful, but any little disaster they send in counselors. We came out of a war and nobody even a good word said to us. We had to start fighting again. We were not afraid of our—we were afraid for our lives in the sense that, like I said, they killed two Jews in Kaluszyn after the war. But we never had any counselors. Maybe that is a gift, that we can still think straight.

MG: Maybe. It's true, maybe you don't need to talk about it all the time.

PP: We can function as human beings.

MG: So what do you do with your time now?

PP: I used to help my husband in the business. I used to keep the books, I used to take care of the invoices. Now, first of all I'm always a reader. You can see in every place there's books.

MG: Right. Me too.

PP: I miss it if I don't have anything. I subscribe to magazines. And then I do volunteer work twice a week in the hospital, in Roper Hospital.

MG: Next time you're there, you better say hi to my dad. I'll tell him I spoke with you, and make sure he recognizes you. What do you do as a volunteer at Roper?

PP: I work in the hospitality department.

MG: So what does that mean?

PP: You keep track of who goes out and who goes in, and if flowers come in, you deliver the flowers to the patients, and the mail. I usually work at a desk, right there at the desk.

MG: Do you see Jewish patients?

PP: Oh, yeah. Whenever I see some I know, I go up to see them.

MG: Do you have contact with other survivors in town?

PP: Yeah, with Pincus. I see Pincus. Charles Markowitz, you know Charles Markowitz? In the beginning, we used to get together, but now we're getting older, and everybody's got their children, and their grandchildren.

MG: Right. You're lucky to have such a large family. When you went to Atlanta, you were with Martha, Sarah, and Mark?

PP: Yeah.

MG: And David had his family here?

PP: And then David is here, yeah.

MG: You were there for Passover?

PP: For the whole Passover.

MG: How big of a Seder was it?

PP: The first Seder was Martha, and she had eleven people. Then Mark had about twenty people.

MG: Wow. Twenty people is big. Thirteen is big for us; twenty people is huge. So before I turn it off is there anything else you'd like to say?

PP: I think I said more than I probably intended to. [Laughs.]

MG: I really enjoyed talking; it was really an honor to speak to you about this, and if ever you feel you'd like to talk again, I would be honored to come back again and do this. I'll stop the tape.

End Tape 1, Side B
Begin Tape 2, Side A only

MG: It's recording, so you can start from the beginning.

PP: Okay. Before the Final Solution in August and July of 1942—let's put it this way, July and August were the months. My parents said that we should be prepared, and they told us that they had those gold, five-ruble coins, Russian coins, and we found out that we could—no, let's not put it that we found out—I know how we did it. We had the dresses made, and we covered—with what was left from the material from the dresses—the coins in the dresses. And also, we had ski shoes, and we took out the inner soles and made little indentations so the coins fit in. They wouldn't interfere with us walking.

MG: So these are gold ruble coins from—

PP: Yeah. Gold, five-ruble coins.

MG: That were from the First World War? Say a little about where they're from.

PP: All I know is that they were Czar Nicholas the Second, the last Czar of Russia. They were from the First World War, when Poland was under the Russian rule. When we were out of the ghetto and we mingled with the Poles, when we pretended to be Polish girls, in order for us to survive, to have a place to stay, we had to pay those people. Those gold coins paid for us.

MG: What do you mean they paid for you?

PP: We converted it to Polish money and we got a lot of money for it. The people who we stayed with, we had to pay three or four times as much as they would probably get from somebody else.

MG: Who wasn't Jewish?

PP: No. They were Polish people.

MG: But you had to pay three times as much as someone who wasn't Jewish?

PP: That's right. Don't think we rented a room. We rented a place where to sleep, and to stay there. When we came to Częstochowa, we worked and we supported, more or less, ourselves. So we used less of those coins. When the war ended, we got three left. So one, I took. My sister took one. I had an uncle who came, and he went—at that time, before the state of Israel was established—to Palestine on legal immigration, what they called aliyah. Aliyah means in Hebrew "stepping up." We gave him one. That's how it come that I still got one left.

MG: Can you tell me a little bit about the dresses? What the material looked like?

PP: That was a cotton dress and it was—

MG: Do you still have the dress?

PP: Oh, no. I have a picture of it. I have a picture of myself in the dress. That dress wouldn't fit me now. [Laughing.] We're talking about fifty-five years ago.

MG: I didn't know if you saved it.

PP: That was the only dress I had. And then I had one for Sunday. Because when you run away from home, you just took a few things with you.

MG: So you threw the dress away after the war?

PP: The dress didn't survive the war because we wore it three years, dressed as Polish girls.

MG: What did the dress look like? Describe it to me in your own words.

PP: It was a cotton dress. As a matter of fact, a friend of mine, she was a dressmaker. She made it for me. It was a cotton dress with buttons down and that's where the buttons came [in], because that was convenient for us. I always say, that dress was so heavy, because regular buttons are light. But the dress was coins. It was very heavy. We used to guard that dress. I used to wear it to work, and I used to guard that dress day and night.

MG: You wore it to bed?

PP: In the camp, I wore the dress, because I didn't have any nightclothes.

MG: You said it was light after the war?

PP: I really don't remember when it finally fell apart. It fell apart from using it so often and washing it and washing it. It fell apart. So that's what the story is with the coins. That's why Pat Conroy, when he heard about it, he said that helped us survive.

MG: It's a fascinating story.

PP: It's fascinating. It's like a paradox. My parents had, during the First World War, saved [inaudible]. Little did they know what they were saving it for.

MG: You said at the beginning, when you told the story, they thought you needed to prepare. Prepare for what?

PP: Because the Germans worked with a plan. Even with extermination of the Jews, it was a plan. For instance, they start taking out from Warsaw ghetto in the beginning of July. My father was originally from Warsaw. He had his sisters, his brothers, his parents died in the war. He said, "I lost my family." We, who were just thirty-five miles from Warsaw, they didn't touch us! The neighboring cities, they took out the Jews. [Inaudible.] They used to surround the city and take them in all one place, put them on the train and they go to Treblinka or to Auschwitz.

MG: Treblinka would have been the camp that Kaluszyners were sent to.

PP: Yeah. Treblinka's about forty miles from Kaluszyn. Sixty kilometers. For instance, they used to take out a neighboring city. And they left Kalsuzyn. Some people who jumped the train—[did] you know people used to jump the train?

MG: Joe Engel jumped the train.

PP: Yeah. My brother jumped the train, but he didn't survive. When they jumped the train, they came and they told people what was going on and, at that time, most of the people were so resigned. Of course, it was already three years of war. Limitations unbelievable. Tortures. The conditions were not humane. So, my parents said, "In case, in case you go, be able to do something, let's have—" I don't know how many they took from my parents, because they probably had some too. I don't know. So, they told us, "We've got those gold coins, let's do something with them. Let's do it in case you're going to need it. So you can survive." We didn't talk about survival. We talked just: "maybe somebody going to take you in."

MG: You had the dress prepared and ready?

PP: I had a dress made before, but we had the material for the buttons. Because when you go to a dressmaker, it's not like you're buying a dress. If you buy a dress, you don't have any scraps of material. When you go to a dressmaker, you had scraps of material left over. That's how we'd come to make the buttons.

MG: You left after your parents were—

PP: I left Kaluszyn eight days before my parents got killed.

MG: How did you find out that they—

PP: When I was in the labor camp, somebody came, because that labor camp was not too far from Kaluszyn. It was a labor camp. It was not a camp like a concentration camp. It was a camp where we dug ditches and [inaudible] the marshes.

MG: You were deported there?

PP: I was not deported. I went voluntarily there.

MG: A German labor camp?

PP: It was a German labor camp. But we went voluntarily—two days I went away—this, I remember. I went on Wednesday, and on Friday, they took out all the Jews from Kaluszyn. My parents were hiding in the house near the mill and they found them seven days later. They kept them overnight in a jail, and then they took them to the cemetery

and they killed them. That's when somebody came—a Pole near the camp—he said, “Oh, they just took out the Jews from the mill,” because that was the only mill in the vicinity. When I came back after the war, and I talked to the janitor who worked in our mill, he told us.

MG: He was still on the premises?

PP: Yeah. About ten years ago, that janitor's son was in the United States, in Chicago—he's a doctor now—and he came to see me, after forty-seven years.

MG: That's amazing. It wasn't strange to see this janitor living on your premises that had been taken from you?

PP: He'd been [there] since I remember. He probably came when I was three or four years old. He was still living in the house that we built for him. We had a little hut for him at the end of the premises and he was still living there.

MG: What was his name?

PP: His name was Yousluf Yismerichik [ed.: rendered phonetically]. That's such a Polish name.

MG: Not a Jewish guy, right?

PP: No. He was a gentile. They found a picture—I showed you the picture of my mother the last time you were here—he found that picture. When they took out my parents, there was a German trustee in the mill—he was not a German, he was a Pole from ethnic German. When they took the house apart—the mill they didn't touch—the house they took apart because they were looking for—treasure. I don't know. Probably. They found a lot of things there. She—the janitor's wife—saw the pictures and she grabbed the pictures. When we came back, she gave us the pictures.

MG: When you and your sister came back after the war?

PP: Yeah, When my sister and I came. She has the original. A few pictures, she saved. Because otherwise, I wouldn't—the only pictures I had were those my aunt took to Palestine. When we came back the whole house was taken apart.

MG: It was flattened? Was it there?

PP: Flattened completely.

MG: You must have just been insane.

PP: Yeah.

MG: When you went to that labor camp, that was a German labor camp? Or was that a Polish labor camp?

PP: It was a forced labor camp. It was forced *before*. But when we saw what was coming, we went voluntarily there.

MG: How did you see what was coming? Were the Germans already in Kaluszyn?

PP: We knew they were exterminating the Jews already.

MG: How did you hear about that? Who told you?

PP: The people who jumped from the trains and they told us they were taken to Treblinka. Every day we heard from the other cities.

MG: How was that news conveyed to you directly? They would come back and tell the rabbis and the rabbis would tell the congregation?

PP: There was no rabbis. There was no organized Jewish life.

MG: In Kaluszyn?

PP: At *that* time. *Before* the war, there was a very much organized Jewish life. But at that time, people were dying from hunger on the streets. The people were so exhausted. You could see people, who before the war [were] considerably well off, were begging for a piece of bread.

MG: Kaluszyn wasn't ghettoized, was it?

PP: It was. It was not a wall, like in Warsaw. What it was is they used to put up posts. It was called Juden [ed.: sounds like "betserk"]. That means "Jewish quarters." You couldn't go out. Whoever they found out of those quarters— Our house was included in those quarters.

MG: Was the mill on the outskirts of town?

PP: It was at the end of town, it was not on the outskirts. It was at the end of town because it needed a lot of land.

MG: Still within the confines of the Jewish quarter?

PP: Yeah. They took away the mill from us in 1940. They put in a German trustee. A trustee came in. He was ethnic German. He spoke Polish. He wasn't [inaudible] on the German border. With the Russian border, there were ethnic Russians, and at the German border, there were ethnic Germans.

MG: How did your parents make a living during those two years?

PP: We didn't. Whatever [we had came] from savings. We didn't make a living. And you didn't eat much. That's one thing, you didn't eat much because first of all, it was not available. Even for the Poles, it was not available. But at least they could travel. We were not allowed to go on a train. We were not allowed to go on a bus. Whatever they could bring in—a little bit in the Jewish quarters—they brought in. And [those] who had money, could still buy some. Not too many people had money. It so happened that we had some savings—

MG: The only flour mill in Kaluszyn.

PP: Yeah. It was not only for Kaluszyn. We used to sell flour for the neighboring cities.

MG: Which cities?

PP: As far as [inaudible] Warsaw. There were small cities around. Just like any community, they had small cities. In the bigger cities, there were more mills. They were the competition. It was just like [inaudible].

MG: So, you were competing with the mills in somewhere like Warsaw.

PP: Right. We were competing with some other cities. There were other mills too.

MG: What was the name of the mill?

PP: There was not a name. They called it Roza. That was the family name of my grandfather who built it.

MG: Your mother's father.

PP: My mother's father. Yeah.

MG: Was your family one of the last families to be taken out [inaudible]?

PP: I don't think so. That was not the last.

MG: The DP [Displaced Persons] camp that you went to after you were smuggled across by the Russian soldiers into Germany—you went to an American-run DP camp or British?

PP: American. Actually, the DP camp was run by the UNRRA, the United Nations Rehabilitation—

MG: Relief. Rescue— [Ed.: United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration.]

PP: But it was under American jurisdiction.

MG: Were there a lot of Jews trying to get to Palestine out of there?

PP: Yeah. Most of them.

MG: What were the quarters like that you stayed in? What town—

PP: Berlin.

MG: You went to Berlin or Ulm first? You were married in Ulm, right?

PP: No. I went to Berlin first. In Berlin, they gave us the German army barracks.

MG: Wow. That must have been a strange—

PP: Yeah. It *was* strange.

MG: Were there mainly Jews in the DP camps?

PP: In the DP camp where I was, it was only Jews.

MG: Just because of circumstances or—

PP: Yeah. They tried to separate the ethnic groups. There were other DP camps, I assume, where there were Latvians, Lithuanians, and Russians.

MG: Americans were running the camps, though?

PP: Um-hmm. We had Americans who oversaw that camp, all military people.

MG: Do you remember what unit that was?

PP: I don't know. We couldn't even communicate with them. [Laughing.]

MG: Right. As far as getting information about family members and that sort of thing, some of that took place through Jewish newspapers and Yiddish newspapers? People would advertise looking for family members?

PP: Yeah. *All* the time. Every place established a little paper and all you could hear [was] “Did you hear about—I am so-and-so. I am looking for a brother, for a mother, for a sister.” When I went to Bavaria, the same thing.

MG: Was the *Forward* circulating at this point?

PP: No. They were local. They were in Polish. They were in Yiddish.

MG: These were locally, private printed [inaudible]—

PP: Crude-made papers. It was not like editorials or edited. *Crude*-made papers.

MG: Out of necessity.

PP: Right.

MG: How long were you supposed to be on the waiting list for before the DP law passed? How long were you expected to wait?

PP: We got the visa and Mark was ten weeks old—

MG: The visa was just for you and your sister though, right?

PP: No. The visa came first for my [inaudible]—the affidavit [inaudible]. But then they send the affidavit for my husband and for the baby. The DP law passed in the beginning of 1949.

MG: Right. I was just wondering, before that passed, how long you were told you had to wait.

PP: Almost three years.

MG: They told you you had to wait three years?

PP: They didn't tell us. The quotas. The quota system. Polish quota was very unfavorable. They considered us Polish citizens. You know how the quota system was established? In 1924, after they closed, so to say, the gates of the United States, they established a quota system. They saw how many people from a certain ethnic group came to the United States, immigrants. Because Germans were the most, they had a favorable— They were afraid that people who would come, they'll be burdens of the United States. So they figured England had a good record, I mean, a big ethnic group. Germans had— I don't know from what year they took it. That's why when you were a German citizen— I could have come two years before. And English too. But because we were Polish— The people from Poland and from Russia started immigrating late in the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, and after the First World War.

MG: They thought they would have a network of people that could help them out.

PP: Exactly.

MG: Did you run into many Germans when you were there in the DP camp?

PP: Of course. At that time, they were *so* nice.

MG: You talked to them?

PP: Oh, yeah. When we lived in Bavaria, after I got married already, we lived with a German family because we didn't have anything. So, we slept in their beds, we used their kitchen, we used their utensils, everything. Their son was an air force sergeant in the German army, and he was stationed in Poland near Treblinka. There was a big city, Brest—

MG: Brest-Litovsk?

PP: —Litovsk. Treblinka was not too far from Brest-Litovsk. And he said he never heard of it. I asked him one time. His name was Heinz. I said, "Heinz, did you ever hear of it?" He said, "No." He never heard of it.

MG: How did you happen to get to live with a German family?

PP: When we came to Bavaria—and my husband was there—I didn't know him at that time yet. They allocated us, because we didn't have anything. Because the Germans, they had a big apartment, they had to share.

MG: Reparations?

PP: There was an allocation office and everybody had to register their apartments.

MG: Forcibly they had to register?

PP: Yeah. That was probably an order from the American—

MG: So the East German people weren't volunteering their apartments.

PP: No. They didn't. They had to share, because there were other refugees too. Not only Jewish refugees, but other refugees too.

MG: So it was you and Mark and Henry staying with this family?

PP: Yeah. My sister too. But my sister went to work in Munich. Yeah, I had Mark and Henry and I stayed with the Germans. They gave us one room, we used their linen and their beds. We cooked in one kitchen, three families in one kitchen.

MG: Keep kosher?

PP: No. We didn't. We used to get supplies from the UNRRA. Was everything.

MG: They'd drop stuff off—

PP: Right. No, they had a committee and the Jewish people always organized. Jewish people are *always* organized. Matter of fact, Henry was the head of the organization.

MG: What was the organization?

PP: It used to be the Jewish committee. They used to give the supplies and there was one—a secretary—who took the names of all the Jews who lived there, how much supplies they need, and they used to supply us.

MG: So, the UNRRA would bring the food, and the Jewish community would organize the dispersion of it?

PP: Yeah.

MG: What town was that in Bavaria?

PP: Landshut.

MG: Landshut. L-A-N-S—

PP: L-A-N-D-S-H-U-T. Landshut. That's how it is pronounced, Landshut.

MG: Can I ask you one more question? It has nothing to do with this whatsoever, but about the *Forward*. You told me that you read the *Forward* and I'm trying to collect a few stories from people about the *Forward*. Did you get that in Kaluszyn before the war? [Ed.: *The Jewish Daily Forward* is a Jewish newspaper.]

PP: No. It's an American paper.

MG: I though it was printed in Poland at some point.

PP: Poland had so many Yiddish papers. Ahh! They had national papers, city papers, there were *so* many Yiddish papers in Poland. The *Forward* was only the American paper. I never saw the *Forward* before.

MG: Before you came here?

PP: Um-hmm.

MG: When did you see it? When you came to Charleston?

PP: My husband and I—I still subscribe to it. Believe me, there is nothing to read now in the *Forward*, because once a week it goes, and there's no writers and no readers. Only for sentimental reasons.

MG: They only have a readership of about twenty-five thousand.

PP: *If* they have it.

MG: My boss, Dale Rosengarten, she's good friends with the editor, Seth Lipsky—I think she went to high school with him—

PP: I just got it this week. They are celebrating the hundredth anniversary.

MG: I just heard something on National Public Radio the other day about it. When you got to Charleston, how did you find out about the *Forward*—through other Jewish people?

PP: Yeah. At that time, when we came to Charleston, that was a daily paper.

MG: It was delivered daily [inaudible]?

PP: It was delivered by mail. It still comes by mail. They used to send out agents to solicit subscribers, and it used to come by mail every day.

MG: To your home?

PP: Um-hmm.

MG: And you would read it in Yiddish, basically?

PP: Yeah. I still read Yiddish.

MG: That's the Yiddish version?

PP: Yeah.

MG: Did you pay attention to the “Bintel Briefs?” [Ed.: The “Bintel Briefs” is an advice column in *The Jewish Daily Forward*. Bintel briefs is Yiddish for “bundle of letters.”]

PP: Oh, I tell you, that's “Dear Abby” and “Ann Landers,” combining. [Laughing.]

MG: Right, the invention of Dear Abby. Did you read that to your kids ever?

PP: My kids don't speak Yiddish. They understand. They speak a little bit, here a word, there a word. We tried ourselves to get to learn English, so we didn't speak to them in Yiddish. Here in Charleston, there were not too many Yiddish-speaking people.

MG: Why did you read the *Forward*? Why did you subscribe to it?

PP: First, my husband wanted it very badly. We always had a paper. Always. So, even before the war, there was not a day—that was the only, probably, communication we had

was newspapers. Even in the war years, when we were in Częstochowa, the first thing we used to go home from work is to stop at the kiosk and buy the paper—even the paper was German-controlled—buy a Polish paper. We had a few pennies [inaudible], we bought the paper.

MG: A kiosk was a newsstand? Tobacco stand?

PP: Yeah. Not tobacco, just papers. Tobacco was not—even cigarettes—you couldn't get it during the war. The Polish people used to beg it from the Germans. The Germans confiscated everything.

MG: What did these people who smoked cigarettes all the time do?

PP: The Polish people are very big smokers. Ooh, they are smokers! Still do. Sarah said when she was in Poland, “everybody smoke!”

MG: Sarah is—

PP: She's my daughter. She was in '88, there.

MG: To do what?

PP: At that time, she was married. She's not married anymore. She went with her husband. It was a group from Dallas. She lived in Dallas. She went there in '88. They had the forty-fifth anniversary of the uprising in the Warsaw ghetto. They had ceremonies there, and she went to see the Polish people who helped us. From there, she went to Israel.

MG: Outside of Warsaw—the woman who—

PP: Yeah.

MG: What was her name?

PP: Her name was Wozniak.

MG: Is she still alive?

PP: *He's* not alive. He's dead. His wife I never met, but she's still alive.

MG: You left Warsaw because of the uprising. You realized it was bad a bad place to be?

PP: Warsaw ghetto, right.

MG: Did they tell you to leave or—

PP: No. we run away. They had, this week, a program on ETV about the uprising of Warsaw ghetto.

MG: I saw part of that.

PP: The flames and the shootings—

MG: Didn't they know somebody that had boarded with them previously that was in Częstochowa?

PP: Right, yeah.

MG: One more thing about the *Forward*. You got it mainly because Henry wanted to have a Yiddish paper around?

PP: We didn't speak any English. So, we needed something to read and they had very good articles at that time. Because so many immigrants came after the Second World War [inaudible]. They even had lectures in the paper how to prepare for citizenship.

MG: So that was a helpful and practical paper too?

PP: We always had newspapers. That was the only paper we could read. Then, I learned more than Henry did, to read English, I started to subscribe to *Reader's Digest*.

MG: Okay, this is great. I told you it would be about ten minutes and it's thirty-seven. I'll stop the tape now.

PP: Okay.

END TAPE 2