

**Museum of History and Holocaust Education Legacy Series**

**Sarah Popowski Interview**

**Conducted by Adina Langer**

**August 29, 2022**

**Transcribed by Amanda White**

Born in Charleston, South Carolina, in 1952, Sarah Popowski is the daughter of Holocaust survivors Paula Kornblum Popowski and Henry Popowski. They both came from the Polish town of Kaluszyn but did not meet until they were living in a Displaced Persons (DP) Camp in Germany after World War II. Having avoided deportation from Kaluszyn by volunteering for hard labor in 1942, Paula escaped from the labor camp with aid from a righteous gentile and hid with her sister in southern Poland under a false identity. Henry spent the duration of the war with partisans, avoiding capture by the Germans. After marrying in the DP camp, Paula and Henry emigrated to the United States in 1949 and settled in Charleston where they raised their four children. Sarah Popowski lives in Atlanta and recorded her oral history interview at Kennesaw State University in August 2022.

**Full Transcript**

**Interviewer**

Today is Monday, August 29th, 2022. My name is Adina Langer and I'm the curator at the Museum of History and Holocaust education at Kennesaw State University. And I'm here with Sarah Popowski, who will be recording a Legacy Series interview with us in memory of her parents, Paula Kornblum Popowski

**Popowski**

Mhm.

**Interviewer**

and Henry Popowski.

**Popowski**

Correct.

**Interviewer**

So, let's start. If you could, please state your full name.

**Popowski**

Yes, Sarah Silvia Popowski.

**Interviewer**

And do you agree to this interview?

**Popowski**

I do.

**Interviewer**

Wonderful. Can you please share where and when you were born?

**Popowski**

Yes, I was born on August 19th, 1952, in Charleston, South Carolina.

**Interviewer**

Okay, and before we talk about your childhood and eventually your life here in Georgia a little bit, we're going to go back and focus on your parents' stories beginning with your mother. So, can you please state your mother's full name?

**Popowski**

Paula Kornblum Popowski.

**Interviewer**

And where and when was she born?

**Popowski**

She was born on January 20th, 1923 in Kaluszyn, Poland.

**Interviewer**

And can you spell the name of that town, just so we have that?

**Popowski**

K-A-L-U-S-Z-Y-N.

**Interviewer**

And what kind of a town was Kaluszyn?

**Popowski**

It was a small town about 35 miles east of Warsaw. They're heavily Jewish, in addition to Catholics living there as well. Very much a community there. From what my, my parents shared with me.

**Interviewer**

And, the, the Jewish population and the Catholic population, did they mix with each other? Were they neighbors?

**Popowski**

They were neighbors, but they really did not interact on a regular basis. For instance, my mother did not go to school with Catholic children. And one of the reasons that she told us is because they taught religion in schools, so the Jewish children went separately from the non-Jewish that were primarily Catholic.

**Interviewer**

So, what was your mother's neighborhood like in Kaluszyn.

**Popowski**

You know, they lived on the property of the business, which was a flour mill, and lived there with other, you know, her family. And I know that her grandmother, last name Rosa, R-O-S-A, lived there with them as well. And so it was, ya know, they, I think they, they, they had a neighborhood that they thought would be and just like any neighborhood that, you know, to which you would be accustomed.

**Interviewer**

And had- was this an old community? Had there been Jews living in Kaluszyn for a very long time?

**Popowski**

I believe so. I don't know in terms of length, but I do believe that there were Jews there for quite a period of time. My mother's mother, my maternal grandmother, was from Kaluszyn [pronounced Call-oo-sheen]. Kaluszyn [pronounced Cuh-loo-shin]. It's pronounced both ways.

**Interviewer**

Sure, and she mentioned that they went to a Jewish school. What, what role did Judaism play in their lives generally?

**Popowski**

I'm not, you know, they went to school, I'm not sure if it was quote "Jewish school," but where they, where the religion was taught in the school. I think they, the students, the children went to the same school but they wasn't the religion, the religious piece, that's how I understood it. You know, I always say there's probably much more that I don't know that what I do know. But in terms of Judaism, Judaism was very much hallmark in the family. Uh, my mother always used to say, you know, we didn't need vacations 'cause we had a vacation every Shabbat 'cause they really, they shut down, the business shut down, they sell, they, uh, observed Shabbat. They were- I would say that they were Orthodox Jews, as we know Orthodox Jews today.

**Interviewer**

And did they go to synagogue? Did they have a synagogue in town?

**Popowski**

I don't know that they, that they had, they had a synagogue to my knowledge. But I think that a lot, lot of the Judaism that they practiced was in the home.

**Interviewer**

And do you know anything about their, their politics, were they involved in any Zionist organizations or anything like that?

**Popowski**

I just listened to my mother's video recently and she did say her mother was a Zionist and she participated in, you know, bazaars and such for fundraising of that.

**Interviewer**

And so you mentioned the family owned a flour mill.

**Popowski**

Yes.

**Interviewer**

Tell me more about that.

**Popowski**

It was from my, on my mother side. It's the flour mill has been in the family for, for quite some time, I don't know the length of time. But it, it served -, Kaluszyn and the surrounding areas. In terms of providing, you know, the, the wheat for the community. My paternal-- my maternal grandfather was originally from Warsaw, but when he met my grandmother they moved to Kaluszyn and started to work in the mill. You know, I usually don't refer to them as my grandparents, because I really, I never knew them. I never knew either set of grandparents.

**Interviewer**

Yeah, so this, this mill, did it have other employees too or was it mostly the family?

**Popowski**

No, it had other employees and there were not- and non-Jewish employees.

**Interviewer**

And was it the kind of place where farmers from around would bring their, their unmilled wheat and they would mill it into flour?

**Popowski**

I don't know that.

**Interviewer**

Okay, just curious. So, you mentioned that your mother went to school. What was her education like?

**Popowski**

She went to school, I think through the 8th grade and did not pursue beyond that because at that age, is, to continue education she would have to leave, leave home. Her brother did. But she had an older brother and a younger sister. And so I know the brother did. And I think I heard in another video testimony she gave that her sister didn't. So one thing I will never know the answer to is: if that was the case why didn't she go? And I don't know that.

**Interviewer**

Do you know much about how they would have learned about the news of the world? Did they have a newspaper or anything like that?

**Popowski**

They did have a newspaper. They had a Yiddish paper that they had got, you know, got every day and they also had connections with people in other towns and so forth. So, they had a network of people that they knew and, and the Yiddish paper that kept them abreast of what was going on.

**Interviewer**

Do you, do you think that they or did you learn that they had this sense for the fact that war was on the horizon, that there were tensions in Europe?

**Popowski**

Oh yeah. Yeah, they knew.

**Interviewer**

Did they have plans or hopes or dreams for the future?

**Popowski**

Interesting question. I would word- the way I would answer that is that I think the dreams they had would be to stay together as a unit for as long as they can, which ultimately did not happen and, uh, so that was probably their dream in terms of when tensions began. And they did that for as long as they could. Uh, but I think that really, had this, these tensions not been there, and had there not been a World War II, you and I would not be sitting here together today.

**Interviewer**

So how did life change for them when the German army invaded Poland?

**Popowski**

Well, I think it started even before that, when Hitler came into power. I think that things began to be, get more difficult, it became more difficult to get medicine, it became more difficult to, to get the, the things that they needed for everyday life. So, that-, it really started before the war. And I think, I think the war just, you know, it went up exponentially after the war started.

**Interviewer**

So, once their, their part of Poland came under German occupation- is that right?

**Popowski**

Mhm.

**Interviewer**

And what, what were some of the first things that changed for them?

**Popowski**

Well, one of the first things that changed is that, you know, at first they took them all out of their home after the invasion. Eventually, they let the women go. And they went back to their home, but, went back to their home, they held them in an area I think is maybe in the school where she attended. I'm not positive about that point. And eventually they let the men go. And so that was something that was, you know, traumatic, if you will, very, very traumatic for them. And, and then became much more, more difficult as I said to, uh, to get the things that they needed on a day-to-day basis such as, uh, medicine became more difficult to be observant Jews. In terms of people gathering together to have a minyan, for instance, uh, those things became much more challenging as time went on after the war began.

**Interviewer**

And did they officially create a, a ghetto in a Kaluszyn?

**Popowski**

I don't know the answer to that. They may have uh, but I know that, that, you know, they had certain, they certainly had restrictions. But I do, I do remember my mother mentioning that they had a, you know, non-Jewish neighbors. So, I don't know that they actually enclosed-, particularly enclosed the town.

**Interviewer**

And did they know people in Warsaw? And I know Warsaw obviously has a, a very large ghetto that was created.

**Popowski**

Correct.

**Interviewer**

Did they have a relationship with anyone who ended up there?

**Popowski**

They did because my maternal grandfather was from Warsaw. And so, they did have connections in Warsaw.

**Interviewer**

So as this tightening of restrictions and their, their lives begin to change, were they able to maintain their business for a period of time?

## **Popowski**

Well, when the war broke out, the Germans, took over the business. And so they, the Germans were on site actually running the business. So effectively took the business away from them. Even though they were still living on the property, they were not running the business.

## **Interviewer**

So, there were these three children in the family. Were-, how long were they able to stay together? When, when did they end up being separated?

## **Popowski**

In 1942, um, when the final solution came into being, and this is when they were hearing from the other counts surrounding them that they were taking Jews out and the family said, you know, "we're not going to go." And they had built a hiding place in the apartment, in the place where they lived on the same property as the flour mill. And so, they started making preparations, knowing that that was going to occur. During that time, my mother had a friend, last name Dombojvic, not sure the spelling, but I'm going to guess at D-O-M-B-O-J-V-I-C, but that could clearly be wrong. But, who, who came to the house one time with, with her parents and they had asked my mother and her family if they would keep a coat for them and they said, "of course we would." And they realized when they took it how heavy it was. And what they realized is that there were coins sewn into the coat. And so, they got the-, and so my mother and her family got an idea. And so, they had some coins from the First World War, this R Nicholas, that had value, okay? And at this point I'll bring out to say because there was a coin left, a few coins left after my parents. And, if you could get close, this is one of the coins that she had left from the war. There were approximately 100 coins hidden in the yard of the property, and they had other coins and they took the other coins and sewed them into the dresses and they put, and they put them into the soles of their shoes. So, there was probably 130 coins in total if you take the ones that were the dresses and soles of the shoes, plus what was in the, in the yard, buried in the yard. Okay so, so they got the idea from Mom's friend, Molly Dombojvic. And so, after a period of time they came back to get the coat and, and her friend says to her, you know, "I've got this opportunity to go to a labor camp." She says, "why don't you come with me?" And her father was home at that time and he said, you know, "it's come to a point I don't know what to tell you to do."

## **Interviewer**

And what, what kind of a labor camp? What would they have? What would make this, I guess, attractive?

## **Popowski**

Oh, a means to survive. And so, and that they wouldn't be liquidated when the Ger-, when the Germans came in. So that would be the advantage. And my aunt was making arrangements to go to another labor camp with, you know, and when we talk about these, we're not talking about long distances. Like, for instance, the camp where my mother eventually went was only about, the equivalent of about 2 miles or so from Kaluszyn. So we're not talking about hundreds of miles. And so, when her friend said, why don't you come with me, she said, you know, she's 19 years old at the time, she didn't know what to do. Her father is there and he said, you know, "there's come to a point, I don't know what to tell you to do."

Later, her mother comes in, tells her mother that, you know, Molly says I should come, and she says, "you go. You go." and she said, you know, she took her two coats, one's a lighter coat one's a heavier coat, because this was September, knowing that, that winter was coming, to the sack and put out some bread and an apple and she went down to the depot where the-, they were gathering. And on, and there's a horse and buggy there, her friend was there and there's probably I think eight to, to maybe a dozen other people there. And when the person who she knew who would, you know, was kind of coordinating the list, he looks on the list and she-, he said, I don't see your name here. My mother says "I'm not going back, I see a space here between two names, you put my name there." And for whatever reason, he did. And I just, I say in these things that these split second decisions that are made, these are not, oh well, this was just a bad decision. These are life and death decisions.

**Interviewer**

So, did she go alone or did her sister come too?

**Popowski**

She went with her friend, so she was-, she didn't go alone and there were other people, I think some of whom she knew that she went to this camp and they also had connections with some non-Jewish people who were helping them out. And they, they had that contact and my aunt had that contact as well, with those people who were going to eventually get them out of the camp.

**Interviewer**

So, what did your mother tell you about the camp?

**Popowski**

It was hard labor, she said that they would, you know, they're, they're digging ditches to plant potatoes. They worked morning until night. They gave very little to eat, maybe some very watery soup and I remember her saying they mildewed bread. So it wasn't, you know, not really sufficient feeding, if you will. Uh, one story I'll share with you that I tell selectively about depending on with whom I'm speaking is that there was a couple- 'cause there's no- there were no children allowed in the camp. And there was a couple there who had a child, I think maybe six or seven years old, they were, they were hiding the child. And the people that were running the camp found the child, and they gathered everybody in the camp, and they put the child in the middle of the camp. And they said "To whom does this child belong?" And nobody would come forward, they were scared because they knew would know what the consequence was. And you know, then they- she said that they became so sarcastic. You know, "here's a young child, they shouldn't be separated" Like, I don't know if it was a boy or girl, I want to say boy, but I'm not sure. You should- a child shouldn't be by, you know by him or herself, you know, come forward. And the parents of this- who actual parents were hiding because they didn't want the child running to them. And so the German said, "well, nobody is going to claim this child." So in front of the whole group they shot the child. And the parents couldn't react, they could not react to this, you know, to witnessing their own child being shot right before their eyes. So, I know that was one of the stories that that, you know, stayed with me in terms of an experience in the camp that how brutal they were. So, it didn't have to be an extermination camp for things like that to happen.

**Interviewer**

So, she was in this camp starting in September of '42. And how long did she stay in the camp?

**Popowski**

No, I don't know that I think it was a period of- yeah, so I think it was probably about a few months. It's maybe six weeks. And then the people that my maternal grandparents knew who helped, or the name last name was Wozniak. W-O-Z-N-I-A-K. My, that- she'd been in touch with my aunt. Somehow they made communications, you know, they didn't have cell phones or computers or anything, but somehow they were able to, you know, have connections. And the Wozniak's came one time, and said let's, you know, go. And it was during the daylight, and she says, no, I can't go, they're gonna, they're gonna find us. So, they made another arrangement to come at night when everybody was asleep. And, you know, and just walk away and that's what- how, so, one of the Wozniak's came and, and helped her to leave.

**Interviewer**

And so there were no guards or-?

**Popowski**

Apparently not. I mean, you know, apparently you know. Not you know, and I'm sure they've selected an area for them to meet. And so what- however they did it, they did it. And there's a lot of that, you know, detail that escapes me.

**Interviewer**

So, what was the plan that, that these friends had for your mother?

**Popowski**

So the plan is first, get them out. And then they got them to Warsaw. And in Warsaw, they got them there and, you know, got them situated at where they lived. And you know, these were people who were literally risking their lives to, to help. And so, one of the things they help- did is they helped, 'cause people had to have papers to be able to move or move around, they had to have documenta- documents. And my mother and aunt didn't have documents, so they helped them to get false documents. And so, they- my mother and my aunt went under assumed- became- my mother went from Paula Kornblum to Apollonia Borkowska. And if you want me to pull this up, there's, I got a picture of that document, I've got the actual document.

**Interviewer**

Yeah, we've- that would be a good thing to show.

**Popowski**

So, this is the actual document that we had framed to preserve it. My mother is 19 years old here. She told me that, uh, that when this picture was taken, it was taken by a female photographer, not Jewish. And when my mother was starting to pose for her she says "give me a big smile like the war would end tomorrow." And this indeed, I believe, is one of the most beautiful pictures I have of my mother. And so, and it has- shows Apollonia Borkowska and it shows her religion as being Catholic, but this is the paper that she carried around with her, like we carry around driver's licenses. To make sure that she had a

proper identification. And you can see on the back here that we preserved it so we can see the back, you know, where she had a stamp in terms of when you- she went from place to place. You can also see up here where you have her fingerprints.

**Interviewer**

Wow.

**Popowski**

Yeah, so this is something of a family heirloom now.

**Interviewer**

And this was something that that Wozniak family helped her to obtain?

**Popowski**

Correct. Now, they also work, you know, during this period- time and they also, the Wozniak's, also helped when one of them went back to the flour mill and got the coins that was in that box. And so what my mother's parents did, she had- they had each child go out at night one by one, and they said, you know, from the front, from the house, there's like 3 cobblestones, and in between the cobblestones, if you dig in there, that's where you're going to find the box. And so, they told him, and so, we went and got that. And he was gonna go home and spend the night and he said, "no, I'm not gonna do that. I'm not gonna do that," 'cause he was afraid his wife might know that he had coins in my- or something else so and he brought coins to my, to my mother and aunt. So, they were able to pay people during the course of the war that helped them out tremendously.

**Interviewer**

So now they're, they're in more solid in their assumed identities and some resources. What do they do next?

**Popowski**

Eventually, what they ended up doing was going to **[Czestochowa?]** And one- the main reason is because they had family in Warsaw and they knew people in Warsaw so that if they were to be going out in the streets and, and they also had the ghetto in Warsaw. And they were concerned that they might be recognized. And you know, they were also told that they had a good face and that what that meant was "you don't really look Jewish." You can pass as not being Jewish. So, they, you know, so the Wozniak's or somebody knew a priest down in **[Czestochowa?]** and said, you know you gotta go down there and make connections with him. See if he could help you out in that way. They're going to the South of Poland, where they don't know anybody. And that's what they did.

**Interviewer**

How- how did they get there?

**Popowski**

Train.

**Interviewer**

And so, they use their, their money to buy tickets and this assumed identity card.

**Popowski**

Yeah.

**Interviewer**

And were there were there people along the way kind of checking ID's and-?

**Popowski**

I'm sure they were. I mean, you know, she didn't explicitly say that, but I would assume that they were and, and he said, you know, "I couldn't last night- I don't think the tickets were in," she said-, and I don't think that they really had, you know, they got the tickets, as long as they showed their identity.

**Interviewer**

So, when they meet up with this priest and Czestochowa. Am pronouncing that right?

**Popowski**

Uh-huh.

**Interviewer**

What kind of a, uh, shelter or do they- where do they end up?

**Popowski**

Living, well, they ended up at a home with nuns. And they spent one night and, and then they said, you know, the nun came said you know, I'm not-, I'm nervous. I'm nervous about this, you can't stay. And then found another place. And also during this time they found work. They worked- they found work in a glass factory that was run by a man named Mr. Rilski, who's very-, played a very prominent role in their survival. And so, they found another place with nuns. And they stayed there and then they started to go to work. Then they'd get up in the morning, they'd go to work, come back at night and that was it.

**Interviewer**

Who in this town, if anyone, knew their real identity?

**Popowski**

The Mother Superior, you know, would know. They didn't tell all the nuns. And uh, Mr. Rilski, which is an interesting story on that about how he knew. But, he, they stayed the second place for a period of time and then one day they came, came back. And then that night became nervous as people around the neighborhood talking and you just can't stay here, and so, they went back. And by this time they had, they knew that, Mr. Rilski knew that they were Jewish girls. And because they were wondering, you know, during this time "does he know, does he not know?" And they were talking to him one day and he says, you know, "you're under my watch now." You know, later that day they said to each other, "He

knows." After that, they were talking to him one day and he said, they said, "why, why are you doing this? Why are you helping us?" And he says, you know, "I have two daughters, and if they were in trouble, or needed somebody, I would want someone to help them." And so, you know, I mean, you know as, as atrocious as the experience that they were going through, the silver lining is that there were people that were willing to help. And so, it also shows, you know, maybe not to the same extent, the goodness of people. And what they would do. So, they were staying in the second place one day, they came home somewhere, you know to the next morning, said "I don't have a place." So, they get to work and they tell Mr. Rilski and he says, "I know that the same priest, he may know of some other place." And he says "I'm going to give you the day off. Go over there, talk to the, you know, to that priest see if he- and see if, another home, with not-," some of them were serving the elderly, "We should go to this other place and see if they will help you out." And she went to that place, talked to the Mother Superior and said, "look, we'll be straight out with you, we're Jewish girls. We have papers, we are working. Can you just help us save by staying the night?" She did. They go back, they go to work next day and they come back and they said, you know, "can we talk to you?" She said, "Listen, you know we are Jewish girls. We're working. We are willing to give you all the money that we earn. If you will let us stay here." And the Mother Superior said, "no, you're not going to give us all your money, you're young girls, you will need some. You will give me some money, but you won't give it all to me." And that's where they stayed until the liberation in January '45.

**Interviewer**

Do you know the name of this Mother Superior?

**Popowski**

I don't. I've never-, I can't remember her mentioning that name.

**Interviewer**

So, you had told me that while they were working at the glass factory that they, they had a close call. Can you tell me about what that was?

**Popowski**

Well, I think people started talking in the factory. And there was a time that they-, so people-, that, there's some authorities that came to the factory and questioned them. And they questioned them about Catholicism and one thing about it, they were living as Catholics, you know, on the Polish side. And so they went to church, they went to mass. My mother said she knew the catechism better than most Catholics did. And so, they, they were practicing Catholicism. During this point, and the authorities came and were beginning to ask them questions about Catholicism. Apparently they answered them appropriately and showed their papers and, and so that they, they escaped that, that situation.

**Interviewer**

So, during this time, did they receive any word from home?

**Popowski**

They did. They knew, really before they got to Czestochowa they, they, you know, what happened to their parents. They knew that they had, you know, that when the trains came to take the Jews out and they were determined not to leave and they didn't, but they were found in the hiding place. And they were taken out and held in the school in Kaluszyn, where they attended school, and they were eventually taken to a field and shot in Kaluszyn. So, they never got to the camps because they were killed before because they tried to hide when they liquidated the town. And so, they had connections, there was-, also they had heard from the boyfriend of a cousin of theirs. Because they had gone to Warsaw one time while they were Czestochowa and he-, she said that he was the only person that knew where they were- he-, they gave him the address and he was really the only person that, that, you know, kind of knew where they were. And so, they, they kept things very close to the vest about their whereabouts, they didn't, they didn't reach out to all family members and say "hey, here we are."

**Interviewer**

Did they know what had happened to their brother?

**Popowski**

The brother also was going on the trains, and he jumped the train and ended up being in the partisans. And he, he didn't survive. He was killed about, about four or six months before the end of the war. And they had lost-, they had contact with him for a period of time, but eventually lost contact with him.

**Interviewer**

So, as they're going through and working every day in this glass factory, did they practice any Jewish ritual in secret or anything like?

**Popowski**

That, to my knowledge, no, 'cause they're their mission and their motive was to survive and, and not to lead-, give any indication of who they actually were.

**Interviewer**

So once 1945, the spring of '45 came, did they have a sense that things were going poorly for the Germans and that the, the war might be over soon?

**Popowski**

Yeah, it was really actually in January of 1945 when Russia invaded Poland. And they heard the bombing start and such and, you know, the, the glass factory wasn't working for a period of time during that. But during that time when it was, you know, they realized that things are changing and in the mother, you know, the head nun at the place where they were living came to them and said "you're free now." Question was, free from what? You know? And there was someone else who, either a friend or a relative who had somehow found out where they were and, and when this was all- after all this was taking place, they've gone back to the glass factory and the, you know, secretary or somebody who was doing at the factory said, you know, "the postman was here and they had a letter for you." And they- but he wouldn't leave it. So, they came back early the next day and waited for the postman. And when the postman arrived he said "I don't have a letter with me." So, what they did is they went to the post

office and they waited for every postman to come in until they found- got the letter and I don't know the name of the person from whom that letter came. I'd have to go back and see if Mom ever actually identified. And, who was back in Kaluszyn and said you know who found out he survived and then they ended up eventually going back to Kaluszyn. They went by train, they went by horse and buggy, they went by, by foot and I think she said it took three days to go 200 miles.

**Interviewer**

And what did they find when they got there?

**Popowski**

Not much. The flour mill was still standing, but it was not- it was nationalized. So, it- that was gone and that, you know, the town was just, she said in, in rubble. They did not have any known survivors, you know, I mean, you know, of whom they knew at that point. And then they found out, you know, that some friends had survived. And people that they knew and that they ended up in Warsaw with them. And, so that's how- that's the first step of what happened.

**Interviewer**

So, at this point, did your mother tell you what they were hoping to do next? What they, what they were looking to do?

**Popowski**

Well, they, what they were hoping to do is to unite with any family and eventually go to Palestine because there was an aunt and uncle who had left Europe prior to the war. And somehow to, to do, to make it there. What they eventually did is that when they saw that there was really, you know, nothing there in, in Poland, they smuggled into Germany and ended up at a DP camp in Schlachtensee.

**Interviewer**

And did they keep their, their, their correct identity? Or, you know, their, their real identity once they got to that point?

**Popowski**

Yeah, oh yeah, from that point, you know, I, I can't say I know that for a fact. I'm going to assume that once they got there and they knew they were in a safe place, and I think that's a word that my mother used to describe when she got to the DP. How do you feel safe? And I know that, she said once she, you know, they were just existing, even with the nuns, they didn't- I mean, they didn't have the robust meals, that to which are accustomed. She did when she had one of the first, what we would consider a "normal meal," she got sick 'cause her, her system was not used to, you know, having that type of nourishment.

**Interviewer**

And this camp, was it run by U.S. soldiers or allied- different allied soldiers?

**Popowski**

I'm not sure.

**Interviewer**

What were her first impressions? You said that she felt safe, when did this camp look like did she-?

**Popowski**

I think, you know, I think there was small apartments. I just think it was enclosed where, we can, enclosed by fence there, but it was it just a community of where people were like them were coming to gather, trying to, you know, somehow rebuild their lives.

**Interviewer**

So, what was life like in the camp? What did they, they-

**Popowski**

In the DP camp? I think that they were trying to find out what their next steps were, you know? And, also to mention is that you know through my- their aunt and uncle in Israel, there was also some distant relatives in the United States that got word that they had survived. And somehow found, you know, got-reached out to him and said, look, if you want to come to the United States, we will certainly help sponsor you to come to the United States, which is eventually what happened.

**Interviewer**

So how did your mother then meet your father at the DP camp?

**Popowski**

He was, you know, they had, you know, a community, if you will, and there are people who were, you know, kind of, you know, leading such certain efforts within the community, and he was one of them. As a matter of fact, their whole- my mother and aunts, whole plan at-, the goal at the time was to go to Palestine and that's what they were doing. And it was my father that said to them "look, also plan to, you know, do the work that it takes to get to the United States. You could always decide where you want to go," because they had people that would be willing to sponsor them. And so, and then eventually my mother and father started to date and they married in 1947.

**Interviewer**

Do you know what their wedding was like? Did they tell you stories?

**Popowski**

No, I just know that they got married and so.

**Interviewer**

What was your father's name?

**Popowski**

Henry Popowski.

**Interviewer**

And where was he born?

**Popowski**

In Kaluszyn, he's from the same hometown and they didn't know each other growing up 'cause there's an 11 year age difference. They knew each other's families and my mother was friends with some of his siblings, but not him. And he left, he left Kaluszyn, you know, when he was about 18. So that would have made my mother, what, seven? So, that, you know, they, they would not have connected at that point.

**Interviewer**

How did he survive the war?

**Popowski**

He was in the Polish army. And he was also in the Warsaw Ghetto and when they liquidated the Warsaw Ghetto he was moved from camp to camp. He was liberated from Mauthausen and then ended up in the DP camp.

**Interviewer**

And did he have any other family members who survived?

**Popowski**

He did. He was one of eight children. And he and two brothers survived.

**Interviewer**

And did they end up in the same DP camp? Together?

**Popowski**

They were, I think, for a period of time, yes. And then the two brothers ended up going to Palestine. Which, you know, eventually that territory eventually became Israel. And so, we, we have family in Israel for that reason.

**Interviewer**

Did you think share anything with you about what the process of applying for US visas and all of that was like for them?

**Popowski**

Yes, they had to get some affidavits and, to be able to, to come to the United States and, and the and the Zucker family which was a family in, in, in the United States in Charleston, SC which is why they ended up in Charleston. So, you know, once you get the affidavits and let us know, and, and we will make the arrangements for the, you know, so they had to get the affidavits. My oldest brother was born

in Germany in 1949, and they had, they had to wait until he was six months old before they could come over. So, my aunt actually came over before they did.

**Interviewer**

And, did anybody else help them? They, they had these sponsors, were there any Jewish organizations or other?

**Popowski**

Joint had some involvement in, in helping them to get-

**Interviewer**

And that's the Jewish Joint Distribution, correct?

**Popowski**

Correct.

**Interviewer**

And, what did they tell you about their journey? What was their journey like to get to the US?

**Popowski**

So, they left in November of 1949. It was on the General McRae, that was the name of the boat. So, here's my mother and my father, my oldest brother, who was six months at the time, and my mother is pregnant with my second brother. And they said it was a two-week boat trip and that the women, you know, that if they had small children, the men and women couldn't stay together. So, all the women who had young children stayed in one place and so that my parents weren't together on the boat, they would see each other, but they, you know, they didn't have the same quarters, if you will, on the boat. And it was, yeah, you know, I'm sure they had turbulence. And you know, my, my mother was pregnant at the time, so I'm sure that there was some rough times there, but it was also a time of renewal because they were rebuilding family. They came over, it was, as I mentioned, it was a two-week boat trip. They came into New York harbor. They didn't come into Ellis Island, but they did dock in New York, and it was on the eve of Thanksgiving. And they couldn't come off the boat because the immigration officials were not there to, to go through the processing, so they had to stay on the boat on Thanksgiving Day. They got a great turkey meal, but they did not know the significance of it because it's an American holiday and what do they know from? But, they've got a great turkey meal on the boat and then, the next day, Joseph Zucker and his wife Rachel, who sponsored them, Joseph was there with his daughter to meet them. And they- he jokingly said when they first started this conversation, you know, it was mom, and, and dad and, and, and my aunt of course, but you know, in terms of family unit. And he said, "you know, you started with two and now we've got, you know, three and a half." Because it was not, my young, my brother and my mother was pregnant. He, he was joking with them, and so they met them, they had an apartment set up for them in Charleston. So, there was some place when they got there and my father first got work, his trade was carpentry, and he got a job that didn't last long because they had difficulty with the language barrier, you know.

**Interviewer**

Your relatives are they- did they have a car? Did they drive them to Charleston from New York?

**Popowski**

I'm, I'm thinking it's a train. I think they took a train. And you know, I- you know, and when they saw the apartment, they thought they were in heaven. But you know, they saw apartment, they saw crib for the baby, they saw food in the refrigerator, so.

**Interviewer**

So, you mentioned this language barrier. What languages did they speak?

**Popowski**

Yiddish and Polish.

**Interviewer**

And, were there any services set up to help them learn English?

**Popowski**

Kind of learned it on the fly. My mother tells a story, you know, she said, "I just learned it by reading." And she said one day she got a knock on the door and it was the paperboy. And he wanted her to subscribe to the Charleston newspaper and she says, well, you know, somehow she was, she, she could speak enough to communicate to him that, you know, I don't really know English. He says, I tell you what to do, I'll give you a three week subscription, and see how you like it. And, you know, and, 'til the day she left Charleston, which was 2007, she had a subscription to the newspaper.

**Interviewer**

So, what was their neighborhood like? Where was this apartment?

**Popowski**

It was in the in the Peninsula city of Charleston, small apartment. Address was 87 1/2 Warren St. But, it was a community for us. I don't remember I was-, when I was born, they were living there, but, you know, it was, they, you know, shortly thereafter moved around the corner, and bought their first home.

**Interviewer**

So, you came along in 19...?

**Popowski**

52. So, my oldest brother was born in April 1949, my second brother was born in June of '50. So, they're 14 months apart. I was born in August of 1952, so a little bit more than two years younger than my second brother. And then my sister was born in 1956, in August of '56. So, so, there's seven years between oldest and youngest.

**Interviewer**

So, what were some of your first memories of your neighborhood?

**Popowski**

You know, it, it was, you know, we had, you know, Jewish people and non Jewish people. A childhood friend of mine, my first friend, was Catholic. She lived two or three doors down, to this day we're still friends. She was a year older than I am. But there's also, you know, Jewish people on the street and in the neighborhood. We were probably a 10 minute walk to the synagogue. I thought it was great. I mean, I, you know, you don't know anything differently, but I, you know, I thought I felt safe. I know certainly, felt loved.

**Interviewer**

How about your parents, what were some of your first memories of your parents?

**Popowski**

You know, I don't, I don't, I didn't have any other parents, so I don't have, you know, you don't have much for which to compare but, yeah. Some of the things that may be different is that, you know, when they spoke to each other, they always spoke in Yiddish. So, if we were in the room, you know, they could speak Yiddish and we wouldn't have any idea what they're talking about until we got the hang of some of the Yiddish. We could get the gist of what they were saying. Then, when that occurred, they would just go to Polish and we, we were totally lost. So as- so, when maybe some of my friends and their parents needed to talk about something, they would say go in another room. They didn't have to do that with us, all they had to do was switch languages.

**Interviewer**

Did they ever talk about their past?

**Popowski**

Eventually, they did. What they did talk about in our younger years is that there were people that preceded us and people that we don't know. One of the things that they, I can remember them saying that, you know, I felt they- my parents felt like they had two families. One before the war and one after the war and the two didn't intersect. Like, like you would expect the family to, to intersect.

**Interviewer**

Do they- did they have a lot of friends in the neighborhood?

**Popowski**

They did, but a lot, you know, there were a lot of Kaluszyner. There were a lot, you know, there was back, I guess in the early 20th century, there was some man from, you know, from Kaluszyn and actually settled in Charleston, and there are people that followed. There was a Kaluszyner society in Charleston, so they were, you know, there are commonalities of people there. So, they, they had that connection and there were also some other survivors there too.

**Interviewer**

And at this point you mentioned that you could walk to synagogue. Was Judaism still a big part of your life?

**Popowski**

Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah, very much so. Very much so.

**Interviewer**

And were you raised Orthodox?

**Popowski**

Orthodox, yes. It was the Orthodox Synagogue to which we live close.

**Interviewer**

And, in Charleston, you mentioned that you had friends who were Catholic. You had- Jewish friends. Were most of your all of your friends white?

**Popowski**

Jewish friends.

**Interviewer**

Jewish friends. Were most of your, or all of, your friends white?

**Popowski**

Yes, in, in the younger, yes.

**Interviewer**

So did you have, did you have a sense that there was this other group of people, that there were black people?

**Popowski**

Oh yeah, because they lived close by. They lived in the neighborhood. I mean they lived, you know, around the, you know, 'cause they lived literally around the corner in some homes, so the answer is yes.

**Interviewer**

But was there a clear kind of line of segregation that you remember?

**Popowski**

Not in the neighborhoods, but, you know, I certainly have memories in the department store of the water faucets where it says, you know, colored only and white only. I do have those memories.

**Interviewer**

And what about school? What was your education?

**Popowski**

I went to a public school. So, we all eventually ended up- my second brother, David, when they, the rabbi came to my parents one day, 'cause he wanted to start a day school with his class. My oldest brother was in public school, so David went first year to the Hebrew Day School, but they didn't- they only started with the 1st grade and they didn't advance it to the next. They didn't, I guess, have the resources or whatever. For whatever reason, they didn't advance it to the second grade, so he joined my brother in the public school. I always start I went to the day school kindergarten, but immediately went into the public schools. My sister went to the day school, I think until the 7th grade, and then went to the public schools.

**Interviewer**

How did the public school, did, did the public school teach about World War II and all, or was it too recent?

**Popowski**

I'm sure I had it in history class. I don't have any kind of memories, you know, in bridging my parents to it, but I know we studied it. But I, you know, I can't, I don't have any strong recollections of that.

**Interviewer**

And was there talk about the Holocaust? Was that something that came up in conversation in your community at all or was it-?

**Popowski**

I don't, yeah, I mean there was, there was conversation about it, but in terms of my parents' story, they didn't really, you know, come sit, sit, sit us down like what we need to talk to you. One other thing I'll tell you about in terms of school is that my mother tells the story when I was in about the second grade or so, they had some program at school where grandparents came. And they weren't at this point, hadn't told us, you know, about all the things that had happened during the war. And she said, I came home from school that day and I don't remember this, but she does, and she said, I said, "why don't I have grandparents?" And she told me the truth, she said, you know, "they didn't survive."

**Interviewer**

Did you have other friends who had similar situations?

**Popowski**

Yeah, I did. Some, you know, some of who were also, you know, also children of survivors.

**Interviewer**

So, growing up through, through school, what, what were your favorite subjects? What'd you like to study?

**Popowski**

I did like history and civics were some of my favorite subjects.

**Interviewer**

And were you in public school when, after Brown versus Board of Education?

**Popowski**

Oh yeah, well, Brown versus Board of Education, because of history, 1954, I was born in 52, so, so, yes.

**Interviewer**

I imagine it took a little longer for integration to come to Charleston.

**Popowski**

Yeah, I, I started having people-, an integrated class in the eighth grade.

**Interviewer**

Do you have memories of what that was like?

**Popowski**

Yeah, I mean, you know, it was fine. I mean, I, some of my best, you know, closest friends played on basketball team, you know, with African American people. I know that there was, you know, curfew when they were trying to, you know, you know. The hospital workers actually were trying to, you know, unionized or the-, you know, the, the blacks, and we had to be under curfew like you know, they, they, cancelled the prom for when I was of age at that time because of that. I remember the name of the first person that integrated the high school, his name was Clarence Alexander. I remember one of my high school, you know, classmates, who was African American. Her name was Betty Jean Higgins. I don't know what happened to them, but I do remember the names.

**Interviewer**

So, what did you hope to do with your future, you know when you're in High School, did you, did you have Career goals or plans?

**Popowski**

I knew I was going to go to college. My plan was to be a high school social studies teacher. And that was my major. I went to the University of South Carolina. My siblings went to the University of Georgia. I went to South Carolina. When I graduated, that field was a dime a dozen, so I just entered the workforce. I worked and I had various careers. I worked in the insurance industry. I worked for an automatic company that did automated services for insurance agencies. My most recent career was in human resources. I retired as a human resources officer at Jewish Home Life here in Atlanta, which is- serves the elder care community.

**Interviewer**

And so, you were in college, what years were you in college?

**Popowski**

1970 to 74, is my undergraduate. I went back and got my masters, but it was 20 years after I grad, got my graduate degree.

**Interviewer**

And was there a lot of Vietnam War protesting and stuff that you remember going on when you were there? Was that something that touched your life in any way?

**Popowski**

The way it touched my life is I can certainly remember because they were, you know, getting draft cards and my brothers were of age. And they had high numbers, I think I can even remember the numbers. I think one brother had 212 and another one had 346. So, they never got drafted, but I like, that's a, that's a clear memory I have.

**Interviewer**

So how did you eventually come to Atlanta?

**Popowski**

So, I graduated from college and I'm, at that point I didn't know, I didn't want to go back to Charleston. My oldest brother was living here, so I came here and got a job and, cause a lot of, a lot of, you know, people from the, in the southeast, migrated to Atlanta. Lot of Jewish kids did that.

**Interviewer**

So, when, when did you really- did you ever really have a conversation with your parents about their experiences that was, you know, kind of complete or frank about what they had lost and what they went through?

**Popowski**

First recollection is when I was either, I think I was in the sixth, maybe eighth grade, probably the 8th grade I had to do a speech. I decided to do it on my mother and I can remember saying, "OK mom, tell me what to say" and she says "no, you asked me questions and I'll answer them." And that's, and so it was really about her war experience and it was the first time I really had some type of chronology to what happened, and that was really my first vivid memory I mean, they talked about family from before the war and such like that but, but that was like really, first clear indication that, you know, of the experience.

**Interviewer**

So, you mentioned that you have family in Israel and did, did you travel to Israel with your parents ever? Or-?

**Popowski**

Not with my parents, but I had been to Israel numerous times.

**Interviewer**

And you told me a particular story about going in 2001?

**Popowski**

I did. In 2001 I went on a Federation trip. It was an all women's trip, small group, 40 to 45 women. And every trip you go to Israel, so, if it's any Jewish group, they're always going to take you to Yad Vashem for the Israeli memorial to the Holocaust. This was my first trip to Israel since my mother had arranged to have a plaque put for one of the Wozniak brothers, in the, on the Avenue of the Righteous Gentiles as you enter Yad Vashem. So, on that trip, as we were heading to Yad Vashem, I said to the tour guide, I said, "look, when we go to Yad Vashem, when we get there, I want to see if I can find this plaque." And she said, "Okay, we'll go up and look, you know, look it up on the computer and see if we can find location," etc. And so, when we got there, the, and we're getting off the bus, there was a lot of construction going on. A lot of things that they were renovating and part of that was the Avenue of the Righteous, where they were doing this work. And we were off the bus and as we were gathering, I said to, to the group which I was traveling, I said, "look, if you're going through this, I'm looking for this particular name: Wozniak." And I mean literally, I think somebody no further than this door of this room from me looks down, says "Sarah, It's right here." And if I can grab this for a moment, I will show you pictures from that moment. And if you want it, so, this is me in, looking a little bit younger than I am today, at the plaque of Wozniak. This is a close up of that same plaque. And this is me in the part of Yad Vashem that's called the Wall of the Cities and these are the cities that were liquidated of the Jews, and this is my parents' hometown. And so, let me see how they spell it here, they spell it K-A-L-U-S-Z-Y-N, Kaluszyn. So, that's the memory that I have of that moment and to this day when I see, run into people who are on that trip, we reminisce about this 'cause it was such one of those "A-ha" moments, that, you know, you, you couldn't script.

**Interviewer**

So why do you think it's important for students to learn about the Holocaust?

**Popowski**

I think it's important to find, to know the facts of history. And what, you know, people did to other people just because of, you know, of their, you know, religious, cultural affiliation and for no other reason. You know, as I think, depending on the ages, depends on how much depth you go. But they need to know that it happened and they need to know the lessons of what we learn from that. And how do we avoid that, something like that, happening again? Even though there have been atrocities since then, and we know that. But they need to know. I think they need to know because we know history can repeat itself.

**Interviewer**

What do you think-, what do you think are some of those lessons?

**Popowski**

Well, you know, my mother did a video for South Carolina ETV and it's a clip I use at the end 'cause the interviewer asks "is there anything you want to add?" She says "don't judge. Don't judge because somebody looks different than you. Don't judge because people have different accents. Judge people on their deeds. Judge them on what they do," and I think that is one of the clear lessons. Don't judge them because they're part of a group. Don't stereotype people and make assumptions about, you know, this person must be bad because they look this way. Or they must be bad because they're this color, or they're this, they must be bad because they're not like me.

**Interviewer**

It's a powerful lesson. What do you hope that future generations will take away from learning your family stories specifically?

**Popowski**

That it really happened. That it's this is not just something that's in the history books. This affected real people. It upended people's lives. People lost family. A lot of family. My mother had numerous, you know, aunts, uncles and cousins who did not survive. Most of her family did not survive the war. And to lose family in this manner for no other reason than the fact that they were Jewish. They need to know that this is just not, you know, something that's printed in a history book. This affected real people. I saw the pain. I heard the pain in my family, my parents. And, I want them to know that, that I don't want anybody to go through what they endured.

**Interviewer**

So, here's that question: is there anything I haven't asked you about today that you'd like to share?

**Popowski**

I think I have pretty much covered it all. Uh, you know, it was man's inhumanity to man. And we don't-, and we, we're better than this. I think regardless of, of the color of our skin, regardless of our ethnicity, we are better than this, than, you know, what happened during, during the Holocaust. And it's each, it's individual people carrying and doing the right thing, not judging. So, this is something that each and every person can, in which they can have an impact.

**Interviewer**

Thank you. Thank you so much for your time and for recording this legacy series interview with us today. I really appreciate it.

**Popowski**

Thank you. I appreciate it.