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Interview with Lena (Mrs. Joseph) Blatman, Lithuanian immigrant, in her home on Wilson Road, Wilmington, Delaware, June 30, 1969, by Myron L. Lazarus.

Q This is a recording of the Oral History Program of the University of Delaware. We are interviewing Mrs. Blatman, and the interviewer is Myron Lazarus. What is your first name?
A Lena.

Q And your husband's name was?
A Was Joe, Joseph.

Q And how old did you say you were?
A Well, I'll be 67 on October--77 October 1st.
Q 77?
A I'll be 77 October the 1st.

Q Um hmm. And you mentioned that you were born in Lithuania.
A It belonged to Russia.
Q But it was the area that was considered Lithuania.
A Yeah, it was the area, because they called me a Litlock. So I was born in Lithuania.

Q Was it a small town, or was it in the country?
A No, it was in the country. It was in the country.

Q In the country . . .
A We had the same as every farmer, as little as we had.

Q Your father was a farmer?
A He was a farmer, he was a peddler. My father died, I must have been--I think eleven years old. He died in 1903, I was born in '92.

Q Um hmm. Now he was a farmer, you say.
A He was a farmer, he was a peddler, he used to peddle on the side, see.
Q But did he have his own farm?
A We had a piece of ground, but we raised--we always had a garden, we had chickens, we had sometimes we'd buy a horse. otherwise we'd do it all by hand. We did all kinds of farming. We had potatoes, we had all vegetables.
Q Do you remember how big the farm was?
A I couldn't tell you.
Q But he did a little of both, huh.
A Yeah, he did a little of both.
Q Was it near a major city?
A Well, I don't know about the meters, the way they count them here. We had a small town near about—which it was called Ravioreczk [sp]—I don't know how much how it is a mile—how it is, how many miles. I know you needed, we walked.
Q What was the name of it again?
A I could never tell you.
Q Um hm. That's all right. Now what did you do—your mother raised you when your father died.
A My father died and my mother took over and did the same thing. We used to—I milked cows, I fed the chickens, I planted potatoes, I planted cucumbers, radishes, all vegetables. And we had hay and we had—we used to call it corn, which is rye. Very small pieces of everything. And we always had a cow.
Q But your mother couldn't peddle, the way your father . . .
A She did.
Q She did peddle.
A She did. She used to carry a pack on her back and a basket to pick up eggs or trade with the farmers, and go once a week she to the market and sell it.
Q Into the city?
A Into the city. And that's all. In 1909 I left with the sister.
Q With just the sister.
A Just the sister.
Q Do you know exactly why you left?
A Why we left? The same what everybody else left, to look—she had a sister here in Shippensburg.
Q Who had this sister in Shippensburg?
A My mother.
Q: Right, an aunt.
A: Yeah, so sister and a brother-in-law. So we came to Shippensburg in 1909.
Q: Why didn't your mother go with you?
A: Because they couldn't afford it.
Q: But it was your mother who arranged for you to get here.
A: Yes, my--one ticket my uncle sent for one of us, and the other one my mother paid. The fare at that time, I think, was $45.00.
Q: Did you have a passport?
A: We had passport to get into Germany, and from there we went by boat.
Q: Where did you get the boat, at Hamburg?
A: We got the boat in Liverpool.
Q: Well, you went from Germany to England.
A: Yeah, to England, to Liverpool. In Liverpool we stayed I think nine days. They had something they found that Russia had some kind of a sickness, so they wouldn't let us through. So we stayed in Liverpool. We were 14 days on the boat. We came to Philadelphia and with tags on us, and they shipped us to Shippensburg. And when we stopped in Harrisburg to change the train, my sister went right back to Philadelphia because she was a dressmaker, and I wasn't, I didn't have any trade. So I stayed around. I was a while in Harrisburg. But I think at the very beginning, either New Year's or something, I know there was a big strike in Philadelphia. I came to Philadelphia, and I went--worked for $2.00 a week and learned how to be a cigar maker.
Q: Is that right? Well, let's get back just a little ways, before you were a cigar maker. You mentioned that you came here for the same reason everyone else came. You mean for more oppor ... .
A: The same as everyone else, we were looking for more opportunity.
Q: Right. But was there any persecution or any other reasons for leaving Lithuania?
A: At the time there was very little. Persecution started in 1916. And we were all here at that time. My brother I think came, also came by himself, I think in 1912. And my mother came April, 1913, with four girls.
Q: How big was your family altogether, now?
A: Well, then, we were seven--six girls and a brother.
Q: Did they go to Shippensburg, also, when they ...
A No, they came to Philadelphia because we were here. We had a home for them, my sister and I and my brother. And they came to Philadelphia.

Q Now your sister you say met you here when you--is that right?
A No. My sister came--the oldest sister came with me.

Q O.K. When the aunt--there was an aunt here.
A The aunt was in Shippensburg.

Q O.K. Right. Well, what was she doing--what kind of occupation were they in?
A They were in the junk business. They're still scattered someplace--some of them are still there. The uncle and aunt's now dead, but the children are still somewhere scattered around, I don't know where.

Q And then you became a cigar maker.
A I became a cigar maker.

Q This was in Philadelphia?
A In Philadelphia.

Q Right. Where in Philadelphia did you live?
A I lived on 5th Street and I worked at 12th and Washington Avenue. There was a big cigar factory, Bayard Brothers. Leave it to me. I don't remember what was yesterday, but I can tell you that. My mother came as I said in 1913. I had already met my--I had already went around with my husband. She came with the four girls. She came in April and I was married June 15, 1913. And he was a baker.

Q Your husband was a baker?
A Yeah. And I lived in Philadelphia....

Q Well, once you got married, you no longer made cigars, you didn't continue.
A Well, I went back once, but--no, I didn't continue. Once for some kind of a bakers' strike or something, I went back when my son was I think two years old, my first son. No, he was already younger than that.

Q Did you belong by any chance to the cigar union?
A No, there was no union, only the bakery had--bakers had a union. And they belonged not to the C.I.O., what was it the A. F.....

Q A.F. of L.?
A L.? They had a very strong union, the bakers always had a union.
Q Uh huh. Then he worked for somebody else.
A He worked for somebody else. If I remember correctly, he worked and then we went into the business, in Philadelphia.
Q What do you mean? What business was this?
A Baker business.
Q He opened his own ...
A His own bakery. And I was in Philadelphia 'til 1926. I had four children. I had two sons and two daughters, and I moved to Wilmington.
Q Why did you go to Wilmington from Philadelphia?
A He had friends here, they wanted a bakery and they built a bakery for us. And we went in business. And we were here together 'til 1938. Christmas, 1938, he passed away. And I was left with the children, with six children.
Q Uh huh. Did you continue with the bakery?
A Yes. I continued with the bakery ...
Q Where was the bakery by the way?
A The first one we start, 213 West Second Street. In fact, 213 West Second Street, I have a pair of twin girls. They look like twins like you and I. But I stayed there, I and the children, 'til war broke out.
Q Um hmm.
A My son was married--my oldest son was married six months when my husband died.
Q You said the first bakery was on Second Street. Where was the second bakery?
A We used to--when we first came there, we were in--baked on Parish Street. Del Campo's Bakery was--I don't know if there was Del Campo's--oh, no, I don't remember who it belonged to, but we baked bread and had a store, 209, until they built for us the bakery at 213.
Q I see. But this was still Second Street.
A Still Second, always Second Street.
Q Uh huh. Do you remember much about Second Street?
A Well, Second Street--how long are you in Wilmington?
Q Oh, a good number of years. I want you to say.
A Well, it was a big business street. There was a lot of stores, a lot of
groceries, a lot of butchers, Jewish butchers—was a Jewish market. Everybody came to Second Street. Then they started to spread out in the later years, very much later.

Q: But Second Street was the center of the Jewish community.

A: Second Street was the center of the Jewish community. And in fact my twins were born in 213 West Second Street.

Q: Where did you live, upstairs from the store?

A: Upstairs. And then the war broke out, took my son. And I still stayed.

Q: This was your first son.

A: No, the second one. The first one is living, thank God. He married in Philadelphia. He was a pharmacist, he became a pharmacist and married another girl in pharmacy. And he graduated a chemist.

Q: Did he go to Delaware? Did he go to the University of Delaware?

A: Well, he went to Philadelphia College of Pharmacy and Science. And he graduated in chemistry. And as per usual, his name was Blatman, he couldn't get a job.

Q: Um hmm. As a pharmacist.

A: No, as a chemist. So he married...

Q: I see. Did he have a bachelor's degree, do you remember?

A: Yeah. So he married the girl that he met in college and she opened a drugstore and he went back to college for pharmacy. And he graduated, naturally, has two children. His son just graduated pharmacy. And my daughter-in-law's father was a pharmacist. So my grandson that just graduated the 9th—the 9th was it, that...

Q: June?

A: 9th of June, I think he graduated. It's the third generation at Philadelphia College of Pharmacy.

Q: He also is a pharmacist?

A: Yeah.

Q: Uh huh. That's very good.

A: And my daughter—they both—well, my son is not a pharmacist now. He is secretary of the Philadelphia Retail Druggist Association. Pick up that box—there is a magazine there. Just pick up the box. Here, this shows my son.

Q: Oh, I see. Um hmm.
A And he's secretary of the Philadelphia Retail Druggist Association. Belongs to everyplace. This is some council that he belongs to.

Q Do you have any other memories, besides your family, of Second Street?

A I have, what kind of memories, there was a lot of Jews on Second Street. I knew 'em all. I knew every Jew in Wilmington, but I don't remember. Since I'm out of there--I'm out of there 16 years. It was 16 years [inaudible] that I closed. I stood and I worked with the men in the shop, and I raised the children.

Q Did you do baking yourself?

A Yes. I worked with the men, made bagels. I was just talkin' the other night about working with somebody that has perspiration--I says, when they walk in on a hot day like today in a bakery, they don't work with the men. They find out. And so I married off the four girls. The last one that got married is this one, so she married a man that they decided they wouldn't leave me there.

Q You mean on Second Street?

A On Second Street. So I got sick and I left the place, and I lived with them.

Q What does your son-in-law do?

A My son-in-law is dead.

Q Oh, I see.

A So, I came here with them. They have two children to raise. That's all.

Q That's a very good story. What are you . . .

A I lost my son in the war.

Q Yes. What was he before he was in the army?

A In the bakery.

Q Um hmm. Do you know what outfit, what kind of a unit he was in? Was he in Germany or Italy, or . . .

A He was in both. He was first--he went over to the Pacific with [sounds like "packing mule"]--they call it field artillery.

Q Field artillery? Um hmm.

A They wanted him to go to Officers Training School there, he just didn't want to go. Then they came one day and told him that he can go home to go to officers school. So he came and became a second lieutenant and went over there and got killed.
Q This was in the Pacific.
A No, he got killed in Germany.
Q Oh, I see.
A He was first in the Pacific. And that's all.
Q Uh huh. Do you see any big contrasts when you used to live on Second Street with life today? What big changes do you see?
A When I think of Second Street, it was better than it is today here.
Q Tell me about it.
A You was not afraid to go out. I lived with the [sounds like shrouts]--I had a shrouts in the house for $9.00--well, you know what a shrouts is, don't you?
Q Yes.
A For $9.00 a week. She took care of the children and the house and everything. Today you can't get a shrouts for $15.00 a day. And that's about all.
Q Did you belong to any organizations besides . . .
A Every one that there is, I belonged and I belong. I belong to the [sounds like "Schulls"], I belonged to . . .
Q Which temple did you belong to?
A I belonged to the Adas Kodesch and the [inaudible] Shel Emeth, now it's both together. Belong to the Jewish--to the Old Age Home.
Q Kutz Home?
A Not the Kutz Home, they were on West Street. And I know that today they're big shots, all right, big cars and they go soliciting, collecting, sell tickets and everything. But when I--when we started--I didn't walk because I didn't have the time. But we walked when we wanted something done. And that's all.
Q Was your husband active in these organizations, too, before he died?
A Well, my husband came from Philadelphia, he belonged to Workman's Circle, they had some got transferred here. I belonged here, I never went out.
Q Was he active in Workman's Circle?
A Well, he was mostly [inaudible]--he was a worker, he belonged to the union, but for the Circle, we never had time. Number one, I had six children. We had a bakery. Where does anybody go? After my children left, the second night Rosh Hashanah we used to go to a movie together. Otherwise, we could never go. Who knew from babysitters? If I went to see a movie,
he stayed home.

Q Life was a little tougher then, huh?

A But it was better.

Q Now you say it was better because you were younger and you had your family.

A I had the family, yeah, I had a family, God bless 'em, we were a big family, [inaudible] sisters. Just lost a sister—we lost one young one early, but I lost one now. My oldest sister that I came with, she's older than me. She's past 80. She's in the York House in Philadelphia. But she had no children, so she's alone. And that's all. That's all there is to it.

Q Do you like Mayfield?

A I like anyplace. I don't go no place. First place, I didn't have to be guided—it's gonna be 12 years—the children, one is 17 and one is 14. So I raised them. And that's all.

Q Well, thank you very much.

[END OF INTERVIEW]