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Mr. Israel Plafker

[0:00:00]

Interviewer: This is a recording in the oral history program of the University of Delaware. We are interviewing Mr. Israel Plafker. Mr. Plafker, where were you born?

Mr. Plafker: Is Austria, Galicia.

Interviewer: Austria, Galicia.

Mr. Plafker: Yeah.

Interviewer: How long ago is that?

Mr. Plafker: How long ago? 1897.

Interviewer: 1897. How long did you live...

Mr. Plafker: Excuse me, 1887.

Interviewer: 1887.

Mr. Plafker: Yeah, 1887.

Interviewer: How long did you live in Austria.

Mr. Plafker: Until I was 19 years old.

Interviewer: So you're 19.

[inaudible] [0:00:43] – [inaudible] [0:02:58]

Mr. Plafker: And after that I went to another city and a year I worked in about my father's grocery store.

Interviewer: What city was that?

Mr. Plafker: Parlov, Parlov.

Interviewer: Did you remember the city you were born in?

Mr. Plafker: *[inaudible]* [0:03:35] another city towards a farm it's called – it was called – you wouldn't be able to spell it.

Interviewer: It's all right. *[inaudible]* [0:03:51].

Mr. Plafker: Yeah Sadbush *[phonetic]* [0:03:53]. That was near the city of *[inaudible]* [0:04:00].

Interviewer: Why did you leave from?

Mr. Plafker: Well I leave from when I got to the army.

Interviewer: Oh I see. And of course this is the way – you could get out of the army.

Mr. Plafker: Yeah.

Interviewer: Because the authorities couldn't find where or...?

Mr. Plafker: Well no, I got scared foot, I was 19 years old. If you're sent in the army territory you're 21, so that gives you enough time even to come back. That was then I was going to the United States. So I took a passport and go to Germany. Once I am in Germany you can go wherever you want to.

Interviewer: But your father was pretty well off. I mean you say he was a manager.

Mr. Plafker: Yes, pretty well off. Well can call it well off, you have to make a living that's all.

[0:05:00]

Interviewer: But did you see some education to become a manager of a farm? I mean it wasn't – what size farm was it?

Mr. Plafker: It was a good – it belonged to do a well-to-do man, well-to-do people and he was managing the farm as long as I can remember.

Interviewer: And then you say you live with your uncle while you were there?

Mr. Plafker: And then I went with my uncle. I stayed at my uncle for about a year. And then I went somewhere else.

Interviewer: Where did you go?

Mr. Plafker: I told you I was going to be *[inaudible]* [0:05:40].

Interviewer: It was a department store?

Mr. Plafker: No, no, private, a private owned store.

Interviewer: Own store.

Mr. Plafker: Own store. Of course it was all like selling all kinds of things even selling Christmas toys, selling business toys, pick **[inaudible] [0:06:05]** cars, groceries, cigarettes, tobacco, I mean, every damn thing, everything you own.

Interviewer: Well you did this for a good number of years, for let's say you were 13?

Mr. Plafker: Yeah I was there. Then I was there in one place for about two years and then went to another place for another city. The city was called **[inaudible] [0:06:36]**. And I stayed there for two years.

Interviewer: Working also?

Mr. Plafker: Also. Then I getting to be 19, I thought it was time.

Interviewer: To go to the United States?

Mr. Plafker: To go.

Interviewer: Well can you remember much about life there? What was it like? I mean were you...

Mr. Plafker: Poor.

Interviewer: Poor?

Mr. Plafker: Poor.

Interviewer: Let's say you were poor when you're on the farm and also when you were clerking in the store?

Mr. Plafker: Well I was – I wasn't rich. I was poor. I made – I got by food and living there and with a little money.

Interviewer: You're pretty independent weren't you?

Mr. Plafker: Yeah, I was independent for myself. Then when I went to go to Europe, I mean to the United States, my brother in law that was here in the United States send me a passage to come to the United States.

Interviewer: Your brother in law you say?

Mr. Plafker: My brother in law.

Interviewer: That's your sister's husband?

Mr. Plafker: My sister's husband, yeah.

Interviewer: Did you have much contact with your parents I mean from this year?

Mr. Plafker: Yes, sure, sure, sure. It wasn't so far away. I come home once in a while.

Interviewer: Can you think of any experiences that are still with you about Austria other than being poor and of course wanting to come to this country? Well for instance did you – did you – did you feel any discrimination against you as a Jew?

Mr. Plafker: Oh, that's prevalent there, always as prevalent.

Interviewer: In Austria?

Mr. Plafker: Sure. They don't like the Jew there. At no time they don't like Jew there, no. Jew there, in fact, they were all Catholics. They were all Catholic. And Jew is always on top of the list. They don't like they do business with the Jew. They contempt the Jew and the Jews have, for instance saloons like. They come to drink there and had something to say about the Jew. And the Jew had to keep quiet.

Interviewer: You felt no particularly loyalty to Austria?

Mr. Plafker: No.

Interviewer: A reason for leaving there.

Mr. Plafker: No.

Interviewer: Not anymore?

Mr. Plafker: No.

Interviewer: Did you have any serious discrimination that they attempted violence on you?

[0:09:59]

Mr. Plafker: No, no, no. We lived in a farm wise, we stayed in the farm. There were all very, very few Jews around, here and there. And mostly peasants and my father was there in that farm. He was managing all the none Jews, all the Catholics, he was. But they didn't like the Jew but they work for them. They make a living out of there.

Interviewer: And this farm was owned by a Jew?

Mr. Plafker: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah. Well you say there was a little Jewish community because after all you were there. What was that like?

Mr. Plafker: That was in another city. And now just for my uncle and two children. I stayed with my uncle there and obviously, how much is out there, I can't tell. How much they like.

Interviewer: Well in this city were you taught, what was the size of the community?

Mr. Plafker: Well it was also a farm community.

Interviewer: Community, what was the occupation of most of the people?

Mr. Plafker: Most of the people?

Interviewer: I mean that where you were taught.

Mr. Plafker: Also farming.

Interviewer: Farming?

Mr. Plafker: Also farming.

Interviewer: Now, you say that your brother in law help you get over this country, where was he living in this country?

Mr. Plafker: New York.

Interviewer: In New York.

Mr. Plafker: New York. That's where I lived.

Interviewer: And he sent you the money?

Mr. Plafker: He sent me the ticket, the pass ticket on the boat.

Interviewer: Where did you get them then?

Mr. Plafker: In Hamburg, Germany.

Interviewer: Hamburg, Germany. Did you have any trouble going from Austria to Europe?

Mr. Plafker: No, no, not at all.

Interviewer: You were still kind of underage, young.

Mr. Plafker: Yeah 19 years old.

Interviewer: Did you come alone?

Mr. Plafker: I came alone. Of course I came alone. I don't know how many people there were on the boat, but I was pretty much myself. I had no friend or a relative with me. Actually I got a pretty friendly with people on the boat. And when I came here, then they were lost.

Interviewer: What kind of a trip was it?

Mr. Plafker: It was 15 days on the boat is enough.

Interviewer: It wasn't like cattle boat or something like that?

Mr. Plafker: No, no, it was a passenger boat. I still remember the name of it, Pennsylvania.

Interviewer: Pennsylvania, it's an American boat.

Mr. Plafker: American boat too.

Interviewer: And you landed in New York?

Mr. Plafker: Yeah.

Interviewer: And how long did you stay in New York?

Mr. Plafker: I stayed in New York 10 years.

Interviewer: What was the occupation with your brother in law then?

Mr. Plafker: He was a presser, press American, a shop they were making vest.

Interviewer: That's coming back vest.

Mr. Plafker: Huh?

Interviewer: That's coming back.

Mr. Plafker: It's coming back, yeah. And I did line the trade of making vests and I worked as a vest maker in New York.

Interviewer: Where in New York City did you live?

Mr. Plafker: New York City, right...

Interviewer: East side?

Mr. Plafker: East side of New York City. And I worked there in two different places. And then...

Interviewer: You learned the trade and he got you a job?

Mr. Plafker: They had a job there with the same place like he was.

Interviewer: I see and you learned the trade then.

Mr. Plafker: I learned the trade of making vests. Then I...

Interviewer: When you made vest, you weren't a presser, you sew?

Mr. Plafker: No, I was sewing the vest, the whole vest.

Interviewer: That was better than being a presser wasn't it?

Mr. Plafker: Yes, I guess it was. And after I got married then I – a friend of mine that we lived together, he had a *[inaudible]* **[0:14:36]** store. I went and took a part in the *[inaudible]* **[0:14:40]** store in the east side of New York. And we were in business both of us for awhile. And then I got married.

[0:14:55]

Interviewer: How did learn about the *[inaudible]* **[0:14:58]** business? Did you just sort of opened up?

Mr. Plafker: No, he was the leader. He was in the business there. Then I – it was nothing, not much to know. I didn't know how to cut that *[inaudible]* **[0:15:16]** by hand now, by hand. And we sell hotdogs.

Interviewer: Was this the *[inaudible]* **[0:15:22]**?

Mr. Plafker: The *[inaudible]* **[0:15:23]** yes, yes.

Interviewer: You said on the east side?

Mr. Plafker: On the east side, yes.

Interviewer: What street was it?

Mr. Plafker: It was 4th.

Interviewer: Well we can come back, it's not that important.

Mr. Plafker: Well it's...

Interviewer: 1st Avenue, 2nd Avenue.

Mr. Plafker: Oh no, no, no, no, no, no, lower down. I think it was 30 and B, near 10th Street, yeah near 10th Street. And stayed there for awhile and then...

Interviewer: Your business didn't do so well?

Mr. Plafker: Well it was about – it wasn't very – it wasn't very industrious.

Interviewer: Prosperous?

Mr. Plafker: It wasn't prosperous. And then a friend of mine, a cousin of mine that was, I had a few cousins in Chester, in Chester and they owned a grocery business. So they persuaded me to come down to Chester and go with the same business. So I left my business in New York.

Interviewer: Business in New York?

Mr. Plafker: And went to Chester.

Interviewer: Why did you think you'd do better in Chester than in New York?

Mr. Plafker: Well in Chester, I went to business with myself. And we all were doing good my cousins.

Interviewer: Oh I see.

Mr. Plafker: And I wasn't doing good around here, I came down to Chester and I got the rest to do. So I went.

Interviewer: But you got married?

Mr. Plafker: In New York yeah.

Interviewer: Now where did you meet your wife?

Mr. Plafker: In New York.

Interviewer: Were you active in the Jewish community in New York?

Mr. Plafker: In the Jewish community I was Jewish.

Interviewer: I know but were you...

Mr. Plafker: But you mean active in...

Interviewer: Jewish affairs?

Mr. Plafker: Jewish affairs? No, I wasn't active, but I had time about it. Who would?

Interviewer: Well I thought you might because since you were teaching here?

Mr. Plafker: No, that was all in the past usually. But when you met my wife in New York because it's funny, we live in the same house and she happened to be a customer of mine. Her uncle was there, so they're tough parents my uncle. And we got acquainted and.

Interviewer: So you got acquainted just mainly from people you knew, mutual friends?

Mr. Plafker: Oh yeah, but my wife was my cousin, my uncle's father.

Interviewer: First cousin?

Mr. Plafker: First cousin.

Interviewer: Oh I see, kind of unusual. What kind of activity beside your job, what kinds of activities did you do in New York? I mean, did you find New York an interesting place?

Mr. Plafker: New York?

Interviewer: Yeah, you were still poor?

Mr. Plafker: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, that's the thing, say, it's hard to make a living.

Interviewer: Did you belong to a union in New York?

Mr. Plafker: Yeah, I do, to the Vest Maker's Union.

Interviewer: Do you want to stop for awhile?

Mr. Plafker: To the Vest Maker's Union, I belonged there. And after I left there, there was *[inaudible]* **[0:19:16]** because I went for a grocery business for myself.

Interviewer: Right, you weren't very active in the union?

Mr. Plafker: In the union?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Mr. Plafker: No.

Interviewer: Okay. Okay, now then you went to Chester with your wife.

Mr. Plafker: Yeah, I built a grocery store, another grocery store there in 1916.

Interviewer: 1916?

Mr. Plafker: 1916 and it was hard in the beginning, then finally along with the end of the First World War things went better. We worked up somehow to make a living *[inaudible]* **[0:20:01]** there.

[0:20:02]

Interviewer: Were you in the war?

Mr. Plafker: No, just by luck.

Interviewer: How is it the Jew went out of it?

Mr. Plafker: Way out?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Mr. Plafker: It was in 1917 when they first started the draft from the war. I was at the grocery – at the grocery store in Chester and I was – at first they were there conscription when they start to call, I was the fourth one to pass for the army. I was the fourth one to pass for the army.

Interviewer: What do you mean the fourth? The fourth number?

Mr. Plafker: They started the first day, the fourth number, I was the fourth one to pass for the army. But my daughter and my second daughter was born on July the 1st 1917. And then I was – then I didn't have to go because of my two children.

Interviewer: Because of the children.

Mr. Plafker: Exactly.

Interviewer: How long were you in Chester?

Mr. Plafker: Ten years.

Interviewer: Ten years. Did your wife work in the store?

Mr. Plafker: With me, yeah.

Interviewer: And you say the business got somewhat better at that time.

Mr. Plafker: Yeah, absolutely, it got a little bit.

Interviewer: Was it a restaurant type of thing or strictly buying?

Mr. Plafker: Strictly grocery store, it was a grocery store.

Interviewer: This was in *[inaudible]* [0:21:43] and this was a grocery store.

Mr. Plafker: This was a grocery store. I remember it was some kind of a small kind of grocery store.

Interviewer: Small.

Mr. Plafker: Small grocery store. Then I bought a store in 1927, 21, 24, about 25 in particular. I bought a store in *[inaudible]* **[0:22:08]**.

Interviewer: You see we're getting closer and closer to Delaware.

Mr. Plafker: Yeah, I bought a store in *[inaudible]* **[0:22:14]**. And lived there.

Interviewer: And was this a grocery store also?

Mr. Plafker: Also a grocery store right across the suit mill and *[inaudible]* **[0:22:29]** was?

Interviewer: Yes.

Mr. Plafker: It belongs now to the DuPont center, before it was suit mill. And I was there for two years, I couldn't take there, so I went back to Chester.

Interviewer: So why didn't you like it there?

Mr. Plafker: Well I couldn't stand it, the smell from the oil and the ashes from the suit mill. And then I went back to Chester. And then I opened up a store in Chester a gasoline station, a gasoline customer with a cousin of mine. We build it. We bought ground there, and we built it there. And we've done a little *[inaudible]* **[0:23:26]** private.

Interviewer: You what?

Mr. Plafker: I was private, my private home, my private home for myself.

Interviewer: I see and your wife.

Mr. Plafker: And sure, my wife and children.

Interviewer: Did you repair cars or just gas?

Mr. Plafker: Oh no, just gas. Just gas and oil.

Interviewer: This is what year now?

Mr. Plafker: Huh?

Interviewer: What year was this?

Mr. Plafker: That was in 1924 or '25.

Interviewer: 1924 okay.

Mr. Plafker: And so finally...

Interviewer: Where was this gas station?

Mr. Plafker: Around 9th Street, 9th and Floral Street. And I think it didn't go so good. In fact, I can't even think back. No, it was in 1927 when I opened up that gasoline station. And we stayed there for about four years, four and a half years till 1932. It didn't go so – it was 1930 and you know that was ***[inaudible] [0:24:36]***.

Interviewer: So good.

Mr. Plafker: I give up that gasoline station to my cousin. We couldn't get along. I was hurt bad, somebody helped me up, it was sign in.

Interviewer: Oh my.

[0:25:54]

Mr. Plafker: Yeah. And we finally – I gave it up.

Interviewer: What was it, did they shoot you or something?

Mr. Plafker: No, they hit me with a pipe.

Interviewer: Oh my.

Mr. Plafker: And I give up there and it wasn't so very good. So after that, I was free as I got filled up on that. And I come down to Wilmington in 1932.

Interviewer: 1932.

Mr. Plafker: I bought a store in Central ***[inaudible] [0:25:32]***.

Interviewer: Why did you take Wilmington? I mean it seems like you're going down the 13th?

Mr. Plafker: Well I looked for a place somewhere.

Interviewer: Yes.

Mr. Plafker: I found here, so I come down here.

Interviewer: So was this another grocery store.

Mr. Plafker: It was a grocery store, 7th and Pine.

Interviewer: 7th and Pine.

Mr. Plafker: 7th and Pine, maybe there was no store there now and do you know the neighborhood there?

Interviewer: Yes, I know generally.

Mr. Plafker: Yeah, 7th and Pine Street, I stayed there. It was hard from the beginning. And we went there and succeeded and we stayed there for 21 years.

Interviewer: Unbelievable, that's a long time, 21 years.

Mr. Plafker: Twenty-one years.

Interviewer: How many children did you say you had?

Mr. Plafker: Four.

Interviewer: Four children. What was Wilmington like then?

Mr. Plafker: As you see it's more built up now.

Interviewer: Did you considered that your home, define Wilmington?

Mr. Plafker: Now, then?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Mr. Plafker: Then I didn't know. And when I came, first came to Wilmington, I felt so strange. I felt so strange and it seems to me that the people in Wilmington don't accept – they didn't accept strangers like you say you see people across the street, they just called a fellow and move then. The first time, I was seeing him, I would go over and talk to him and I

welcome him to the community the neighborhood right immediately on that. That's another story. But we felt so strange. People don't recognize you. You were a stranger, an outsider. They don't want you. It was a very good days, good times there 1932 and 1933, it felt awful. We felt awful, but in time we got acquainted and started to feel at home. Salon went to an elementary school.

Interviewer: Where did they go to school?

Mr. Plafker: **[inaudible] [0:28:12]** on the east side of school, the...

Interviewer: Did they go to Wilmington High?

Mr. Plafker: No, no, no, no, no. They didn't go to Wilmington High. They went to PS.

Interviewer: PS, I see, from Wilmington?

Mr. Plafker: Yeah, yeah, yeah they had to go to PS. They didn't go to Wilmington High. They used to go there on 7th Street, I forgot the name of the school, High Land – not High Land, this is High Land.

Interviewer: It is High Land.

Mr. Plafker: This is High Land, the school there – I forgot the name of the school there and that's where they went. And after that they went to...

Interviewer: PS.

Mr. Plafker: PS, graduated there.

Interviewer: What are they doing now your children?

Mr. Plafker: My children?

Interviewer: Is that one of your son?

Mr. Plafker: This is one of my sons. This is one my bachelor son. He went to a university door, then he went – he was in Delaware. And well my daughter married here in Wilmington, you'd probably know her. Do you know Alec Beldwik?

Interviewer: I think so.

Mr. Plafker: He married Beldwik.

Interviewer: Yes.

Mr. Plafker: Do you know him, Alec? Alex married her.

Interviewer: What did your son do, your bachelor son?

Mr. Plafker: I will tell you. My daughter married Alec Beldwik. He got a *[inaudible]* **[0:29:40]**.

Interviewer: I see.

Mr. Plafker: Him and his brother, Alec. Right now, he's got a meat place in New Jersey.

[0:29:56]

Interviewer: Meat packing.

Mr. Plafker: Meat, a portion of meat in Pennsville, New Jersey. He opened up there.

Interviewer: Did you wife pretty much helped you in the store?

Mr. Plafker: Always, always.

Interviewer: Otherwise it was both of you working.

Mr. Plafker: Yes, she knows working and.

Interviewer: What other interest did you have in Delaware? Were you active in the Jewish community here?

Mr. Plafker: Well we belong to a Jew, we belong to...

Interviewer: Which one?

Mr. Plafker: We belonged, at that time, we belonged to the *[inaudible]* **[0:30:38]**. We belong there. My wife belonged to the pioneers and other clubs right for the – try to get money to the federation many a times. And it was 1956 unfortunately my wife passed away.

Interviewer: '56?

Mr. Plafker: She passed away. And I was living here at that time. I moved in here 1952 in this place and living here ever since. I kept up my home where it was and in the later part of 1957, I met a slave. She was a little tiny. She was a little tiny. And my *[inaudible]* **[0:31:52]**.

Interviewer: Good. You're now retired?

Mr. Plafker: Oh yes, I do. I'm retired since 1954.

Interviewer: 1954. What do you do with your time?

Mr. Plafker: Watching television.

Interviewer: Are you active in the show?

Mr. Plafker: Yeah.

Interviewer: You're pretty close. Are you active in the show?

Mr. Plafker: In the show? Oh yes, I watch the show everyday. Oh yes, sure. Yes, I used to be active in the show. Now I'm not into it.

Interviewer: Were you ever interested in politics in Delaware?

Mr. Plafker: Politics?

Interviewer: Yes.

Mr. Plafker: My brother is big enough *[inaudible]* **[0:32:33]**. What good will it do me? They come out and want you to vote for them and if when I ask them for a favor, they don't know you.

Interviewer: They don't know you?

Mr. Plafker: The hell with them.

Interviewer: Well I want to thank you very much for...

[0:32:52] **End of Audio**