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# Mrs. Blanche Stepnowski

[0:00:00]

Interviewer: This is July 5th, 1970, and my name is Angela Turochi *[phonetic]* [0:00:04] and I live in New Castle, Delaware. I am going to interview Mrs. Stepnowski. Mrs. Stepnowski, tell me your full name.

Mrs. Stepnowski: Blanch Stepnowski.

Interviewer: And where do you live?

Mrs. Stepnowski: 107 South Jackson Street.

Interviewer: In Wilmington?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Wilmington.

Interviewer: How old are you now?

Mrs. Stepnowski: 74.

Interviewer: When were you born, the date?

Mrs. Stepnowski: In Poland. It was...

Interviewer: You were born in Poland, what's the name of the village that you were born?

Mrs. Stepnowski: *[inaudible]* [0:00:45].

Interviewer: And what is the date of your birth?

Mrs. Stepnowski: February 29.

Interviewer: The year?

Mrs. Stepnowski: 1896.

Interviewer: Under what government control was Poland at that...?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Russia.

Interviewer: Tell me a little bit about Polish life about the time when you were a little girl, what did your father do for a living and where you live.

Mrs. Stepnowski: Well, we live in a little farm. My father and a little bit help and carpenter job. After work, how we got our work *[inaudible]* [0:01:21].

Interviewer: What is your father's name?

Mrs. Stepnowski: *[inaudible]* [0:01:27].

Interviewer: And your mother's name?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Ann Malim Lonkavich *[phonetic]* [0:01:27].

Interviewer: Were they also born in Poland?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Yes.

Interviewer: Was there anybody in America when you were a little girl from your family, from your immediate family?

Mrs. Stepnowski: My uncle's, Julian Lonkavich, Andrew Lonkavich and Frank Lonkavich, and my brother, Alexander Lonkavich.

Interviewer: What year was it that you left Poland and how old were you?

Mrs. Stepnowski: I was 17 that time.

Interviewer: And what year was it?

Mrs. Stepnowski: 1913.

Interviewer: To what port did you come to America?

Mrs. Stepnowski: New York.

Interviewer: And who did you come to? Who got -- bought you the passport? I mean, who got you the fare to come to this country?

Mrs. Stepnowski: My brother, Alexander Lonkavich.

Interviewer: And to who's home did you come?

Mrs. Stepnowski: I came to *[inaudible]* [0:02:20] my uncle Julian Lonkavich.

Interviewer: And let me get back to Poland before you left, how did you travel from your village to the port?

Mrs. Stepnowski: I -- first, my father bring me to a German land. After a while we came in a train to the port.

Interviewer: And what was the name of the name of the port? Do you remember?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Rotterdam.

Interviewer: You mentioned that you came to Rotterdam, so what line was it that the ship was on German, I guess, was it?

Mrs. Stepnowski: In German, I guess.

Interviewer: And how many days did you travel?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Nine days.

Interviewer: Do you remember the date that you left?

Mrs. Stepnowski: 15th in August.

Interviewer: August 15, 19..?

Mrs. Stepnowski: 1913.

Interviewer: 1913.

Mrs. Stepnowski: I came to New York 1913 in August 22nd.

Interviewer: What kind of food, was it good food on that ship?

Mrs. Stepnowski: It was good.

Interviewer: How was the passage, was it stormy or clear weather?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Clear weather.

Interviewer: When you came to New York, did you have any trouble with the customs?

Mrs. Stepnowski: No.

Interviewer: Did they pass you all right?

Mrs. Stepnowski: All right.

Interviewer: And how did you travel from New York to Wilmington?

Mrs. Stepnowski: By a train.

Interviewer: Did anybody meet you in New York from the family?

Mrs. Stepnowski: No.

Interviewer: So, you came to Wilmington. And when you came to Wilmington, were you the only one that got off the train or were there others?

Mrs. Stepnowski: With two girls, myself and other girl, and some other girl has got her brother along and she came -- he came after her. I don't have nobody at that time and then he took me to his place and next day to my uncle.

Interviewer: Well, how come that nobody was waiting for you? What kind of station was it?

Mrs. Stepnowski: *[inaudible] [0:04:21]* station.

Interviewer: And how come that nobody was there to meet you after all you had two uncles and brother? What happened?

Mrs. Stepnowski: *[inaudible] [0:04:30]* station. My brother waited for me and *[inaudible] [0:04:35]*.

Interviewer: *[inaudible] [0:04:35]*?

Mrs. Stepnowski: *[inaudible] [0:04:36]*.

Interviewer: You mentioned that you come to Pennsylvania station and your brother was waiting at the Biano station. How is it? What happened?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Because -- I told my brother that I came to *[inaudible] [0:04:51]* and I came to Pennsylvania station.

Interviewer: And you mentioned just a moment ago that there was somebody else.

**[0:05:00]**

Who came to meet the other girl?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Her brother came to meet her and nobody is waiting for me. And he took me in his house because it was late already. And I slept over that house and the next morning, he brought me to my uncle, Julian Lonkavich.

Interviewer: How far away his house has from the station?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Close to -- close in a station and...

Interviewer: Popular street.

Mrs. Stepnowski: Popular street.

Interviewer: So, next morning he took you over to your uncle. Who is your uncle? What was his name?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Julian Lonkavich.

Interviewer: And that was how early in the morning?

Mrs. Stepnowski: I guess seven o'clock.

Interviewer: And was he surprised, your uncle?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Yes. He's so surprised because he's not expect me that money. He think just my brother meet me in -- the night before.

Interviewer: When did you finally meet your brother?

Mrs. Stepnowski: My brother, same day, we came from work for a lunch and he came to see me into my uncle house.

Interviewer: So your brother did not live with your uncle, did he?

Mrs. Stepnowski: No, he's living with somebody else on boarding house.

Interviewer: He is single or married brother?

Mrs. Stepnowski: He was single that time.

Interviewer: So where did you stay when you first came?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Well, he took me that same day to my other uncle, Andrew Lonkavich on Carmen Street. I stayed over there.

Interviewer: So you lived with your uncle Andrew Lonkavich.

Mrs. Stepnowski: Yes.

Interviewer: Did you -- how many days was it before you went to work? Did you stay home and rest?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Two weeks.

Interviewer: Is it because you needed rest or was there no work?

Mrs. Stepnowski: No, no work. But because *[inaudible]* **[0:06:57]**.

Interviewer: How old were you, really, when you came?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Seventy years old.

Interviewer: So you were too old to go to school, I supposed. You have -- you're going to work.

Mrs. Stepnowski: Yes.

Interviewer: What was your first job? Where did you work for?

Mrs. Stepnowski: *[inaudible]* **[0:07:11]**.

Interviewer: Who got you the job?

Mrs. Stepnowski: My uncle, Julian Lonkavich, who is at that time *[inaudible]* **[0:07:23]** that's why she took me to work.

Interviewer: What kind of work was it that you were doing there?

Mrs. Stepnowski: *[inaudible]* **[0:07:35]**.

Interviewer: What was that mean? I don't...

Mrs. Stepnowski: Leather *[inaudible]* **[0:07:39]** leather jacket.

Interviewer: How many hours a day did you have to work?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Ten hours a day.

Interviewer: How many days a week?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Five days and a half.

Interviewer: Five and a half days. And how much were they paying?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Four dollars and fifty cents.

Interviewer: How much board did you pay?

Mrs. Stepnowski: \$2 in a week.

Interviewer: So you have about \$2 left to yourself.

Mrs. Stepnowski: Yes.

Interviewer: Was that enough to dress yourself with?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Well, it had to go enough.

Interviewer: Were you able to send money to Poland?

Mrs. Stepnowski: No, not at that time.

Interviewer: So, how about -- how long were you single and did you all the time work in Morocco shop when you were single?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Three years.

Interviewer: And you always work in that same Morocco shop all the time?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Yes.

Interviewer: What's the name of the man that you married? What's his name?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Cashmere Stepnowski.

Interviewer: Where did you meet him?

Mrs. Stepnowski: *[inaudible] [0:08:39].*



Interviewer: But I mean how was it, a party or something, how did you meet your husband?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Well, he came from *[inaudible]* *[0:08:49]* visit to somebody in Wilmington.

Interviewer: Was he living in Wilimington at that time?

Mrs. Stepnowski: He live in Philadelphia.

Interviewer: And he came to Wilmington for a visit and you two met?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Yeah.

Interviewer: When did you get married?

Mrs. Stepnowski: 1916, October 30.

Interviewer: Did you work at all after you got married?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Short while.

Interviewer: For about two or three months?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Yes.

Interviewer: When was your first child born?

Mrs. Stepnowski: 1917.

Interviewer: Did he live or...?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Six months.

Interviewer: He only lived six months?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Six months.

Interviewer: He died when he was six months old?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Yes.

Interviewer: When was your second child born?

Mrs. Stepnowski: 1919.

Interviewer: What's his name?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Ann Kieffer.

Interviewer: Oh, her name, I'm sorry. It's a girl.

Mrs. Stepnowski: Yeah.

Interviewer: The girl, Ann Kieffer?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Yeah.

Interviewer: And your next child was?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Windsel.

Interviewer: And he was born?

Mrs. Stepnowski: 1921.

Interviewer: And the next child was?

Mrs. Stepnowski: 1925.

Interviewer: And his name?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Stanley.

Interviewer: And then your last child?

Mrs. Stepnowski: 1930, Edmund.

**[0:10:10]**

Interviewer: And his name is Edmund. Where did you live after you got married?

Mrs. Stepnowski: With my uncle.

Interviewer: You had a house or apartment?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Apartment.

Interviewer: Did you work at all while these children were born?

Mrs. Stepnowski: At that time, a short while because my husband was not working steady.

Interviewer: Why, why was it? Because what?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Because it's hard time *[inaudible]* [0:10:28].

Interviewer: After the first war.

Mrs. Stepnowski: After the first war.

Interviewer: When did you go to work steady?

Mrs. Stepnowski: 1928.

Interviewer: It was when?

Mrs. Stepnowski: July.

Interviewer: And it was in depression time.

Mrs. Stepnowski: Depression time.

Interviewer: And all the time that you did work those small time jobs between children and then steady, what kind of factory did you work all the time?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Same place, it's Morocco shop.

Interviewer: Now here's an interesting question, when did you buy your first home and where?

Mrs. Stepnowski: I bought my home at Pleasant Street.

Interviewer: Was it one home or did you buy two houses? I think there were two.

Mrs. Stepnowski: Two houses, small houses at that time, a cheaper price, 1924.

Interviewer: And your second house from there?

Mrs. Stepnowski: 28.

Interviewer: And where is your second house?

Mrs. Stepnowski: At 107 South Jackson Street.

Interviewer: So it's the same house then.

Mrs. Stepnowski: Same house...

Interviewer: The second house that you bought is the same one.

Mrs. Stepnowski: Same one I still live in.

Interviewer: How did you ever manage to do your housework all the time you were working?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Night time after work.

Interviewer: You mean you cook...?

Mrs. Stepnowski: I cook and wash and iron and sewing, and everything.

Interviewer: In evening, you cook in the evening ahead for next day?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Yes.

Interviewer: Did you live close the leather factory?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Yes, from Jackson to *[inaudible] [0:11:56]*.

Interviewer: Did you have to come home for launch?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Yes, I come for launch and pick them up every *[inaudible] [0:12:04]*. I go back to work, sometimes *[inaudible] [0:12:08]*.

Interviewer: Where did you learn to speak English?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Well, *[inaudible] [0:12:18]* a little bit and after a while as my children grow up and learned. But for my fourth children *[inaudible] [0:12:23]* one worth a language, American language.

Interviewer: So you learn from them?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Yes, I learned after a while I go to school.

Interviewer: And also while working in the shop all the time.

Mrs. Stepnowski: Yes.

Interviewer: Did you go to any night school at all?

Mrs. Stepnowski: No. At that time, I can't go because I've got small children.

Interviewer: Did you become citizen of this country?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Yes.

Interviewer: And when did you become citizen, do you remember?

Mrs. Stepnowski: 1943, if I'm not mistaken.

Interviewer: And why did you ever come to this country?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Well, because my brother is here, my family, and my father family that's why I always want to come here.

Interviewer: You mentioned that you bought a home and a house next door, how much did you pay for them?

Mrs. Stepnowski: 2400.

Interviewer: Why did you buy two?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Because I have to, because I can't get it one because it's one ***[inaudible]*** ***[0:13:16]***.

Interviewer: Tell me about the house that you live there, the first house, how many rooms and...

Mrs. Stepnowski: This is four rooms, small ***[inaudible]*** ***[0:13:32]*** and no gas, no electric and no bathroom and no toilet.

Interviewer: Just an old house outside?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Yeah, everything outside.

Interviewer: You said -- and where did you get your water?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Outside, we bring in the home.

Interviewer: In a bucket?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Yes.

Interviewer: How long did you live in that house?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Four years.

Interviewer: And then how much you paid for your second home, do you remember?

Mrs. Stepnowski: 2900.

Interviewer: And was it a better house?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Better because it's larger and no air-condition. I have put in so much into that house too.

Interviewer: How many rooms did it have, the second house?

Mrs. Stepnowski: That second house is six rooms and a small little kitchen.

Interviewer: Did it have water inside?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Yeah, water at that time *[inaudible]* **[0:14:15]**.

Interviewer: And how about a bathroom?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Yes, that house has bathroom.

Interviewer: You bought your second house, you said, for \$2900, is that right?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Yes.

Interviewer: What was your income? How much was your husband making then?

Mrs. Stepnowski: That time, he's making \$20 a week.

Interviewer: And you were making about how much?

Mrs. Stepnowski: I never work in that time *[inaudible]* **[0:14:38]** a couple of weeks later, because I needed something done at the house *[inaudible]* **[0:14:39]** from small house to larger. And there are other things, small things done in the house. I have to work for that time I mean that time *[inaudible]* **[0:14:50]** and he lost his job at that time because he got sick. He got *[inaudible]* **[0:15:00]** as Roosevelt became the president.

**[0:15:10]**

Interviewer: And then did he go back to work after that time or not?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Yes. After that, he got a job, 1932.

Interviewer: And you went to work too about that time?

Mrs. Stepnowski: I work and study after that because I need a lot of things *[inaudible]*  
**[0:15:22]**.

Interviewer: So, while you were living in Jackson Street there were six of you?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Yes.

Interviewer: Your husband and you and four children.

Mrs. Stepnowski: Four children.

Interviewer: And that brings us up to about the time of World War II. How -- did it affect your family? Did any of your sons have to go in? Tell me about your oldest son and the second and even the third one.

Mrs. Stepnowski: Well, the second -- first one, he go to work -- the war, he's 21, he have to go. He just finished school, he go to work. Second one, he's 18, he's not finished his high school and he have to go too. And the third one go and after that, after he's finished 21 he got his drafting done at Korea war.

Interviewer: So the first two sons both served during the Second World War.

Mrs. Stepnowski: Yes.

Interviewer: And the older boy went so, what service was he in, army or navy?

Mrs. Stepnowski: He's in the coast guard.

Interviewer: Coast guard. How about the second?

Mrs. Stepnowski: The second one in the navy and the third one is in the army.

Interviewer: Did they see any action during the war, did they see any fighting or...?

Mrs. Stepnowski: I can't say that because they never told me anything because they don't want to tell me anything because I worry too much.

Interviewer: You are plenty worried, weren't they? Were they were on a high sea during the war?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Yeah.

Interviewer: And I think -- did you become sick from all this?

Mrs. Stepnowski: **[inaudible] [0:17:02].**

Interviewer: And your third son served in the Korean War.

Mrs. Stepnowski: Yes.

Interviewer: So you're really one of the proud American mothers, you have three sons in the service during the World War II and during the Korean War.

Mrs. Stepnowski: Yes.

Interviewer: When you left Poland, you were 17 years old. Who was left home behind?

Mrs. Stepnowski: My three sister and one brother.

Interviewer: And father and mother?

Mrs. Stepnowski: And father and mother.

Interviewer: Then I think when you came very shortly later, maybe a year later, World War I broker out. Did you maintain letters? Did you write letters? How did you ever communicate?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Not just in a year **[inaudible] [0:17:46]** four years.

Interviewer: So between World War I and until the Second World War broke out, did you write letters after that? Did you...?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Oh, yeah, at that time.

Interviewer: Did you help them out?

Mrs. Stepnowski: **[inaudible] [0:18:02].**



Interviewer: Did you send them packages?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Yes.

Interviewer: And how about the Second World War?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Second War is the same way *[inaudible]* **[0:18:14]**. I send in medicine. I send in packages and I do all I can to do.

Interviewer: Well, just a little while ago, we were saying about your sons serving and being in the service, three of them, that brings up to a little bit past Korean War. Did anybody else come to this country from your family?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Well, I've got my sister now, six years ago.

Interviewer: How old is she now?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Well, what, 65.

Interviewer: She's 65. She came six years ago. Who else is left now in Poland?

Mrs. Stepnowski: My two sisters and one brother.

Interviewer: Your parents are already gone, both of them?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Yeah.

Interviewer: Are you helping them out now?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Oh yes, *[inaudible]* **[0:19:02]** every single I can.

Interviewer: Do you notice a difference in this country in conditions now, and let's say 10 years ago, 20 years ago? Is it always better in this country, better standard?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Well, I'd say it's better for me because I got a better living here than I got before and I can help my family after work.

Interviewer: And luckily for you, since then, Social Security law...

Mrs. Stepnowski: Yeah, Social Security *[inaudible]* **[0:19:32]**.

Interviewer: So in other words, you're not sorry that you left Poland.

Mrs. Stepnowski: No.

Interviewer: You like it in this country?

Mrs. Stepnowski: I thank God just -- I'm glad I'm here.

Interviewer: You would never want to go back to live over there?

Mrs. Stepnowski: No.

Interviewer: Sometimes you like to visit?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Because I got all my family here.

Interviewer: So you're very satisfied and you're quite thankful, are you, that you live in this country?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Yes.

Interviewer: We were talking about your sons, so I'm going to come back them again.

**[0:20:00]**

Your oldest son, Windsaw, how did he make out in the war? Was he promoted?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Well, he's promoted, he's chief petty officer.

Interviewer: Chief petty officer.

Mrs. Stepnowski: Chief petty officer.

Interviewer: And what's he doing now?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Well, he's working *[inaudible]* **[0:20:13]**.

Interviewer: Is he married?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Yes.

Interviewer: Has he got any children?

Mrs. Stepnowski: No.

Interviewer: Now, your second son, Stanley, is he married now?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Yes.

Interviewer: And he has children?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Only one.

Interviewer: And how about Edmond?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Edmond? He's married. He's got four.

Interviewer: Four children. How about your daughter, Ann?

Mrs. Stepnowski: She's married and she's got three children.

Interviewer: Any of her children married already?

Mrs. Stepnowski: One.

Interviewer: Grandson, wasn't it?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Yes.

Interviewer: Has every one of them got their own homes?

Mrs. Stepnowski: Everyone has got their own homes.

Interviewer: So, that proves that America is a good place to live in for a large family like that.

Mrs. Stepnowski: Yes.

Interviewer: Well, you being a housewife most of the time and always working at one place and struggling so hard to make a living, there's not much more to say anymore in this interview. Is there?

Mrs. Stepnowski: No.

Interviewer: So, I want to thank you very much for giving me an opportunity to ask you these questions.

**[0:21:11] End of Audio**