Washington State JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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Harriet Bloom-Wilson

SUMMARY

Harriet Bloom-Wilson recounts her journey to Spokane, where she found a welcoming Jewish community after decades of living in Wyoming, and reflects on the importance of family, faith, and belonging. She shares her family's immigration story from Ukraine to the United States, highlighting the resilience of her grandparents and the enduring impact of their experiences on future generations. Bloom-Wilson emphasizes the value of preserving family stories as a way to strengthen cultural identity, connect generations, and foster a broader understanding of heritage and community.

Sha'Niya Black: My name is Sha'Niya Black with the Washington State Jewish Historical Society. The date was May 27th, 2026. Can you please state your first and last name?

Harriet Bloom-Wilson: Harriet Bloom-Wilson.

Sha'Niya Black: And do I have your consent to record this interview?

Harriet Bloom-Wilson: You do.

Sha'Niya Black: Perfect. I'd like to start by asking what your connection is to the Spokane community?

Harriet Bloom-Wilson: Um, I moved here with my husband three and a half years ago. Um, from Wyoming, originally from New York City, then, um, New Mexico for graduate school, Wyoming, where we taught at a small college, and now Spokane because our daughter and her family live here.

Sha'Niya Black: Uh, what keeps you connected to your Jewish identity in Washington?

Harriet Bloom-Wilson: Um. Uh, I live at Rockwood, um, South Hill, and, um, I'm fortunate enough to count Carla Peperzak as one of my close friends. So, um, through Carla, you know, I've been able to participate and help, um, run, uh, several gatherings around Hanukkah, Passover at Rockwood South Hill. And also, thanks to Carla, I've become familiar with the synagogue, um, right down the street, and Rabbi Tamar and, um, attend many of their functions as well.

Sha'Niya Black: That's very special. Um, how has movement or migration shaped your family's identity? You talked about this a little bit. Could you expand?

Harriet Bloom-Wilson: How has.. say that one again?

Sha'Niya Black: Movement or migration shaped your family's identity.

Harriet Bloom-Wilson: Yeah. Yeah. Well, my grandparents emigrated, my mother on my mother's side from outside of Odessa, Ukraine, in 1907, um, having been pretty much, um, driven off from their shtetl [Little town], uh, and so emigrated to the United States that early. Interestingly, they came on the Lusitania, um, before that ship was, um, destroyed in World War I. And, they ended up in New York and have a fascinating history. And, um, so yes, so that migration has always really interested me. I was

close to my bubbe and my grandfather was quite a bit older, so he was very observant as a Jew, but didn't speak much English. But um, you know, growing up in the Bronx, New York, I got to spend a lot of time with them. And ultimately in my career, I was able to travel to, um, close to where they came from in Ukraine and see Odessa and do some touring of the Jewish community, what was left of or had been the Jewish community there.

Sha'Niya Black: That is very special. Are there any specific family stories or memories that have been passed down that you might want to share?

Harriet Bloom-Wilson: Oh gosh. Yeah, just wonderful ones. I think, um, one that comes to mind was my where my grandparents on that ship and in steerage, of course, and my mother used to talk about, well, one, there are two things. One of them, my mother used to talk about my grandmother, saying, you know, that she had never experienced an elevator before. And, you know, somehow or other she witnessed somebody or people going in a door, closing the door, opening again, and they were gone. And what did that mean? What happened to them? You know, it was like a was it magic? Was it, you know, um, black magic? Was it what happened to them? The other wonderful, touching, really poignant story was my mother would say that once, of course they left. They had no contact anymore with the family they left behind. And my grandmother had, um, was divorced. She had divorced. Her husband had two children who died. And she married my grandfather who needed a wife because his wife had died. And he already had three children. But my mother said that my grandmother once in a while would muse, what was I doing when my mother died? Was I ironing? Was I baking? You know, just wondering at what moment would my. You know that I'm not aware of. Did my mother die? And I never knew it because there was just no more communication. So it's, you know, things like that that just make me, um, like admire the courage that it took to just leave and, you know, come to this country and start a new life and, you know, um, and in a very brave way, especially I think for her, because it was with this new man and his three children already, and then went on to have three daughters, my mother being the youngest in New York.

Sha'Niya Black: Thank you for sharing that. Um, I'd like to ask, why do you personally believe that it's important to preserve family stories?

Harriet Bloom-Wilson: Oh, um, because it's the connection, you know, it's the connection to place to time. Um, I have only one grandchild, and, um, she has a mixed background. She's Korean American and which, you know, I'm very much, much fostered for my two daughters, the idea of being women of the world. And so I'm eager for her to know about this generation where my people come from. My husband's background is Irish Catholic from Ireland. And so I just feel that that enriches her and opens her mind. And, you know, um, we all need to share our stories. We all need to learn our stories.

Sha'Niya Black: Absolutely. Do you have any other stories or thoughts you might want to share?

Harriet Bloom-Wilson: Um, well, I'm just delighted to have this opportunity here. And I'll just say this coming from Wyoming, where I lived for 42 years, never planning to teaching in a small college in a very conservative small town where I could count the number of Jews, maybe not even totally. On one hand, it's become so, so joyful for me to find the extended Jewish community here in Spokane and to see all these opportunities, for example, what's happening here tonight?

Sha'Niya Black: That's beautiful. Thank you so much.

Harriet Bloom-Wilson: Thank you.