

Robert Braun Interview



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Robert Braun Interview

[Abrupt start of recorded material]

00:00:00 Robert Braun: Not in front of the kids, but --

Interviewer: Yeah, oh yeah.

Robert Braun: Eleanor told us that later. I didn't learn about this until 20 years after
the fact, you know, after she was --

Interviewer: That's why the interview with you, Bob, is so pivotal because none
of these other kids --

Robert Braun: Well they were there for, at the most, two months.

Interviewer: None of them had any history with the Krauss.

Robert Braun: Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: And you did. And since this is their story and they're not here to tell
it.

[Director's comments]

Interviewer: Simply start by saying who you are and spelling your name.

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00:01:06 Robert Braun: Well, my name is Robert Braun, spelled B-R-A-U-N. And, uh, I'm one of the 50 children brought to this country by Mr. and Mrs. Kraus.

Interviewer: Bob, tell us when and where you were born.

Robert Braun: I was born in Vienna on July 11, 1928.

Interviewer: Let's start in Vienna. Before we start talking about your memories, I want to know a little bit about your parents. You had mentioned before we started rolling about your father's family's long storied presence in Vienna.

00:01:51 Robert Braun: Uh-huh.

Interviewer: So tell me a little bit about your parents.

Robert Braun: Well, as I mentioned, my father's family, as far as we could tell by the genealogical research of an uncle of mine, has lived in Vienna for probably about 600 years and been involved with the life there, including the, uh, Turkish siege of Vienna. And he always felt very much 100 percent Viennese and Austrian patriot. As a matter of fact, I might describe him as a super patriot.

00:02:22 He, uh, uh, was in the army for universal military training in 1889, I believe. He had to spend, I think, three years in the military because he was the youngest son in the family and there was, I think, a

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regulation that one member of each family had to serve in the military. So they picked him because he was the least necessary being the youngest. Those were the days when they still wore comic opera uniforms.

00:02:51 We have some pictures of him sitting on a café table with the shako on his head and red and blue uniform, presumably. And, uh, his business was, uh, wine. He and his brother, older brother Alexander, had a little vineyard in Baden, which is a small town outside of Vienna. And they also bought wine from the surrounding vintners. And my father's job was to run the office in Vienna at, at, uh, District 1, Schulof 2, was the address.

00:03:25 And, uh, he had an office there and a cellar underneath where wine was stored in bottles and in barrels. The cellar was made, in part, of the, uh, old, uh, uh -- I'm trying to think of the name. [Laughs] I had it before. The, uh, catacombs that were under Vienna where they buried people hundreds of years ago. And they simply walled off a part of this and turned it into a wine cellar.

00:03:55 It has a steep stairway going down. I remember going down there and the aroma of wine permeating everything. And, uh, altogether I had an extremely happy childhood. In the summertime my parents rented two rooms in the second floor of a farmhouse in a little village called Piesting about 25 miles from Vienna -- 25 kilometers from Vienna.

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00:04:20 And, uh, we spent the summer going barefoot and playing with the farm kids; going with the cows up into the hills to graze every day and then riding them back down with the bell clanging. And each cow would go to its own separate yard. Uh, in the wintertime, of course, we went to school. Uh, I went to a grammar school called the Schubert Schule because it was the grammar school where Schubert had taught as a teacher before he died.

00:04:51 And I know it was right around the corner from where we lived in an apartment building, Number 22A, Porzellangasse in the ninth district. And my two older sisters and I all went to that same school for four years. Uh, my older sister, Martha, ended up going to the Gymnasium afterwards, uh, on academic course. My next sister and I weren't old enough to change schools yet. Uh, all together it was a very happy existence as I remember.

00:05:21 My mother frequently took us almost every day in the summer and the spring and fall. We went to a park and I played with marbles and my sister played with other little kids. And, uh, I had just had no bad memories whatsoever. Uh, we secretly hang -- hung out our bedroom window in this apartment building. We lived on the second floor. Because right next to it there was the outside, uh, dining area of a café, uh, which, uh, had dozens of tables underneath a, a network of wires supporting, uh, an, uh, uh, vines growing over it.

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- 00:06:00 You peek through the vines and see the men playing chess and reading the newspaper and drinking coffee and talking. Uh, it was a pretty typical existence, uh, which changed very abruptly, of course, with the Anschluss. In March 1938 very abruptly, uh, everything changed. Uh, I think the details are well known by anyone.
- 00:06:27 Uh, the first thing we noticed in terms of change, that I noticed, was that the -- I went to the classroom about three weeks after the Anschluss and a yellow line was painted in front of the last row of seats in my classroom. And the teacher announced with a very serious face, not a cheerful face, and says, "The authorities have ordered that we rearrange the seating in the room." And he called out the names of all the Jewish kids, boys, and we had to go sit behind this line and the other boys sat in front.
- 00:07:01 And that was the beginning of things getting rather unpleasant. Uh, some of my fellow students behaved as they always had. Some didn't. A lot of them started wearing their Hitler Youth uniforms to class and it was best to stay away from them. Sometimes it wasn't successful and a few times I got chased. I still have a little mark in my hair that the barber notices where a rock bounced off my head.
- 00:07:28 Uh, and then that even changed at the, uh -- November 10th, or rather November 11th at Krystallnacht when, uh, the teachers -- actually I skipped something. In the fall -- this was the spring of, uh, of 1938. In the fall of 1938 all the Jewish boys and girls were

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sent to one school each in Vienna. They called it, uh -- it was an old, uh, Jewish school called the Chajes Gymnasium.

00:08:00 And we were packed in there, about 50 or 60 boys in one classroom standing around because we didn't have enough seats. I didn't know what was going on because a lot of the instruction was in Hebrew. It was an orthodox Jewish school or had been. So for several months I went there totally befuddled as to why, until the Krystallnacht occurred on November 10th. After that, they closed the schools altogether and, and Jewish kids didn't go to school at all.

00:08:28 And, uh, some -- a couple of weeks after the Krystallnacht I recall my father took me with him to his wine cellar. He, of course, uh, didn't go back after that. It had been totally trashed. The cellar reeked of wine because all the bottles were broken. It was about, it looked to me, ankle deep in wine. And that was the last time I saw that. Uh, after that 10th of November, 1938, I just stayed home and so did my sister.

00:09:01 Soon after that my older sister went with a youth group to British Mandate of Palestine. My younger sister, who was two years older than I and I just simply stayed in the apartment and off the streets because it wasn't really safe to go into the streets. And I did a lot of reading. And among some of the books I read morning, noon and night was a series of really poorly written, ridiculous adventure stories by a German author called Karl May, who specialized in writing fanciful novels of Wild West America.

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- 00:09:36 Indians, cowboys, trappers and basically they're all the same. You know, the terrible Indians and the, the galloping buffalo and the heroic frontiersmen and mountaineers. And I was just fascinated by these images and I kind of dreamed about it constantly for months and months and months, until we finally left, uh, Austria. And it never left my mind and it came in rather useful.
- 00:10:02 Because when it came, when it came time, uh, for my sister and I to, uh, leave the country, to leave our parents, my father would tell me about the wonderful things we were going to do in America.
[Crying]
- 00:10:31 Well, anyway it turned out, uh, it really happened because, uh, many years later, uh, after I finished college I went to work for the National Park Service at Yellowstone Park and another park in South Dakota called Wind Cave National Park. And I actually had to shoot some buffalo for the local Indian tribes and, uh, ended up trapping bears in Yellowstone that, uh, bothered campgrounds. And it was a real Wild West sort of an existence.
- 00:11:02 And, uh, it always struck me that, uh, because, uh, my parents encouraged me to think about this when we were leaving, that the leave-taking wasn't sad at all. It was -- I was looking forward to a wonderful adventure and actually it turned out that way in the long-run. And also in the short-run because, uh, my sister and our life

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coming to the United States was really extremely pleasant. Now, I don't know if I should go on at this time beyond that.

Interviewer: Let's stop for just a second. Go back just a little bit. I also wanted to ask you, Bob, when you were growing up in Vienna did you grow up in an observant Jewish household?

00:11:48 Robert Braun: No.

Interviewer: What was the --?

Robert Braun: No, no, no. The background was, uh, my father and mother got engaged before the First World War in 1914. She was technically a Catholic. Her family had originally come two generations earlier from a small village in Bohemia called [Chernikov], which I've never been able to find on a map. And they moved to Vienna. And, uh, her father, however, was a rather militant atheist. He was involved in founding the first shoemaker's union in Vienna. All the, all the Czechs in Vienna were shoemakers.

00:12:19 And my mother, actually, before she was married worked in a big shoe factory as an office manager called [Chopik] Shoes. And, uh, uh, the war intervened, so they didn't get married. So four years later my father survived the First World War, came home and they wanted to get married, but, uh, in Vienna, or at least in Austria you could not marry outside of religious denomination. So it was a question which denomination would they pick.

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00:12:49 I don't know if they flipped a coin or not. I'm not -- I really don't know. But anyway, my mother converted to Judaism and they got married. And we were not religious at all. Once a year my father would go to a large hall where they had a Yom Kippur service and he'd drag me along with him. And I didn't like it at all, mostly because there were a lot of older men there with horrible breath because they hadn't eaten for 24 hours. Anyway, that was about the extent of my Jewish upbringing.

00:13:17 However, my mother did have special dinners and celebrated Passover, for instance. She cooked all the right dishes and the matzo ball soup and everything else that went with it. And so we celebrated in a, in a cultural way, I would say. I would say culturally we were Jewish, but not, uh, religiously. And, uh --

Interviewer: I'm sorry; I just want to make sure, are you picking up the --?

00:13:45 Robert Braun: The sniffing?

[Director's comments]

Interviewer: Just because it was interesting before, I wanted you to also mention the anecdote about your parents. You had told me about the officers coming to the door and her showing the --

Robert Braun: Oh, yes.

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- 00:14:12 Well, the reason my parents survived, especially my father, he was one of 180 Jews alive in Vienna when the Russians broke in at the end of the Second World War in Vienna. There had been 180,000 Jews in Vienna. There were 180 living and every one of them was a mixed marriage that survived. And my mother was able to protect him. She was a very outspoken person. Uh, she did not, uh, hesitate to raise her voice.
- 00:14:40 And, uh, as soon as the racial laws came into existence, uh, she wrote home to that little village, [Chernikov] in, in what was then, uh -- I don't know what the Germans called it, the Czech Protectorate or something -- and, uh, to the priest there, the village priest, and he sent back she told me within a couple of weeks, uh, certificates showing the birth, marriage and death of all her ancestors going back three generations.
- 00:15:09 And on the basis of these she was able to get what was called in German an [Ehreanschein], which means a certificate of your area and ancestry. And, uh, it was fully printed out with all the proper swastikas and signatures in the right place, except on the bottom was written, "gattin Jude," which means spouse Jew. And when troubles arose my parents never had to leave the apartment where they lived. Other people had moved in with them, but they stayed there the whole time.

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- 00:15:36 But anytime, which happened several times apparently from what she told me afterwards, uh, that an SS man or a policeman came in looking for my father, she would fly into an outrage and wave the Aryan certificate in the officer's face, holding her thumb over the notation "gattin Jude" on the bottom and start screaming at him, "How dare you insult a good Aryan woman. The Fuehrer should hear about this. This is an outrage." She carried on quite loudly and she was able to do it.
- 00:16:04 I spent many, many hours listening to her stories. And the guy would leave and that's one of the ways my father survived. Uh, also because she was able to get a, uh, ration card she was able to buy food, which he, of course, couldn't. And also she had a childhood friend who had a pastry shop in Vienna and my mother went to work there when my father couldn't leave the apartment. He had to stay low.
- 00:16:31 And she was able to, uh -- like all business people they cheated like heck on, on the rationing system and everything else and she was able to bring extra food home to feed my father, as well as herself. And then finally the war ended for them. The Russians broke into Vienna and my father was the first one out of the rubble of the, uh, cellar that served as an air raid shelter and went looking for a Russian.
- 00:17:01 And sure enough, he said he encountered a, uh, a Russian soldier driving what was called a gulasch [canolia], a gulasch can -- an

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field kitchen; one horse and a wagon behind with, I don't know, a pot of stew or something on it, smoking. And my father was an inveterate smoker and I think that's the one thing he missed during the war years more than anything else, cigarettes. And he saw the Russian soldier smoking on the -- driving the horse and he said, "Hey Tovarich, cigarette?" And the Russian said, "Da," and he threw him a whole package of Russian cigarettes.

00:17:30 So my father, happy as a clam, grabbed the cigarettes and ran -- and walked as fast as he could back to the apartment building and told my mother, "Look, look! The Russians are here, the Russians are here. Look what I got from them, cigarettes." And she said, "What kind of a Russian?" "He was driving a field kitchen." She says, "You fool! We're starving to death here. You get to a Russian field kitchen and you ask for cigarettes?" From that day on she refused to buy him cigarettes. She never would buy him cigarettes at the store again. But he got his cigarettes.

Interviewer: That's a good story. Let's move to the kindertransport. I'd like to ask you if you remember how you or your family first heard about the opportunity for you and your sister to come to America, whenever that was.

00:18:23 Robert Braun: Well, uh, apparently, uh, the Americans, Mr. and Mrs. Kraus and Dr. [Schleis] the pediatrician, uh, posted a notice at what was called the Jewish [Kultur] [unintelligible], which

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is the Cultural Center office, which was a quasi-official agency -- it wasn't just a social office.

00:18:42 Announcing the fact that there were Americans here who would take 50 Jewish children, 25 boys and 25 girls, back to the States. And to get an application form, I assume at that office, and fill it out and then, then bring it back. And my mother got the form and, uh, they filled it out and brought it back. And then, uh, they received word that they should report to the, uh, a particular office again to be interviewed.

00:19:11 And I remember going back there and I vaguely remember a long line of people, parents and children, waiting to get in and eventually our turn came. We came in and, uh, uh, we had to bring our school certificates, report cards, birth certificate and, uh, citizenship papers. And on the basis of that we eventually went in one at a time and spoke with Mr. Kraus.

00:19:42 He didn't speak German. He had a few words of German, but very little. And apparently, Mr. Kraus had hired a, a young Austrian woman or Viennese woman to act as an interpreter who spoke English as well. And through that he asked us a lot of questions, uh, I think on a level with the child's age and school grade so we could communicate. And he talked about this and he had a map of Europe and he asked me to point out where's Paris and where's Berlin.

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00:20:12 And, uh, you know, we pointed to where we thought it would be and, uh, just asked simple questions in general. And, uh, then Dr. [Schleis] saw us. I'm speaking about myself. I went into to see Dr. [Schleis] and, uh, he gave me a physical examination, as I recall. And he also showed me some weird blotches on paper, which in retrospect, you know, 50 years later I realized were probably a Rorschach test.

00:20:43 But he said, "What is, what is this? What is this?" And I said, "Geez, this is kind of stupid. You know, it looks like a butterfly or, I don't know, maybe a beetle or a bug or a star." And, uh, asked some other questions; quite a, quite a bit of questioning, both by Mr. Kraus and Dr. Schleis and then we went home. And then eventually my parents got notification that my sister and I had both been chosen.

00:21:12 And incidentally, Mr. Kraus had promised parents that if siblings were chosen they would not be separated. Because the parents were told that we would go to a good, healthy place to live and he would, uh, find homes for us. If there were relatives in the United States, he would eventually bring us to the relatives to live. And if not, then they would find nice people to take care of us until such time as the parents could be reunited with us.

00:21:40 At that time, it wasn't at all clear that there was going to be a mass extermination. This was in, uh -- long before the, uh, actual murder started. So there was that constant idea that well sooner or later,

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eventually either perhaps maybe the children would go back or perhaps the parents would come to the States. And on the basis of that, uh, promises were made by Mr. Kraus to the parents that they would be taken care of no matter what.

00:22:08 And subsequently I found out that he personally signed affidavits --
[Crying] -- guaranteeing that, uh, he would be responsible for --
[Crying] -- did I complete that question?

Interviewer: Yes you did. At that time, Bob, were your parents themselves looking to leave Vienna?

00:22:42 Robert Braun: They tried, but they had no connections. They had no relatives close enough in the States that they could call on for an affidavit and it looked quite hopeless. There was no question of them being able to leave. Of course, there were rumors around. You could, you could buy a visa to get to Cuba, I think, or to China or to Shanghai or things of that sort. But my parents were not wealthy. We were strictly lower middle class and, uh, my father lost what little business he had, so there was no question.

00:23:13 I don't think they had any hope of being able to leave, at least not in the foreseeable future.

Interviewer: And also during that time when you were visiting with Gill Kraus and Dr. [Schleis] and going through this process of hopefully being chosen to be one of the 50, along with your sister --

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Robert Braun: Yeah.

Interviewer: I'm curious; what kinds of things did you and your sister talk about while --?

Robert Braun: We were excited about going to America. First, we hoped we could go.

00:23:44 And our parents talked it up right from the beginning. "Oh, there's a wonderful opportunity. You can see America. You can, you can, uh, climb mountains. You can, uh, hunt buffalo," things of that sort. I guess my sister responded to other things. I'm sure they told her similar enticing vistas of the future. So we weren't the least bit sad. Nobody cried. My parents didn't cry. We didn't cry. And we were kind of surprised when we got to the train station eventually -- I think it was at night.

00:24:15 As a matter of fact, it was a major event. It was the first time in my life I ever road in a car because my parents engaged a taxi to bring us there because we didn't want to be -- I think in retrospect they didn't want to be seen walking the streets with suitcases. It wasn't safe, so they splurged for a taxi. And that was impressive riding in a car. And on the platform some kids were crying and some parents were crying and hugging and, and, uh, my parents didn't do any of that.

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00:24:44 Uh, it was a, it was like going, I suppose -- we didn't have summer camp in Vienna, but subsequently it must have been like going off to summer camp.

Interviewer: What were you allowed to bring with you? Do you remember?

Robert Braun: It seems to me we could have one small suitcase, but no -- nothing valuable. Uh, I don't even know if we were allowed to bring books. But all we had -- I'm sure my parents packed as much in as they could.

00:25:13 I had clothing and, uh, yes I had one other thing. I had something, a really expensive toy my parents bought me before we left, which I thought it was great. It was something called a Schuco Fernlenkauto. It was a little mechanical windup toy, which is very well made. And there was a wire coming off the roof to a little steering wheel up high. And you could wind it up and you could actually steer it; no batteries. As a matter of fact, a few months ago I saw the same toy on, on Antiques Road Show and it was auctioned off.

00:25:46 The expert said it's worth at least \$500. However, I brought this with me. I took good care of it, but one summer -- you don't want to hear all this detail [surely]. [Laughs] One summer I was playing with it on the roof of, of, uh, the Kraus' summer home on Long Beach Island. It had a flat roof and there were vent pipes sticking up through it. And another boy named [Amram], who eventually

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became an author, I think. I'm trying to remember his first name.
His last name was [Amram].

00:26:14 They were neighbors and friends of the Kraus'. He was playing with it and he picked it up by the wire and the doggone thing slipped off and fell down one of the vent pipes. And to this day somebody is having trouble with their plumbing there if it's still standing. So that was the end of that. Uh, I'm sure my sister also had some special thing that she took along with her.

Interviewer: So off you went on a train from Vienna to Berlin.

Robert Braun: Berlin, yes. It left in the evening. I remember it was dark.

00:26:45 And, uh, the -- somehow we were told that once you were in that seat you have to stay there because the doors are going to be locked. And I don't know if they locked them for our protection or to keep us from escaping. I'm not -- but it didn't concern me particularly. And we slept, at least I slept and my sister slept. I was fortunate because my sister was two years older than me and she kind of mothered me. You know, I was not quite 11 and she was 13. And, uh, so I didn't feel at all unhappy.

00:27:15 We got to Berlin and, uh, we were brought to a, uh, some kind of a camp or barracks that was run by a Zionist youth organization, which was still in affect at that time in Berlin in, uh, in, uh, May of

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1939. And, uh, all the boys slept in one big room in bunk beds and the girls in another. And we ate there.

- 00:27:42 They brought food in and the young people running this camp, encampment were very pleasant. They taught us Yiddish songs, as a matter of fact. I can still think of some of them. It's the only place I ever heard a Yiddish song because I never heard anyone speak Yiddish. We always spoke German and my parents didn't have any acquaintances that spoke Yiddish. So they taught us these songs and I realized that gee, it sounds a lot like German, but not quite. And to this day, I still remember them quite well. I won't sing them now. I have a terrible voice.
- 00:28:11 Uh, and we ate there. And then the next, uh -- I had one interesting experience there. Naturally, like boys will, the older boys -- I was, I guess, one of the medium-aged boys, maybe, I don't know, fifth or sixth from the eldest in age. We peeked around what was going on and at one point I have a distinct memory of Mr. Kraus sitting in a kind of an anteroom to this big room with bunk beds.
- 00:28:37 There was a table there and he was talking to an SS officer in this black uniform loaded down with his pistol and his authority. And Mr. Kraus was yelling at him in English. I said, "Geez, he shouldn't yell that. That's dangerous," you know. If in Vienna when we were on the street, if you saw an SS man coming you made sure you got way out of the way and made believe you were invisible. And here

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was Mr. Kraus yelling at this officer and the SS officer was talking back in German.

00:29:03 Mr. Kraus had very few German words and there was a paper there and he kept pointing at it and banging his fist on the table. And we were terrified. I don't remember who the other boys were with me because I thought this SS man is going to shoot him. Instead, he picked up a pen and he signed it. And to this day I have no idea what it was all about. Some permit or something of that sort that had to be signed. But I was really frightened because I thought that, uh, Mr. Kraus was going to get shot.

00:29:34 And he was a very husky man. He had tremendously sized fists, I remember. And when he banged down it really made a noise. Uh, that's what I remember about Berlin.

[Director's comments]

Interviewer: Mrs. Krause; was she visible during --?

00:30:19 Robert Braun: Yes, yes. She was there. I don't recall if she interviewed children, but she was certainly present because she smiled at us. And I think, I think she led us by the hand into the room where Mr. Kraus talked to us. I have a memory of that because I knew what she looked like long before we ever got to the United States. And of course, once we got onboard ship we saw her constantly. She was always with the children. And, uh, that was

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actually the next thing that happened, is we boarded ship in Hamburg.

00:30:49 I think we took a train from Berlin to Hamburg. I don't remember. It could have been a bus, but I think it was a train. And we got onboard the SS President Harding and, uh, we were assigned the cabins. And, uh, Mr. and Mrs. Kraus and Dr. Schleis were on the same ship also. I think we were either two or four to a cabin. Some were two, some were four.

00:31:15 And I was and all those kids were terribly impressed, at least the ones I spoke to, because you could order your meals off a menu in the dining room. You had a choice of eight different things for breakfast and there were several courses. It was unbelievable. I mean, uh, you know, we used to -- when we went out on a Sunday somewhere with the family at home in Vienna, you know, we'd go to a, a place out in, in the, in the, uh, uh, in the hills where they had, uh, taverns, outdoor seating.

00:31:46 And I'd get a soda pop and my father would have a beer and my mother would have a beer and, and that was the extent of our going out. And here was a menu with three choices of meat; unbelievable. I said, "Well this is America. This is how America lives." And the ship was a delightful experience. I didn't get seasick. But there was one hilarious episode. I don't know if it's hilarious, but an interesting episode on the ship because two of the boys came from a very religious home, apparently.

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- 00:32:16 And they kept strictly kosher at home and the parents were afraid they wouldn't be able to get kosher on ship, which is true. They didn't have a kosher kitchen that I know of. So they apparently packed food for them in their suitcase. And I have a memory partway out in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean of seeing Mr. Kraus and a steward, each one carrying a, a small suitcase at arm's length, running through the railing and dropping it in the ocean. And I subsequently found out apparently the food had started to smell and the steward complained there was something terrible going on in that stateroom.
- 00:32:47 And Mr. Kraus checked and he found the decaying food; I think fish and things like that. Uh, that was hilarious because I had never saw Mr. Kraus run so fast. Uh, other than that, uh -- well, the trip had one scary experience, which I didn't find out about until, oh, probably 30 years later.
- 00:33:13 Uh, when, uh, when my sister and I used to visit Mrs. Kraus when she was widowed, she lived in a very nice apartment near Rittenhouse Square in Philadelphia. And about every several months we'd go down and pay a visit for the day. And at one of these visits she told us something which she had never mentioned before, we knew nothing about. It seems that the ship docked in South Hampton briefly, perhaps for a day and the, the children were not permitted off the ship, but visitors could come onboard ship.

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00:33:44 And I guess several of the children had visitors. And, you know, they took pictures and they greeted each other and talked about the family, I suppose. I don't know; we didn't have a visitor. And then the ship left and we went on to America. And, as I said, maybe 30 years later Mrs. Kraus once told us when we visited her in Philadelphia that a terrible thing happened.

00:34:10 It seems that Mr. Kraus discovered that one of the children had been carrying some valuable jewelry and turned it over to the visitor in South Hampton. And he was simply outraged. She said he was practically violent. He says, "That could have cost every one of those kids incarceration or their lives or whatever, and they risk it for that lousy bit of jewelry." And he said he's going to send that child back. I got the impression it was a much younger child.

00:34:39 I had no idea what was going on. And she said she calmed him down and she calmed him down and she finally convinced him that you can't punish a child for the sins of their parents. But apparently, he was just outraged because it would have totally destroyed the whole enterprise if it had been discovered. Otherwise, the voyage was very pleasant. As I said, I didn't know about it at the time.

Interviewer: When you mentioned ordering off the menu, I've read some amusing accounts here and there about foods that none of you children were even familiar with.

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00:35:17 Robert Braun: Yes, I'm sure there were quite a few, but, uh, I always had a good appetite and I tried everything I could. I really did, except the fish. They had fish choices and fish dishes and we never ate fish at home because being in a landlocked country it wasn't on the market. The only fish that was available, usually, I think was carp out of the Danube and it was pretty awful. [Laughs] So we did not eat fish at home and we never got used to eating fish, except sardines.

00:35:47 But otherwise, I thought the food was wonderful. I mean, to have, to have pancakes for breakfast, what I now know as pancakes, with sweet syrup on top and butter and jam, it was just unbelievable.

Interviewer: Staying on the ship for just another second or two, what kinds of things would you do during the day?

Robert Braun: Oh, uh, during the day we'd have English lessons.

00:36:14 Mr. and Mrs. Kraus would get us into groups and then they'd, they'd hold up pictures and say, "Das, this, uh, [buh], bye," simple words. And then, uh, that was kind of fun because, uh, you know, it changed the routine and there was nothing to see on the Atlantic Ocean. Uh, so we did that everyday, I think. I don't know how often, once or twice a day. And there were little exciting things like lifeboat drill.

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00:36:42 And, uh, basically that was [about it]. Then, you know, kids roam around the ship. We roamed all over the place and the crew would sometimes have to say, "No, you have to go back over there," because we went up the wrong stairways and climbed here and there. It must have been a bit of a headache for the crew, uh, with the large number aboard.

Interviewer: Who was watching out for you?

Robert Braun: Mr. and Mrs. Kraus, Dr. [Schleis] and there were nurses onboard ship.

00:37:10 And, uh, they kind of kept an eye on us, too. And, uh, you know, they'd caution us. You know, you can't lean over the railing and things of that sort. They kept a very close watch on us, the crew on the ship as I remember.

Interviewer: And I think the voyage was about 10 days.

Robert Braun: I think it was longer. Well, I don't know. I really don't know the date exactly. I can't even tell you the exact date when we landed.

00:37:36 Uh, but when we landed, uh, we didn't see anything of America because we immediately -- well, we didn't have any checked luggage. You know, I guess there must have been such a thing as checked luggage onboard a ship; maybe not. We each carried our own little suitcase and we quickly got on buses. I think there were

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two buses. And, uh -- because everything was different, new and -- we didn't land in, uh, in Manhattan.

00:38:05 We landed, I think, I think in Brooklyn. There was a, a port. But, again, I'm not certain. And, uh, then we drove all the way to Collegeville, Pennsylvania. And, of course, we looked out the windows constantly. And that was before interstate highways, so you went right through the middle of towns and cities and the most amazing thing we saw -- I guess it's a normal reaction.

00:38:34 None of those kids as far as I know ever saw a black person. And suddenly we saw people out the window and that was amazing to us because it was like an exotic apparition, you know. Uh, that's, I think, what impressed the children more than anything else. Perhaps not the very older ones who were more sophisticated, but everybody else certainly was impressed. Uh, well and then we got to Collegeville and disembarked.

Interviewer: Before we get to Shalomville in Collegeville, there is that somewhat iconic photograph of the children looking at the Statue --

00:39:17 Robert Braun: Yes, the Statue of Liberty, that's right. That was taken by the ship's photographer I believe at the behest of, uh, Mrs. Kraus. And there were other pictures taken onboard ship, too, by the ship's photographer, posing all 50 children with the Captain and then 25 boys alone and then 25 girls alone. And then, uh, I

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think several pictures of lifeboat drills and things of that sort. I guess the ship company thought it would be interesting.

00:39:43 And, uh, Mrs. Kraus obtained, or the Kraus family obtained the original prints, or some of the prints, at least. And she kept a very good scrapbook it turns out. And many years later she gave us her scrapbook with those photographs and a lot of newspaper clippings describing the event.

Interviewer: At this point, Bob --

[Phone ringing]

[Pause]

Interviewer: Let's go back to the ship for a second, Bob.

00:40:30 Robert Braun: Yes.

Interviewer: Because I'm interested in your recollections of the ship, both in terms of two things. What do you remember about other passengers, if anything? And also, just your memories of the physicality of the ship itself.

Robert Braun: Uh, well, I thought the ship was, I thought the ship was huge. I had never seen such a large ship before because the Danube didn't have

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big ships of that sort. And, uh, we didn't have much contact with the other passengers.

00:41:00 I remember, uh, talking to a Spanish boy who was a little older than I not in our group. And, uh, he said a variety of things about Franco and I didn't know anything about Franco. [Laughs] So, uh, that puzzled me because we were not informed about the political situation in Europe; not at age, uh, 10.

00:41:29 And we really had no -- I had no contact with the other passengers. Maybe the older children may have. Uh, most of the time, too, I stayed close to my sister. She was kind of my guardian angel and kept me out of trouble and told me not to climb the ladders and that sort of thing.

Interviewer: Do you remember who your bunkmate was or roommate was on the ship?

Robert Braun: Frankly, no, I don't. It was another boy -- I don't even know if there was another boy or three more boys.

00:41:57 I don't remember if there were two or four in that particular cabin. It was so-called third class, but I thought it was real luxury because I couldn't get over ordering off a menu. That was just overwhelming.

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Interviewer: Uh, and then, uh, when you first arrived at the camp, did you already know then that you and your sister were going to go to live with the Kraus'?

00:42:27 Robert Braun: No, absolutely not. And after we kind of worried because every weekend, following a weekend when people would come out to look at the children and see them, you know, more and more would disappear. And pretty soon by the end of the summer, I think in September [unintelligible] we were the only ones left. And I said, "My God, nobody wants us. What's going to happen?"

00:42:48 But, uh, I found out subsequently when my mother came to this -- with my father came to this country in, uh, 1947, she told me that when we were first interviewed by Mr. Kraus -- and Mrs. Kraus spoke to us, too, I guess, spoke to my parents -- they said, "We are going to take your children into our home, but do not tell them please, because they'll talk about it and the other kids will be jealous." So we never knew about it.

00:43:17 I didn't know about it until 30 years later. No, no, until my parents - - my mother told us. Uh, I'm wrong; it was 1947, 1948 that I found that there was a previous arrangement.

Interviewer: Do you know why?

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Robert Braun: Well, I suspect it was because they had two children, a boy and a girl, and the boy, Stephen, was about two years older than I. And the girl, little Ellen, was, uh, uh, two years younger than my sister.

00:43:49 And we shared bedrooms with them. I mean, we -- at the Kraus family's home we were treated identically with their own children. We got the same clothes. We went to the same school, a private school, Friends Select School; a wonderful school. Uh, all in all it was no difference in the, in the way they behaved towards us.

00:44:20 I remember every, uh, every so often, maybe once a month Mr. Kraus would give each of the children, Stephen, Ellen, my sister and me a whole handful of nickels and we'd go to the automat and we could eat anything we wanted to. And I thought that was just the, the biggest thrill in the world to pick your own food and just have nothing but cake and pie. It was great. It was really a, a marvelous experience.

Interviewer: Steve and Ellen were pretty much the same age as you?

00:45:03 Robert Braun: No, Ellen was two years younger than I, I think. And Stephen was one or two years older than my sister.

Interviewer: And what do you remember about their reactions to the two of you showing up?

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Robert Braun: They were very pleasant. I mean, uh, Stephen had other interests, you know. There's a big difference between an 11-year-old and a 14-year-old.

00:45:29 Uh, but I think, uh, Ellen and, and my sister -- she was called Hanni, H-A-N-N-I, not H-O-N-E-Y; short for Johanna -- uh, they seemed to get along very well like sisters, I think. And, uh, you know, we played board games together and, uh, went visiting other people together as a family. I remember at Christmastime, uh, it was traditional then, I guess, in, in their circle to visit other people.

00:46:00 And, uh, usually the other people they visited would give the children some small gift. And I remember getting numerous Esterbrook fountain pens. [Laughs] They were all the rage. Uh, and the Kraus' were not religious. I mean, they celebrated Christmas, had Christmas trees, gave Christmas presents. Uh, nobody went to Hebrew school and, uh, that always interested me that -- [Crying].

00:46:33 It's getting [unintelligible]. Totally irreligious Jews did that. Even though various Jewish organizations, I subsequently found out from Mrs. Kraus and also from reading her memoir, opposed them.

00:47:02 They said, "Don't do it. You're making trouble. You're going to call attention. We'll take care of it." But they went ahead on their own and they did it, together with B'rith Shalom Fraternity. And, uh, did a lot more than a lot of the Jewish organizations. And it's, it's

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always impressed me that, uh, they on their own went ahead, even though they had absolutely no Jewish traditions at all.

00:47:29 I think Mr. Kraus' family came to this country from Germany in around 1846 when there was a big exodus of Germans through the revolutions there. And I suspect that at that time from what I've read in history, uh, they were considered Germans, rather than Jews. And, I don't know, a lot of them went to New York. A lot of them went to Philadelphia. Some went down South.

Interviewer: And you lived with the Kraus' then for what, two years?

00:47:58 Robert Braun: Two years, yes. And then it became obvious that the war was on and, uh, there wasn't going to be any possibility of parents coming. And so I don't know how the arrangements were made, but we were informed that my cousin Rudolph and his wife in Bridgeport, Connecticut would take over our care or live with them. He was, he was also a refugee. He was a doctor in Austria.

00:48:25 And he came here a year before we did because he was -- he had a, a, he had, he had some relatives here that got him an affidavit. And he was doing quite well by that time because, uh, he was practicing medicine and had a pretty good income as a result. And so we moved in and lived with them. Uh, uh, it was a big difference, a big difference. No chauffeur to take us to school. [Laughs]

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00:48:57 I remember one time, uh, I went to [Friends] Select School, which was an unbelievably great school. They, they even, uh, had a special young teacher stay with us after school to teach us English for an hour everyday. Uh, but at one time -- you know, we got all American clothes, of course, but I still had my old leather pants with me. And one time, I don't know why. I don't know, maybe I couldn't find my -- those awful corduroy knickers that everybody wore that went brup-brup when you walked.

00:49:30 So I put my leather pants on. I didn't think anything of it and went to school. And apparently, uh, Mrs. Kraus got a phone call from the school, "Robert has inappropriate attire." So the chauffeur came and picked me up and I went home and I changed my clothes and went back to school. But I still have those pants in my bottom drawer.

[Director's comments]

Interviewer: Bob, you mentioned going to Friends Select for, I guess, a couple of years.

00:50:40 Robert Braun: Two years.

Interviewer: Two years. Why was that school such a great school?

Robert Braun: Well, it was altogether different from the Austrian schools I went to. Austrian schools are strictly dictatorial. I learned my multiplication table by holding my hands up like this, backside up

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in front of the class. And the teacher stood there with a 30 centimeter ruler and you recited it. And if you made a mistake, whack across the knuckles. And to this day I can do mental arithmetic faster than an adding machine, but I have to do it in German.

00:51:11 I have to think in German. Uh, it was not fun. I mean, facts you learned, but not much else. But Friends Select was just, uh, uh, pleasant. You looked forward to going to school everyday. The teachers were pleasant. Uh, I was impressed by once a month we went to meeting and sat in silence. Occasionally, one of the bona fide Quakers would stand up -- excuse me, Friends would stand up and say a few words, sit down again.

00:51:40 There was no one in front, uh, and then we went home. Uh, not home; went back to school. Uh, it was simply extremely pleasant. And the, the teaching was easy. I mean, there was -- it was a friendly atmosphere. And it was easy for my sister and myself because the, the dictatorial part, the memory part of teaching of school in, in Austria was much advanced than here.

00:52:09 So we were way ahead in math and geography and things of that sort that were taught in both places. And the other ones, the teachers helped us quite a bit with the English language, composition. Writing we were superb in because the kids here don't write, they scribble. And again, if you didn't write exactly the right way, you

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got whacked in, in, uh, Vienna. So I loved the school and my sister did, too.

00:52:38 Oh, and they, they had plays. Nobody ever heard of kids putting on plays and operettas in a public school in Vienna. That was considered frivolous. It wasn't -- didn't happen. I remember my sister Johanna's class put on, uh, Hansel and Gretel and, uh, she, of course, had to play Gretel. And, uh, that went off very well. I don't remember what play I was in. Anyway, it was a delight, that school.

Interviewer: It sounds as if you acclimated yourself culturally to life in America fairly quickly.

00:53:19 Robert Braun: I think so. I really do. I've never had a problem of not feeling at home. But I think there is something else behind it, too. Uh, when I got older and I realized that I was rejected by my home country, I decided well, I'm going to be 110 percent American. And I did. I joined the Boy Scouts. Uh, I got enough merit badges for an Eagle Scout, but I didn't get Eagle Scout.

00:53:50 And the reason why is because my cousin Rudolph that I lived with was too busy. I never went to Hebrew school or attended temple or anything else. But technically, I guess his family was a member of a conservative synagogue in Bridgeport and, uh, when it came time for me to get my Eagle badge -- I guess I was 15 at the time -- I had to have a letter from your minister attesting to your good moral character.

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- 00:54:18 So I went back to the Rabbi at that particular synagogue that he was technically a member of and I asked him for the letter. Now, I had joined a Boy Scout troop sponsored by the First Methodist Church in Bridgeport. The reason was that my first friend in Bridgeport when I went to school here was a kid who belonged to that troop. And he said, "Hey, why don't you come down to a meeting." So I did. And there were a lot of Jews, Catholics, Protestants in that troop. It was interdenominational. It was just sponsored by that church.
- 00:54:48 So I joined that Troop 46. When it came time three years later to get that letter, I went back to the Rabbi at that temple on Hancock Avenue in Bridgeport and he said, "What troop do you belong to?" I said, "Troop 46, the First Methodist Church." He said, "Why didn't you join our troop?" They had one there, too. And I said, "Well, you know, I made a friend there and one thing led to another." He said, "Why don't you go ask the minister for a letter."
- 00:55:15 I was just -- [Crying] -- that son-of-a-bitch. It didn't do much for my religious convictions. Anyway, so I never got Eagle Scout. I was too embarrassed to go to the Reverend [Alderson], the minister for a letter, you know.
- 00:55:42 As a matter of fact, many years later I had his, some of his children as patients, or grandchildren, rather. But I digress.

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Interviewer: Bob, when did you graduate high school?

Robert Braun: 1946.

Interviewer: The war was over.

Robert Braun: Yep.

Interviewer: While the time the war was on, of course, you were still too young to --

Robert Braun: Well, I tried. In, uh, June 6, 1944 we learned of the landing.

00:56:14 And I had the idea well, it's a landing, [unintelligible] landing [unintelligible]. It must be the Marines. So I was determined, I think for revenge more than anything else, to join. And I hitchhiked to New Haven where there was a big Navy recruiting station because they wouldn't possibly know me and I had heard or knew that at age 17 you could enlist in the Marines if you got your parents' signature. So I went there and I figured, you know, I'll forge my cousin's signature; no problem, and I tried to enlist.

00:56:44 And they looked at me and they laughed and they said, "Come back when you're shaving." [Laughs] I was really crushed, absolutely crushed. But that's what happened, so I didn't get in. But then I applied for the -- when I finally, uh, uh, got through dental school, uh, I didn't want to be a dentist. So I got a job with the National

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Park Service and I worked -- I had worked there one summer before already and I was stationed at Yellowstone Park.

00:57:18 And then some much later in the fall I got a letter from the War Department; report to Fort Sam Houston, Texas December 31st. So off I went into the Army as a dentist. I tried hard to get out of the Dental Corp, but, uh, they said, "No." Uh, by that time I had a good girlfriend, my present wife, who was in the Army Nurse Corp and she ended up being stationed at, uh, Fort Benning, Georgia, which was the jump school for the Army.

00:57:52 And I was in Korea right on the front line in the medical company, 15th Can-Do Regiment and I found out that the Airborne needed doctors and dentists, because in the Airborne Division everybody jumps, no matter who; general down to private. So I applied for jump school and I figured I'll get to Fort Benning. So they accepted me and I filled out the forms and just before I finally committed it, I had learned that that's fine, but when you complete jump school you're still going to have to do another two years in the [war].
[Laughs]

00:58:25 I got my papers back so I didn't go to jump school. But I digress again; sorry.

Interviewer: I want to ask you a couple of questions about your parents during the war years.

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Robert Braun: Yeah.

Interviewer: Starting with did you have any word from them?

Robert Braun: Well, at first there was correspondence through the mails. The letters were censored, the ones that came from Austria -- or from Germany rather by then. They were opened by a German censor and then sealed again.

00:58:54 However, my parents never wrote anything that needed censoring. Nothing was ever erased or cut out. But they did have a censored sticker on the outside. And then, of course, uh, when, uh -- it got poorer and poorer and then, of course, Germany declared war on the United States, uh, right after Pearl Harbor and that was the end of the postal. And then we had no more contact whatsoever; none, zilch. The Red Cross claims that they could get word through to people; 25 words, I think, once every three months.

00:59:27 So I used to bicycle out to the Red Cross headquarters in Bridgeport and give them my 25 words and they'd demand a contribution. At that time I was making, I think, \$4.00 a week on my paper route and I gave them a dollar. But my parents never got a message. The first word we heard from them that they survived was before the Russians occupied Vienna, they apparently somehow ran into an Italian Army deserter and they gave him a brief note and he said he was going to get through the lines somehow back home to Italy.

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01:00:00 And he actually mailed that letter to us. And that's how we found out before Vienna was liberated that, uh, my parents were alive. Until then we didn't know. We could only assume.

Interviewer: Please tell me the circumstances under which your parents then made it.

Robert Braun: Well, then they waited for two years until my sister turned 21 in, in 19, uh, 40 --

01:00:29 well she was born in, in -- oh, let me think, uh, 1926, so 1947. She was able to write out an affidavit and claimed enough adequate income. She was working for my cousin after school and nights earning some money in his office and she filed the affidavit and they were able to come then.

01:01:02 They finally got here Christmas Day 1947. And, uh, that was nine years later after we saw them. And it was remarkable. I recognized them, of course, but they were so small. Uh, it was strange. Uh, but it was interesting because my mother lived on to 102.

01:01:29 And, uh, every lunch I'd take my lunch from my office on Stratford Road and Fairfield down to where she lived with my sister, which was only a few blocks away and I'd have lunch there. And she'd talk about her experiences during those nine years. And if you ever read a book by [Otto] Klemperer called This I Remember, two volumes,

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he similarly was a mixed marriage in Dresden and he went through everything my parents went through. His wife was a, a convert.

01:01:58 And the stories she told me were identical to those two volumes. I have them here on the shelf. Uh, fascinating about what went on in their apartment building. The neighbors, the air raid shelter in the cellar where they weren't allowed to go into the proper place, but had to sit somewhere else during the air raids. And then one day a, a police inspector came to check up on air raids, air raid shelters and he said, "You people are crazy. This is the best place to be," where my parents were.

01:02:27 But they wouldn't let them into the other one. So they all packed up and then they all sat together after that. And once the bombs started falling and the Russians got closer, people got a lot friendlier, very friendly. She had some interesting adventures, but you don't want to hear that.

Interviewer: Not that she necessarily would have, but given the fact that your mother was a certified Aryan --

Robert Braun: Yeah.

Interviewer: Could she have left Vienna at any time?

Robert Braun: No, no.

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01:02:55 Well, yeah, she could have moved to Germany, but she couldn't come to the United States because somebody in the United States had to -- besides, once the war started that was the end of immigration. And, uh, uh, yeah. As a matter of fact, unfortunately there were many, many instances where the, the Aryan partner in a mixed marriage would simply go to a local police station and says, "That Jew has been living with me," and he'd disappear within two hours. And unfortunately, it did happen.

01:03:24 Again, you can get a detailed history of that from Klemperer's two volumes in Dresden.

Interviewer: When your parents did arrive on Christmas Day 1947, where did you first see them?

Robert Braun: In Hoboken. They landed -- their ship landed in Hoboken. I think they came on a freighter. I remember we bought the ship's tickets for them. No, no, it was a regular passage ship because I remember my mother said she never ate so much in her life.

01:03:53 And she put on, I don't know, 10 kilograms on that long voyage across the Atlantic. And, uh, then we went back, drove into Bridgeport. My brother-in-law -- my sister was married by that time -- drove us and, uh, my parents lived with them in an apartment that they rented. And technically I lived there, too, but I was never -- you know, I really didn't -- once I got out of high school I didn't spend any time home. I worked in the summertime at a resort hotel.

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In the winter I was away at school. I was pretty much self-supporting.

Interviewer: What was your contact like with the Kraus' in those first few years after you moved in with your cousin?

01:04:30 Robert Braun: We had contact with them. We went to visit them, even after, you know -- uh, especially at Christmas we visited them and, uh, we made the rounds of their friends and we got more Esterbrook pens. [Laughs] And, uh, we felt like, uh, you know, I suppose kids feel away at a college going home. It was very pleasant. And in the summertime, uh, we visited at Harvey Cedars on Long Beach Island. They had a wonderful summer home there right on the beach.

01:05:00 Uh, it was like family. And it gradually petered out, you know, slowly. I mean, everybody got older. We got other interests. I saw them occasionally when I went to dental school in Philadelphia at temple. I remember once, uh, Mr. Kraus took me to see the, uh, farm he bought in Bucks County in Doylestown, where he was going to raise purebred cattle. And he was a fascinating man. He was really fascinating.

01:05:30 He was an expert, a wonderful piano player, a superb musician, artist, athlete. The other interesting thing I noticed about the Kraus' when we went to visit them after the war started, they were

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absolutely rigid about rationing. Now, Mr. Kraus was a very prominent person.

01:06:00 He had a lot of influence and connections and so on. He could have gotten anything he needed; gasoline, sugar, you name it. Not an ounce, never, which was quite different from some of my relatives in Bridgeport. But I was impressed. It was, uh, strictly a matter of honor.

Interviewer: It's interesting you raise that Bob, because not long ago Liz found the family's ration cards.

01:06:32 Robert Braun: Really?

Interviewer: She has the ration cards.

Robert Braun: That's fascinating.

Interviewer: And I have to say until you just mentioned this, I could never understand why they had ration cards.

Robert Braun: Believe me, people in his position -- well they were issued ration cards, but they didn't bother using them. I mean, uh, you know, people who had influence unfortunately used their influence. And he certainly had influence. I mean, somebody who can get, uh, 50 visas from the State Department has influence.

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01:06:59 Nothing; I mean, whatever -- it was strictly according to the ration laws. We were there some several days and, you know, we knew what was going on, saw what was going on.

Interviewer: Did Mr. Kraus ever tell you at any point the story of how he got these visas?

Robert Braun: No. The best indication I got was from a newspaper article written by an investigative reporter. I sent a copy. And he theorized that Mr. Kraus was a law school classmate of Biddle, uh, Francis Biddle.

01:07:33 And I think he subsequently -- he was high up in the Administration and close to Roosevelt and subsequently became Attorney General, I think. And he thinks that somehow -- they weren't extra visas. They were ones that simply hadn't been used. They had been issued and charged against the quota, but not used. But nobody ever told us exactly for sure. Mr. Kraus didn't.

Interviewer: Along those similar lines I'm also interested in the years that followed this episode and the war, was this something that he and his wife talked about much in your recollection?

01:08:16 Robert Braun: Not really, no, no. They, uh -- well I didn't have a chance to talk with him very much because if we visited he was busy. Mrs. Kraus was home. And subsequently when she was widowed, she would talk about it, but she considered it more like a,

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a kind of a pleasant, nice interlude, you know. Nice and, and emotionally satisfying. But, uh, I think that was her main attitude towards the whole thing.

01:08:44 It was a pleasant, good experience. And I'm sorry she never completed her memoirs. It ends rather abruptly and, uh, it's a pity somebody didn't interview her.

Interviewer: Tell me about it.

Robert Braun: Yeah.

Interviewer: There's a paucity of accounts directly from them.

Robert Braun: Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: Other than --

Robert Braun: Well, they didn't brag about it. They didn't talk about it.

01:19:13 You know, they considered it something natural that you didn't wear on your sleeve. They were -- [Crying].

Interviewer: And as the years passed I know that your interactions with them tailed off a little.

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Robert Braun: Yeah, yeah. It was more and more time between visits and so on. And then unfortunately, Mrs. Kraus went to a, a home in West Chester County.

01:09:44 She sold her apartment and moved out. It was a beautiful apartment right near Rittenhouse Square. And, uh, that's when she turned over her scrapbooks to us, which I have out there, because she couldn't take them with her to this home. And I think she was very unhappy in that home. We visited her, my sister. I drove. It seems to me it was in White Plains, but I'm not certain. And, uh, I think she was very unhappy. She cried sometimes. She was going blind.

01:10:15 Her teeth were in terrible shape and I tried to talk to the home and they said, "Well, no we can't do anything. You know, we can't take her to a dentist." And it was very sad.

Interviewer: She was a very cultured woman.

Robert Braun: Yeah, extremely.

Interviewer: My wife tells me that not formally educated, but very, very cultured.

Robert Braun: Yeah, yeah. Well, they moved in very cultured circles, you know.

01:10:44 Memorized culture isn't the same as the one you acquire by living. Uh, they had, uh, a large circle of friends. They went out every

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Thursday night visiting. And Thursday nights in Philadelphia, uh, uh, their children's childhood nurse came to stay with us and she always cooked the same thing. We always had lamb chops and spinach. [Laughs] And I hated the spinach. [Laughs] And Stephen would eat my spinach for me. He also loved milk and I couldn't stand milk.

01:11:15 We never drank milk in Vienna. So at the dinner table I must admit we cheated a little bit. When nobody was looking I'd slide my milk glass to him and he'd slide his empty one to me. And he drank milk and I didn't. The other impressive thing about the dining, I mean, I said, "Well that's how Americans live." You know, there was a butler who comes in and waits on you individually. And what always puzzled me is how does he know when to come in? And once I figured it out. I saw Mrs. Kraus move her foot.

01:11:44 And then later that night I sneaked in the dining room and I felt around and there was a little bump under the rug, the bell. [Laughs]

Interviewer: I have to say, I didn't quite realize that they lived at that high a level.

Robert Braun: Well, there was a cook fulltime and her husband, or presumably her husband, a black couple. And they lived on the third floor in a room in that house on 2125 [Cypress] Street.

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01:12:10 And he drove Mr. Kraus to work and he drove, uh, on errands and he did the housecleaning and so did the cook. And, uh, Mrs. Kraus did the shopping every day. And then, uh, the cook would prepare everything. No, we considered well, that's how Americans live, you know. This is -- after all, that's all we knew. You know, we went to Friends Select School, which was very genteel. And, uh, at home, what we considered home, that's how people lived.

01:12:41 And the people we visited and we, they knew lived in a similar way. As I said, we went to school driven by the chauffeur and picked up by the chauffeur; 17th on the Parkway in Philadelphia. So it was an abrupt change when we moved to Bridgeport, Connecticut. Oh boy, I learned.

Interviewer: No more chauffeur.

Robert Braun: No. I quickly got a paper route.

01:13:12 Yeah, it was a very interesting and formative experience.

Interviewer: Did you stay in touch with the family, with Steve and with --?

Robert Braun: Not very much, no. Well, I did again with, uh -- no, no, because unfortunately, young Ellen died in her 20s and left a baby. And that, uh, was kind of -- and Stephen moved away.

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01:13:40 We went to his wedding. That's right, I remember, in New York. He married a girl, a woman -- I don't know if he's still married or not -- anyway, named [Strauss], right? And, uh, they lived in an apartment. I think it was a penthouse on a huge skyscraper in Manhattan. And there was a private express elevator up there and my sister and her husband, Sidney, and I were invited and we went. And it was a very nice reception, pleasant.

01:14:11 Uh, and then unfortunately, brother-in-law Sidney did not -- couldn't tolerate alcohol very much. Even though he spent three years fighting in the Army in Europe and so went through all the campaigns and got a bronze star, nonetheless he drank a little too much and he got sick in the elevator going down. And it was a high speed elevator and he turned green and I heard strange noises. And it was an elevator operated by a man, a person, an elevator operator.

01:14:40 And he stood there with his back to us and we're in the back and my sister panicked I could see. Sidney took his hat off and used it and we marched out through the lobby and there was a wastebasket and he dropped it. [Laughs] That's my memory of Stephen's wedding. You don't have to include that.

Interviewer: I can tell you that they're still married.

Robert Braun: Good.

Interviewer: In fact, Sue, his wife, was just visiting with us in San Francisco.

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01:15:10 Robert Braun: Oh, really? Good, nice.

Interviewer: Sue Strauss became Sue Strauss Kraus.

Robert Braun: That's a mouthful.

Interviewer: It sure is. She's a terrific woman.

Robert Braun: Yeah. I, of course, don't remember anything about her. She was the bride and there were a lot of people there and it's the only time we ever met her.

Interviewer: I have to ask, because we're now talking a little bit about my wife.
You did know Liz when she was growing up.

01:15:39 Robert Braun: Yes. Because when she got to be about 11 or 12 or so, uh, her father brought her here. They lived in Rowayton, which is part of Norwalk not far from here. He brought her here for her braces and I took care of her braces for her. I don't know if she remembers it, but, uh, I saw her -- about once a month we saw her.

Interviewer: She still has the teeth to prove it.

Robert Braun: Are they holding up?

Interviewer: They sure are.

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01:16:09 Robert Braun: Are you sure?

Interviewer: I'm quite sure.

Robert Braun: I'm always worried to see ex-patients. Sometimes I see them in the line at the supermarket. Some post-middle-aged woman says, "Oh, look, look," and she shows me her teeth. I have to check them out, you know, and hold up the line. [Laughs] And the girl at the register gets goggle-eyed. [Laughs] Oh, well. But I digress once more.

Interviewer: And this is the part where the film gets very personal for me.

Robert Braun: Uh-huh, of course.

Interviewer: I didn't know Gill or Ellen.

01:16:40 Robert Braun: Yeah.

Interviewer: They were long gone by the time Liz and I met.

Robert Braun: Yeah.

Interviewer: But, of course, Liz has told me all of these stories.

Robert Braun: There is a certain amount of Greek tragedy to that family. You know, Gill had a very sad end. He had a severe brain disease that's

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related to that, that prion caused mad cow disease; awful. I didn't see him then. He was in an institution.

01:17:06 And Eleanor became blind; was lonesome, sad. Her daughter died young. There ain't no justice, you know that?

Interviewer: I know that we've been talking about this now for a couple hours, but why do you think they did what they did? Why do you think the Kraus' did what they did?

01:17:45 Robert Braun: I think about it a lot. I think they were just plain, decent people. And they felt they have some power, they have some influence and they should use it and they did it. I mean, why did the B'rith Shalom spend all that money, I mean, to ship tickets? Feeding kids, 50 kids for two months, perhaps? Hiring people? You know, and without publicity.

01:18:14 And some of these organizations -- that's why I'm rather down on professional organizations like the Shoah Foundation. I'll give you a piece of my mind about them if you want to hear it. But, uh, they talked a lot. They do a lot of fundraising. They send out endless literature, but they don't do anything. Or what they do is minute, minuscule and, and they toot their horn. And people like Eleanor and Gilbert do something and B'rith Shalom does something.
Whoever heard of B'rith Shalom?

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- 01:18:43 As a matter of fact, one of the clippings in Mrs. Kraus', uh, scrapbook is an article pointing out that -- or something written about, about, uh -- what's that other big Jewish organization? B'rith, uh, B'nai B'rith brought 50 Jewish children here. And so fortunately, somebody wrote an article -- I don't know how much circulation it got -- saying, "No, it's wrong."
- 01:19:11 It's not B'rith Shalom" -- "It's not B'nai" -- whatever, the other one, which is a big organization well financed, very prominent. I often wonder why that happens. Individual people make a big difference. Well, I think I learned that from them.
- 01:19:44 Uh, yeah, those two years did me a lot of good. They, uh -- it felt real good when I worked at Yellowstone and was able to do things without getting paid for it. Well --
- Interviewer: Let me ask you just a couple of questions about your sister, Bob.
- 01:20:19 Robert Braun: Yep.
- Interviewer: Because I don't know much about what she did in her life.
- Robert Braun: Yeah. Well, excuse me; I've got to blow my nose. Honk. [Laughter] Sorry.
- Interviewer: We won't include that either, don't worry.

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Robert Braun: I don't care. Include it. At this age, at this age there's a saying, "I hope I live long enough to embarrass my children." Be that as it may, my sister being a middle child in the family was the one who was nice.

01:20:50 She was the nicest person I ever knew. She -- you couldn't insult her. She forgave everybody anything. She wasn't vindictive like I am. Uh, I think she would have forgiven the Nazis even, if she'd had a chance. Uh, but she worked very hard. She worked, uh, all the time she was in high school, living in Bridgeport, in my cousin's office until maybe 10 o'clock at night.

01:21:13 And then she went to pharmacy school and did all her studying on the train going to New Haven where the school was located. And she, uh, worked again in my cousin's office afternoon and evening. He had evening hours. And then, uh, she married a fellow student, Sidney [Gitlin], who was a war hero. He was in, in the European combat. He was a medic. He rescued wounded under fire, being [unintelligible] by American Air Corp planes.

01:21:45 And he ran out and pulled them free and got them out and he got a bronze star for that. The one with the V on it, not the M. You know, there are two kinds of bronze stars. And, uh, she had three children. The oldest one is, uh, Lois. She became a physician. The second one is Ellen. She became a Ph.D in geology. And she, incidentally, was named after Ellen. And, uh, the youngest one is Jane who lives here in Fairfield and she's an architect.

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01:22:15 And, uh, Ellen has this fabulous porcelain statue. I have a photograph of it. And the reason she has it is because my sister named her after Ellen Kraus. And that was the porcelain figurine that the 50 par -- 50 sets of parents of those children bought in Vienna and gave to Mrs. Kraus as a gift. I think you have a picture of it and a little card that goes with it. Uh, and all those -- all her children, they have grandchildren, too.

01:22:46 So that's why there's so many picture -- so many people in that Fourth of July picnic picture.

Interviewer: And the oldest sibling who --

Robert Braun: Martha.

[Director's comments]

Interviewer: I want to make sure I have the family story. The oldest sibling who
--

01:23:36 Robert Braun: Martha. She was three years old -- five years older than me and she went to Israel to British Mandate of Palestine with a youth group and they founded a kibbutz there called Kfar Blum in Galilee. And, uh, she eventually married a fellow [kibbutznick] there. And they were involved in the '48 war with the Arabs and, you know, some of the subsequent ones. And she's a

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totally different personality, much more forceful than my sister,
Johanna.

01:24:08 And eventually I think, uh, after my parents came here, but I think after my father died she moved with her family to the United States and he went to the University of Connecticut and got a doctors degree in civil engineering; the first one that the University ever offered, as a matter of fact.

01:24:34 And he subsequently started, uh, together with another man a, uh, civil engineering firm in Auburn in New York. And eventually they sold that and he went to work for the Bureau of Standards in Washington. And that's where he was until he retired and eventually passed away a few years ago. They have three children, two of them doctors. The third one -- what was the third one? Oh, he's also an architect.

Interviewer: Your father passed away when, Bob?

01:25:11 Robert Braun: Uh, at age 76 and that would be -- again, he was born 1879. Whatever year that -- I can't remember the exact year. It's not in my mind. But, uh, he passed away here in, in Bridgeport, Connecticut. And, uh, as I say, my mother eventually in the last couple of years she couldn't stay at my sister's home anymore and she went to the Jewish home for the elderly.

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01:25:41 And she died there just before her 102nd birthday. But her mind was clear until the last year or two. So she had a lot to remember and a lot to talk about.

Interviewer: Remarkable. I'm pretty much out of questions.

Robert Braun: Oh.

Interviewer: I'm going to ask if there is anything in particular you want to mention that I didn't quite get around to asking you.

01:26:12 Robert Braun: Well, I used to sneak into Mr. Kraus' bedroom when we lived there in, uh, the first two years here, because at one time he used to go big game hunting in Alaska. And he had oh, three or four massive rifles leaning in the corner of the bedroom in cases, zipper cases. And when nobody was looking I'd go in there and I'd unzip them and I'd play with them. Nobody ever found out. This is the first time anyone knows. [Laughs]

01:26:43 But, uh, that was kind of fun. Uh, well, there are endless things you could talk about, but, uh, I don't know if anything is significant. All I can say is that I'm sure that my personality was molded by the Kraus' and my own parents, too. Because my mother was a -- my father was a happy guy. He told stories, he entertained people, he knew a million and one jokes.

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01:27:13 And my mother was, uh, the mathematician and kept things in order. She also sang all the time. She used to sing endless Viennese songs. You know, some of the ribald, some of the humorous. And she knew them all and she had a very, very good voice. She could hit -- she was precisely on tune and she had the ability when there was any, anyone else singing she could harmonize automatically.

01:27:40 And, uh, the last, uh -- we took this voyage down the Danube on one of these [unintelligible] cruises and the ship's doctors were a couple from Austria, two Austrian physicians considerably younger than I. And, uh, so eventually I got to know them and they seemed - - you know, as I said, I don't blame the children for the sins of their parents, so we got fairly chummy. And they were fascinated because I used to sing these songs to them that I remember from when I was a kid and heard my mother singing them.

01:28:11 And they never heard them. They didn't know they existed. It went out of style. And they kept egging me on to sing more and more of them. And if they had had a dictating machine they would have taken them down. Some of them were a little on the shady side, which amused them no end. Well, I could, I could ramble on for a few hours if you like.

Interviewer: Well, I'll tell you there was something I wanted to ask you and you just reminded me of it with your reference to the trip down the Danube. You did return to Vienna.

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01:28:40 Robert Braun: Yes.

Interviewer: Tell me a little bit about what that was like.

Robert Braun: Well, I'll tell you. One interesting -- we went back and we -- my mother, not having been Jewish, she has a nephew still living there and she -- when they left Vienna in 1947 they turned their apartment over to her brother, who is much younger than she, uh, 30 years younger. She kind of raised him. And, uh, he lived in that apartment with his wife.

01:29:08 And they had a child and that son, who is named Robert after me for some strange reason, still lives in that apartment. And, uh, so we went to visit him. But he has some interesting problems. He believes in the unemployment policy and getting unemployment compensation, which he takes full advantage of. So we visited with him and, uh, it was still the same, except it was filled up with odds and ends. Now I forgot the question you had.

Interviewer: You were recollecting --

01:29:39 Robert Braun: Oh, I went -- oh, yes. Okay. Then, of course, I wanted, wanted to go see my father's old place of business, the wine cellar. And it is now the Viennese Clock Museum, former clock museum operated by the City of Vienna. It's a two-story building. He had a -- before he was married he had a small apartment on the second floor and his office, uh, where his desk and telephone were

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on the ground floor in a small part of this, but the whole building is now the clock museum.

01:30:06 And the cellar, the catacombs where he stored wine and so on had a very steep wooden stairway going down to it and a trap door and that was below. So when I went to the, uh, clock museum I said, "You know, many years ago my father had a wine" -- I said, "How long has this been a clock museum?" He said, "Always." I said, "Well, wait a minute. You know, before a certain year my father had a wine business here and there was a cellar underneath formed out of the old catacombs where he stored wine.

01:30:37 And do you think I could possibly go down to look at it just to see what I remember as a child?" He said, "Well, it's locked and the guy who has the key isn't here and you have to get, you have to get permission." I said, "How can I get permission to go down there?" She said, "Well, you have to call the director of the Vienna museums." There's a chain of, I don't know, seven or eight different small museums scattered all over Vienna and, uh, one director for all this.

01:31:04 A big shot because after all there must be 40, 50 people working in these museums and it's a major establishment. And I said, "Well how can I reach him?" "I will give you his telephone number and you call him up exactly 12 o'clock tomorrow. Precisely 12 o'clock and he'll be available and we'll get him on the phone and you can

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talk to him about getting permission to go into the cellar." So we'll see how that turns out. So sure enough, the next day I telephoned.

01:31:33 On the first ring the head director picked it up. He was sitting there waiting for the call. And he knew all about it and he said, "I'm very sorry, but it would be impossible to let you go down there because, uh, it's dangerous and, uh, uh, besides we'd have to get approval from the director, board of directors of the Vienna museums." I said, "Come on, all I want to do is peek in it. What's wrong? I'm not going to touch anything. I'm not going to fall down." "Impossible," and he hung up.

01:32:03 Now, I know that they tipped him off that this guy is going to make trouble. I wasn't going to make trouble. I just wanted to see. And he knew the call was coming. He had it all prepared and he decided there was no way we're going to let some ex-patriot come down here and give us a hard time. So as far as they're concerned, it doesn't exist, it's not there, there was never a wine cellar there. That was my reaction to Vienna. And I found that reaction in all the places we stopped in Austria. They're like oblivious, nothing happened.

01:32:33 It was an unfortunate episode. Those two doctors were very nice people. They said, "Das waren schwierige zeiten." That was the only comment. It was, "Those were difficult times." Zip. In Germany on the other hand, every time we got off the boat at a town or a village we had a guide. Same in Austria, but in Germany

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the guide, the first thing they would do is take the group to the Holocaust memorial in every single little town. Invariably, it was a place where some temple was burnt down and there was some kind of a memorial there.

01:33:02 And they talked about it to all the tourists. And these were not -- it was not a Jewish tour group. I mean, there were maybe five percent Jews in it. In Austria it was completely different. Nobody remembered anything. Nobody remember a thing. It was really funny. I mean, it was humorous actually. Okay, that's all.

Interviewer: A couple of minor little points. When did you become an American citizen?

Robert Braun: As soon as I turned 21 I was eligible and I applied and I took the oath and I got a piece of paper.

Interviewer: And the related question is when did you first feel like you were an American?

01:33:46 Robert Braun: Very early, because I went -- frankly, I think - - in thinking back, I went out of my way. I said, "They kicked me out of there. I'm going to be 110 percent American." That's why I joined the Boy Scouts. That's why I participated in all the parades. That's why I got interested in American history. That's why I collect American historical prints. I can show you a few hundred more.

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We're going to walk down that hallway where you see some more.
And I decided, uh, I'm as good as anybody else here.

01:34:17 And the way to do that is to be that, not to, you know, stand on sides and throw stones and, uh -- I never had a problem. Occasionally, you know, you run into anti-Semitic cracks and comments, at Boy Scout camp, for instance. But I just yelled back at them. You know, there'd be, uh, an all Catholic troop full of micks from Saint Augustine's Cathedral and they'd say, "Hey you Christ killers."

01:34:45 And I'd say, "You god damn stupid mick." It was fine, no problem. As a matter of fact, one of the micks who had a severe protrusion, Francis Flynn, once beat me up. He broke my glasses in a similar episode. Fast forward; he brought his kid into my office to get his teeth straightened. The kid had the same teeth this far out. And he said, "Hey, Bob! Remember we were at Boy Scout camp together." "Yeah, I remember. You broke my glasses you stupid mick." Ha-ha, it was very funny. [Laughs]

01:35:15 But I never let it bother me when there were -- I mean, there were plenty of cracks, you know, here and in school and various places. And, uh, I became a member of the Board of Directors of the Connecticut Audubon Society and, uh, there was no hint of anything of that sort. I mean, under the surface probably, because those people were mostly retired, uh, executives from General

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Electric. And so, you know, I didn't pry into it and they -- it was all very collegial and congenial.

01:35:44 And one -- every -- once a month we had a board meeting at the headquarters up in Fairfield and there was a new member there who was a retired Vice President from the General Electric Company, which has its headquarters in Fairfield. And before the board meetings for about half-an-hour we'd have wine and crackers and cheese and stand around and socialize and talk. You know, all very, very friendly. And this guy in a rather loud voice started cracking some kind of a Yiddish accented joke like that song, Sam you made the pants too long.

01:36:17 The suit is fine. But obviously, you know, humorous. I ignored it and nobody said anything. And a few weeks later I bumped into him on the railroad station. He was all over me; arm over the shoulder, hugging, "Oh, hey, how you doing?" And occasionally I'd bump into him and he was always the friendliest, outgoing guy imaginable. Somebody got to him and tipped him off and he behaved after that. [Laughs] It was kind of funny.

01:36:48 Sorry, I digress.

Interviewer: That's okay. The trip to Vienna was what year?

Robert Braun: Well, there were two, actually. The first one was, uh, two years ago. What's this, 19 -- in the fall. This will be fall of, uh, oh, fall of, uh --

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what are we talking about? Uh, uh, 2010 -- 2009, yeah. And it went up, up the Danube and then through a canal into the Rhine and to Amsterdam.

01:37:22 Uh, so, uh, that's --

Interviewer: So just last year. So the anecdote of the clock museum --

Robert Braun: Was the second one, a year ago. Because the first one, uh, they were quite open about it. They said, "Geez, we don't have a key." And the boat left the next day and I couldn't wait, so I said, "If we ever get back." And sure enough we got back the next time because the second trip we took went in the other direction. It went all the way down to the Black Sea. So we spent -- had more time in Vienna and I still couldn't get in.

01:37:55 But the same experience with the tour guides and stopping at places and so on. It was all just a difficult time. End of story.

Interviewer: Austria has a difficult time dealing with this.

Robert Braun: They don't deal with it. They ignore it. When I was in -- did I tell you the story about the flags issue? I was in the stamp club at the junior high school I went to in Bridgeport. We had a stamp club. I collect everything, as you can see by looking around.

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01:38:24 You name it, I collect it. I had a stamp collection and I was in the stamp club. And about 1942 the United States Post Office started issuing commemorative stamps, one a month for each of the overrun countries, so-called; Holland, France, uh, Denmark, Norway, on and on and on and on. And each stamp that came out once a month had the, just the picture of the flag in color on the stamp. And one month, boom, out pops the Austrian flag.

01:38:56 I said, "Wait a minute. They made a terrible mistake." And the teacher in charge of the stamp club, the counselor, the advisor, I said, "Look, look, they made a mistake. Somebody should tell them." He said, "No, no. It's one of the overrun countries." I said, "It's not. It's not an overrun country. They joined them." I was shocked, absolutely shocked. But that's been the reaction. That was the American Postal Department, for God sakes.

[Director's comments]

Interviewer: This is one of those funny questions and it has nothing to do with the story. What was your Scout project?

01:39:38 Robert Braun: Project?

Interviewer: Did you have an Eagle Scout project?

Robert Braun: Uh, yes I did, as a matter of fact, but I'm trying to remember what it was. You know, you're going back 70 years almost. Uh, I remember

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there was a project -- wait a minute, no. We didn't have projects. We had to get 40 merit badges and some of them were difficult. The bird watching merit badge was the hardest one to get. You had to identify 50 birds in the field.

01:40:07 You had to go with the merit badge counselor and find 50 birds, which was not easy, but I did it without any trouble. There was no project at that time. I know I've read about where they have to build a trail or do something of that sort. But this was way back in 1944, '43 and I'm pretty sure that we had no projects.

Interviewer: Okay. Switching gears, you mentioned LBI.

Robert Braun: LBI?

Interviewer: I think, Long Beach Island?

01:40:38 Robert Braun: Who?

Interviewer: Oh, Harvey Cedars.

Interviewer: You mentioned something happened --

Robert Braun: Long Beach Island, yes.

Interviewer: So this kind of ties in with where were you when and --?

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Robert Braun: Okay. Well, the two years we actually fulltime at the Kraus family home, every summer we went to Long Beach Island and on nice weekends, fall and spring, we also drove there in their nice wooden-sided station wagon. And it was regulated because there wasn't enough gas to go often.

01:41:08 So Mr. Kraus was very careful to save gas in such a way so that there was enough to get to Long Beach Island and back. He wouldn't take a gallon of extra gas beyond his ration. And then after -- and then my sister went down there to visit for almost the whole summer during the war and that's when the Coast Guard patrolled the beach on horseback.

01:41:34 And, uh, she -- the neighbors, the Amram family -- God, I can't remember the boy's first name. He became an author. I've got one of his books. Had a daughter my sister's age and they were good friends and they did a terrible prank once, which fortunately Mrs. Kraus or Mr. Kraus never found out. They turned the chairs in the Kraus home upside down and they rearranged the furniture and did all kinds of things like that.

01:42:00 Because my sister was staying with the Amram family next door, but they got in there and they thought that was very funny. It wasn't funny as it turned out because when Mr. Kraus came out there the next time he saw that and he reported it to the police. So the police called the Coast Guard and they came and investigated and they thought there might have been a surreptitious landing here. You

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know, that was after the 10 saboteurs landed, uh, off the coast of, was it Long Island somewhere?

01:42:30 Uh, but she was so afraid of telling what they had done. The two girls, they never admitted that they did it and the whole thing was just finally just, well, it's a mystery what happened. So I have to admit, I didn't do it, my sister did it, may she rest in peace. Uh, and what, what was her name? [Luigi] -- [Wigi] Amram.

01:42:59 Well you can look up Amram on, on, on Google and you'll find all about the Amrams and the younger brother and dropping my car down a ventilating tube. [Laughs]

Interviewer: I'm assuming that you and your sister always lived in the main house.

Robert Braun: Yes.

Interviewer: But what do you remember about the camp and all the other kids?

Robert Braun: Oh, the camp. Oh, well, we were at that camp longer than anybody else because by the time we left they closed, by the time we left they closed it up.

01:43:32 Uh, what do I remember? It was very new. We were two children to a room. There were two wings and a central building with a dining room and kitchen facilities. There were several women who worked

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there fulltime taking care of the kids. I don't know if they were nurses or volunteers or paid help. I'm not sure. The food was different, but very good, I'm sure. The first meal we had there had a dessert of, of sliced bananas embedded in Jell-O, which was a mystery, because in Vienna bananas were kind of like a candy.

01:44:05 You'd buy one at a time from an Italian peddler on the street and it was treated like a candy bar, a special treat. And here we saw these little pieces of banana in this strange packing material. And all 50 kids started to scrape this odd, reddish stuff away so that we could get at the bananas. Nobody knew you were supposed to eat it. And the women -- I remember this very clearly. The women taking care of us, serving us and so on were trying to tell us, "Eat it," and we wouldn't eat it because it was different from anything we'd ever seen before.

01:44:35 Nobody had ever heard of Jell-O. Uh, it took quite a while. To this day, I can't eat Jell-O. But the bananas were good once you scrapped all that pink stuff off, the red stuff. But the care was excellent there. Uh, doctors came to visit. Uh, the two boys who were ultra, ultra orthodox drove everybody crazy for the first couple of weeks.

01:45:00 Because Friday night before sunset they'd try to make all the kids tear off pieces of toilet paper and prepare it for the Sabbath so you wouldn't have to tear up paper on the Sabbath. This went on for a couple of weeks. Then Mr. Kraus found out about it and he put a

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stop to it. He said, "No, you don't have to do that. If you want, do it, but you don't have to do it." So we all stopped doing it, except for those two boys. [Laughs]

Interviewer: There was a bar mitzvah. Do you recall?

01:45:28 Robert Braun: No, I don't recall that at all. I don't know. We -
- I --

Interviewer: I had heard that one of the older boys was just turning 13.

Robert Braun: Oh, well it may have been, but I stayed away from religious observances as much as possible. Uh, and do to this day. We joined a temple when, when, when, uh, our children were young. Park Avenue Temple here, which is a very liberal outfit.

01:45:57 But I quit that in a huff when, uh, I didn't approve of the Rabbi's sermon one time. It happened after Rockefeller ordered the storming of the prison in Upstate New York. And this Rabbi, may he live in infamy, brings into the sermon, he said, "The people --" -- what was the name of the town?

Interviewer: Attica.

Robert Braun: Attica. "The people of Attica are just as guilty as the Germans that smelled the smoke coming out of the smokestacks and didn't ask about it.

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01:46:26 Why didn't they rise up against this brutal murder of all those poor prisoners?" And I said, "What are you talking about?" And my son was next to me, Tom. He pulled at me, "Don't make a fuss." He's shy. He doesn't like to make no -- he forced me to sit down again. And the next day I told him, "Forget us. We're through. We're done with that temple." It was outrageous for him to make a comment like that. As you can see, I don't have much nachus for rabbis.

Interviewer: Well, it is interesting Bob that here you have Gilbert and Ellen, which as you know quite well --

01:46:59 Robert Braun: Yeah.

Interviewer: And as I have learned were completely irreligious.

Robert Braun: Yes.

Interviewer: And yet, doing what they did --

Robert Braun: Exactly. That's what impresses me so much. And that's what makes me look with suspicion at, uh, the ultra-relig -- well, no, they can do what they want. But as far as their behavior is concerned, uh, no religious organization did anything like they did. Not one. Now, they had influential people in their board of directors, I'm sure.

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Interviewer: Just to follow-up quickly on what David asked, while you were at the camp were the kids taking outings outside of the camp?

01:47:41 Robert Braun: No. We were on the campgrounds and, uh, we, we were kept active. We had outdoor games, uh, tag. They tried to teach us baseball. That was pathetic. If you can imagine Mr. Kraus or some other volunteers be out there speaking English, trying to teach kids that had never heard of baseball before how to play baseball; unbelievable. The most confusing thing I ever went through.

01:48:04 And then on weekends we were supposed to really be, you know, energetic and athletic and play games because people came from Philadelphia and New York and other places to perhaps provide a home for some of these children. And it was, it was a madhouse. [Laughs] I, I don't imagine how they ever placed those kids, but they did place them all eventually.

Interviewer: What was that process like? What do you remember?

Robert Braun: Well, I don't -- I didn't know because we just were told by Mrs. Kraus, "Well, now you're coming home to stay with us."

01:48:35 And I don't know how the other kids responded to it. I do know that, uh, they would say, "Oh, so-and-so went to live with this nice family in, in Doylestown," or in Philadelphia or in New York or in Pittsburgh or something. And, uh, there weren't any sad partings. I

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mean, we didn't say farewell or have parties. It just -- it was like, uh -- well, uh, it seemed normal somehow. We knew that sooner or later we would live with somebody.

01:49:05 We wouldn't be there forever. We sang songs. It was called -- they called it Camp Shalom. And we sang, "We're the boys of Camp Shalom you hear so much about. The people stop to look at us whenever we go out. We're noted for our winsomeness and clever things we do. That everybody likes us, we hope you like us to. As we go" -- you don't want to -- shall I go on? "As we go marching and the crowd begins to play -- no, and the band begins to play, you can hear them shouting.

01:49:36 The boys of Camp Shalom are on their way." Stuff like that. One interesting coincidence; you know, I became a great aficionado of Audubons, as you may have guessed. As a matter of fact, in the past I used to go -- when the New York Historical Society sent their original Audubon paintings on tour to various museums; to Detroit, to San Fran -- Los Angeles and so on, I had a slide talk, a two projector talk, uh, on, on how to identify Audubon originals, as opposed to reproductions, fakes, restrikes and so on.

01:50:12 And they asked me if I'd be willing to give this talk at different museums and I said, "Sure." So I talked at, I don't know, a number of museums, Detroit and Los Angeles and I think, uh, Portland, Oregon. They paid for my ticket, but I didn't take any money for it. I said, "No, I don't want to get paid. This is fun." And, uh, it so

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happens that Camp Shalom, B'rith Shalom's establishment, was on the banks of Perkiomen Creek. Perkiomen Creek is the creek that ran through Audubon's farm when he first came here from France.

01:50:44 His father owned what they called a plantation. And his father was a -- you don't want to hear about Audubon. Anyway, his father owned it and in Napoleonic times he sent his son, who was draft eligible and Napoleon grabbed everybody, everybody who moved, sent him to his plantation in North America to get him away from Napoleon's armies. And Napoleon lived there and became fascinated by birds on the banks of Perkiomen Creek. It's the same place where this Camp Shalom was.

Interviewer: Wow!

01:51:14 Robert Braun: See, destiny.

Interviewer: I don't think that facility is even there anymore. I asked somebody -

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Robert Braun: Oh, no?

Interviewer: If the camp -- yeah. Because I was hoping to just go visit it and walk around.

Robert Braun: Well, there are pictures of it.

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Interviewer: Yeah, yeah, there certainly are.

Robert Braun: But I remember Perkiomen Creek. It wasn't a big river. Geez.

Interviewer: The thing I'm still trying to get; there's kind of the group, you called them the syndicate. That basically when they came over to get you guys they were kind of representing a syndicate of people. Did --

01:51:56 Robert Braun: I don't know about that.

Interviewer: I mean, in a way. In terms of --

Robert Braun: Syndicate sounds sinister somehow. Group, organization.

Interviewer: Right. But I'm just wondering did they ever come and visit.

Robert Braun: Yes. Some men and women visited and talked to us. And they didn't -- they were not necessarily to pick a child to take home with them, but just to see what was going on and -- wait a minute. The president of the B'rith Shalom was -- we called him Uncle -- I can't remember his first name.

Interviewer: Louis [Levine].

01:52:30 Robert Braun: Uncle Louis, yeah. He came frequently and talked to the children. And gradually the children learned more and more English. A lot of our time was spent learning English, that's

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right. Volunteers, I presume, would come out and in little groups and they, they would point to things and teach us words. We picked it up very fast, I think. I didn't think there was a problem with language by the time we left. Uh, there wasn't any other school type of education. I mean, no math or things of that sort, but English and American history.

01:53:02 Mrs. Kraus used to lecture us. There is a great photograph of her pointing to -- standing in front of a picture of President Roosevelt, uh, over a fireplace I remember with little kid -- with some of the children standing around there. No, they certainly taught, uh, patriotism. Of course, during the war everybody taught it. [Laughs] It wasn't that unusual. All in all it was a very happy experience, those two months we spent there or three months; I don't remember. We even got used to the food.

01:53:33 I don't think we ever ate Jell-O, though. To this day I won't eat Jell-O. [Laughs]

Interviewer: But ice cream. I heard ice cream --

Robert Braun: Oh, yeah. Oh, ice cream; that was terrific. As a matter of fact, that was particularly favored because in Vienna they didn't have ice cream. They had Italian ices, which were good, but it wasn't like ice cream. It wasn't rich. It wasn't with cream. You know, we could never get enough ice cream. Uh --

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Interviewer: As a 10-year-old or 11-year-old, what do you remember being the biggest just sort of cultural or just the biggest distinction between your life in Vienna? Aside from the obvious of not being --

01:54:12 Robert Braun: Well, I'll give you something obvious. Right on the bus going from I guess Hoboken to, uh, Collegeville where the camp was located, Stephen Kraus came along with his parents. I don't think Ellen did. I think there were two buses. Maybe she was on the other bus. And, you know, in America people are relaxed, especially young men and they put their feet up on things. And Stephen Kraus sat in the seat right behind the driver. I was several seats back.

01:54:42 But we all stared because Stephen Kraus got on the bus and he put his feet up on the railing. We said, "My God, look at that." It was shocking. I mean, if you did that in Austria you're parents would clobber you or the conductor would throw you off the bus. But it seemed very relaxed. Eventually, I got used to that's how Americans are. They don't care about putting their feet up. But I have that picture in my mind; the back of his head. He had some kind of tweed slacks on and I remember he had big feet.

01:55:15 And the shoes were right up behind the driver. There was a chrome rail. That was a shock. Don't tell him. Oh, he's going to hear this. Oh, geez. [Laughs]

Interviewer: Oh, yeah.

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Robert Braun: As my wife says, I talk too much.

Interviewer: No such thing.

Robert Braun: No such thing?

Interviewer: No such thing.

Robert Braun: Well you can always chop it out.

Interviewer: I'm going to see Steve in about six weeks.

Robert Braun: Uh-huh.

Interviewer: In April. We're going to do this --

01:55:46 Robert Braun: Oh, good. I wonder what -- I wonder how his memories coincide with mine?

Interviewer: Bob, I've never talked to him about this.

Robert Braun: Yeah.

Interviewer: Neither Liz nor I know what he's going to remember. We've never talked to him about this until the film project came up. We never had a conversation.

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Robert Braun: I remember I spoke to him several years ago when Liz told me that he had a copy of -- he had the original memoir.

01:56:13 And I wanted a copy and I asked him about that. And he said, "Okay," uh, he'll send it. And I said, "I promise I am not going to" -- he said -- well, you know, he was concerned that this might be some commercial enterprise, which would have been abhorring. This was her personal memoirs. And I said, "No, no, no. I just want your permission to make copies to give to the children of my sister." She has three daughters. So they each have a copy and I have a copy.

01:56:41 But, uh, that's as far as they ever went. As a matter of fact, I got my copy just, uh, when I was in the hospital with cancer surgery. And I was in a fog most of the four weeks and my daughter Betsy read it out loud to me. I was lying on a gurney. It was very nice.

Interviewer: She read the whole manuscript?

Robert Braun: Yeah.

01:57:10 Well they screwed up my operation. My intestines came apart afterwards. [Laughs] For a week, gastric contents were spilling into the abdominal cavity. It was a -- anyway they managed to pump me full of this and that and the other thing and finally they patched me up again. But, uh, Betsy came and stayed there for hours and hours

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and, uh, she had the -- she had this. I couldn't read and, and she read it out loud to me. It was very nice.

Interviewer: It's quite a story.

01:57:43 Robert Braun: Yeah.

Interviewer: That Ellen committed to paper.

Robert Braun: It kept me breathing.

Interviewer: Do you remember any of the other kids coming back and visiting while you were still there?

Robert Braun: Yes, one person, uh, Irvin [Tipper]. I think he's a radiologist. And, uh, it turns out I first met him at the reunion I went to in Philadelphia.

01:58:13 And then he called me and he lives in New Jersey somewhere. And he said, uh, you know, he'd like to come up and visit. I said, "Fine." And he came up. And, uh, he had some information I didn't. Uh, and he said -- he told me something. But anyway, uh, he was here for several hours.

01:58:45 And he gave me some of the data he had and I gave him whatever copies of whatever I had. And, uh, ever since then I get a, a greeting card from him on, on, on, on the Jewish New Year. I'm not really an

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anti-Semite. Honest to God, I'm not. [Laughs] My children -- my grandchildren went to Sunday school at this reform temple.

01:59:15 And it was funny because my -- that son in a house next door married a Korean nurse that he met in a hospital he was interning in in Connecticut. So his children are half Korean, but Jewish. They all had bar mitzvahs and bat mitzvahs. The mother insisted on this. And, uh, when they went to the temple, uh, reform temple in Bridgeport -- no, in Fairfield, I guess it is -- they had pageants and every Thanksgiving, of course, they had a Thanksgiving pageant.

01:59:43 Invariably, one of my children played the role of the Indian because they looked like an Indian. And it was a big hit. They said, "Gee, where'd you get that Indian for the Jewish pageant?" [Laughter]

Interviewer: That's great. So there have been a couple of bar mitzvahs in the family?

Robert Braun: Oh, yeah. No, everyone. All my grandchildren had bar mitzvahs. Not the one out in Oregon, no. He did not because -- I don't know. Well -- although there is something interesting there.

02:00:12 My son the arborist who is a tree doctor, found a, a, a gravestone, a flat one in the weeds outside a Christian cemetery back in the woods somewhere near an abandoned village in Oregon where he was working in the trees. And he scraped away the leaves and it had

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Hebrew lettering on it. And, uh, below it said in English the name. His first I don't know it, but the last name was Brown, B-R-O-W-N.

02:00:42 And the first name was, I think, Adolph or something like that. And there was a Hebrew inscription above it and it said born -- no, it said died 18 -- I think 1856. Born a certain year in Posenon, Prussia. And Posenon is a town where one part of my family came from.

02:01:10 My Uncle [Yatchov] when he tried to bring a case against -- claim damages against the [Hepsburgs] it was kicked out of court. He traced some of the ancestors down to Posenon, Prussia, which is at that time was called Posen, P-O-S-E-N. I'll betcha the guy is related somehow, because Brown, of course, is the English translation of Braun, B-R-A-U-N. And I often wondered, uh, if we had some early ancestor in the Oregon territory.

02:01:42 Probably an itinerant peddler or something of that sort. [Laughs]

Interviewer: We have friends named Posen.

Robert Braun: Named Posen?

Interviewer: Posen, yeah.

Robert Braun: Well, they probably originally came from Posen. Because see, in the Napoleonic era everybody had to take a name so he could tax

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them. And Jews picked names. That's why they have some strange names; quite often the name of the town.

Interviewer: He was in the silver business in Germany before the war, Posen Silver.

02:02:11 Robert Braun: I suppose, yeah. I don't know much about Posen. But it changed nationality. One time it was part of Prussia and then Germany and then Poland. They changed the spelling, yeah.

Interviewer: It went back and forth, yeah. Anything?

Interviewer: Well, I guess I'll cut for a while.

Interviewer: What's that?

Interviewer: I guess I'll cut for a while.

Interviewer: Is it possible to get a little --

[Abrupt end of recorded material]