

Rudolf Braun- Interviewed by Anca Staceseu

ANCA STACESEU: [00:00:00] (inaudible), and I'm interviewing Dr. Rudolf Braun at 525 Clinton Avenue, his office. Would you please give me your full name and age?

RUDOLF BRAUN: I'm a medical doctor. My name is Rudolf B-R-A-U-N. I was born on August 25, 1902, and I've been living in Bridgeport since 1938.

AS: Wow, would you please tell me a little bit about yourself? As in, were your parents residents of Bridgeport?

RB: No, my parents were not residents of Bridgeport. My parents were born in Austria in a small town near Vienna. I myself was born in an even smaller town outside of Vienna. The name [00:01:00] doesn't make too much difference. You wouldn't understand it. It was just a little village with 1,700 people. My father was a physician there, and he practiced in that little village. The name was Piesting in Niederösterreich. He practiced there since 1898. So I went to school first in my native village in Piesting. I went to the college in Wiener Neustadt, that's the district town about 30 miles outside of Vienna. After I was through with college, I started at the University of Vienna and became a medical doctor. After I graduated as a medical doctor in the year 1929,

that means about 31 years after my father graduated from the same [00:02:00] university, I went as a resident to several hospitals, and I was a medical resident for approximately five years in different hospitals. Among others, I was in Vienna. I was in Germany, and later on I was in a hospital which tended to (inaudible) people that was up in the mountain. I stayed there for approximately one year until my father became ill. My mother asked me to substitute for my father's practice in my native town. He never was able to practice anymore, and I settled there for the next four years until 1938. In 1938 Hitler marched into [00:03:00] Austria and started the same Holocaust in Austria as he started in Germany. Thereupon I left my native country, Austria, and went to Bridgeport, Connecticut. That was a city where my mother's sister had been living for the last 50 years.

AS: So, you came to a relative here?

RB: In the beginning I came to a relative, but then I went to New York to learn the English language a little bit. After I was a master in the English language I made the state board in Connecticut so that I could practice as a medical doctor again. The state board [00:04:00] I passed shortly after I arrived here. I settled on Clinton Avenue, 525, about 45 -- 47 years ago, and I have been in the same

location ever since. I have been active from the first day I arrived here until now, and I intend to remain active in practice as long as my health will permit. If you want to know something about earlier times in Bridgeport around the time of my arrival it might interest you that when I came in 1938 Bridgeport was a small town with about 100,000 inhabitants, and in 1935, that means three years after I arrived, Bridgeport celebrated its 100th anniversary.

[00:05:00] Only 100 years compared with towns in the old country which are thousands of years old. For instance, my parents' house, where I was born, was 200 years old. By now it is almost 300 years. That means that my parents' house was built long, long before there was anyone in Bridgeport, Connecticut. But I want to tell you about the town of Bridgeport itself. When I arrived here there were no thruways. The main thoroughfare was the Post Road, that means Fairfield Avenue, and I stayed with my relative for the first few weeks at Waldorf Avenue, and went to the corner of Fairfield Avenue, and I saw a stream of cars unending coming down Fairfield Avenue in either ways because there were no thruway. There were no [00:06:00] Merritt Parkway. The only means to go between New York and Boston was to use the Post Road. It took approximately four hours by car to go to New York City. It will interest

you that the prices were different from now also. I personally know that you could -- my wife told me that she could buy a pound of veal for 18 cents. She bought a pound of grapes for five cents, and a pound of flatfish was also five cents. You could go into a restaurant and drink a glass of beer, and you got a sandwich on top of it.

AS: Did you have any kids? Do you have any kids?

RB: I came with a small boy, who was three years old, two and a half years old when I came to Bridgeport. He went to school in Bridgeport. He [00:07:00] went to Bassick High School. He graduated there as the valedictorian of his class, and he went to Yale University to study -- for his college studies, and then went on to the Columbia University to study medicine, and he also is a physician. Now he has been a physician for the last 20 years. He is a professor of Harvard University at the present time. Things have changed since I told you that you could buy a pound of veal for 18 cents. You pay considerably more, but life itself has changed too. When we stayed here in the early 1930s we usually left our front doors opened. [00:08:00] And when we mailed packages, usually the post boxes, the post office boxes were so full that people didn't bother to put the boxes into the post office. They put it on top of the boxes. No one stole. There was no

crime on the streets. It was the most peaceful surrounding you can imagine. Today you have to have a burglar alarm and to be afraid that somebody might come into your office and tries to do you harm, which, as a matter of fact, happened to me myself, too. Is there anything else you would like to know?

AS: Could you tell me anything about the depression years?

RB: The depression years, yes.

AS: How did it affect your family, and how did it affect other people around you?

RB: The depression years were very cruel. The depression years were so that people didn't have enough to [00:09:00] buy the pound of veal for 18 cents. And there was not much welfare at that time, so people had to work (inaudible) for money or sustenance. It was very, very bad, and it started to get slightly better after I arrived here in Bridgeport. That was in 1938. The worst of the depression was over, so I cannot tell you too much about the worst of the years.

AS: Do you remember much about the war?

RB: About the war?

AS: About WWI or --

RB: Yes, I remember everything about the war. I was fortunate. I was born in a generation which was [00:10:00] too young for the first World War, too old for the second World War,

but I worked during the war years here in Bridgeport, and if anyone complains of hard work I should have complained because I remember that I worked during the war years from 8:00 in the morning till 11:30 at night. I was extremely busy. I got telephone calls sometimes during the middle of the night, and I did not hesitate to get up at 4:00 in the morning and make a house call. House calls are a thing of the past now. House calls are unnecessary nowadays because the ambulance service is very up to par, and the hospitals are organized to take care of acute emergencies, which were not organized at the time [00:11:00] in the years of 1930 to '38 and even up to 1940, to the end of the war.

AS: How did the medicine (inaudible)?

RB: Huh?

AS: How did your job improve by different equipment with which you were -- I imagine it must have changed quite a lot?

RB: My job is the job of a physician. That job changed radically like anything else changed during the last 50 years, because when I started there was no electric cardiograph. There was no nuclear physics, no (phone ringing; inaudible). There was no microbiology. Everything was in its infancies, and the job of a medical doctor is 100 percent different today than [00:12:00] when I started out.

AS: You find it a lot easier now to diagnose?

RB: It is much easier to practice medicine now because you had to practice only with intuition in former years, and you had very little diagnostic means to verify your diagnosis. Want something else to know? Anything else?

AS: I want to thank you for your time.

RB: You're very welcome.

AS: (inaudible) very interesting, and -- [00:12:34]

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