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## Escaping to Palestine

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1 hour, 13 minutes, 29 seconds

Speaker: Stephen Victor Kraus

Transcribed by: Stephanie Duncan

[Holocaust Living History Workshop](#)

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Time	Transcription
00:00:02	[UC of San Diego Holocaust Living Workshop Presents]
00:00:06	["The Long Shadows of the Past" / Series for Fall 2012]
00:00:11	[Escaping to Palestine by Stephen Victor Kraus]
00:00:14	Hilde Kraus: Thank you all very much for coming. Good afternoon. As Amy said, my name is Hilde Kraus, and I'm here to introduce someone very close to my heart: my father, Steve Kraus. He is a survivor, to be sure, and he's also someone with an enormous zest for life, a distinct avidity for new experiences, and an adventurer. He's done many different kinds of work - chief among them, journalism, stock market analysis, and interpreting. Dad has traveled wildly - widely - and wildly. And he has a knack of connecting with people wherever he goes. He currently publishes a nifty newsletter called, <i>New York Good News</i> which is actually about good news from all over the place.
00:00:47	[audience laughs]
00:01:00	Hilde Kraus: It was featured recently in the <i>Huffington Post</i> . Clearly, his optimism is undimmed. A little-known fact about him: a couple of years ago, he was spotted by a talent scout on his stoop in Manhattan, and ended up in a fashion shoot for <i>W Magazine</i> . I mentioned that my father is an adventurer. Today he is going to discuss what is perhaps his first great adventure - fleeing the German invasion with his family in September 1939 - with some background on pre-war Poland as well. Please give a warm welcome to Steve Kraus.
00:01:40	Steve Kraus: Shalom, shalom. I think I'd like to begin by - and I hope the organizers don't mind - correcting a couple of things. First of all, I'm now 82. I was nine years old when the War broke out. And it also says in this flier: after an arduous journey. The journey was really not arduous at all. And thirdly, I'd like to say that I did wind up - in 1941 - in a place which was called Palestine then. As you probably know, most of it today is called Israel. But at that time it was a British-administered mandate - the Brits got the mandate from the League of Nations. So Israel came into being in 1948. Anyway, just wanted to clear that up.
00:02:40	Steve Kraus: I was born in - on December 4th, 1929 into a rather well-to-do family in Poland. My grandfather became - I would think - one of the richest Jews in Poland. After World War I, he was joined in his firm by his son, and although they started by selling Singer sewing - my grandfather got the agency for Poland of the Singer sewing machine. Which at that time was, you know, was a revelation 'cause most clothes, I think, were made by tailors. And my parents were also rather extraordinary people. My father fought in World War I in the Austro-Hungarian Army.
00:03:38	Steve Kraus: My - his father was a doctor. My mother was one of the first women lawyers in Poland. They were also - both of them - pioneers of skiing in Poland, then they met on the slopes. That's how they met. So my life in pre-war Poland was very comfortable. I still don't know - and I only have one aunt left and I may find out from her - how it is that my family was so well-to-do in the thirties, with the world gripped by a terrible depression. And we were very well-to-do. My father

became the vice president of a large insurance company. My parents separated sometime in the mid-thirties.

- 00:04:37 Steve Kraus: But when war broke out, my mother told me - much later on - he came and said my place is with you. So we rode into exile very comfortably in the limousine - I think it was a Packard - the limousine in which my father's company had, you know, given to him. And with our chauffeur. I remember the outbreak of the War. I was nine years old. We lived in a rather comfortable apartment. I was all alone. And I don't remember - it was my governess or a maid - my parents had probably gone out to see if they could get anything from the banks, which of course they couldn't. The war broke out, and the banks closed their doors. So I was all alone and I - all I remember is looking out of a window and a plane high up. I didn't hear any bombing, and I don't - I don't know - it might have been a Polish plane. It was probably a German plane.
- 00:04:58 [audience laughs]
- 00:05:38 Steve Kraus: As you might know, of course, Warsaw, later on, was heavily bombed, and besieged by the Germans - held out for quite a while. We left at night, and I remember the streets full of people leaving the city. And I remember a long line of nuns walking. We rode away in this car, and I think already the car was pretty full because people didn't have a car but they had gasoline. So they traded places in the car for gasoline. So I think possibly - although this is a large, comfortable car - there may have been eight adults and two children. One of the things I remember is someplace in our flight to the east, we stopped in some town and I was in my pajamas, I think, and I bounded out of the car because it was morning and there was a newspaper kiosk.
- 00:06:48 Steve Kraus: And I went there, and I asked whether my favorite comic book - because it was, let's say it was Tuesday, and on Tuesday I would buy this comic book. And the lady that ran the kiosk sadly said, it didn't come from Warsaw this time. Anyway, we wound up for a while - okay - there was a rather dramatic time, at a crossroads, and I guess the adults were - you know, it was a crucial moment. Should we keep going east into the Soviet Union, or south to Romania? And I remember it. It was a crossroads, just countryside, crossroads. And I guess a discussion among the adults, and the chauffeur - who I think was a socialist - said, No, no let's go into the Soviet Union. I'll work. My father had a doctor degree, so Dr. Kraus will work. It'll be alright.
- 00:07:54 Steve Kraus: And my mother said, no, no. Let's go south into Romania. Which was a very wise thing to say and do because the Soviets did not look fondly on professionals - on people with soft hands. My father might have wound up among the ten thousand Polish officers and professionals executed on Stalin's orders at Katyn, a year later. So, on the way to Romania, we stopped at a rather nice estate of some friends - a friend of my father's I think. And I remember a light plane landing, and a young officer emerged. And later on, my mother told me that he had whispered to the general - who was there also - the Soviets have crossed the border.
- 00:08:50 Steve Kraus: It was September 17th, as you know, probably. Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia signed a pact a few days before the beginning of the War. So he

whispered to the general - in French, you know, to keep it a secret - that the Soviets have crossed the border. We went south from there, and I remember crossing the border, and - this must have been maybe September 20th or 22nd - Warsaw fought on. And the road leading into Romania was full of cars and planes, which should have been fighting to defend Warsaw, were flying into Romania. And we wound up in a little town called Gura Humorului. This was in Romania already.

00:09:53 Steve Kraus: And a rather dramatic memory I have: we were staying in, I guess, a pension - a small hotel. It was afternoon. My parents were inside, and I wandered out to the porch. And a car came by, and two soldiers got out of it carrying a brand new, never used anti-tank rifle. Which the Poles had used and sold abroad so that the colonels - semi-fascist colonels - who ran Poland could buy their shoes in England, and their ties in Paris. And these two soldiers got out, and the stock of the rifle was this color - it had never been used. And just then, and I'm not making this up - somebody turned on the radio. And a voice came out, in Polish, this is radio Warsaw. Warsaw fights on.

00:10:58 Steve Kraus: And here was this rifle in Romania. I don't think we stayed - by the way, Gura Humorului was in Transylvania. And you know, maybe I'm making this up, but there was something weird about that countryside. Anyway, we went to a rather large town, north of Bucharest, called Ploiești with large and very important oil fields. And we stayed in a villa - I mean it wasn't our villa - but I guess my parents rented a room or a floor. As I said, our escape was really not arduous. And I do remember one night going on the roof with my parents and the entire horizon was aflame. British saboteurs had set fire to the oil fields because the government of Romania was already flirting with Nazi Germany.

00:11:14 [audience laughs]

00:12:01 Steve Kraus: We stayed for a while in Ploiești. Then we went to Bucharest. And although I didn't see it, I heard that the soldiers - the Romanian army - were barefoot by the Royal Guard because we stayed not far from the Royal Palace. The Royal Guard was gorgeously attired, like from a 1930s Ziegfeld operetta, you know, very colorful uniforms. And we stayed in Bucharest for a while, and then - as I like to call it - the ground started getting warm. The government of Romania started getting closer to Hitler. So we left for Yugoslavia. Now Yugoslavia was important to us because one of my aunts had married a Yugoslav. And he was a part - he worked for my grandfather's firm. And he was the honorary Yugoslav consul in Warsaw.

00:13:00 Steve Kraus: And he has some family in a tiny place - it was in Croatia. No, sorry, Slovenia, outside of Ljubljana called Dolenji Logatec. We stayed there for a while. And then we went - Anyway, by this time it was spring. We went to a couple of places, Yugoslavia, and we spent the summer of 1940, with Europe ablaze, with Hitler invading Denmark, Norway, Holland, Belgium, and then the battle for France. And we lay on the golden sands of the Dalmatian Sea coast. So now you know why I objected to the word arduous journey. So we were there for a while. Then we went back to Zagreb which I think is today the capital of an independent - but at that time Yugoslavia consisted of Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia, and Herzegovina. It was sort of a federation.

- 00:14:06 Steve Kraus: I think for a while we were in Belgrade, and it was in Belgrade that I renewed my acquaintance with American media. American media was already sweeping the planet well before World War II. First - not only the cinema - but comics. And already in Poland, I was reading comic books. Which actually, they weren't comic books. They were called little big books. There would be one page of text, and a photo. And there would be *Tarzan*, *Flash Gordon*, *Sergeant Preston of the Northwest Mounties*, I think. And once we got to Yugoslavia, the main newspaper, which came out of Belgrade, was called - and I believe it's still at, you know, it's still coming out. It's called *Politika*. And every Thursday, they had a comic supplement.
- 00:15:02 Steve Kraus: And what were the comics? *The Katzenjammer Kids*, *Flash Gordon*, *Buck Rogers*, and not *Dick Tracy*, I think. But anyway, *The Phantom*, *Mandrake the Magician*. I think most of you are too young to remember them. Well, I can see some faces in the audience who are close to me in age, so I think they remember those comics. Now, I think you probably know that children pick up the language very quickly. And in Belgrade, in *Politika*, was in Serbian and in Cyrillic - the alphabet of Russia, Bulgaria, and Serbia. And yet, I picked it up, and I read the comics. My father - again, this is something that I learned much later. We were living in Belgrade, I guess in a not particularly luxurious pension.
- 00:15:19 [audience laughs]
- 00:16:02 Steve Kraus: And my mother tells me that New Year's Eve, from 1940 to 1941, father came in near midnight and spread a whole bunch of bank notes on the table. I was asleep on a cot. And mother told me that she said to him, you stole, didn't you, for the child? And he said, no, I have a new job, but I cannot tell you anything about it. What it was, he was recruited by Allied Intelligence. In the Balkans, the Allied Intelligence was run by the British Secret Service. Was it MI5, or M15? And I have to tell you that one of my father's first - well, my father was quite a pre-war playboy. He was not - well you know, I told you he was separated from my mother.
- 00:17:02 Steve Kraus: And one of his - he was quite handsome, elegant. And one of his first assignments as an intelligence operative was to seduce the wife of the president of the National Bank of Yugoslavia. Because Yugoslavia was still neutral at the time. And they had a branch in Berlin. So if you turned the wife, she could influence the husband - the president of the bank. Let's say, you know, they would be talking and the husband would say, you know, I really don't know who - I have to replace one of our people in the Berlin office. I really don't know who to send. And the wife, who had been turned, would suggest someone who was in the Allied Intelligence apparatus.
- 00:17:59 Steve Kraus: I think it was April that the Prince - the King was a young man. Well, he was a teenager. The country was run by Prince Regent Paul [Prince Paul Karadjordjević, regent of Yugoslavia], and he saw which way the wind was blowing, and he went to Berlin to sign a pact with Hitler. The young officers, principally of the Yugoslav Air Force, who are pro-French and pro-British, stage a coup d'état. And when Hitler - and, you know, deposed the Prince, the pro-Nazi Prince Regent. When Hitler heard of this, he flew into one of his rages. I mean tremendous rage. And he was already preparing Operation Barbarossa, the

invasion of the Soviet Union. Which of course was a tremendous operation of hundreds of divisions and mountains of equipment all moving east.

- 00:19:00 Steve Kraus: He was already allied - Romania had already allied with him. He had half of Poland. And he flew into a rage and I believe he pounded the table. Göring, his Air Force chief, was there. He turned to Göring and he screamed, I want Belgrade destroyed! I want Yugoslavia. How dare they do this to me! I want Yugoslavia attacked immediately! he screamed at Göring, I want Belgrade destroyed to the ground. And these generals, Oberkommando der Wehrmacht, remonstrated with him, but you know, all the divisions were already ready - getting ready to strike east, to attack the Soviet Union. And he said, I don't care, 'cause how dare the Yugoslavs defy me! Destroy Belgrade!
- 00:20:00 Steve Kraus: We were already evacuated in a small convoy of Poles to Turkey. Father was still there, and he left Belgrade on the last train to Thessaloniki in Greece before the Panzer divisions striking from the north, from the east. From Bulgaria - cut the Belgrade railroad line. So he was evacuated in a convoy from Greece to Egypt. Bombed, the convoy was bombed. And we were in Turkey and I wished we went to Istanbul by train. I don't remember much of Istanbul. I think mother and I walked around. I have a vague memory of the - what is it? The Santa Sophia? The famous cathedral. But not much. And then - this was 1941.
- 00:20:59 Steve Kraus: We went by the Trans-Anatolian Express to a harbor - a port city called Mersin in southeast Turkey. I think now it's kind of an important port, but it wasn't that big at the time. And we waited there. At this point - I don't know how many of you believe in God. I happen to believe in God, and I think God has watched over our family, and I have to go back - way back - to World War I. And my father, who I told you, was a young officer in the Austro-Hungarian Royal and Imperial Army fighting on the Italian front. And he told me that he was asleep on a hillside. And during the night, he had the urge to urinate, and he didn't want to do it near where he was sleeping - he was using his knapsack as a pillow.
- 00:22:07 Steve Kraus: So he went down the hillside. And as he's doing his business, he hears a shell come over. And when he got back to the knapsack - completely destroyed. The shell had hit the knapsack. So if he hadn't done that, I wouldn't be here. Anyway, I don't know. I just have a feeling - we were so lucky. We were so lucky. Mother and I arrived - okay, so from Mersin we took a little Polish ship called *Warsaw*, *Warszawa*, *Warsaw* to Haifa in Palestine. In the harbor was the wreck of a ship ironically called *Patria*, which was the name of the insurance company that my father was with. *Patria* had been a small ship - possibly even a small coastal freighter - which several hundred Jews had chartered to escape from Nazi-dominated Europe.
- 00:23:13 Steve Kraus: At that time, the British still - contrary to the League of Nations mandate - allowed only fifteen hundred Jews to enter Palestine throughout the whole war. These people, who were hoping to be allowed to land in the land of their ancestors. They were not allowed to land. They blew themselves up. They blew themselves up in the harbor. In Haifa - we didn't stay too long. We went to Tel Aviv, and I think it was there that I was interviewed by the headmaster of the school that I was going to go to in Jerusalem. And I may have had some tutoring

in English. Not - I don't think so, maybe a little bit. But as I said, kids - and I was eleven at the time, this is 1941 - learn languages very quickly.

00:24:19 Steve Kraus: So I wound up in the boarding school. My mother had a nice apartment. I mean, nothing luxurious, but quite comfy in Jerusalem. And for one year, I was starved and was beaten, for my own good of course, in Saint George's School, Jerusalem. Saint George's School was what the English call a public school, which meant private school. It was attached to the Saint George's Cathedral next door. And as I said, they starved us and they beat us so that when we graduated, we would run the empire. Older students were called prefects and they had the right to come up to us, if we were doing something wrong, and hit us in the face. The masters - the teachers were called masters, and of course, the principal was called the Headmaster.

00:25:20 Steve Kraus: I once had the honor of being caned by him, personally, because I only studied the courses that I was interested in. I did well in English, Geography, and History. Sciences, I was abysmally bad at. And the school had a practice of a notice board on which they posted, or it posted, the student rankings at the end of each semester. Which I think was called a term. And I once wound up at the very bottom of the form. And for that, I was summoned by the headmaster himself. And he told me, Kraus, you have no right to be at the bottom of the form! And he soundly caned me. And some of the canings were quite severe. They - you know - we were told to drop trou [trousers], and I think sometimes the caning would draw blood.

00:25:23 [audience laughs]

00:26:24 Steve Kraus: I think the next term, I was number two in the class. I got with it. We played what we called football, which is called soccer in this country. Cricket. And, at that - okay, so the years advanced. You know, it was [19]42, [19]43, [19]44, and the War was going on. The school did not particularly imbue us with any flag-waving - Brit patriotism. But I guess we just felt for Britain. After all, Britain under Churchill's leadership did fight alone against Hitler until 1941. And I felt badly, and maybe other students did too because the War was being taken over to some extent by the overwhelming number of U.S. troops. And U.S. ships.

00:26:27 [audience laughs]

00:27:24 Steve Kraus: And U.S. planes. So, until [19]42, [19]43, Britain was the number one power at fighting Nazis, but then it became almost a junior partner to the U.S. I was in that school until 1947. Some of my family had already come to the U.S., including my uncle. Grandfather had a son and four daughters. Again, I'd like to go back a little bit. On both sides of the family, my grandparents - father of my mother, and the father of my, the father of my mother - and well, I should say the two sets of grandparents belong to the first generation of Polish Jews who wanted to be Poles. They would not give up their religion, but Yiddish was not spoken. Polish was spoken.

00:28:37 Steve Kraus: And even more significantly, my grandfather - my mother's father - changed his Jewish name of Tobias to Teofil. And his son - his only son - was called Władysław, a very Slavic name. My mother had the name Halina, which I

think is of Greek origin. But then another daughter was called Bronisława. Again, a Slavic name. Eva and Jenena were not Slavic, but my father was called by his father Mieczysław. Again, a Slavic name. So as I said, Walter - he called himself Walter 'cause Władysław was probably too difficult for Americans to say - just as my father called himself not Mieczysław, which was his first name, but Victor, which is my middle name.

- 00:29:37 Steve Kraus: Walter was already here, and he had established himself in the old family business - oh of course, before the War, the family was - my grandfather, Teofil Glocer, and his son, Walter, were so successful that the family really owned a conglomerate from dealing in textile machinery, sewing machines, etcetera. They branched out into office machinery. When Walter managed to get to America, he went back into the same business - excuse me - and he also got from the Swedish company - which for whom he had distributed adding machines and other office machinery in Poland before World War II - the right to distribute in North, Central, and South America.
- 00:30:36 Steve Kraus: Which was meaningless at the time because there was a war on and there was very little traffic of these machines from Sweden to the U.S. After World War II, he still had this right on paper, which meant that somebody else was doing the distribution. But he would get a dividend check, and he had to go to the bank every month with a very substantial check from the Swedes. The Swedes also treated my grandfather very well. My grandparents survived the War. Grandmother - my mother's mother - died of natural causes I think just before the War ended. Grandfather survived and went to Sweden where his former Swedish associates I think took care of him. But he died in Sweden.
- 00:31:33 Steve Kraus: Okay, in forty - as I said, the Brits had this mandate from the League of Nations which they violated. Why? Oil. Oil. The appeasing government of Neville Chamberlain in 1939 published a so-called white paper. Again, I say in violation of the League of Nations mandate. By which they restricted immigration - as I said - of Jews to Palestine to fifteen hundred a month. And even though Churchill - as you all know, probably, came to power in 1940 - it was still important for the Brits to stay on good terms with the Arabs. The white paper stated, false.
- 00:32:31 Steve Kraus: Armed resistance against British rule began in [19]44. One of the more radical Jewish resistance groups was called the Irgun Zvai Leumi, headed by a chap who was named Menachem Begin, a sergeant in the Polish army who deserted from my father's intelligence unit. Another even more radical group was called the Stern Gang, after a leader who had been killed in a gunfight with the Brits. And the Stern gang, they were called the Lohamei Herut Israel, Fighters for the Freedom of Israel. Irgun Zvai Leumi means National Military Organization. Haganah which later became the Jewish Army or the Israeli Defense Force. Haganah means defense and it came into being, [19]20s or [19]30s as the unofficial army of the unofficial government of Jews in Palestine called the Jewish Agency.
- 00:33:41 Steve Kraus: And, after the end of the War, the survivors of the camps wanted to come to Palestine, most of them. Ninety percent of Polish Jewry died in the concentration camps. But there were still thousands of Jews who had been hiding, or survived somehow the camps - they wanted to come to Palestine. They



couldn't. The Brits, the Royal Navy, patrolled the Mediterranean, intercepted the ships, wouldn't let them land - some did manage to land, secretly - captured the ships, took the Jews, and put them in Cyprus. And then the Irgun Zvai Leumi and the Lohamei Herut Israel started armed resistance against the British.

- 00:34:43 Steve Kraus: [19]46, [19]47, [19]48, there were attacks on British - on Royal Army and the Palestine police force. The Palestine police force was partly manned by criminals, because if a chap was facing a judge in England, the judge would often say, Okay, you have a choice: five years in jail - or maybe two years in jail - Or join the Palestine police force. So there were increasing attacks, there were increasing attacks on the Brits in Palestine. The United Nations had already - which had inherited the mantle of the League of Nations - concerned itself with the so-called, Palestine Question. And there were several possible plans which were drawn up so as to please - so as to do an impossible task to please both the Jews and the Arabs.
- 00:35:44 Steve Kraus: Finally - I think possibly in [19]47 - anyway, it was decided to divide Palestine between the Jews and the Arabs. The Jews - the Jewish resistance groups fought on. And at the same time, had to repulse attacks by the Arabs. In [19]47, we left - my mother and I - No, I'm sorry. Father and I went to the U.S. Mother went to Sweden, she wanted to visit the grave of her father who had died in Sweden. Dad and I boarded a liberty ship. Perhaps some of you know the name, Henry J. Kaiser, a great industrialist and builder. And during World War II, his shipyards produced two liberty ships a day to transport U.S. troops across the oceans.
- 00:36:51 Steve Kraus: And I think it was estimated that one of - they were sure that one of the ships would sink. And they built two of them a day. And father and I arrived in New York. And I stayed - Dad took a room someplace, and I stayed with an aunt and uncle in Forest Hills, one of the boroughs of New York City. And I still had a year to go of high school. And so my aunt took me to this Forest Hills High School, and I think - since I guess, you know refugees were still kind of interesting - the principal wanted to interview me. And I was told to wait in this huge auditorium, which was easily four, five, six, times the size of this room.
- 00:37:50 Steve Kraus: Now, American movies had kept coming to Palestine all throughout World War II. We would see these movies with, you know, Andy Hardy, with Mickey Rooney and Judy Garland, and they would Let's put on a show! And they would put on a show. And we would, we would be watching this, pupils of this very, very strict boy's school, Saint George's. You know, how ridiculous, how impossible. And here I am sitting in the back of this auditorium waiting for the principal to interview me. And on the stage are these kids doing *La cucaracha, la cucaracha!* There was a rehearsal for a show. And you can imagine, you know, I was sitting there in wonder. I think maybe I want to put forward a mantra of mine which you may care for or not.
- 00:38:49 Steve Kraus: The school I went to, Saint George's, was as I told you very strict. The Headmaster taught two courses himself, and the highest grade he would award would be sixty-five out of one hundred. Because nobody could be better than that. The school was very tough, and I've said it many times to people: it was designed to break the spirit of the boys who went there. Because when they

graduated, they would run the empire. The map of the world until the mid-forties - one-quarter of the map was this color: red. The sun never set on the British empire. And the boys who graduated from this school, dispirited, would go out and administer the empire and follow and obey any order that would come from London. Any order.

- 00:39:56 Steve Kraus: And some of them would become generals. Or Ministers of the Crown. Those boys whose spirits were not broken didn't become ministers. They became prime ministers. And they did not become generals, they became field marshals. Because - and you'll be happy to hear, I'm about to end my talk. I think it was in McSorley's, a wonderful, age-old bar in New York City, with the walls covered with old photos, and drawings, and mottos. I read: Let us thank God for the nails that pierce our sides because they put iron into the system. Thank you very much for listening.
- 00:40:47 [audience applause]
- 00:40:51 Steve Kraus: Shalom, shalom. I don't know, I hope I haven't bored you too much. Do you have any questions?
- 00:41:02 Speaker 1: I am going to be carrying a microphone around if anyone would like to ask any questions.
- 00:41:09 Steve Kraus: I guess I've stunned them.
- 00:41:10 [audience laughs]
- 00:41:11 Speaker 1: Do I see an arm over there?
- 00:41:12 Speaker 2: Did you ever receive any formal Jewish education?
- 00:41:15 Steve Kraus: None. It would have been advantageous for my parents to convert to Catholicism - the religion of Poland. They did not. They did not. No, no. And of course, in the school I went to - I guess you would call it grade school - in Warsaw, there would be a religious class, and I might have been the only Jewish boy and I would go outside and wait in the corridor. No, none.
- 00:41:49 Speaker 3: Thinking about your perspective...
- 00:41:51 Steve Kraus: I'm sorry?
- 00:41:53 Speaker 3: Just reviewing the perspective that you have, and what you have been through, what do you see in terms of what happened in the United States and Israel? Do you have any perspective on that?
- 00:42:10 Steve Kraus: What do you mean what happened? I don't understand what you mean by what happened.
- 00:42:14 Speaker 3: Okay, I'm saying the life that you led, the experiences that you have give you a unique perspective, and my question is, looking at the current state of affairs in the United States and Israel, what are your political views? Would you care to share them?

- 00:42:34 Steve Kraus: Well, I think you probably know that Israel is called our aircraft carrier in the Mid-East. It's the only country that we can depend on. Remember, it's practically next door to the Suez Canal. I don't have to tell you how important the Suez Canal is. I don't think that Jews are as influential as some people who don't care for Jews claim. But I think Jews are influential in this country. They're a minority. I forget how many - I mean they're a small minority. But still, in both finance and particularly in show business - in the media, there are many Jews. And I think practically every administration we've had, either Republican or Democratic - or Democrat, has seen Israel as a very important ally. An ally that we can always depend on. And who depends on us. Does that answer your question?
- 00:43:50 Speaker 3: Yes it does, thank you.
- 00:43:51 Speaker 1: Anyone else? Okay.
- 00:43:54 Speaker 4: So you became a -
- 00:43:56 Steve Kraus: Hold on, Hold on.
- 00:44:00 Speaker 4: When you became an adult -
- 00:44:02 Steve Kraus: Could you speak a bit louder?
- 00:44:03 Speaker 4: When you became - can you hear me?
- 00:44:06 Steve Kraus: My hearing is not perfect. I am, but my hearing is not.
- 00:44:09 [audience laughs]
- 00:44:10 Speaker 4: Mine as well. Now can you hear me?
- 00:44:12 Steve Kraus: Yes.
- 00:44:12 Speaker 4: When you became an adult in New York and lived in New York, what was your vocation, what kind of occupation did you have?
- 00:44:21 Steve Kraus: Okay. You want to know my work?
- 00:44:24 Speaker 4: Yes.
- 00:44:25 Steve Kraus: Yeah. I went to - first I went to New York University, and I didn't do too well. And I transferred to George Washington University in the fall of 1951. George Washington University had a weekly student newspaper called *The Hatchet*. You all know the legend about George Washington and the cherry tree. And I wandered into the offices and offered to write a column. And I figured since the paper was called *The Hatchet* I would call my column *The Crow's Nest*. And there was the beginning of my journalistic career which ended when I wanted to write a column asking why there were Black students from African countries at George Washington, but no Black students who were Americans.
- 00:45:36 Steve Kraus: They wouldn't print it. And I was received by the president, Cloyd Heck Marvin, the president of the university. He had me to tea. And he explained that the case, what was the case, the famous segregation case?

- 00:45:56 Audience: Brown - Brown versus Board of Education
- 00:46:00 Steve Kraus: Brown v - thank you, Brown, versus Board of Education, was before the supreme court. He himself was a member of the Cosmos Club which was the club in Wa - we know all the big people belonged to it. So I'm sure he was intimate with the Supreme Court Justices, and he explained to me that he understood my position but it was the case - you know, the whole matter was before the Supreme Court. And then he preened himself on the fact that when the Daughters of the American Revolution refused Marian Anderson the permission to sing in - was it in Constitution Hall? He welcomed her in a smaller hall which belonged to the university. I didn't write for this paper anymore. I met my daughter's mother, fell in love, married her, dropped out of school, worked as a construction worker briefly, and then I became a copy boy on the late *Washington Evening Star*.
- 00:47:11 Steve Kraus: And I even carried either dispatches or photos from the Army-McCarthy hearings. I was drafted, took basic training, etcetera. And then I would - you see, in the Army, there's a saying: There's the right way, the wrong way, and the Army way. I can see heads nodding. Since I passed two tests for European languages, Polish and French, the Army sent me to Alaska.
- 00:47:42 [audience laughs]
- 00:47:44 Steve Kraus: And when I arrived at Ladd Air Force Base, which was outside of Fairbanks, where there were stationed the 4th Infantry Regiment, the second oldest infantry regiment in the U.S. Army. I was being - you know, we were being processed and the sergeant says to me, Okay Kraus, what did you do in civilian life? And I said, Sergeant, I was at college. And what did you study? And I answered honestly, well, to tell you the truth, I slept through most of my classes, and I wrote for the school newspaper. Ah, you wrote for the school newspaper. And so I was put - I mean the best assignment possible: The 4th Infantry Regiment Public Information Office. I did not go out into the field. I worked in an office. I did not wear fatigues. I wore a dress uniform, and I wrote articles about army people, army activities.
- 00:48:42 Steve Kraus: And then after I left - I was discharged - went back to Washington with my wife, and at that time my daughter's brother, David. I had some jobs, and I was interviewed by the head of the Polish desk of the Voice of America. And he told me, Unfortunately - and we were talking Polish of course - You have a foreign accent. Because of my German governess and the British school, I spoke English fluently but with an accent, and he told me that the microphone would emphasize this. And then he said to me, I'm terribly sorry, I can't spend much more time with you - because Budapest was burning.
- 00:49:45 Steve Kraus: You see, this was during the Soviet invasion. The suppression of Hungarian - The Hungarian Revolution. So I left, and I said to myself, every language I speak, I speak with a foreign accent.
- 00:49:59 [audience laughs]
- 00:50:01 Steve Kraus: And I went to see a medium-grade movie.
- 00:50:06 [audience laughs]

- 00:50:08 Steve Kraus: However, I think through my father's connections, I was interviewed and accepted as - I was interviewed by an extraordinary person, Dr. Somebody, I forget his name. The State Department had a - and probably still does - something called Division of Language Services. And somebody during the Cold War - we're now in the later half of the 1950s, somebody - and probably not a committee - came up with a brilliant idea. It was called the Leaders and Specialists program, by which people - possibly from all countries, probably from the Soviet satellite countries, including Poland. Important people were invited to the United States. They would tour the United States, and they would be put in contact with their professional colleagues. Most of them of course did not speak English.
- 00:51:08 Steve Kraus: So they needed a contract...contract...escort officer/interpreter. You're looking at him. So I had a very interesting job taking these people around the country, and I've probably seen more of the U.S. than many people born here. I even took around a film director and we were invited and present at the Oscars. I came back from the first trip, which was a group of agricultural scientists, and through a friend, I dropped in at the offices - you know in those days in the late [19]50s there wasn't all this security stuff, you just walked in. I met a man through this friend of mine called John Jacobs, who was the editor of a magazine called *America Illustrated* which was put out in Polish and Russian and sent to the Soviet Union, and the Soviet Union would send an equally beautiful magazine here, in English.
- 00:52:17 Steve Kraus: I want to tell you that the magazine we sent was very honest. There was one issue, I think in the [19]60s, devoted to the Civil Rights struggle. There were photos of the cops in Alabama beating the dem - you know, the Civil Rights demonstrators. And I dropped in on John Jacobs. He was preparing the first issue of *America Illustrated*. And he said, hi Steve, where have you been? What have you been up to? I said, well, I just got a ck from this trip to escort this Polish delegation. He says, why don't you write an article for us about it? And I said, yeah, fine, sure. I'd be happy to do it And I thought that since this was owned by the United States Information Agency. I would have to get paid. I would have to fill out all sorts of forms and I happen to be allergic to filling out forms. And John said - so I said, yeah, fine John, I'll do it. I'll do it as - you know, I'm happy to be an American citizen. I'll do it for nothing.
- 00:53:25 Steve Kraus: And he said, this is 1957, I don't think you know how much we pay. I said, no, how much do you pay? he said, we pay ten cents a word. This is 1957, so it was like a dollar a word today. So I wrote many articles for them.
- 00:53:42 [audience laughs]
- 00:53:45 Steve Kraus: I wrote many articles. Then I moved - I divorced - I got a - I divorced Hilde's and David's, my late son's, Ben's, mother. And I moved to New York City, and I did have all sorts of crappy part-time jobs. But I continued writing for the - for U.S.I.A. If I still have your attention, which is marvelous, I want to tell you that after the War Churchill went to his school - which was like Saint George's, good old-fashioned public school - and he said to the boys, remember the motto of the old school: Never give up, never give up, never give up. I wrote an article about consumer's union, consumer reports. Unlike the other articles I had written, it was rejected.

- 00:54:45 Steve Kraus: I was told to rewrite it. I rewrote it, and the second version was rejected. And John Jacobs, the editor, said, well, you know, Steve, maybe - maybe we should just drop it. And I said, no, let me rewrite it. And the third version was not only accepted but was published both in the Polish and Russian versions. Which made me feel - I mean, I was only paid once, but it made me feel very good.
- 00:55:10 [audience laughs]
- 00:55:13 Steve Kraus: And I continued to have assignments, you know, from the State Department, you know, escorting. And then I, in [19]67, began writing for a so-called underground newspaper. It was called the East - I lived on what we old-timers call the Lower East Side, now it's called East Village. And the newspaper began publishing the day that Nixon was elected, called *The East Village Other*. Which was a very radical paper - sex, drugs, and rock and roll - of course, opposition to the war in Vietnam. So I began writing for them. And then, when that paper folded, many of us went to a anarchistic, but sex - sex newspaper called *Screw Magazine*.
- 00:56:13 Speaker 1: Any other questions?
- 00:56:14 [audience laughs]
- 00:56:17 Steve Kraus: Well, just let me say, I did write two books. I'm guilty of two books. One for the National Student Association called, *Work, Study, Travel Abroad*. And the other one was called *Variations in Love*, which was kind of a guide to seduction.
- 00:56:32 [audience laughs]
- 00:56:33 Steve Kraus: I am now semi-retired, but I publish my own newspaper, as Hilde said, *New York Good News*. Which is nothing but genuine, good news.
- 00:56:44 Speaker 5: Yeah, my question consists mainly of three parts.
- 00:56:48 Steve Kraus: I'm sorry?
- 00:56:50 Speaker 5: My question consists of three parts.
- 00:56:52 Steve Kraus: I was afraid of that.
- 00:56:54 [audience laughs]
- 00:56:56 Speaker 5: It's mainly about, like, what we see now - conflict of, conflict, Palestine and Jerusalem.
- 00:57:03 Steve Kraus: I'm sorry, what I see now - what kind of conflict?
- 00:57:07 Speaker 5: The conflict between Palestine and Israel.
- 00:57:11 Steve Kraus: I think both sides are - I was about to say assholes. I mean, this endless fighting, this endless bickering, this endless, fruitless negotiations. It's ridiculous. I mean, why the hell can't they come to terms? I look forward - if I may

just add one more thing - way in the future to a Semitic-Mediterranean confederation of all the Arab countries and Israel. Way in the future, perhaps, but I hope it will come to pass. Second question.

- 00:57:46 Speaker 5: That for the future would be the last part, I thought, the first part would then be, as you lived there before the state of Israel was founded?
- 00:57:59 Steve Kraus: Yes.
- 00:58:00 Speaker 5: Can you describe how the living between, or how people lived there - Israel, or Jews and Arabs. How was the living?
- 00:58:10 Steve Kraus: Okay, at that time, as far as the Arabs were concerned, there was a small, very well-to-do, very small - Husayni, Nashashibi - wealthy class, very small. And not particularly large middle class, shopkeepers, etcetera. And I think most of the Arabs were quite poor, lived on the land. And as far as the Jews were concerned, Tel Aviv was already quite a bustling city. The Jewish part of Jerusalem, also. There were, so I think, many of the Jews, who were reasonably - you know - comfortable. Not maybe rich, but comfortable. And a great many lived on the communal settlements. There were various kinds of communal settlements, but I would think at that time - then, not now - quite maybe a majority of the Jews in pre-Israel Palestine lived and worked in the communal settlements.
- 00:59:13 Hilde: How did they get along, Dad? 'Cause the question is how did the - at the time - how did the Jews and Arabs get along?
- 00:59:18 Steve Kraus: The Arabs rose in armed conflict with the Jews. 1928, [19]22, [19]28, and then encouraged by Hitler and Mussolini. In [19]36 or [19]37, there were armed conflicts between Arabs and - you see, the leadership of the Arabs resented the Jews not just because - because they, you know, the women and the men wore shorts. They were bringing modernity to the country. And the elite, the small Arab elite wanted to - didn't want most of the Arabs to get ideas, you know improve themselves. They didn't get along.
- 01:00:14 Hilde: Do you have another question or [unclear]?
- 01:00:16 Speaker 5: It would be then - you just answered the question - if there would have been like a way to prevent the conflict that we see today?
- 01:00:27 Steve Kraus: Today?
- 01:00:28 Speaker 5: Yeah.
- 01:00:32 Steve Kraus: How can we prevent it? Israel is independent. The Palestinians are semi-independent. How can we force them to come to terms?
- 01:00:41 Hilde: I think his question is, could it have been prevented then?
- 01:00:44 Steve Kraus: I don't think so. I really don't think so. Unfortunately, no. Are you from Israel or Germany?
- 01:00:54 Speaker 5: Germany.

- 01:00:54 Steve Kraus: Germany.
- 01:01:00 Speaker 6: Okay, not really a question -
- 01:01:02 Steve Kraus: I cannot hear you.
- 01:01:03 Speaker 6: I just wanted to ask if you'll stay after a bit because your - the years, and the places where you were are very, are parallel with my family's story. And I'm hoping you'll stay after so I can talk to you.
- 01:01:20 Steve Kraus: I'm surprised so many of you - I mean, gratified and surprised that so many of you have stayed this long.
- 01:01:27 [audience laughs]
- 01:01:29 Steve Kraus: Yes, of course, I will. Certainly.
- 01:01:31 Hilde: Any other questions? Yeah, I'll get right over to you.
- 01:01:35 Speaker 7: Yeah, since you were young, then - Yeah - during World War II, but you obviously knew a lot about what happened in the Holocaust, what kind of attitude or reaction did you have when you found out what the Nazis were up to, and how many people that they eliminated both in Poland and in other parts?
- 01:01:38 Steve Kraus: I was young once, yes.
- 01:01:42 Steve Kraus: Right.
- 01:02:01 Steve Kraus: I'd be happy to answer that, and I hope you don't mind if I answer it the only way I can, which is in my own way. Polish people are often accused - wholesale - of antisemitism. No greater lie, I know of. Already in 1942, the Polish underground sent an emissary, through Hitler occupied Europe to England to inform the West of the beginning of the Holocaust. Secondly, I believe that the Polish, so-called the Polish underground, which was called the Home Army, Armia Krajowa, had a special, and I think the only, underground movement in Nazi-occupied Europe - had a special department called Żegota whose sole aim was to help hide the Jews.
- 01:03:06 Steve Kraus: Thirdly, In Yad Vashem, the Garden of the Righteous in Israel, there's a tree planted in the memory of a gentile who saved a Jew, or Jews. Percentage-wise, the largest number of trees is to the memory of Poles who - I want to tell you - during World War II, in Nazi-occupied Poland, if a Pole was found by the Gestapo to be hiding a Jew, or Jews, their entire family was taken out of the building and executed on the spot in the street as an example of what - to the neighbors - of what happens to people who hide the Jews. I - we didn't know about the Holocaust until after the War.
- 01:04:08 Steve Kraus: We didn't - I didn't find out during the War what was going on. And I don't think many people did know. The West, the powers in the West did know and did very little. U.S. and Britain are often accused of why didn't you bomb the railroads leading to the death camps? And I don't think there's a satisfactory answer.



- 01:04:38 Hilde: We have a question over here, Dad.
- 01:04:40 Speaker 8: I have a, actually, maybe two questions -
- 01:04:42 Steve Kraus: I can't hear you.
- 01:04:44 Speaker 8: I'll speak a little louder. How's that?
- 01:04:46 Steve Kraus: Good.
- 01:04:47 Speaker 8: So I have two questions. One, I was just reminded, maybe you could tell us a little bit about Jan Karski. And secondly, maybe you could tell us a little bit about the impact of the exile of the Sephardic Jews during the -
- 01:04:58 Steve Kraus: Wait a minute, hold on. I heard about Jan Karski. What is your second question?
- 01:05:03 Speaker 8: Second question is about the exile of the Sephardic Jews during the Israeli War of Independence, and I think the estimate is that there were 800,000 Sephardic Jews who were exiled from all the Arab countries because Israel declared its independence.
- 01:05:22 Steve Kraus: I really - Jan Karski, I, I believe, survived the War. Although I think he may have died quite recently at a very advanced age, in his 90s. He was honored both in this country and in Poland. I think in his declining years he was on the staff, on the faculty of one of the universities -
- 01:05:47 Hilde: Who is he?
- 01:05:47 Steve Kraus: I can't hear -
- 01:05:48 Hilde: Explain who he is.
- 01:05:49 Steve Kraus: I said before - no, no -
- 01:05:51 Hilde: Jan Karski.
- 01:05:52 Steve Kraus: Yes, I said before Jan Karski - I didn't mention him by name? Okay, Jan Karski was the emissary of the Polish underground in [19]42 who went through Nazi-occupied Europe to England to inform the West of the beginning of the Holocaust. I really - that's about as much - I never met him. I don't know much about him. He was not Jewish, he was a Pole. Polish, Pole. I really don't - I probably should know much more about the movement of Jews from the Arab countries. I don't. I think as far as the Jews of Abyssinia, that might have been foretold in the Old Testament. I know that Morocco had a monarchy quite, either neutral or quite friendly to the Jews.
- 01:06:54 Steve Kraus: I really don't - I must confess complete ignorance on - I'm sorry, I cannot answer your second question.
- 01:07:01 Hilde: Yes.

- 01:07:03 Speaker 9: This is a statement. My family is a Holocaust family from Poland. My father's family lived in Drohobycz and when -
- 01:07:14 Steve Kraus: I'm sorry where?
- 01:07:15 Speaker 9: Drohobycz, Drohobycz. And when the Germans came through, they came with loudspeakers, and they said, for every Jew, you bring out of hiding, we will give you a cup of sugar. The Poles in that area, in Drohobycz, brought people they had lived with all their lives out of hiding, and they were immediately shot on the spot. Finally one of the German officers stated, we're sorry, we have no more sugar. That's how many Jews were brought out of hiding by their Polish neighbors. And you know what? The Poles kept bringing them out.
- 01:07:57 Steve Kraus: The Poles what? What?
- 01:07:57 Speaker 9: The Poles kept bringing Jews out of hiding. So while there were many righteous Poles, there were very many antisemitic Poles. And this is in the [19]40s.
- 01:08:10 Hilde: Thank you.
- 01:08:10 Steve Kraus: I am afraid that I have to agree with you. But remember, Jesus had only 12 Apostles, and yet his faith has conquered the planet. It says, in the Talmud that there is a statement that there are always - is it ten or twenty just men, well you know, men - otherwise the world would come to an end. I'm afraid that what you said is probably true, but I personally - might be of interest to you - am a volunteer in New York City at the Jewish Foundation for the Righteous. And the foundation supports the hundreds, now there are about 800 left, of the righteous gentiles. And you're probably right: most of the Poles were either neutral or there were some that, you know, did help the Nazis. But I honor the ones who had the risk of their lives - and not just their lives, but of their whole family's lives - to help the Jews.
- 01:09:20 Hilde: Can I just interject something, that in our family, Dad's parents were hidden in Warsaw during the War -
- 01:09:28 Steve Kraus: No, grand - no, no. Okay, let me correct -
- 01:09:30 Hilde: Well, let me finish, Dad. And then other relatives were hidden with Christian families in Warsaw. Wanda was hidden, right? She was - oh sorry. I just wanted to point out that several members of our family were saved by Christian - Christians in Poland because at least one of them, Wanda, Dad's cousin, was hidden with a Catholic family and was passing as Christian. She was in the resistance.
- 01:09:39 [chatter from the audience]
- 01:10:00 Steve Kraus: Not only that, but Janina, one of my mother's sisters, married - I think I mentioned earlier on in my talk - married a Yugoslav. And during the War, he hid them, and he's honored in Yad Vashem. There is a tree to his memory, in the Garden of the Righteous in Israel.
- 01:10:29 Hilde: So maybe one more question if there is one. Okay.

- 01:10:33 Steve Kraus: I'm frankly surprised and gratified, I must say again, that so many of you have stayed, come and stayed.
- 01:10:43 Speaker 10: This is just so you -
- 01:10:45 Steve Kraus: Louder, louder, please.
- 01:10:46 Speaker 10: This is for your information because you're obviously are a very bright and curious -
- 01:10:51 Steve Kraus: Could you come up.
- 01:10:54 Speaker 10: This is just for your information if you want to know about the North African refugees. The 898,000 that were created in pogroms initiated by the Mufti - by the way, who was Hitler's Kommandant for Yugoslavia. And he had a blueprint of Auschwitz - was going to be his reward. He would build in Palestine, and he would prevail. But there is footage - if you go to if you google - I don't remember the name of the organization - Mufti Hitler, okay. You will come to an organization whom Tom Lantos - may he rest in peace - Congressman from Los Angeles finally brought under the last administration to the Congress. And it details basically - it's a long story - that the Mufti wanted to stir the pot after the War. So reportedly, they were offered a deal that they would get a half of Palestine, and [Golda] Meir said, you'll take the north. and he said, I won't take anything. He wants war. So, in any event, whatever is the lead-up, the War created 898,000 Jewish refugees when the state of Israel was declared all northern Africa, Transjordan because they were told that the Jews took all of the land.
- 01:12:09 Speaker 10: And he was offered half. And so communities that had gotten along for 500 years, 300 - it was for pogroms again, Kristallnacht again. But this time, countries took them. And they went in front of the United States Congress, last administration, they didn't get very far, but if you want at least the history, the newsreels, that you may decide for yourself if you google, Grand Mufti, Hitler. It's the affidavits of the grandchildren, some who still survive who experienced it, who brought it to the attention of the United States public. If you want to know.
- 01:12:50 Steve Kraus: Thank you.
- 01:12:50 Hilde: Thank you.
- 01:12:54 Speaker 11: Okay. Thank you very much, Mr. Kraus.
- 01:12:56 [audience claps]
- 01:12:59 Speaker 11: Thank you, everyone, for coming tonight.
- 01:13:03 Steve Kraus: Thank you very much for coming and listening so patiently to my story.
- 01:13:09 Speaker 11: And we have further events planned in November, and if you want to take a flyer in the back in honor of remembering Kristallnacht. There are a number of events in November here at UCSD. Not just academic, but also of music. Have a good evening.

