

## RRFA 01: Robert Rauschenberg papers

Interviews: Hopps, Walter and Ginsburg, Sue / Personal Interview, 1975

ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG  
INTERVIEWED  
BY  
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&  
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LAFAYETTE ST.  
N.Y.C.  
11/4/75

TAPE 1 OF 6  
SIDE 1

**WALTER HOPPS:** Sue, why don't you talk?

**ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG:** You do the talking, Sue.

**SUE GINSBERG:** No, I (*not clear*).

**WH:** While you're here do some talking so we can here on the test beside the clink of the ice cube.

**SG:** That's a good sound.

**AUDIO BRIEFLY STOPPED**

**RR:** You're embarrassing me. Intimately praiseful.

**SG:** Patronizing, too.

**RR:** Each word was like you thought maybe it should have been just a love letter or something.

**WH:** (*Not clear*) loves the work and strange for that to be in New York Magazine.

**RR:** I know. That's what's so inconsistent about it, 'cause that's a rough magazine.

**WH:** Cynical, rough kind of place. You don't publish your love letters there.

**RR:** But he couldn't use his usual style which is to start off with some kind of poem or something. He never got funny.

**SG:** Is that bird a new addition? You see the bird in there?

**WH:** Oh, flying around in the room.

**SG:** He's not flying. He's standing there on the window sill.

**WH:** Oh, that's terrific. What kind of bird is that?

**RR:** Chickadee, or something like that.

**WH:** Was it a gift?

**RR:** Sort of, yeah.

**SG:** How nice.

**WH:** What is a chickadee or something like that?

**RR:** From China.

**WH:** China.

**RR:** And they eat them there.

**SG:** They eat a lot of things.

**RR:** They sell them down in Chinatown.

**SG:** For food?

**RR:** Yeah. And Bernie and Sue saw one escape and two days later Bernie was going by to do something with Bob Whitman, and the bird was sitting in the middle of the street. So Bernie stopped the car and got out and picked him up and they road around in the car for a couple of days, and Bernie didn't know what to do with him. He offered him to Bob Whitman but Bob Whitman's dog had just gotten killed, and they're sort of off live animals for awhile and so I want to take him to Florida but now I have a problem.

I don't -- I think it's very unkind for there to be only one sort of something somewhere.

So now I have the problem of whether I'm going to get another one or not to release.

And if so, what sex should it be, or which one is this? Great Jones and Fourth Street.

**WH:** Between Great Jones and Fourth Street. Between Great Jones and Fourth Street

**RR:** And ask the cab driver to ring the doorbell.

**WH:** G-r-e-a-t. Great. Yeah, Great Jones and Fourth Street.

**SG:** Can't you get someone who would know about what sex it is?

**RR:** Maybe I should just take him up on the roof.

**SG:** Make his own wings?

**RR:** Maybe he would get along with kittens. Be beautiful to take a new species down in Captiva. A lot of our animals have been brought just like a lot of our trees.

**SG:** You call -- I mean I used to call the Museum of Natural History when I had a problem.

**WH:** That's good. Better than the zoo, even.

**RR:** Before it's stuffed.

**SG:** No, they'll tell you about them.

**WH:** 'Cause they know.

**SG:** No, they'll tell you about them, if they can live in that kind of habitat. They'll tell you what to feed them. They tell you all kinds of things like that.

**WH:** That's a good idea.

**SG:** When I got the spider I called the man at the Museum of Natural History. He told me what to feed them.

**RR:** Do you give them someone's name or just anyone?

SG: I asked for the spider man.

RR: Spider man. Birdman?

SG: I called the spider man a number of times you know about some spider -- not on purpose, in a crate. It was running by the New York Culture Center and so we saved it in a jar. So I called the spider man to ask what to feed it. Live worms. It lived for awhile. It was a strange spider.

RR: It's hard to imagine that a spider would live off of live worms. I've never seen any digging for worms.

SG: Flies (*not clear*) that kind of things.

WH: Once they're caught keep in a jar so maybe it doesn't do its web and catch flies.

SG: It wasn't a web-spinning spider.

WH: Oh.

RR: Just your everyday museum, art-loving spider.

SG: I described it and he knew what kind it was and what to feed it and (*not clear*).

RR: Call now. Maybe he'd rather be in Los Angeles.

SG: He also will tell you if they're rare or things like that.

RR: They can't be too rare if they're selling them for meat.

SG: Wonder if they're tasty.

RR: You sound like (*not clear*) now.

SG: Is he anxious to get to it?

RR: That's why the bird's down here, yes.

SG: How long.

RR: (*Not clear*) can't wait till I leave town.

**SG:** *(Not clear)*.

**WH:** The story goes that when you were little you had a lot of pets in Texas.

**RR:** I was very shy of people and so I used to collect all kinds of animals, bugs and things just like anybody does, but I was a little bit -- I was almost exclusively doing it.

**SG:** Did you read about them, too?

**RR:** No.

**SG:** Or just sort of observe them?

**RR:** Yeah.

**WH:** And collect them.

**RR:** In jars and jars around the house.

**SG:** Did your mom think you were nuts?

**WH:** From bugs *(not clear)*.

**RR:** No, she didn't care as long as I did my work.

**SG:** *(Not clear)* nothing.

**WH:** What kind of animals?

**RR:** Oh, well, I had goats -- what did I have? I had goats, rabbits. We had ducks and it was legal to use live decoys for duck hunting. I don't think I ever had any fish. Dogs, naturally, and nothing terribly exotic.

**WH:** Was the --

**SG:** Goats pretty exotic.

**WH:** Was the house or the place kind of rural or in town or suburban?

**RR:** Just sort of --

**WH:** You had yards?

**RR:** -- on the edge of the highway and it grew up while -- I mean, it got denser as we were there. And our place got tackier.

**SG:** How far were you from the water?

**RR:** Oh, at least a half hour.

**SG:** Really? I thought that Port Arthur was right on the river.

**RR:** Yes, but it's not the beach right there. You have to go to Sabine Pass before you hit the beach because it's mostly -- as you got to the water there -- the marshland, and salt grass.

**WH:** How young were you started collecting all the animals and bugs as pets?

**RR:** Oh, I don't remember.

**WH:** But little?

**RR:** Yeah.

**WH:** Very little.

**RR:** Well, my most exotic things -- I don't even know what they were, but I had worms and, you know, anything that would fly or crawl or could be caught and I'd figure out what to feed them and stuff. It kept me busy.

**SG:** Did you have snakes?

**RR:** Yeah, I had snakes.

**SG:** Poisonous ones?

**RR:** No.

**SG:** Where you interested in that kind of -- how would you have known?

**RR:** There was no sense of danger about it. It wasn't like -- like, well, like (*not clear*) had these fantastic poisonous snakes and piranhas and, you know, because that was where (*not clear*).

**SG:** Well, you might not have known if a spider was poisonous; would you?

**RR:** No. Just don't let them bite you. Anyway.

**WH:** There's only one other artist that I've ever made a point (*not clear*) I'm going to ask you now and that was Bernie. It's a funny coincidence that you came up with him a moment ago. There was nothing that I ever referred to in writing about in any catalogue or anything, and I don't know if I ever will but it was interesting to know to get him thinking about the earliest drawing or artwork that he ever made like when he was very very little. I mean I've heard and sort of observed and talked to other artists about that. I listen to them on the subject but he's the only one I ever asked.

**SG:** Most artists (*not clear*) tell you.

**RR:** I think the first thing I can remember there was a -- I painted a duck on a bread board for a present for my sister.

**SG:** But you were already -- how old were you? You were in your twenties; right?

**RR:** Right. But I didn't start being a painter until after I'd gotten out of the Navy except that I drew all the time. But she was just a baby.

**WH:** Yeah.

**RR:** And -- ten and a half years difference in our age.

**WH:** When you were little and made drawings, what did you draw?

**RR:** I copied things from magazines.

**SG:** Did you try and be exacting?

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**RR:** Oh, of course. Freedom is a very sophisticated idea. You better start with freedom.

**SG:** Did you succeed in being exacting?

**RR:** In some cases I did very good like with Veronica Lakes. You had to do just half the amount of drawing.

**SG:** Because of the way that it was to begin with?

**RR:** Because of her hair. You didn't have to worry if both eyes were right?

**WH:** The earliest kind of drawing like you when you were doing these exacting drawings would be like copies from magazines?

**RR:** Yeah, and John Whitcomb; remember him? Those awful illustrations with the stars in the eyes. And a couple of the comics, too. I can still draw Betty Boop and Mickey Mouse.

**WH:** This was like grammar school?

**RR:** Yeah.

**WH:** Before junior high or high school?

**RR:** Yeah. And then I was on every kind of -- I did very badly in all my classes with the exception of chemistry, which I got interested in in high school, and the only math that I ever could do was geometry. Nothing seemed interesting. There's something that was fascinating about sort of arguing with yourself to prove something. So I mostly either stayed after school because of not doing well in class or because I volunteered for every extra committee job they had. Also, I wasn't terribly anxious to go home.

**SG:** You weren't a discipline problem in school; were you?

**RR:** Huh?



SG: You weren't a discipline problem; were you?

RR: What's a discipline problem?

SG: You know, like staying after school because you were bad in class? (*Not clear*)

RR: Oh, lots of times.

SG: Did you cause trouble?

RR: I didn't cause trouble. I just didn't pay any attention. Also, I think being nearsighted had something to do with a lot of other problems.

SG: You didn't --

RR: I didn't know I was nearsighted until I was sixteen and had to get glasses.

WH: Did any --

RR: That's in order to get a driver's license or something.

WH: (*Not clear*) my shortest (*not clear*).

RR: Yeah. Okay.

WH: See you soon.

#### **TAPING INTERRUPTED**

WH: Sort of grammar school scene when you were little.

RR: I was going to say that I don't think -- there's nothing that I know about me now that would actually justify how stupid I was in school or how disinterested I could be.

And, I mean, I can't really just blame it on, you know, the kinds of teachers that we had

or anything, because it seems to me that if there is anything that's constant in my work

it's a kind of practical flexibility, and so I think I was reacting from a deliberate

stubbornness plus the fact that I was nearsighted and they had this great idea of sitting

everyone alphabetically and things like not being able -- not knowing that I wasn't able to

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read the blackboard, and teaching with flashcards was very popular then. And by the time that I had figured out what it said, the question was gone and the next one was there.

**WH:** Back in the context --

**RR:** I don't think -- I think maybe in other ways the lack of basic information may have been like a great stimulant for my beginning to do what I actually found that I could do so much later, and also never going more than about fifty miles outside of Port Arthur, Texas, until I was drafted in the Navy. So everything was brand new. And when I went to the Navy I was traveling around and -- I never went overseas -- but it wasn't until I was out of the Navy and came back home that it ever occurred to me that one did have the responsibility of making their own individual life. Because no one around me -- I'll say it this way. Everyone around me had established such a pattern of activity that you didn't have a future you had an inherited, obligated present.

**SG:** Did you see that though in terms of your life? Did you --

**RR:** I did when I got back home.

**SG:** You did? You never really questioned that at all?

**RR:** No. I thought, well, when I get out of the Navy I go back home and I do what it is that I have to do (*not clear*). And it was almost as though some kind of time trick had been played on me. I wish (*not clear*) would look at the phone all the time. It never looked (*not clear*) when I look at it.

**SG:** He'll answer it.

**WH:** But in terms of a kind of calling to get into it, it meant something to your mother to get into it.

**RR:** I thought she took it a little cooler. Can we take the phones off?

**RR:** -- church, until I realized that within the particular doctrine that one had to view nearly any activity or any thought as sinful and it was the negative -- the fact that (*not clear*) suspicious -- the negative aspects of anything that was supposed to be guiding or creative or building. Like I really enjoyed dancing and I felt no sin in dancing.

**WH:** Even though the church --

**RR:** And the preacher said -- I told my mother about this and she said, well, you'll have to speak to the preacher about this because, you know, dancing is sinful. And so I did and he says, well, even if you aren't sinning, someone might be misinformed about your intentions and you will be leading them astray. And I said, isn't that true about anything that I could do. And he had to agree. And that was when I decided that this was not any direction at all. But I was very serious about it.

**WH:** Back when you were very little in the school -- just one quick question -- do you remember other kids being interested in your work when you drew cartoons or anything?

**RR:** Not seriously. People would ask me if I would draw them a Betty Boop.

**WH:** That's all I wanted to know.

**SG:** They recognized that you had an ability they didn't have.

**RR:** Yeah.

**SG:** Did you feel special? (*Not clear*) talent, sort of?

**RR:** I don't think the concept of talent -- that's another one of those sophisticated ideas.

**SG:** But kids that can do something well know that they can do it better than the other kids.

**RR:** Oh, somebody can play marbles better or . . .

**SG:** Sure.

**WH:** This was your --

**RR:** And that was what I had.

**WH:** (*Not clear*)?

**RR:** But it wasn't a very sociable activity. It was, again, you were kind of a loner and I was terrible at all sports. I had a lot of things that I had to do at home, and one of the reasons I almost enjoyed staying after school was I liked to put off having to do those jobs.

**SG:** You mean like jobs for your mom around the house?

**RR:** Yeah.

**WH:** That's interesting.

**SG:** Did you get paid for those jobs?

**RR:** Very little. But usually by the end of the two-week period I had done something that required a forfeiting of my allowance. So I was very (*not clear*).

**WH:** You were taking care of all these pets and so on. You had jars and arrangements and stuff and all the habitats and housings, paraphernalia that's all stuff you put together.

**RR:** Right. And we had fantastic funerals. Many of them.

**SG:** You buried them all in the backyard?

**RR:** Different places (*not clear*) nicer place. Bugs don't live very long, you know, anyway, in the best of conditions.

**SG:** Goats do.

**RR:** Oh, yeah. I had a goat for I guess it seems like -- it seems like twelve years but I don't think it could have been that long. And he was a great source of my having to

forfeit my allowance because every time the goat got out it either -- they're incredible what they can be interested in for no reason at all. I mean they could eat -- they would bite somebody's rosebush and the entire rosebush would die. He knew exactly how to pull down clothes in the rain, you know. And of course people would complain to my mother, she would punish me and the goat paid no attention.

**SG:** Did he like tennis balls?

**RR:** Huh?

**SG:** Did he like tennis balls?

**RR:** I don't know.

**WH:** Did you name any of these pets? Did your goat have a name?

**RR:** Oh, Billy.

**WH:** Billy.

**SG:** Thought maybe (*not clear*)?

**WH:** No. Back in the --

**SG:** Well, what about the bugs? Did you name the bugs?

**RR:** No, they were bugs. I knew they were bugs so -- again that was a nice kind of moment -- sport -- is catching them, you know. I could catch a live bee and get it in the jar before it could sting me. And then there's some way of being by yourself and making it as interesting as possible. I had an aunt that was three years older than I was who was, of course, a quite aggressive athlete. They called them tomboys in those days. She was really impatient and furious with my lack of ability in all sports. She spent one whole summer trying to change this. I mean it was a source of embarrassment that I didn't know how to play football and didn't care, you know, or baseball or basketball. It just

didn't interest me. A lot of that probably had to do with my not wanting to begin something that I already didn't know how to do. I never figured out when all those guys learned all those games. It seemed so complicated and still do to me today. I'm a lot of fun watching football on TV because I manufactured a lot of the rules. What seems like might be happening --

**WH:** *(Not clear)*.

**RR:** -- and founding out has nothing to do with the way they're playing the game. Anyway, this summer she taught me how to pitch. So I thought, alright, I'll try it. So school started again and I volunteered as the pitcher. She taught me underhanded. Boys don't pitch underhanded. There it was a whole summer's work, and I don't think I ever tried again.

**SG:** You could have played with the girls.

**RR:** That wasn't so popular then either.

**WH:** Did anybody even try and teach any of the kind of art down there like they do little kids, little kids painting and all of that sort of stuff?

**RR:** Art classes wasn't something again that you would do if you were a boy. Art class was made up of usually lazy girls. Like if you were flunking all your other courses and you needed something that you could do, they made little books. In high school I took mechanical drawing and I was -- I didn't have the patience to use all those tools when I could almost draw it anyway. And -- but I never, you know, you could never fool anybody about that. I mean, the instructor wasn't fooled. But I spent all my time doing it almost right just by eye. And he said that -- my grades were so bad in everything that if I flunked that course that I probably wouldn't be able to graduate. And that he had

arranged that you know, with a supervisor or something -- that I could get into the art class instead and he wouldn't flunk me. And I did that and that was the first time I had any art class. And there was a girl in the class -- I guess this was my tenth or eleventh year, anyway, whose father owned a photography shop and --

**END OF SIDE 1**

ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG

TAPE 1 SIDE 2

WH: -- but you drew animals.

RR: *(Not clear)*.

WH: Dogs, cats, any live animal -- this is what's so strange *(not clear)* maybe three, four years old, trying to *(not clear)* any pets that were around the house that you saw they were sort of exotic *(not clear)* never imagine to presume -- it would be presumptuous to draw your mother or a relative or your father.

RR: Uh-huh.

WH: There weren't other children, really. *(Not clear)*. But the first thing and once having thought of it you then went on a great search to see if you couldn't find it. A *(not clear)* situation came up in junior high school where you had a mechanical arts, what they called an industrial arts class back in this era, and they had a class where *(not clear)* -- 'cause there had been no art except drawings, maybe a little more sophisticated sketching *(not clear)* seemed respectable *(not clear)* sketching although, again, being a boy he didn't show it to anyone. But in this junior high school or whatever, industrial arts class he *(not clear)* make ceramic tiles, decorative tiles, and he said for reasons he'll never understand what occurred to him to do, he knew exactly what it was because he'd been around New York City, he did the *(not clear)* sketching *(not clear)* high beam. Everyone else is doing arabesques and so on. And having remembered that as we were driving upstate New York, he said, Annalee, you must make a note and get to my mother who was still alive and I have to find that tile. She must have saved it. And she became sort



of intrigued with the idea and the row that it caused in that school. It was just not (*not clear*) boring. He said but I explained what it was. He liked the way it looked. Anyway, he managed to save it and take it home.

**RR:** Did he find it?

**WH:** I don't know. Annalee said that his mother kept it while he was alive. (*Not clear*).

**SG:** (*Not clear*) urban environment, urban (*not clear*).

**WH:** He said he really wanted to see it again. It was just three colors. Sort of a red, brown, (*not clear*) and then sort of a yellow background on the tile and it was outlined in black.

**RR:** Sounds terrific.

**SG:** Yeah.

**WH:** The story, I think you were (*not clear*) gallery, (*not clear*) gallery in Paris and we -- something came up about the tenth or eleventh or twelfth grade and you ran for student office?

**RR:** Yes.

**WH:** And had a duck or a goose -- it was a goose, if I remember?

**RR:** Yes.

**WH:** Tell us about that where you put the sign board on it to advertise. How did . . . ?

**RR:** I think that was -- I don't know if it was eleventh year or twelfth year but for some strange reason, being one of the -- that's what makes it strange is that I was one of the most unpopular kids in school.

**SG:** And a poor student on top of it all.

**RR:** And a lousy student. And I decided that I would run for president of the student body, but then I was too shy to do those speeches where you go from homeroom to homeroom. And I guess it was in search of -- looking back at it it could have been in search of some kind of joy or trying to supply some of the humor that I felt my life was starved of. And so I went out to the farm and got this goose and for two or three weeks before the election they have homeroom periods and everyone goes and says, you know, they'll try to improve the food in the cafeteria or whatever they (*not clear*) bigger parties after the football games, you know, --

**SG:** Yeah. Sure.

**RR:** -- really important things that will change your life. I would simply -- the homeroom setups was a front door and a backdoor. And I would just open the door and put the goose in with a sign saying "Vote for Rauschenberg," and I'd go to backdoor and open the door and someone would chase the goose out.

**SG:** Did you have a great time doing it, though?

**RR:** I took it very seriously. I mean I say (*not clear*) humor.

**WH:** Yeah.

**RR:** But it seemed to me like a perfectly logical thing to do.

**WH:** What was the upshot of all this?

**RR:** Oh, I think I got two votes out of about eight thousand.

**SG:** Well, obviously somebody agreed with you.

**RR:** But why I decided that I would run for president in the school is really -- no stretch of the imagination could I think of that. Also had -- for the big meeting, the last meeting before the election I sponsored a beauty contest where there wasn't anything

very legal or democratic about it. I just picked who I thought was the best looking girl in each class and instead again of making speeches about what I might accomplish for the school I had all of them on stage, which I thought was like pretty good and then I had our lankiest basketball -- homeliest player dress up in a dress and he won, so as not to make any enemies there.

**WH:** They voted for him.

**RR:** Yeah, well, they voted in the cafeteria. Also, well something I thought was actually nice and that was that I arranged with the librarian, which was the center building upstairs -- center room to get to school at 7:30 and I played music. School didn't start till 8:30. And you know just from the library window.

**SG:** Like being a disc jockey?

**RR:** Yeah. I could have had a good time in school if --

**SG:** If they'd let you.

**RR:** Yeah, if they'd let me.

**SG:** You think you would have been the great entertainer.

**RR:** I was very good at all the extra things.

**SG:** Yeah. (*Not clear*).

**RR:** I didn't -- it was considered frivolous for me to be allowed to take classes like theatre or drama. My father went to the -- I think he went to the third grade. My mother got through to the sixth. So the idea of going to school was not taken lightly. And, well, I wasn't allowed to say take drama, I think something that I could have -- that may (*not clear*) take some of those other kinds of courses that I can see some aptitude for. It might have given me some kind of focus on everything else. But I was the only (*not clear*) you

know at the end of the -- when you graduate there's special honors (*not clear*) and I was the only one to get what it was exactly that determined those groups.

**SG:** What about like for a prom or something?

**RR:** And so you even felt more isolated. Well I had a beautiful girlfriend.

**SG:** See.

**RR:** But she went to a different school.

**SG:** Oh, I see (*not clear*).

**RR:** I don't think she ever realized the extent of my unpopularity. It's like I had to go out of town or something. And we both would rather dance than eat. And she was a very nice compliment to my lack of success. She graduated from her school which was a Catholic school, which didn't please my mother very much, seeing as how everyone but the people in our denomination were going straight to Hell.

**WH:** How did you meet her?

**RR:** She was a neighbor of my one friend.

**SG:** Did you see her for a long time?

**RR:** Yeah, we went together for about four maybe six years after she had moved to the University of Texas.

**SG:** Long time.

**RR:** Well, I was in the Navy so I mean the last two and half years were quite (*not clear*). I was probably just going with her in my head.

**SG:** A lot of people have those kind of --

**RR:** But she graduated as the most beautiful girl and -- what is that? Valedictorian?

**SG:** Yeah.

**RR:** And valedictorian which is a pretty super --

**WH:** Do you remember her name?

**RR:** Yeah. Gretchen Braun. B-r-a-u-n.

**SG:** B-r-a-u-n?

**RR:** Uh-huh.

**SG:** German names, huh?

**RR:** There are a lot of Germans in Texas for some reason.

**SG:** Do you know what happened to her at all?

**RR:** Yes, she's married and living in Houston, Texas. Five kids. Catholic.

**WH:** Your father was an electrical contractor or electrician?

**RR:** Well, he started digging -- just digging the light poles, the holes for the light poles. And in spite of so little education in a time when -- well, in his early days nearly no one had college -- the Depression and everything, nearly no one had a college education. And he really survived the influx of electrical engineers and everything and finally went on to be the district supervisor of south Louisiana.

**WH:** What about grandparents, Bob? Were his folks anywhere accessible to you?

**RR:** They lived in Gatesville, Texas, and we made an annual trip there. I mean to drive a hundred and fifty miles you didn't do that but, say, once a year, even if it was your own father --

**SG:** You had a car --

**RR:** But my mother had a big family.

**WH:** Yes, and they were closer at hand?

**RR:** Yeah, they were right in Port Arthur. My mother two brothers and five sisters and there was -- there was so much assumed family life that nearly no one in the family did anything but see someone else in the family. Also in our house -- well, my mother had -- only one of the sisters was a whole sister and the other four were half sisters and one by one we would take to get them out of this -- away from their step-mother.

**SG:** Was she awful?

**RR:** She was awful. She -- well, they lived right off the docks in a port town and my mother's half-sisters, step-mother -- had two children of her own -- and she used the other children as maids and ran a boarding house for sailors.

**SG:** Sounds like a real Cinderella story.

**RR:** So it was very important -- we never had enough room to take more than one at a time and it was almost just sort of programmed that my mother would keep one of the children until they could manage to get married and then we'd take another and the ages were so split. Like I said the last one of course was the one that was only three and half years older than I was.

**SG:** A real extension of your own family?

**RR:** Yeah.

**WH:** Well, right after you graduated from high school --

**RR:** What were we talking about just before that, though?

**WH:** Uh, the grandparents.

**SG:** Your girlfriend.

**WH:** And your girlfriend just before that.

**RR:** Oh, yeah. I was up at the Kansas City Art Institute so you know it's quite a bit later.

**WH:** Yeah.

**SG:** *(Not clear)*.

**RR:** Yeah, but this is about Gretchen.

**SG:** Oh, I see.

**RR:** Actually, we called her "Gay."

**SG:** Gay?

**RR:** Yeah.

**SG:** That's terrific.

**RR:** She was five foot two and beautiful blonde, long, blonde curly hair and I was sitting on the bus in Kansas City, and the person next to me had a Life Magazine and there she was on the cover of Life Magazine as a coed studying on the roof of her sorority house. And I jumped up and down on the bus and screamed at everybody, jerked the magazine away and said, I know her.

**SG:** That's terrific. Real celebrity.

**WH:** This was Gay Braun?

**RR:** Braun, yeah.

**SG:** Was it pronounced Brown or Brawn?

**RR:** Brown.

**WH:** Brown.

**RR:** Like Rooschenberg.

**SG:** Yeah. Rooschenberg.

**RR:** My mother still calls herself Rooschenberg. That somehow is supposed to be easier for people to understand than Rauschenberg. If you say Rooschenberg you have to spell the name anyway. You always have to spell the name.

**WH:** When did they come to this country, the family?

**RR:** My mother's mother is Swedish. Wait. No. She's Holland-Dutch. And she married a Swede. And my father's mother was Cherokee and he was German.

**WH:** Come from Germany?

**RR:** Yeah. His father had come from Germany.

**WH:** His father had come from Germany.

**SG:** So the name is really a German name?

**WH:** Your great-grandfather came --

**RR:** Right.

**WH:** -- from Germany?

**RR:** And he was a doctor.

**SG:** Medical doctor?

**RR:** Yeah, a medical doctor from -- I think it was Berlin. There's a story that I haven't checked out. I don't really know whether I imagined it or whether it's my great -- anyway for years one of the most fascinating, and maybe only fascinating thing that I remember about my family on either side actually was that I had the story that my mother's mother married my mother's father by proxy by having her glove, and I don't know whether I added to it 'cause she was still in the old country. I don't know whether I fanaticized it or not but I imagined that they had done it over the -- somehow over the radio or something.



**SG:** Did they (*not clear*).

**RR:** And it was one of the like one of the first proxy-cable-overseas marriages.

**WH:** She would have been in Texas then?

**RR:** No, she wasn't yet. My mother was born in Galveston and that's where her family is.

**SG:** Galveston's not far from Port Arthur though, isn't it?

**WH:** It's on the Gulf Coast below Houston.

**RR:** Right.

**SG:** Below Houston?

**RR:** Right. Right. Fifteen minutes south of Houston with the bridges. With two ferryboat rides it's half a day.

**WH:** I'm thinking of the boats that go from New Orleans to Galveston, it's a long, strange trip.

**RR:** Yeah.

**WH:** You went right in the Navy after high school?

**RR:** Not exactly. My family was very -- I think it was both things. Both wanted me to go to college. I was very glad to be out of school but you would be drafted if you didn't go to a university. And I refused to go to Texas A & M -- oh, okay, I think this is pretty sophisticated for my family. I told them that I would study anything they wanted because I wasn't interested in studying anything. And I'd study anything they wanted me to for one year and if I wasn't interested in it at the end of the year then they would just, like, forget about me going to school.

**SG:** (*Not clear*).

**WH:** Un-huh.

**RR:** Is this the expulsion?

**SG:** No.

**WH:** No.

**SG:** I have *(not clear)*.

**WH:** *(Not clear)*.

**RR:** They thought that I liked animals so much that I'd be a veterinarian, that I'd be interested in that. And that was like in those days you either did something like be a veterinarian or be in agriculture or a chemical engineer is about the only three things that anyone taught. But I refused to go to military school.

**SG:** To a military college?

**RR:** Yeah, well, Texas A & M is the only place that had courses in veterinary and so they thought – and so then the other school was the University of Texas. So I went to the University of Texas and the closest thing they could think of there was to be a pharmacist.

**SG:** That should have interested you. You were interested in chemistry.

**RR:** They thought so. It's not the liveliest course you could study. Pharmaceutical mathematics at 8:00 o'clock in the morning? The history of pharmacy at 10:00?

**SG:** I've seen you watch a television program about the invention of ether and you were really glued to it.

**WH:** Well, that's different.

**RR:** That's different and also it's a different time.

**SG:** Right. I know. You're older now.

**RR:** I'm older now. It's not so threatening.

**SG:** How did you get into college though if you'd done so poorly?

**RR:** I had to go in the summer and do make-up -- the easiest make-up courses they had to offer. You know, like, real cinch -- I was good in English. And so I took summer cram courses of as many English classes as I could. But then that didn't last --

**WH:** *(Not clear)*.

**RR:** -- very long because I was in biology and walked in one day -- I liked doing the drawings, there again, you know, but I didn't like to study. But I wasn't doing too badly because all of my notebooks were some of the best in the class because the focus was on the drawings. And I came in one day and there is a -- on every desk there's a jar with a live frog in it. And the assignment was to take your frog, alive, and cut it open and watch his heart beat. And I had an argument for not doing it and that was that I wouldn't learn anymore than I would from seeing a picture of it. That I didn't have to actually see the frog's heart beat if it was going to kill the frog. And the instructor thought that I was just -- didn't take me seriously and so -- but I did. I was you know, I was dead serious and I wasn't going to do it. I couldn't do it. I didn't mind what the consequences were and so I just went open an opened a window and to show how serious I was I threw my frog away. Then I had to go to the dean and the more I was attacked for doing this the more I was determined that it was the right thing to do, and in a matter of about twenty minutes I was expelled from school. And I couldn't figure out how to tell my father why I had been kicked out of school because giggering for frogs and eating frog legs was, you now, like one of our greatest delicacies. And I just knew that he wouldn't understand that I had been kicked out of school for throwing a frog out the window.

**SG:** You only went that summer?

**RR:** And so I didn't know how to -- no, I went that summer and then the Fall.

**SG:** Oh, this is the Fall.

**RR:** And so I just took a job as a soda jerk in a drugstore. Actually, I had that job for at least four months, because even after four months I couldn't figure out how to tell my family that I wasn't in school.

**SG:** *(Not clear)*.

**RR:** And then I was drafted and I was so glad.

**WH:** What year was that now?

**SG:** Forty . . . ?

**WH:** It's just before the Korean War.

**RR:** No, we're talking about World War II.

**SG:** '42.

**WH:** '42. That's right. That's right.

**RR:** That's not my war.

**WH:** Of course. Of course.

**SG:** You were drafted in 1942.

**WH:** And you were glad?

**RR:** I was glad because to this day -- it doesn't matter now but to this day it's a very familiar unknown fact why I was kicked out of school and it doesn't matter. But they were so upset about my being drafted that it never came up.

**SG:** Does your mom know now?

**RR:** I think so, yeah. Well, she wouldn't have cut the frog open. It was my father you had to worry about. He was about the greatest --

**SG:** Sportsman.

**RR:** -- sportsman in all of --

**SG:** *(Not clear)*.

**RR:** -- southern Texas. People would fly in from all over the country to go hunting with him.

**SG:** Did you learn any of that *(not clear)*.

**RR:** And fishing. Huh?

**SG:** Did you learn how to do it from him?

**RR:** Not professionally.

**WH:** Did he keep trophies around?

**RR:** No.

**WH:** From his hunting and fishing?

**RR:** No.

**WH:** *(Not clear)*.

**RR:** We illegally pedaled some of the ducks to make extra money.

**SG:** *(Not clear)*.

**RR:** My mother was very good about -- no, it's sportsmen. He got paid for being a guide. And then my mother and I would clean the whatever, the fish or the ducks or what. And then we would sell them. My mother would park a block away from wherever I had to sneak up through the alley. It was usually to some doctor or lawyer's house, and it had all been pre-arranged, and deliver the ducks. I also sold -- my mother's

very enterprising economically. Well, we had to be. We also had sold Christmas cards every summer since I was about seven or eight years old. That was an interesting job.

**WH:** The Christmas cards?

**RR:** Yeah, I enjoyed it in the middle of the summer walk up to some strangers door and tell them how they should get their Christmas cards now.

**SG:** You always liked the irony?

**RR:** While there's still time.

**SG:** You really liked the irony?

**WH:** Where on earth did the Christmas cards come from?

**SG:** *(Not clear)*.

**RR:** Oh, you'd send off. You'd send off. Mail order things.

**SG:** But you never really were taught to love to read and things. I was up to you to know all that kind of stuff.

**RR:** Well, no we really didn't have books in the house.

**SG:** Well, where'd you learn everything?

**RR:** It's been a lot of time since, but I didn't learn everything either. I still have no sense of history which I think one can use to an advantage. It really has helped me because it's been important in my aesthetics to forget as quickly and successfully as you can to not be -- I mean --

**END OF SIDE 2**

**END OF TAPE 1**