



BODO KNOWS

Round Top - I wasn't here during Mr. Bodo Kraus's prime years but people have told me all sorts of wild stories about him. The Mayor said he used to be one of the strongest men in the county.

Some of the ladies claimed you could always find him at the Rifle Hall during a dance. I heard he had the biggest hands anybody had ever seen. I knew he had been the president of the bank for a long time and had headed up the school board.

What I didn't know was what caused people to talk about him with such affection and respect. I decided it was time to find out.

When were you born?

April 26, 1903. Right here on this same place. I been livin' here all my life. My grandfather...bought this hundred acres...in 1847 for two dollars an acre and

and they still celebrated their fiftieth wedding anniversary. He was almost again as old as she was. There's not too many Kraus left in our family, just one boy named Kraus, county judge in Lee County. When they hauls us up on the hill, it'll be the last Kraus.

Is your real name Bodo?

There's not many by that name. My nephew got me a book on the Kraus family and in that book there was one that had the same name as I did. I wrote him a letter tellin' him about it. He called me on the telephone when he got the letter and said "I thought surely you was pullin' my leg."

Tell me about your childhood.

Well, we learned how to work. We worked like slaves. My daddy had two bachelor brothers and they worked together. We had about 600 acres and different land other places. We had to do a lot of repair work, fences, cattle, bail hay. We planted as much as 85 acres of corn and gathered it by hand. We used to drive cattle up to Ledbetter on horses...leave four in the morning and get back that night...had good horses. I had a little country school here (Nassau) to the seventh grade, then I went to Blinn College.

I got married in 1927. My wife always kidded me cause she said she thought I had plenty of money only to find out I only had \$800 when we got married. She died last year...in our sixty-seventh year.

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I'm still on part of that land after all these years.

Tell me more about your family.

When they first came over in 1844, they came into Galveston and they put a log cabin right down here on this hundred acres. There was a spring down here they used for water.

Then they went to visit some of their kin-folks...and they came home that night and that log house was burnt down so they put up a house here on this spot.

What crops did they farm?

Cotton, corn, sugar cane... whatever...peanuts. Cotton was the cash crop. 'Course they raised chickens, sold eggs, turkeys, different stuff...cattle, horses, hogs.

My grandmother...moved into a place about a mile and a half out of Round Top on Rocky Creek. They had a boy in Germany who was bad about huntin' and killin' deer and they was afraid he was goin' to get in trouble over there so he came here about a year before they did. He brought a rifle and a shotgun along from Germany. Somebody offered him a section of land, 640 acres for that rifle and he didn't take it.

Next to the door in there is a deer's rack. My grandfather killed him in 1848. He was out in the woods huntin' birds with this old muzzle loader and this deer flat jumped up in front of him...musta been asleep. He shot him in the face...shot him blind and he went to circlin' and he (his grandfather) caught him by the horns and cut his throat...hundred and forty somethin' years ago.

Them old folks was rugged weren't they.

How about your parents.

My mother was raised at New Ulm. She was twenty and he was thirty-six when they got married

What did you do for fun?

Hunt, fish and play scat.

I heard about you and scat.

Well, I been the vice-president of the Texas Scat League for forty-eight years. We have our meetings in New Braunfels, Seguin...German communities. It's a game brought over here from Germany. Bridge is deep but scat is deeper. They have tournaments. The most state scat players they ever had was 820...in La Grange. I still play ever monday...about five hours for a penny a point. The boys come over here since I don't drive any more. Last time I lost about fifteen dollars but I laughed it off.

I heard you played football at Blinn.

Yeah, I played football. Course an old country boy hardly ever saw a football. We didn't have much of a team. I played basketball and baseball too. In basketball, we had an undefeated team in 1922. I played center.

When did you first go to work at the Round Top State Bank?

I inherited some stock from my bachelor uncle and they voted me in as a director in 1931 on October the 12th. I'm still on the board as an honorary deal. I don't have much to say but I'm still making the meetings. I was President of the bank twenty-nine years.

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Tell me about the bank.

It was on the Fourth of July in 1912, a bunch of the old fellas was all sitting around, the Frickes and the Kraus...they was drinkin' beer at the celebration an a home boy from Round Top who was workin' in Bellville at the bank came walkin' up and they started hollerin' at him sayin' "Hello Banker!"

He made the remark "You fellas oughta start a bank here. You got enough right here to start one." That's what got it started...in 1912. They got it started...all squareheads. It was \$10,000 surplus and \$10,000 capital. My bachelor uncle was one of the originals. I was a pretty good stockholder at one time but I give it away to my kinfolks.

The old building (where PJ Hornberger's gallery is now) is still there. It had that rock-faced

tin on it. The old safe is in the new bank sittin' there in the lobby. It was bought for about \$300 and the building cost about \$300 and something.

I can still remember when we got our first million dollars in deposits. We had to change our check writers and adding machines because they didn't have enough numbers.

How many people lived in Round Top when you were young?

I guess a little over a hundred. They had about three or four saloons when I was big enough to find out. They had a dance hall and three or four stores. They had a jail. I remember that jail. It was small...wouldn't hold but about two people.

What things were better then than they are now?

People had more time to visit than they have now. Now they don't have time. The neighbors...you had more friendship and your family would get together more. They didn't have much credit then like they do now. It's just different.

The doggone crookedness in the world today is so much different. I guess you had it then but not that bad or that much. I had a pretty good reputation for bein' honest and doin' the right thing. My Daddy always raised us to be honest. I told a bank examiner one time "We got people here you could loan them a thousand dollars without a note and they'd pay it back." He looked at me like I was crazy. We still have those kind of people here.

SPRING

BODO KNOWS

Tell me some funny stories about people still living in Round Top.

...(pause)...I think I better renege on that.

You're are too smart. Tell me some fun stuff that you used to do.

I used to love to hunt and fish...used to run fox with the hounds...used to hunt at night on horseback...run wolves, bobcats...We had an old house that we caught possums live before the season was over.

We had a hundred live possums. We'd feed 'em jackrabbits. When Christmas come, a friend of mine come by and asked "How much you want for them possums?" We told him a dollar a piece. So he went to killin' 'em and boy did we have a sticky mess.

I used to make all the dances in the country. I danced in forty-eight different dance halls. I danced with over 350 different women in my time.

You counted huh?

Well, I can kind of picture them in my mind goin' back...roughly. When we had our fiftieth wedding anniversary, we had a dance. I danced with thirty-three women that night.

Somebody says you used to own over 3,000 acres.

Well at one point we had over 5,000 acres. During the depression we were land poor. We couldn't rent it out for the tax. It's a lot of work.

What are you proudest of?

I don't know if I should say this but I helped a lot of people myself. I got the names of over 350 people I helped with money. That kept me hoppin'.

Well I got to say this...as long as I was in the bank...there's not anybody in this world I can't look straight in the eyes with a clean conscience.

A few years back, Bodo and Pearlie created a \$100,000 scholarship fund to Blinn College for graduates of Round Top/Carmine schools.

When we were done, Bodo showed me the gun that his grandfather used to shoot that deer. He still has it.