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Rodney Waldbaum

SUMMARY

Rodney Waldbaum, who grew up in Seattle's Capitol Hill neighborhood, built a strong academic foundation at Garfield High School and the University of Washington. He excelled as a student leader and later studied accounting, which set him on a path toward a distinguished professional career. His story also includes military service during the Vietnam era and a long tenure in tax law, including work with the IRS and a local law firm, alongside deep involvement in Jewish community organizations and leadership roles. Throughout his story, he emphasizes the importance of family, especially his marriage and children, as well as personal interests like travel, bridge, and genealogy that shaped his fuller life experience.

Brad Lowenstein: So why don't you tell me a little bit? I know you went to Garfield High, but even before that, can you tell me about, like, where you grew up? What was your household like? Starting way back there.

Rodney Waldbaum: Okay. I was raised on Capitol Hill on 20th and Prospect right across the street from the Prospect Congregational Church. My mother was raised on Capitol Hill on 15th Street. My parents bought their home in, I believe, 1935, and my mother lived in it till 1993. So I was raised in that house. I was born in Swedish Hospital. I was the son of Helen and Al Waldbaum, and I had two brothers. My older brother was Kenny Waldbaum, and my younger brother was David Waldbaum. They had had a sister, who had died before of undiagnosed appendicitis before I was born. I went to Stephen's School, which was the elementary school in the neighborhood. I went to Meany Junior High School, where I was Boys Club Vice President, and got the award for the outstanding student in my class. And then I went to Garfield High School, where I became senior class president and was a top ten student, academically. And then I went to the University of Washington, where I joined the Sigma Alpha Mu fraternity. And, was very active on campus, particularly in my first two years. And, I majored in accounting. I was in Beta Alpha Psi, the accounting honorary, and Beta Gamma Sigma, the business school equivalent of Phi Beta Kappa. I graduated as the number two male student in my class at the university, in the School of Business. But those were the days when the grades weren't nearly as high. Both the guy who won and I came in second. We had 3.4 something averages compared to my high school average of 3.97. And that was good enough. I see the grades today are highly inflated. Then I went on to the University of Washington Law School, where I was on the Law Review, and I graduated in December 1970. I had been after my first year in law school, the United States took away my class deferments. It was the first time in the United States, but that was the Vietnam Era. And the class ahead of me was safe. But mine, they took away the deferments. So I got married right after my first year of law school. And the day after I got back from my honeymoon, I enlisted in the United States Army Reserve, and I also joined Arthur Andersen, the international CPA firm, as I had my choice of which CPA firm to join, and then I had to go into the Army. The only slots available were as a cook. So I went through basic training, and then I went to cook school for eight weeks at Fort Ord, California. And, it was a great experience. When I graduated from law school, they offered me a direct commission, and I turned down the commission as a lieutenant because I would not give up the power of being first cook in my reserve unit, which was composed of about 125 soldiers, 57 who were majors and above, with seven full colonels and 22 Lieutenant Colonels. We had more rank in my civil affairs unit at Fort Lawton, out in Magnolia, than probably the entire rest of the West Coast combined.

Brad Lowenstein: Oh.

Rodney Waldbaum: Would you like me to go on without more questions or just continue?

Brad Lowenstein: Yeah. Let's keep going. Yeah. This is great. And I turned my video off just for the recording.

Rodney Waldbaum: Okay. I did start my tax career with Weyerhaeuser, the state and local tax department, when it was on 11th and in downtown Tacoma. And I did that between the summers of my junior and senior year, and then the summer between my senior year and first year of law school. That was a great experience, and I observed that if you wanted to be a success at Weyerhaeuser, it was easier to go back out and then come back in at a higher level than working your way up through the ranks. And so I purposely chose Arthur Andersen as my CPA firm because they were the CPA firm for Weyerhaeuser Company. And, I thought that's what I would do. But then I after the Army, and I graduating from law school, when I was in law school, I got interviewed by the IRS, and they told me, if you go with the IRS, you'll get to go up against such great opposition as Lassard and Patton, which was a local CPA firm. And I ended up checking, excuse me, a local law firm. And the reason I checked that out, and the former dean of the law school said, you know, I know, the little firm. Let me make a phone call. And the next day, I had an appointment there, and I was immediately hired. And I ended my career with Lassard and Patton for over 47 years. It was a great experience. My practice was probably the broadest of the attorneys in the firm, but it was a heavy concentration of tax, particularly tax. Controversial work. I became a fellow of the American College of Tax Counsel, and I was president of the tax section of the Washington State Bar Association from 1993 to 94. I was also actively involved in some community organizations. I was involved with the Hillel Foundation out at the University of Washington for many years, and in the late 1980s, when I was president of Hillel, Rabbi Jacobovitz from the Hillel Foundation was going to retire, and we had to decide on the new executive director of Hillel. And that was a very tough decision, because we had two individuals who, on a scale of 1 to 10, the board thought both were tens. And so we had to decide. And, fortunately, we did hire Danny Bridge. And, he successfully led Hillel for the next 18 years, I believe. And, they were able to rebuild the facility, and I was always very proud of that decision. I later became president of the tax section of the Washington State Bar Association. Between '93 and '94, I was president of Temple de Hirsch Sinai. In the year '97 to '98. I was on the temple board for 14 years before I was president. I was treasurer for six years. And, we had been discussing for years how to get an elevator in the Seattle sanctuary at Temple de Hirsch, and how to expand from the existing Bellevue location, which resulted from a merger of Temple Sinai into Temple de Hirsch, which was on 124th in Bellevue. And we had been discussing it for years. When I became president, I decided we were going to do something, and so I got congregational approval to buy the property of the current facility, which is now the current facility in Bellevue for the temple. And, we also while I was Mr. President, we bought the land. We have got the approval from the congregation to have the fundraising drive, which did prove to be successful. And, we were able to build on the raw land that we bought in Bellevue. And that was completed after my term was over, but always very proud of my accomplishments while I was at Temple, and particularly that the elevator finally got installed, in the Seattle facility connecting the sanctuary level with the Jaffe room down below. My family has been the key to everything. I met my wife, Nina, in 1960 as I was entering Garfield, and she was going to enter the ninth grade at Meany Junior High. We dated in high school, but we also dated others in high school. We were sweatshirts and lavaliers, pinned, and finally engaged, and on her 21st birthday, and got married after my first year in law school. We got an apartment on Beacon Hill, and in 1971, we moved to Bellevue. And we've had three sons, Brett Walbaum, Chad Walbaum, and Erich Walbaum, all of whom became Eagle Scouts. I've always been proud of that. And they all ended up being very successful and live independently, have their own homes. And, we have four grandchildren. Brett and Hallie Brodeur-Walbaum have two daughters who are now turning 16 and 13. And Chad and Oreet have two children, a boy, who is five, and a daughter who is three. And Eric is fabulous. And, he's still looking for the right gal. As far as interests, I'm very interested, besides professional things, I'm interested in bridge and family. We're doing a certain amount of family genealogy. We love to travel. We've skied, we've played racquetball. We lived for over 30 years in Clyde Hill, and it was wonderful. I loved having Father's Day at our house for my extended family, which, whenever we would have an event, a major event, we had over a hundred people in the family. Before I could invite my first friend. But even the Father's Day, we would have 35, 45 people. And, the yard lent itself to that. And then, 14 years ago, in 2007, we downsized to a condominium in Kirkland, Washington, which we absolutely love.

Brad Lowenstein: Great.

Rodney Waldbaum: More questions?

Brad Lowenstein: Yes. Thank you. That made my job very easy. You just gave me the full rundown. I'm going to start over, kind of at the beginning, if that's okay.

Rodney Waldbaum: Certainly.

Brad Lowenstein: So going back, you said. And forgive me, I'm not familiar with Stephen's School. That was middle school or elementary school.

Rodney Waldbaum: That's elementary school.

Brad Lowenstein: Okay.

Rodney Waldbaum: On Capitol Hill, it was on 18th Avenue between Highland Drive and Galer.

Brad Lowenstein: And that was public. Nondenominational?

Rodney Waldbaum: Correct.

Brad Lowenstein: Were there any sort of religious studies that you undertook?

Rodney Waldbaum: Oh, yes. I started in Sunday School, I believe, when I was still two, with preschool, pre-kindergarten, and I went all the way through and was confirmed. Bar mitzvah at Temple de Hirsch, where my grandfather, I believe, was the first Bar Mitzvah at Temple de Hirsch. My great-grandparents had been founders of Temple de Hirsch, and I was Bar Mitzvahed there. Confirmed there, graduated there, married there. And, ultimately, had our kids named and there and had their Bar Mitzvahs there and weddings there. And it's been wonderful.

Brad Lowenstein: That's great. Do you have any fond memories as a child from Temple De Hirsch going to school there?

Rodney Waldbaum: Well, I had a lot of fun at Temple. I was always a year ahead of my public school grade at Temple, because I was a November baby. And the deadline in the Seattle public schools was November 1st. And it was December 1st for Temple. So, I was always a year ahead. When I was in kindergarten, in public school, my mother had arranged for me to be for me to skip in the public schools to first grade, but the principal called me in the office and asked me what I thought of that idea, and I thought I was already the leader of the band in kindergarten, and I didn't want to, do that. So I told her so. And to this day, that's probably one of the best decisions of my life, because I always excelled in public school. I was always, throughout school, I was the second shortest guy in the class, as it was, without having skipped. And, I just think it was a very good move.

Brad Lowenstein: Great. I was very similar on a November birthday. So have a November birthday. So similar memories as well, and growing up in your household, did you keep a kosher household? Is there a form? Obviously. Yeah.

Rodney Waldbaum: Well, we belong to both my parents, I should say, belong to both Becher and De Hirsch. My dad had been raised Orthodox in New York, but he didn't observe Kashrut. My mother did not allow any pork or shellfish in the house, but we weren't strictly kosher. It wasn't kosher meat and everything like that. At some point, my mother, by mistake, tasted crab and found that she liked it. And I even told this at her funeral. You know, I don't think she ever tasted a shrimp. I'm sure she never tasted any pork, but she did like Dungeness Crab. And that was the only exception. My dad would eat bacon in restaurants, but not at home. And we do not keep kosher in my home.

Brad Lowenstein: Did you celebrate Shabbat or Hanukkah in any meaningful ways for your family?

Rodney Waldbaum: Yes.

Brad Lowenstein: Um, and.

Rodney Waldbaum: We always celebrated the holidays. My mother became the patriarch of the entire Rogers family, which we thought at that time was the largest Jewish family in Seattle, with all of our relatives. That was before we later learned about some of the Sephardic families, which also tended to be very large. But my grandmother died in 1953, and my mother, in her 30s, became the matriarch. She was the eldest of nine children. And so we had all these family dinners, and we did observe all the holidays. The one difference was Hanukkah. My parents had founded Direct Buying Service, which was Seattle's first complete discount house. It was very it was small-scale. It was probably a lot of it; you name it, they could get it. My mother was quite the businesswoman, and, because the Christmas season was the main part of their business, probably a third of their business in the month before Christmas. We always really celebrated Hanukkah on the morning of December 25th, after the retail crush. And we never had a Christmas tree. I did feel, as a child, a bit like Dennis the Menace, our next-door neighbours. We were raised in a wonderful Catholic neighbourhood, and the next-door neighbours were elderly. I got to go and decorate their Christmas tree, which we never had, but I always understood that was their custom, and believe me, it didn't hurt a bit. But admittedly, my mother did hang stockings on December 25th. And then we would have lots of pancakes and things like that to eat to remind us that we were Jewish. But we opened all our presents on Christmas morning, officially for Hanukkah.

Brad Lowenstein: Yeah, that's interesting, that it makes sense that I would do the same thing. Business comes first sometimes. Yeah. Okay. And while serving in the Army was there. Did it ever. Or as the Army reserves? Did being Jewish ever come up in any significant ways there? Um.

Rodney Waldbaum: No. I was very fortunate in the Army. Um, the one trauma I had was when I was in basic training. Um, I was notified that my dad had a heart attack by the Red Cross. And they, um. It was like the day after Thanksgiving. And that Friday night, they flew me home. And we had the funeral on Sunday morning. Um, and they told me that I had to be back by the start of drills on Monday morning. Otherwise, I would have to start basic training all over again. And, um, so I had to literally go from the funeral straight to the airport to fly home. But I was lucky in the Army. I never pulled KP. I. They asked for a volunteer, and I volunteered to be in charge of the utility closet during basic training, which meant I was responsible for checking out all the mops and brooms and everything. And so the army cared more about its things than its people. And so I, uh, never had to clean a latrine. I never had to pull KP. I got to be in charge of this utility closet. And then when I went to cook school for eight weeks, I should mention that during basic training, I did go to services on Friday nights and Saturday mornings. I had one friend who was in basic training, whom I met, and he was Catholic, but his former roommate from USC, he knew, was a couple of cycles ahead of him at Fort Ord. And his friend was Jewish. So he would go to the services with me for the Jewish services in hopes of seeing his friend. and this guy was very smart. And by the time we were done with basic training, I think he knew more Hebrew than I did, and he asked if he went to any congregation in LA, in Los Angeles, whether they would know that he wasn't Jewish. And I said, No, I said he could fake it. And I do remember that the day after we went to our first services in basic training, his name was Fike, F i k e was his last name. His name tags for all his uniforms came back Fike, F i nk. So anyway, in cook school, it was an unusual time because we normally had the cooks who were the lowest of the low in the army when they flunked out of school. Other schools'd make them a cook. When I was there, there were a lot of reservists who were very bright and had college educations. And I did have the highest scores in the cook school from the written test. I wasn't the best cook, but I could remember the temperatures to cook a roast or whatever it was. Also, I should tell you that our mess section was the best. We came up with original ideas. For example, the army required well-done meat on the serving line. Well, I came up with the suggestion and implemented it so that we could put it in. If we were cooking 15 roasts, we'd put five of them in at one time, five of them in 20 minutes later, five of them in 20 minutes later. And we take them out at the same time and give them a choice of rare, medium, or well done. And as long as you had enough, well done. That was fine. And I once had a major try to take me on and close down my mess hall to do work on our trucks was our second secondary MOS assignment for all cooks in case you ever had to go out in cars into the field. And I said no. Anyway, he found out he didn't like baking soda in his coffee, and he never tried taking me on again. So it was a powerful position. I've been president of many organizations, but I don't know that I've ever been in a more powerful one than being first cook in the Army.

Brad Lowenstein: Oh, so you weren't. It wasn't a line cook. It was more of a managerial role. Sounds like.

Rodney Waldbaum: I. Well, when I was in cooking school, because I had the best test scores, everybody else had to get up to cook the breakfast meals. In my case, I was assigned to the non-commissioned officers' mess hall, which only turned out a noon meal. And I was really trained to give a nice tea because I was with a lifer who was 27 years. He did all the cooking. I put the bed of lettuce under each square of Jell-O. I put the parsley on top of each pad of butter. Those types of things. And I actually got a certificate hanging in my office here at home from the US. Army for my culinary excellence. But frankly, it was I who was more the political liaison. When we would go to summer camp, I would work to have my cooks work double shifts on and double shifts off so we could go to the surrounding area and be off base, uh, because otherwise, when we weren't cooking, if we were on base, there was a feeling that they had to find work for you. And so that worked out very well. But the enlisted men were absolutely brilliant in my reserve unit.

Brad Lowenstein: Earlier, you had mentioned that you never took KP. Could you just define KP?

Rodney Waldbaum: Kitchen. Police.

Brad Lowenstein: Kitchen. Police. Okay.

Rodney Waldbaum: Okay. Yes.

Brad Lowenstein: And. Yeah. Can you tell me about that?

Rodney Waldbaum: What? What is kitchen police?

Brad Lowenstein: Yeah. What was that?

Rodney Waldbaum: Well, I mean, everybody else would have to go and clean up the kitchen and wash the dishes and peel the potatoes and peel the carrots and. All the grunt work. I never had to do that.

Brad Lowenstein: Okay. I see. That's great. Um, so.

Rodney Waldbaum: You did ask about discrimination. I was conscious of that in terms of finding a lost law firm, and I was I did ask, you know, which law firms would be free of discrimination, in which I might run into it? Fortunately, even though I was the only Jewish person in my law firm when I joined it. I never had any discrimination. And I remember some clients would. Every once in a while, I would find a client who would make a derogatory comment regarding Jews. But I let them know immediately that I was Jewish and they never did it again in front of me.

Brad Lowenstein: And that's interesting. You never experienced it in the military, college. High school?

Rodney Waldbaum: No. God, Garfield High School was fabulous. It was the greatest high school in the world. We were so far ahead of the rest of the country. Martin Luther King came and spoke. When I was in high school. Quincy Jones had gone to Garfield. Jimi Hendrix was, I guess, at Garfield when I was there. But I don't think anybody knew him because he did not perform with the Garfield bands, but there was no discrimination. All the parties were mixed. We were about a third black, a third Caucasian a and a third Asian, primarily Japanese, and the parties were mixed. I remember going, taking a group of guys up to an all-city dance, and it was either in Queen Anne or Magnolia. And I took them after the Garfield talent show, which was the Garfield Funfest. And we walked into this room, and at that time, I all of a sudden felt these eyes staring at us. And I just realized that all the friends that I had just brought happened to be black. And there wasn't one other person who was black in the entire room. Those were Caucasian neighborhoods at that time. And there was no problem whatsoever, they were great guys that I had brought, and there was no problem. I still remember, you know, the parties were mixed. Three couples from my class up in Garfield married high school sweethearts. One black, one Japanese. And my wife and I, all three couples, are still married over 50 years later. And I think that's absolutely wonderful. One of those black guys ended up with the Harlem Globetrotters, and he married one of my classmates from my elementary school. There were ten elementary schools that fed intoGarfield, including Stevens, which was my elementary school, and I ended up the senior class president. And the one guy that was shorter than me all the way through school was a black student, Larry Vallely. And he also had gone to Stevens, and he became my vice president, and at the ten-year reunion, he had shot up, and he became like five, ten. I just couldn't believe it. He was inches taller than I was, but he was. He was still tiny bones, you know, thin. Could be. This could be.

Rodney Waldbaum: So let me ask, how tall are you now?

Rodney Waldbaum: I was about five. Six. I'm probably down to about five four.

Brad Lowenstein: Okay. But graduating from high school about five six.

Rodney Waldbaum: Yeah.

Brad Lowenstein: Okay.

Rodney Waldbaum: But I was small. I was like 119 when I got married. And then I came back from the Army, absolutely buff at about 135.

Brad Lowenstein: Wow. Good food.

Rodney Waldbaum: If it was in my mess hall, it was good food. I mean, I could tell you lots of stories about the food in the army. We used to take the initiative when we were given steaks, and we were cooking for fewer people on a Sunday because a lot of people got the weekend off. We would go out of our own pocket, go and buy charcoal at the PX, take the square head pans out of the ovens, take the oven racks out, and charcoal broil the steaks. And if you were at Fort Ord, all the mess halls are in a row, and people could smell the difference. And so we would have hundreds of people in line for our mess hall, and we'd have to limit it to those who were supposed to be in our missile.

Brad Lowenstein: Yeah, that sounds delicious. That sounds good. You had previously touched on. I just wanted to learn a little bit more about how you met Nina. She was raised Jewish as well, right?

Rodney Waldbaum: Absolutely. Her family also goes back. Her grandmother, and just like my mother, was among the first confirmands at Temple de Hirsch Sinai. Wow. She was a Bardi; her parents were Ted and Lois Bardi. My parents were Helen and Al Waldbaum, and when I met her, because I love to go to Madison Beach during the summer, it was the neighborhood beach, and there wasn't much happening. And a friend of mine, Art Kaplan, and I were there, and one of Nina's friends, Leslie Fisher, happened to be at the beach. And she said, well, you know, I have a friend with a swimming pool nearby. And so she took us over to what was Nina's house. And we went swimming. And Nina thought the other guy was cute. And he's still a good friend of ours, and Nina and this girl ended up having a party about a week later and invited us. And so that's how I met Nina.

Brad Lowenstein: The rest is history.

Rodney Waldbaum: But she was also confirmed and graduated from Temple. She became very active in the community as well. She was president of A.F.I., she was president of Brandeis Women's Organization, and she was president of the Jewish Day School. All three of our sons went to the Jewish Day School of Metropolitan Seattle, and we started that. We were both public school committed, but our experience with our oldest son was not good. He was very bored in kindergarten and first grade. And when they were at Medinah, when they told us that, uh, elementary that, uh, well, if you leave him here, you'll find that they all To graduate. They all, uh, congregate in the middle, and, uh, I, we decided to put him in the Jewish day school, which was only the second year of the Jewish day school at that time. And then all three of our kids, we had 19 years of Jewish Day School between our kids. Then they went to public school and graduated from Bellevue High School, and went on to college. Okay.

Brad Lowenstein: Jumping back a little bit, can you tell me any anecdotes or special memories from UW? When you were in the Sami Sigma Alpha Mu fraternity? A little bit about that.

Rodney Waldbaum: Sure. I ended up being a townie because I couldn't afford to live at the fraternity, but I was rush chairman, and one year, and that summer, I did get to live at the fraternity house. One of a couple of vivid memories, tradition was that the pledge class would have a sneak, and, uh. After you got caught, you know, they'd line up, and they would take a hack with a paddle? Uh, for your pledge, brother. And they'd go around and around, and everybody would say, yes, they would take a hack. They got to me. And I was, I guess, a smart ass. And I said, No, I said, but if you give me a hack or any of my pledge brother's hack, we will all walk out, and this fraternity will fold because it cannot survive without a pledge class. And they yelled, and they screamed, and they hollered, and nobody got hacked. And another memory I have is we did kidnap an active member and sent him on an airplane at SeaTac airport with a beanie on his head, suspenders in shorts, to Vancouver, no passport, no identification. We knew he would be able to talk his way back into the country. Can you imagine this? Since 911, you never would have happened.

Brad Lowenstein: No way.

Rodney Waldbaum: But they let us go all the way out to the gate. And, after that, of course, the Actives had to retaliate, and so the Actives kidnapped me and drove me around blindfolded. Left me on some wooded road in the middle of nowhere. I could hear there was another car, and it turned out one of my other pledge brothers had been dropped off. So we yelled and we got together. It was like two in the morning. We had no idea where we were. It was all dark. We did see a mailbox. So we walked down this road and we were smart enough not to go and knock on the door at that hour, but we yelled and yelled so that the guy came out. He came out with a shotgun, and he did not have a phone, but he did decide to drive us into Duvall. It was the nearest town, which was a long way away. And, he swore his son, who was of high school age, would never be allowed to join a fraternity. And we called one of our fraternity brothers to come and get us. The first one I called was one of my friends from pre-kindergarten days and whose mother was one of my mother's best friends. She answered the phone at two in the morning and said, he's not allowed to take calls at this hour. Click. And again, this is when they had payphones, and we only had enough to dial one more number, but we did find a fraternity brother who picked us up, and we got back, and we were at the football game the next day. The Active ones who we sent to Vancouver also got back in time for the Husky game.

Brad Lowenstein: Sounds interesting. Very fun times.

Rodney Waldbaum: Very good time. As I said, I did end up getting the award for Best Active. I would not. That was one position. I would not run for president. I declined, I said, I was a pledge leader. I was rush chairman and all those things, but the president had to make decisions, some of which would cost you some of those friendships. And the friendships were more important to me than the power of being president of the fraternity.

Brad Lowenstein: And it is a Jewish fraternity as well. Are there any specific practices? Was it kind of more of a social club?

Rodney Waldbaum: No, at that time, it was a Jewish fraternity. And we couldn't get into any of the non-Jewish fraternities easily. I did have a cousin who pledged a non-Jewish sorority. But you know, we never even tried. I was a legacy both with the Sami's. And I was asked to join both. And I had gotten such a good rush from these Sami's that I just felt more comfortable joining them. Anyway, it was fun. My wife just interrupted me.

Brad Lowenstein: Okay, great. And then moving on.

Rodney Waldbaum: Will mention one thing I just thought of, my freshman year. We've got to go to the Rose Bowl. The Huskies. Oh. And so we rented a bus and took guys and gals down to LA. We stayed at the UCLA Sammy house. The guys did. And it was great. And I go to a Jewish delicatessen near the UCLA fraternity house with two of my pledge brothers, both of whom were

Sephardic. And I was shocked that I just didn't have any knowledge of the differences in food between the Ashkenazi and Sephardic. They didn't know about Gefilte Fish, they didn't know about Chicken Matzo Ball Soup. And then, of course, I didn't know about half of their dishes. So that was very enlightening. And of course, now I have nephews who are married to Sephardic girls and everything. A lot of our best friends are Sephardic. But at that time, it was just different when my older brother was a CBT. Uh, he graduated from high school in 1954. He was about the first class, I believe, at CBT that admitted Sephardic before then. The CBT house did not admit Sephardic Jews. You had to be an AEP or Sami.

Brad Lowenstein: Mhm. Interesting. Were there any, just speaking of food, were there any Jewish restaurants that you would go to, or most of the cooking? Jewish cooking was in-house.

Rodney Waldbaum: It was in-house. I mean, we had Brenner's Bakery, and there were Bloomies there were some of the delicatessens. Uh - huh. Yeah. But you'd pick up the food there. But you didn't eat, you know, you didn't eat there, I think. Brenner's, in more recent years as they developed, ended up having some dining inside. But, it originally was just all takeout.

Brad Lowenstein: Great. Right. Mostly catering. Classic deli style.

Rodney Waldbaum: Classic deli style? Not so much catering.

Brad Lowenstein: Okay.

Rodney Waldbaum: Everybody cooked.

Brad Lowenstein: Mhm.

Rodney Waldbaum: I mean, the family dinners were huge, and there was my great-grandmother, you know, the big family dinners at her house before she passed away. You know, as I said, she had nine kids. The Rogers family was huge. She was a Protestant was her maiden name. And that was a big, you know, we had the Protestants had the seats in the front row of the home. We would always go to the home, on the High Holidays, as well as De Hirsch, until they moved to the South End. But while they were on 17th and Yesler, we always did that.

Brad Lowenstein: Okay. And yeah, it's a great transition. I'm curious about a little bit of those leadership positions you held, how you became involved with the UW Hillel, as well as De Hirsch, how you initially became treasurer, and then went on to become president. Just to expand on that.

Rodney Waldbaum: Well. I was raised in Temple, so that was a natural. My uncle, Fred Rogers, had been a past president of. He had been president of the Temple, and one of the real perks for the temple president was that the president of the congregation would sit on the Bima during services. And so whenever your kids or your nephews or whatever had a Bar or Bat Mitzvah or a Simcha, you could always be up on the pulpit. And so that was a real incentive to me. Unfortunately, when Rabbi Wiener became the head of Temple de Hirsch Sinai, he discontinued that practice. And, the president does not typically sit on the bima. I mean, I've been asked to be on it from time to time, during the holidays and things. But not. I haven't had the. Benefit of that past tradition, of sitting on the bima as far as Hillel. You know, I'd gone to Hillel all through college. Always went out to Hillel for the Seder lunches. My wife had become particularly close to Rabbi Jacobovitz. She and two other ladies ended up going and cleaning Rabbi Jacobovitz's apartment and organizing it. Not, she says, not cleaning it. They were cleaning it and organize trying to organize it, which was probably impossible, but he was a wonderful guy. And, so we became close in that respect, too. So, I knew a lot of the prior leaders of Hillel, and I, too, became a leader of Hillel. And I was always very proud of the fact that I was able to create a great transition from Rabbi Jacobovitz to Rabbi Bridge. One other thing I guess I coula d mention is that it was unusual when I was just 13. I carried on what h d been, from time to time, a family tradition of selling hats and horns in downtown Seattle on New Year's Eve, and I. I picked up my materials, my hats and horns, and everything from Benji Mayer and Ace Novelty. And I would go to the owners of the storefronts on Pike Street myself. I had just turned 13, and I looked young; I really looked young. And I got written permission from Ben Bridge Jewelers. I got it from Friedlander and Sons. Chris Foreman and Clark, all up and down the south side of Pike Street. And I got that I could only afford one business license, so I picked that location at 4th and Pike, and I had as my salesman, fifth and sixth graders from Stephens School, which I had just graduated from. And I had trained them on the prices, and I had them all on commissions. And my parents dropped us all off downtown. And I stalled the police for as long as I could, and eventually we had to consolidate to the one location where I had a business license. It was you could only buy an annual license, and it was too expensive to have it for just one night at each location. And we did make it till midnight. Then we took the bus home, and I took everybody and gave them their commissions and hot chocolate at our house, and I spent New Year's Day rolling the quarters and things that we got from the sales of hats and horns. But I only did that for one year because it was a lot of work. And you know, it was at that time considered safe. There was a curfew, and we were all younger than 16. So that was the other thing. I had to stall the police from making us go home before midnight.

Brad Lowenstein: That sounds fun. Yeah. As a young 13-year-old.

Rodney Waldbaum: Yeah. I was also, my sophomore year at Garfield. I was charged with the money-making committee or something like that. Yeah.

Brad Lowenstein: I'm sensing a theme there.

Rodney Waldbaum: Yes.

Brad Lowenstein: And you mentioned this earlier, but I'm curious to hear a little bit more about the purchase of the land in Bellevue, as well as the elevator construction, and US construction for Temple de Hirsch.

Rodney Waldbaum: Yes, there are two different sites. The Seattle site, which is where I was raised, and of course, I remember the old sanctuary on 15th and Union. And then when they built the wonderful sanctuary on 16th that, uh.

Rodney Waldbaum: And my wife said she was the first confirmation class in the new synagogue. Mine was still in the old synagogue, but I've lost my train of thought. My wife is toxic, and I lose my train of thought. Um.

Brad Lowenstein: Okay. Hi, Nina.

Nina Wallbaum: Hi. He's doing great.

Brad Lowenstein: Yes. He is.

Rodney Waldbaum: Oh, these. These sites. So after they had merged with Temple Sinai, the Temple had a location on 124th in Bellevue, just south of NE 8th. And they had clearly outgrown it. And so we looked for lots of different properties. Larry Broder was the executive director of Temple at that time. There is a story there because I was, I believe, president or at least on the board. And, Larry's daughter ended up marrying my oldest son, who she first saw when we hired Larry, who had been a younger fraternity brother of mine at the Sami house. They had come to a Temple graduation, and that was the year my oldest son, Brett, had, was among the graduates. And he was carrying one of the Torahs down the aisle, and she thought he was cute, and she managed to go out to he became a CBT, and she went out to the CBT house, and eventually they got married. And we announced, at the Temple board meeting, the first engagement to our knowledge of the temple president the the son of the temple president, and the daughter of the executive director. And then they were married at the Temple.

Brad Lowenstein: Yeah. It's only natural. I just wanted to ask a little bit about raising the three boys. The decision to become Eagle Scouts. Is that something that you had enforced, and was it something important to you or them?

Rodney Waldbaum: Well, they were all self-motivated in a certain different ways because each child is different. I had been in scouts, and I was extremely active in Cub Scouts, and I was going to Boy Scout meetings before I was 11 and eligible for the Boy Scouts. But then they changed Scout masters. They thought I'd become the first Eagle Scout in that troop. And it wasn't the same once they changed Scout leaders. Brett has always been on the temple board. He just finished his six-year term. He was always very methodical. And he liked the merit badges and the accomplishment. And so he was self-motivated. Chad, our second son. He loved camping and the outdoors. And he was the real scout of the three. But of course, since his brother became an Eagle Scout, he had to become an Eagle Scout. And then our youngest, his older brothers, have become Eagle Scouts, so he had to become an Eagle Scout.

Rodney Waldbaum: In his own mind. But I had a couple of uncles who had been scout leaders. My uncle Sid Rogers had gotten the Silver Beaver Award, which is the highest award for adults in scouting. I always thought scouting was wonderful. Our kids ran track in high school. Brett ran. I had to choose between debate and track in high school, and I chose debate. My older brother had been a track star at Garfield. Brett did track and wrestling. Chad did wrestling. All of them skied and played Little League and soccer, and all those things. Eric played Little League and soccer and all those things, too. So you know, I'm a big sports fan. So great.

Brad Lowenstein: Great, great. I'm just reviewing the last of my notes here. You said you're involved in the Bridge Family genealogy. And you enjoy traveling, skiing and and playing racquetball. I'm curious if. Yeah, those are more recent pursuits, or those are lifelong pursuits.

Brad Lowenstein: I guess it varies.

Rodney Waldbaum: Um, I've played, I learned Bridge. Nina's parents were life masters. Um, Um. Where? Life. Masterson. Bridge.

Uh, Nina's mother was considered the best female bridge player in the northwest when she was young; they chose a northwest team to play the American team. And she was the only woman selected to be on that team. So Nina's parents, when we were in high school, agreed to give us lessons, I think, for a dollar each. And, just so that we would maintain our interests. And so I. I learned to play bridge. Then I've played it much more in the last 10, 15 years. And now I'm playing the tournaments and getting master points and enjoying all that. I did play a little racquetball, but not much. We had a pickleball court at our home in Clyde Hill. And so we did play a lot of pickleball, and I played pickleball with some of our friends rotating, um, you know, and our kids all had ski lessons, and we went skiing and things like that. Where would you like to travel? We've traveled. That's our thing. And we love to travel all over the world. We particularly go and crash in Mazatlan, Mexico.

Rodney Waldbaum: And where we have a timeshare. We love to travel all over the world.

Brad Lowenstein: So it sounds like Mexico is a favorite destination for your family.

Rodney Waldbaum: At least for us, and certainly for our youngest son. We absolutely love it. That's the one place where we just crashed, and we don't. It's not sightseeing. It's not educational. It's just great food. It is the best. The beach is like velvet. The surf is just perfect for body surfing. The food is great. Everything is so inexpensive. You have these wonderful breakfasts on the beach for $5 or $6. What is your $25 breakfast in Hawaii? You know, so it's wonderful.

Brad Lowenstein: Sounds beautiful.

Rodney Waldbaum: Yeah. But we love that we've done both land and river cruises. Uh, ocean cruises.

Rodney Waldbaum: Land tours. All sorts.

Brad Lowenstein: Have you been to Israel?

Rodney Waldbaum: Yes. And we want to get back to Israel. We went back to the Federation's Young Leadership. They had a thousand people. It was about 1982. Wow, and it was through Federation, and we had, like 20 some 20-something people from the Seattle area, 20 couples. And, it was wonderful. And I thought Jerusalem was one of the two cities that most impressed me. Our middle son, Chad, married a Sabra, who was born in Israel. And they live here. But her parents still live in Israel, although they're here about half the year. And we're trying to figure out how to get back to Israel and see it. We loved our trip to Israel. We did the whole thing. But, you know, it was like ten days or something. It was all too, too short. We did get down to Alot.

Rodney Waldbaum: Everything? Everything. It was just wonderful.

Brad Lowenstein: Great. That sounds great. So we're coming to the close here. I just want to ask if you have any closing thoughts or reflections on being a Jew in Washington State. Anything about the community, or just what your life has been. Any reflections.

Rodney Waldbaum: It's been wonderful. I've been blessed. It really has. I haven't had to face real discrimination, and my family has been wonderful. And it's been close. When my older brother passed away in 2001, it was the largest funeral I've ever seen at Temple. I figured there were over 800 people. Larry Broder, who was executive director at the time, thought there were at least 1100. And it was on a Tuesday, not a weekend. And it had not even been in the paper until that morning. So, it was quite a tribute. Yeah.

Brad Lowenstein: Well. Rod, I have to say, it's been great hearing from you. It sounds like you truly had a beautiful life growing up. It's truly a rich experience with your family. Um, both elder and offspring. Um, a model citizen, I have to say.

Rodney Waldbaum: Thank you. I did forget to mention two awards that I'm very proud of. Yeah, one, is that I was admitted to the Garfield Golden Grads Hall of Fame. I was the first person from any of the classes of the 1960s to be admitted to the Hall of Fame. So I was very proud of that. I was also very active in the non-Jewish community. I was a town council, a town councilman for the city of Clyde Hill. I was also a King County judge pro tem and the tax section of the Washington State Bar, which I had been president of, honored me in 2004 with the Roger Stauder Award, which is in recognition of my dedication to your community, exceptional skills in the field of taxation, and, above all, my display of professionalism. So that was quite an honor. It's the only award that they give. It's, in essence, a lifetime achievement award. And I was proud of that. I was the president of the liaison to the IRS for the Western region of the United States. I've had a great career, lots of interesting clients, including the Seattle SuperSonics. You mentioned the one book by the Washington State Jewish Historical Society. I also have a page in the book about sports things, but it's really because of my representation of the Sonics, not because of my athletic prowess. But it's been a wonderful life, and we've been blessed with a wonderful family and friends. And that's what I'm most grateful for.

Brad Lowenstein: Great. Well, this has been great. It's been really great hearing from you. I think it's going to be a great addition to the archives.

Rodney Waldbaum: Thank you. And sometimes we will get into the family's history, because it does go all the way back. And I'd be happy to share that with you. Some of it's in writing, and we will be sharing some of those documents with the historical society.

Brad Lowenstein: Okay. I'll have to talk to the people on the staff who are more familiar with how to take care of those documents and ingest them properly. Um, but yeah, we'll definitely, definitely want to take a look at those.

Rodney Waldbaum: Thank you.

Brad Lowenstein: Great. Thank you. All right.

Rodney Waldbaum: Thank you for your time. I hope, of course, I hope I'll get to know you better at some point.

Brad Lowenstein: I would love to. Yeah. I'd love to meet you sometime. Um, yeah. This is really great.

Rodney Waldbaum: Thank you.

Brad Lowenstein: Inspiring story. So. All right, I'll stop the recording.