

### EXILE EPISODE 3

**MANDY PATINKIN:** On a hot summer's day in the German town of Caputh, a small sailboat floats along a lake. On the deck, a man stands barechested, dreamily unaware as his boat drifts into the reeds. The year is 1930. And this isn't just any boat, this is the Tümmeler - a craft known to everyone in Caputh as the beloved pastime of one of the most famous men on Earth: Albert Einstein.

Not the intellectual, buttoned up Nobel Prize winner we see in photographs. But a different version of Einstein. Shoeless. Shirtless. And instead of a hat, he wears a handkerchief tied over his unkempt hair to protect him from the heat. As the sun dips lower in the sky, he's unsure how many hours have passed. The last time he was out this long, his family was in a panic - worried something happened to him. The genius who apparently doesn't know how to swim.

The last decade has been a whirlwind of lecture circuits and international travel. He doesn't know yet how short lived these moments of serenity are. How in just a few years, Hitler's movement will close in, and this slice of paradise will be lost to him... forever. But for now, he'll stay here, floating on the lake in his favourite place in the world. Simply, Albert.

*(OPENING THEME)*

**MANDY PATINKIN:** Welcome to Exile - a podcast from LBI, the Leo Baeck Institute, New York. I'm Mandy Patinkin. When everything is taken away, then what? From LBI's archives, untold stories of Jewish lives in the shadow of fascism.

Today, we go behind the curtain to a fleeting moment of escape. A few short years of serenity before the storm in the life of the most famous scientist of the 20th century.

*(ERIKA BRITZKE SPEAKING GERMAN)*

**VOICE ACTOR - ERIKA BRITZKE:** And what do we see? Yes, towards the forest. That's what Einstein also would have seen - pine trees. And we see a bit of Lake Templin, that flows from Potsdam to Caputh.

**MANDY PATINKIN:** Erika Britzke is taking us on a tour of the Einstein summer house in Caputh - a fairly modest two-storey home. We're standing on a huge deck.

**VOICE ACTOR - ERIKA BRITZKE:** Einstein supposedly said it is so big that all the important people of his time could fit in it.

**MANDY PATINKIN:** Now in her mid-80s, Erika knows every detail, every bump in the path of Einstein's summer home. She's been giving these tours since 1979.

Today, the house is mostly used for conferences, often by scientists. But on the weekends, it's open to the public for tours. People come from all over the world to learn about this period of Einstein's life.

**VOICE ACTOR - ERIKA BRITZKE:** Herr Einstein came here in 1929. He had just turned 50 and he wasn't a big city person at all. He said, deep thoughts don't flourish next to busyness. That's why life in the big city is not for researchers and students.

**MANDY PATINKIN:** The big city - Berlin. During Einstein's time there, Berlin was a bustling metropolis and cultural mecca. The Golden years of the Weimar Republic. Think roaring 20s, the birthplace of Bauhaus, a hot spot for Burlesque, and the time that inspired the musical, Cabaret, decades later.

**MICHAEL BRENNER:** If I did not know how the period ended, I would very much like to live in Berlin in the 1920s.

**MANDY PATINKIN:** Michael Brenner is a professor of Jewish history and culture and the international president of the Leo Baeck Institute.

**MICHAEL BRENNER:** I think it was an exciting period where you could have all kinds of events to go every night to have encounters with people who were flocking in from all parts of Germany, but also outside Germany.

**MANDY PATINKIN:** Einstein was at the height of his fame during this time in Berlin. His general relativity theory was confirmed in 1919. And he received the Nobel Prize in 1922 for his discovery of the photoelectric effect.

**DON HOWARD:** Einstein especially was very much a part of the cultural scene in Berlin. He knew many of the prominent figures in literature and the arts.

**MANDY PATINKIN:** Professor Don Howard has devoted over 40 years of his life to studying Einstein. It seems more like a calling than a scholarly pursuit.

**DON HOWARD:** He was not simply a closeted intellectual or scientist. He was out and about and very engaged.

**MANDY PATINKIN:** Einstein's fame helped him champion particular causes. It gave him access to Berlin's 'it' parties. And he was able to rub elbows with leading intellectuals and artists of the day. But being famous wasn't something Einstein particularly enjoyed.

**DON HOWARD:** He wasn't consumed by ego. He didn't let it go to his head. He actually remained a very modest person in many, many ways.

**MANDY PATINKIN:** Einstein hated the idea of "personality cults," as he called them. And despite a rumour that he kept a bowl full of signed photographs in his living room for visitors, he didn't like giving autographs. He made fun of people who asked for one.

In the Spring of 1928, Einstein arrived in Switzerland to lecture to young tuberculosis patients. The story goes that a heavy snowfall overtook the town. And there was no one available to drive him to his hotel - at the top of a steep hill. So Einstein walked. He carried his luggage, trudging along in the wet weather. And later, after lecturing to terminally-ill youth, he too became sick. So sick that he was bedridden for weeks. Some thought it was because of that night walking in the snowstorm. Some thought he might have died.

This experience seems to have marked a turning point in Einstein's life. For one, it was around this time he started exploring an idea he called "cosmic religion."

**DON HOWARD:** This is something that's not at all well-enough known about Einstein's thought. And that is that he became really interested in the late 20s and early 1930s in questions about religion and the relationship between science and religion.

**MANDY PATINKIN:** "A contemporary has rightly said that the only deeply religious people of our largely materialistic age are the earnest men of research." A passage by Einstein from an article he wrote in the New York Times.

**DON HOWARD:** Einstein was not a supporter of any of the established religions, including the Jewish faith from which he emerged. He was adamant in rejecting the notion of what he termed a personal god. And yet there's this very, very strong spiritual aspect to his way of thinking about the world that he tried to express in this notion of cosmic religion. And the key idea that he put forward was that the divine, as he understood it, was the universe in its law governed aspect. That's a really cool idea to think about.

**MANDY PATINKIN:** Einstein saw divinity in nature, a harmony in natural law. It was also around this time that he started to eye the town of Caputh. Was it Einstein's near-death experience that made him seek the idea of a spiritual science? Did his illness, a brush with his own mortality, spur his need for a simpler life in nature?

During his long convalescence, Einstein got a taste of what it would be like to escape the big city. He became close friends with his doctor, who owned an estate in Gatow, a lakeside area of Berlin. In 1928 and '29, Einstein would often visit. He enjoyed working in peace and quiet. The only problem was that the estate was downwind of a sewage farm. On one occasion, the mayor of Berlin was dining with Einstein and asked if the terrible smell of the sewage didn't bother him. Einstein replied that it didn't and that sometimes he returned the favour.

**VOICE ACTOR - ERIKA BRITZKE:** We are now entering the largest room in the house. That was the Einsteins' living room. They welcomed guests here. This is also where the family got together for meals, and Einstein had said to the architect: Simple and practical.

**MANDY PATINKIN:** Einstein's house in Caputh perched on a wooded hillside with a view of the lake and a garden overflowing with flowers. For a modest man, it was not a cheap purchase but in Einstein's eyes, it was worth it.

The house was designed by a young, unknown architect named Konrad Wachsmann. In 1929, Wachsmann heard that the Einsteins were looking to build a summer house. Within hours, he showed up at their door in Berlin. And convinced Elsa to hire him. Elsa - Einstein's second wife - ran the household.

**VOICE ACTOR - ERIKA BRITZKE:** He would have failed at the practical things of everyday life. He always needed help. And Elsa, she packs his suitcase and makes sure he dresses properly when he gives a lecture somewhere.

**MANDY PATINKIN:** Elsa also managed the business side of Einstein's career. And took on the task of overseeing the construction of Caputh.

**VOICE ACTOR - ERIKA BRITZKE:** Have a look at how the light is now coming in through the open doors here into the stairwell. For me, the house is almost like a house of light.

**MANDY PATINKIN:** Albert and Elsa Einstein moved into the summerhouse in the fall of 1929. Erika tells us the Einsteins gave the architect key instructions - simplicity, lots of light, and plenty of opportunity for fresh air.

For the next three years, they would spend as much time in Caputh as possible. They'd arrive early in March and stayed long into the autumn, when the leaves turned yellow.

**DON HOWARD:** Einstein's life in Caputh differed from his life in Berlin in many ways. Caputh was for Einstein, a very quiet and for the most part, very private retreat where he could get away from the hustle and bustle of the big city, where he could get on his favorite sailboat and just idle on the waters. It was a haven for him during that time.

**MANDY PATINKIN:** Einstein was a freer version of himself. He worked in the study, but he also spent hours sailing - no matter the weather. He sunbathed on the main terrace and went on long, meandering walks in the woods, returning with foraged mushrooms.

**VOICE ACTOR - ERIKA BRITZKE:** And he liked Caputh because nobody took offense at how he looked. The pants were falling or the sweater didn't reach over his belly. No one ever said anything.

**MANDY PATINKIN:** Hoping for absolute peace and quiet, Einstein refused to have a telephone installed at Caputh. If anyone in the family needed to place a call, they went to an office down the road. If a call came in, someone at the office would shout for them. Eventually, Elsa bought a small trumpet so the person at the office could signal who the call was for: three short blasts for the housekeeper, Herta; two long blasts for Elsa; one long, loud blast for Albert.

**DON HOWARD:** Now, it's not the case that he was totally isolated.

**MANDY PATINKIN:** Einstein couldn't fully escape, well...being Einstein.

**DON HOWARD:** He famously entertained a number of guests at Caputh, including some very, very prominent international figures.

**MANDY PATINKIN:** When the Einsteins moved into the summerhouse, they received a housewarming gift from their neighbours. It was a large guestbook with a cover made from thick parchment, the title embossed in gold:

“GÄSTEBUCH VOM HAUSE EINSTEIN.”

In it, Einstein made a note. He wrote: prose forbidden. Despite Einstein's desire for solitude, the guestbook is filled with attempts at poetry and signatures from prominent figures of the time, including his close friend, the physicist Max von Laue:

"In this book, someone has to start,  
And make the first entry, I'll do my part.  
Therefore, without pondering too much,  
If more worthy ones might resent me as such  
And despite my scribbly handwriting,  
I put down, right here  
My name."

- M Laue "

**MANDY PATINKIN:** Other notable people signed their names, including Chaim Weizmann, who went on to be the first president of Israel, and the leading Indian poet and philosopher, Rabindranath Tagore. For the more formal visits, Einstein was forced to clean up, to change clothes. He was often grumpy when that had to happen. In a letter from Caputh in 1931, Einstein writes:

"Everyone is pulling me this way and that and now my dearest friends are coming to join the cast of my tormentors. If I cannot find the strength to withdraw completely, then this will be the end of me."

But there were some aspects of Einstein's Berlin life that he welcomed in Caputh...and that Elsa didn't. It's a sunny afternoon and the kitchen window is open. The Einsteins' young housekeeper, Herta, is preparing dinner for the family - new potatoes with butter and parsley, herring filets, and as usual, a Caputh specialty: white asparagus. The house is quiet. Einstein is out for the day - on one of his walks or on his boat. Who knows? Herta hums to herself as she cooks. But she can't help overhear as the conversation in the living room gets louder and louder. She hears one of Elsa's daughters tell her that she just has to put up with it or leave Albert. Elsa was crying. And although it was Herta's job to pretend not to, she knew exactly what this was about.

**DON HOWARD:** So it's a, to many people, surprising fact, perhaps a sad fact that Einstein, who was such a moral exemplar in his public life, was hardly a moral exemplar in some important aspects of his private life.

**MANDY PATINKIN:** Professor and Einstein expert, Don Howard.

**DON HOWARD:** And one example of this is that there is abundant evidence of his having had many, many affairs. This started when he was living in Zurich. It continued when he moved to Berlin.

**MANDY PATINKIN:** And when he'd visit Caputh.

**DON HOWARD:** And there's one story according to which he and Elsa had worked out an arrangement that when he wanted to invite a girlfriend to the house in Caputh, she would go spend the day shopping in Berlin so that he could have his privacy.

**MANDY PATINKIN:** Though Einstein was brilliant in his professional life, he was a mess in his personal one.

**DON HOWARD:** I myself just shudder when I think about what that says about the nature of their relationship, the hard-hearted way in which he was treating his wife, who was someone with whom he was head over heels in love when they had an affair when both of them were married to other people. It just seems like such cruelty. But we know of many, many examples of the affairs that he had.

**MANDY PATINKIN:** In a much quoted letter about him, Elsa wrote:

"Such a genius should be irreproachable in every respect. But no, nature doesn't behave like this. Where she gives extravagantly, she also takes extravagantly."

In 1931, Einstein struck up a friendship with an acquaintance of Elsa's, a young woman named Margarete Lebach. Residents of Caputh saw Einstein and Margarete sailing on the Tümmeler. Margarete was young and beautiful. And, like Einstein, she loved to laugh.

The affair seemed to cause a particular tension. Maybe from Elsa's point of view, it poisoned their fairytale life in the woods. Once, after a long day spent out on the Tümmeler, Elsa asked her husband and his assistant to bring some things up from the sailboat to be washed. She took the bundle to the bathroom, and angrily called Einstein to speak with him privately. A raging fight ensued. The unsuspecting assistant had brought back a low-cut bathing suit. Elsa knew immediately that it must be Margarete's. The tension hung in the air for days. The affair with Margarete would last just one summer...the family's final one at Caputh.

Though Einstein managed to find some solace at his summer home, the one thing he couldn't escape was Germany's bubbling undercurrent of hate. The Weimar Republic wasn't a progressive party all of the time.

**MICHAEL BRENNER:** There was a certain paradoxical development here.

**MANDY PATINKIN:** Historian Michael Brenner.

**MICHAEL BRENNER:** On the one hand, Jews could rise to positions that were closed to them before. But on the other hand, they were also more threatened physically than they were before, because at the same time, there was a rising anti-Semitism after World War I that expressed itself not just in words and in theory. But now Jews actually were threatened and some of them like Rathenau were killed.

**MANDY PATINKIN:** In 1922, the successful Jewish industrialist Walter Rathenau was appointed foreign minister to the Weimar government. He quickly became a target of a far-right nationalist group in Germany. And in less than six months after taking office, he was shot in the streets of Berlin. Rathenau was Einstein's friend. The police worried the far-right group had plans to target other prominent Jewish people. They cautioned Einstein to leave the city for his own safety. And he did.

**DON HOWARD:** So on the one hand, as a period of wonderful developments in science and culture, on the other hand, at the very same time, you see the rise of anti-Semitism and proto-fascism and taking ugly, violent forms early in the 1920s. It was a period of great tension.

**MANDY PATINKIN:** As the decade progressed, anti-Semitism infiltrated more of society in more insidious ways. And Einstein became even more of a target. Not of a far-right fringe group this time, but from the scientific community itself.

A group of Einstein's colleagues started to rally around the idea of "Deutsche Physik," or "Aryan physics." And they labeled so-called "Jewish physics" as all wrong.

Imagine that...using Einstein to discredit what the Nazis called Jewish physics? The man who changed the face of science, who won a Nobel Prize for his work, and who was globally recognized as a genius. It seems like a ridiculous move. But it got traction.

**DON HOWARD:** There were newspaper articles written attacking Einstein. There were large public gatherings that were organized for this attack on Einstein, including a couple of events where they rented the Berlin Philharmonic Hall and filled it with followers of this anti-relativity movement. Einstein himself snuck in and just sat there quietly in the back of the room because he wanted to know for himself exactly what was going on.



**VOICE ACTOR - ERIKA BRITZKE:** This is the last room down the hall. That's where we're going now.

**MANDY PATINKIN:** Erika Britzke is taking us to Einstein's bedroom.

**VOICE ACTOR - ERIKA BRITZKE:** Yes, this little room was a bedroom, study, director's office - all in one. He basically needed no furniture. The bed was supplied by the architect. Right here was also a shelf screwed on. Sometimes, a formula came to him in the middle of the night. He could put it down here very nicely.

**MANDY PATINKIN:** As things became more complicated in Berlin, Einstein spent more and more time in Caputh. He seemed to anticipate that his fame as a German scientist would no longer be enough to protect him from his status as a Jewish person. He once said in a New York Times article from 1930:

"If my theory of relativity is proven correct, Germany will claim me as a German and France will declare that I am a citizen of the world. Should my theory prove untrue, France will say that I am a German and Germany will declare that I am a Jew."

Einstein often referred to himself as a bird of passage - as someone who lived in many different places - and this seemed like a moment to consider an opportunity to do just that - to leave, even if just for a while.

In 1932, Einstein accepted an exciting job in Princeton. At first, the plan was to spend half the year in America and half a year back in Germany, mostly at Caputh, but history had other plans. In January of 1933, Adolf Hitler became chancellor of Germany. And the Nazis continued their public campaign against Einstein, calling him a symbol of so called "Jewish degeneracy."

That same year the Gestapo raided the Einstein apartment in Berlin. But the Einsteins weren't there. He and Elsa intended to spend the summer in Caputh. On their way back to Europe, they learned their summerhouse had also been ransacked by the Gestapo. In March of that year, in 1933, Einstein renounced his German citizenship. His summer paradise, now officially beyond his reach. When the Nazis started to seize Jewish owned properties, Einstein's beloved house in Caputh got new tenants: Hitler Youth. Even the Tümmeler was lost.

**VOICE ACTOR - ERIKA BRITZKE:** There are complete files, archival documents. It's so brutal to read this. Who was allowed to buy this sailboat, how Aryan this person had

to be to buy it. And then, so the boat was supposed to be worth 15,000, and it was sold for a thousand, I think 600, and a dentist got it, from Babelsberg.

**MANDY PATINKIN:** Einstein continued his storied career in the United States, never to return to Europe. And after the war ended, for decades, the house passed from renter to renter, no one ever settling in for long. But the place could only ever be home to one family.

**VOICE ACTOR - ERIKA BRITZKE:** Einstein had never felt better anywhere else than here in Caputh, he writes in thousands of letters. how beautiful it is here.

**MANDY PATINKIN:** It's a cruel irony that his self-imposed exile in Caputh from Berlin was interrupted by a real one. But for a few short years, Albert Einstein found a place where he could truly be himself...at peace. He wrote:

"The sailboat, the distant view, the lonely walks in the fall, the relative silence. It is paradise."

*(CLOSING THEME)*

**MANDY PATINKIN:** The Albert Einstein Collections in the Archives of the Leo Baeck Institute in New York include hundreds of Einstein's personal photographs, many from Caputh, as well as the Guestbook from his summer home. After a few pages bearing the signatures of the friends and international luminaries who visited the Einsteins those short summers before 1933, most of the pages remain blank. You can see the Collections at [www.lbi.org](http://www.lbi.org).

**VOICE ACTOR - TEASER:** On the next episode of Exile...

**WENDY ARONS:** The entire company like has their bags packed backstage and people are listening to the radio while the production is happening because, you know, there's this fear that they're going to have to evacuate the theatre and go into hiding at any moment.

**VOICE ACTOR - TEASER:** A fearless Jewish theatre director teams up with a band of refugee artists who've escaped Nazi Germany to Switzerland.

**MANDY PATINKIN:** He was risking his life and the lives of his colleagues.

**VOICE ACTOR - TEASER:** Together, they boldly stage plays that directly attack Hitler's regime - despite the anti-Semitic protesters waiting at the theatre doors. Kurt Hirschfeld and the theatre of resistance...on Exile.

**VOICE ACTOR - CREDITS:** Exile is a production of the Leo Baeck Institute, New York and Antica Productions.

It's narrated by Mandy Patinkin.

Executive producers include Katrina Onstad, Stuart Coxe, and Bernie Blum. Senior producer is Debbie Pacheco.

Produced by Emily Morantz. Associate Producer, Hailey Choi. Research and translation by Isabella Kempf. Sound design and audio mix by Philip Wilson with help from Cameron McIver. Additional sound by Kevin Caners. Theme music by Oliver Wickham. Voice acting by Jillian Rees-Brown.

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