ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

Edited transcription by Alexa Luberski, November 1981

Session 1 Tape 1 Side 1

AN = Dr. Abraham Phineas Nasatir, narrator
AL = Alexandra Luberski, interviewer

The following interview is with Dr. Abraham P. Nasatir, historian, scholar and professor emeritus of history at San Diego State University. Dr. Nasatir taught history at San Diego State University for 47 years and is considered the outstanding authority on the Spanish in the Mississippi Valley as well as the French in Alta California. Today is October 28, 1981 and the session is being held at the Malcolm Love library in the San Diego History Research Center on the campus of San Diego State University. The interviewer is Alexandra Luberski, graduate student, representing the University Archives here on campus at the Research Center.

AN: I haven't got it exactly in my mind what you want.
AL: Well, with the oral history tapes, the idea behind it is to get a narrative of your different experiences and I would just get a small sampling. You saw the questionnaire I sent.
AN: Yes, but I did not prepare on that.
AL: You didn't.
AN: No.
AL: Purposely?
AN: Nope, no, just busy enough that I forgot about it.
AL: Ok.
AL: So, did you see the brochure when they put me up for the best teacher?
AN: I saw a lot of the things on file at the San Diego Historical Society.
AL: Well, I understand that Starr (Dr. Raymond Starr) put that up there. If not, I have the only copy that I know of now, but there were quite a number of copies out a long time ago. That has lot of data up to I guess it's about sixty-four, five, six, right around in there.
And, I brought this out for you (Dr. Nasatir hands me the original manuscript of his speech "Adventures in Scholarship") which is a speech I made more length of—I think I must have given it in various forms—fifteen times, I never have published it and I won't. And, I found one copy of it, I think this is the whole one. I only gave half of it to a speech here, but originally it was given to Phi Alpha Theta. You can have that (a copy is attached to this transcription).

AL: Alright. Great.

AN: And that will show you some of the experiences that I had with regard to my own scholarship.

AL: Ok.

AN: I called it "Adventures in Scholarship," when I first gave it and later on called it "Sleuthing," "Historical Sleuthing."

AL: Alright.

AN: (he laughs)

AL: Ok. I'll look this over after we're done and xerox it.

AN: That ought to tell you some of my experiences which start in my graduate years.

AL: Ok then maybe we can start with your early years, as in your growing up in the Santa Ana area.

AN: Oh.

AL: Which I gathered from some of the newspaper articles.

AN: I'm born in Santa Ana.

AL: Perhaps we can start there so I can find out where your family came from and how it turned that they came to California. I noticed your work with the Sons of the Golden West.

AN: Oh, that's because I'm born in California.

AL: Right, I'm wondering how that tied in.

AN: Well, I don't know if you want it or not, but let me try it out on you. My father (Morris Nasatir), came from the extreme border of Lithuania from a town now known as Davinsk. The Davinsk is on the Duina River but it was on both sides and the Jewish part of it was on one called Dennenburg but that doesn't make any difference that's called the city and that's where he was born and about his early life I don't know much about it. I tried to find out and once and a while we'd get something on it but nothing on to it. My mother (Sarah Ester Hurwitz),
was born on the other side of Lithuania near the Latvian borderline and she was a niece of my father's. But let me hold back for a minute and give you the story. My father came to this country, why, I don't know but I think it was probably to escape the draft of the Russian army or something like that. But he got over to Hamburg and he heard from everybody that everybody from those towns and so on went to New York so he asked for a ticket to the next place to New York so they sold him a ticket to Chicago. That's all they knew. My father came over to Chicago with eight dollars, that I know definitely, in his pocket. And, naturally as an immigrant he went to the synagogue where every Jew helped each other out and he became a peddler. Not liking to remain in Chicago he was one who peddled to the south. He went out from Monday to Friday to the south into Pioria and around the central part and came back to Chicago every Friday 'cause the Jews at that time always centered in the synagogue and anybody that needed money to pay for his goods there, they all chipped and gave it to him. And he was turned in West that way. Now, why, I don't know and he got enough money and he went over to Omaha and opened up a grocery store, a store anyway that was his first store. Why he turned West I do not know, except that he probably went away from the centers of populations because as you go west there are fewer and fewer Jews. And he worked himself--now wait a minute--now where it comes in, it should come in before in here. My father came to this country and from here he went to South Africa, he left from here and was fourteen or eighteen months in Orange Free State peddling.

AL: Gee.

AN: And came back to the United States in 1888 and the reason I know that is because it was during the election of Benjamin Harrison. And then began the next thing into here, then he went West. Now where the two come together, I don't know I never did find out. I know why I didn't find out about my progenitors, where and why his family came into this because they have no records, and I do not know Russian. My father could only remember of his grandfather and that isn't much and as to what line he came from wheather some of the old line up the background up the medieval trade routes in Russia or to Spain to Holland and then in where most of
them came later on. I don't know which one it is. The parents of both my father and my mother were dead before I ever got to Europe for the first time. So, I never visited Russia, knew no Russian. Now, now to go back. My father came out to California and looking for a smaller city he never did care for the big city for some reason or another and he finally settled on Santa Ana where he opened a gents furnishing store. Then he sent for my mother from Russia and brought her over to Los Angeles. My mother was only in this country ten days when he married her in Los Angeles and that's why we're all born in Santa Ana you see. He used to go into Los Angeles to buy goods and so on and that was the Jewish population and some were my friends and my godmothers were there too and the rest of them. We were the only Jews in Santa Ana.

AL: As you were growing up.

AN: Oh yes, there was one later on, and toward the end of our stay in Santa Ana, they did have more Jews.

AL: Then you would travel to Los Angeles to go to the synagogue.

AN: On the high holidays until my older brother, I'm the third one of four of us. My older brother, then comes my sister, then me and then my younger brother. Now, when my older brother was confirmed at the age of thirteen.

AL: What was his name?

AN: Julius. He was born the first one. By the way my father and mother were married in February in 1900 and my brother was born November of 1900. That we always remembered his birthday. When he was thirteen, my father had all of our celebrations come down from Los Angeles to Santa Ana and from then on for the high holidays we had a synagogue in our house.

AL: Then your family became like the community center for a while?

AN: Well, it's just that our house we had it from that time on. We used to hold it some Saturdays until we'd poop out by not getting the required number and so on.

AL: Right.

AN: But my father was very anxious to get out of Santa Ana for two reasons
first of all he was a good Jew and didn't want us growing older without any Jewish background.

AL: The influences?
AN: Oh yes, he was very afraid of that. Now with regard to me let's see.
AL: The second child was your sister, what was her name?
AN: Frances.
AL: And then you, right?
AN: And then my younger brother, George.
AL: Did any of them become academic or were you the only one?
AN: I'm the only academic. We all went to college, my older brother was a pharmacist, my sister was a social worker, I'm an academician and my younger brother, well he's an accountant and businessman. He went to college as an accountant, but he never was a CPA and he was in business rather than an accountant you see.

AL: Did you father ever get you out of Santa Ana, or not?
AN: Oh yes, when I was in junior high.

AL: In junior high?
AN: Oh yes, but wait a minute, there are two things that are important in my life in Santa Ana, outside of birth. This thing happened (Dr. Nasatir motions with his left hand which is partially amputated to his knuckles).

AL: I read about that in a newspaper clipping.
AN: Let's see this happened in 1913. August, It thing it was August the eleventh, it's August 1913. I was a pretty wild kid, that's true. But that doesn't mean much here.

AL: You were what? About nine years old?
AN: Yes, I was ten in November so that would be about nine, almost ten.
Now there is some question about that and the reason is that it came up later on. I've been brought up to think I've been born on November 24, 1904. The state says I'm born 1903. The question arose when I returned from sabbatical here and had to do with retirement. And we don't know to this day.

AL: Your birth certificate was never recorded?
AN: No. Orange County wasn't even organized. The only one that had a birth certificate was my younger brother, and there's the question you see. That would make me more or less nine years old you see I was in the fifth grade at the time. I was sent by my mother to the bakery on skates
and I got it and came back going around the corner in there, the bakery truck, the owner of the bakery I had just come out of-- he didn't wait on me, he was the owner, I knew him very well-- out of sort of a blind ally and I fortunately had my hands with the bakery goods, I think it was rolls -I forgot- and I stuck my head out here into the the bakery truck, you see that was the open truck of the wheels and so it knocked the thumb off and just went in here and left a little here (pointing to knuckles) and I was bleeding and crying. So I got up myself and started to skate home, holding it up cause I was afraid to face my mama, when they caught me and took me to the hospital.

AL: Aw, you poor little thing!

AN: Oh sure. My father said that he would have never consented to it (he refers to amputation of the fingers). Although the doctor told me at that time, now remember that's before World War I, that it would never come back sewed on, see not the thumb, that was gone- but the rest of it. See it would be stiff and couldn't use it anyway he said. It was because of my mother who was a sickly woman and very nervous and he had to take care of her anyway when he had consented to it. Now a days it's different, I couldn't of had my thumb cause that was severed but the rest of it. Now that's the turning point in my life. Because I was interested in the violin at the time as a young kid and probably would of been a doctor.

AL: You were studying music locally at the time?

AN: Oh sure, I had already gone from the beginning teacher to the second teacher at the time.

AL: And you were interested in becoming a medical doctor?

AN: Well, I would have probably been a doctor, that's a guess on my part. Going backwards you never know. But I'm quite sure that I would of never been an academician, you never know. Then my father's influence not what to become, because my father who never went to school in his life but never missed a day studying in his life either. Every morning, sure, I use to get up every morning, five o'clock and study Hebrew with my father until he went to the store, sure, then I'd practice my violin, then I'd go to school. I was a pretty rambunctious, mischievous kid.

AL: What was school like in Santa Ana, was it a traditional one room school house?
AN: No, no, oh no.

AL: Because you'd mentioned in Santa Ana there wasn't too much. (Here I was confused because Dr. Nasatir's not having a recorded birth certificate led me to believe the community was very small.)

AN: Who said so?

AL: No?

AN: Oh no, we had several grammar schools and about two years before I got graduated through the sixth grade we created the junior high school already and we had a new high school. The junior high went into the old high school. No. We were in a regular six grades. And our house on Orange Avenue, the alley, and then the rest of the whole block was the school. Two story or three story, a wooden one.

AL: So you lived close by.

AN: Right in the back door. As a matter of fact when I was in the sixth grade, I was a small boy, a Mrs. Strickenbaugh, I'll never forget her to this day, she would get me up and put me up on the corner facing our house through the pepper tree and my mother would see me and she knew I was a bad boy. But it got so bad in all the school there that if I ever come home with my collar button still on, my mother would inquire whether I was sick or something of the kind. See I was a very mischievous boy, not a destructive one, but mischievous. I would never pass up a dare, oh yea, now I can tell you why all these things happened that's a later development as you find out. You see my father always talked to me. He was not a poor man when we were born, he was not a rich man but never a poor man so far as we concerned. So I never knew poverty in the lowest level. He always said he would take care of us until we would get on our own, always counseled us to do what we wanted. But in my case he was a little scared, I didn't know it then. He said, listen, I can lose my money, but anything you can put into your head, you can't lose. That's where the old Hebraic training of a profession comes in, so, it was some kind of a teacher that started to come out of that. There is no question about it, that's where it started. He believed in anybody who sat down and studied is
alright, he didn't care what it was, he could even catch my errors in grammar, and he probably had a harder time spelling than I did, because he came over here without any schooling. Now, the point is that just at this time too, I was in fifth grade, that they didn't know how to handle me, they couldn't give me enough work. But I always was through with my homework before school was out. I was never evidently a dull, dumb kid, I was a fairly bright fellow so I went through the fifth and sixth grades in one year. And was put into junior high, right off the bat and then you see, from the middle of junior high these are the two transferring things in my youthful life. When I was in the eight grade we transferred to Los Angeles. And I went to Custer Junior High and bragging at all times that was the toughest school in Los Angeles too by the way, but I never had any trouble with that.

AL: What general area was that in?
AN: Echo Park.
AL: And this move was part of your dad wanting to get out of Santa Ana?
AN: Oh yes.
AL: He got you out.
AN: Yes, he got us all out, you see at the time, there, I used to get into all kinds of trouble. Use to make me bring my dad down and my dad used to tell them you can do anything you want to my boy except kill him. And the Vice-Principal was Vernel Kersey, who later became the State Superintendent and he used to take me out and send me on all kinds of errands, and any errand they needed at USC, he'd pull me out of class and send me. And also he taught the Spanish, there I was in taking Spanish and I was given every kind of punishment of sorts to stay after school and the secret of that, of all the trouble, they never really could do anything to me to keep me out of mischief is cause they never found a punishment that I didn't like. I loved to sit behind and help the janitor, I did that in grammar school, I did it there. I'd love to stay after school to help the teachers—that's fine that never bothered me. But, that I didn't learn until after I was
in college of why it was—because I was known always as to never pass up a dare. That's why to his day I squint out in the sun, that comes from it (being dared to stare into the sun). I use to go up on the house and jump to the street and make my mother crazy. All kinds of instances of my life of that nature. Not destructive, just mischievous and noone could ever do anything. My father never knew what to do with me in the summer time. So when my uncle came to town, he was a junk man, I use to go out with him.

AL: Is this you father's brother?

AN: No, no my mother's brother. He left and went to Oregon and he made me go out for the only agricultural experience I ever had. We went out irrigating an orange grove in Garden Grove one summer. My father was a great walker and he would always meet my brother and I at the end of school, this is grammar school in lower grades.

AL: This is Santa Ana.

AN: Santa Ana, take us out walking on the railroad tracks when it was just being built at the time and he knew instinctively that when we'd tire about a mile or two, and then my brother and I would sit down and play marbles, and he would go further, but he knew instinctively when to get back. This happened for years, we've always been walkers all our lives.

AL: You were telling me that once you got into the eighth grade you were about to explain some of the experiences that you had there. Had this started your interest in history? At the time you studied Spanish?

AN: No, when I was in junior high I was interested in Spanish and so on. I went through junior high in nothing flat.

AL: Now this was in Los Angeles, right?

AN: In the middle of the eighth grade is when we were there. I didn't have a whole year. When I graduated from junior high, which was in 1917, I went immediately into the eleventh grade not the tenth, into the eleventh and got through high school in February of 1919, just a year and a half in high school.

AL: (kidding) Now they didn't move you along just because you were so mischievous, now did they?

AN: No, no, I was collecting credits. There was one instance I'll never
It was the graduation from junior high, they wanted to go on a trip to Seal Beach or Huntington Beach, this is when we were in Los Angeles, and my father didn't want me to go. Why, I don't know. He didn't want to tell me not to go—he says if you give me all "A's" I'll let you go. And he knew I couldn't get an "A" in deportment. That's all. But I did.

AL: You did.

AN: I did. I'll never forget that, all "A's" in scholarship and an "A" in deportment. And I went. To give you an idea about how things happened the way they did, I was in the same Spanish class with my sister who was ahead of me in high school, we were together later on, and I used to sit in the front row. We had an old man teaching Spanish—Mr. Ewing. We didn't know whether he had a wig.

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It wasn't a question of study or I always had my work done all the way through, that wasn't it. Then, let me see.

AL: Did he have a wig or not?

AN: Yea.

AL: You found out?

AN: Yea, yea.

AL: How did you find out?

AN: Pushed him.

AL: Pushed him!

AN: Sure.

AL: Oh no.

AN: Sure, sure, I can still see him 'you, sit down, you' -- oh man.

AL: Oh dear.

AN: Oh yea, you see I graduated from high school in the flu epidemic of winter that is February of 1919. I never had the graduation, we were out of school half the time. This is the first big flu epidemic. Everyone in our family were down, except my father, oh sure.

AL: What was the name of your high school?

AN: Los Angeles High School.

AL: Oh, that's easy.
AN: There is an interesting thing about that. I entered high school, jumped to eleventh grade, when they opened the new L.A. high which was way out on Eleventh Avenue about a mile beyond the end of the street car line, way on the other side of town and the cows were grazing across the street and when we were bad boys in gym, they made us go over the cross-country route, right through where the Miracle Mile is now, right up to La Brea--Wilshire and La Brea. That was all grass. And we used to go through mud and everything else. It was a long way. Yes, yes I remember that very well. I first entered when they opened the new one, that by the way was just condemned last year.

AL: I suppose they'll be tearing it down.

AN: I don't know if they tore it or I think they did. I went the second semester, the first winter of 1919, I was in Junior College right there, it was then on the same high school at the time. Now, my grades were always good, there wasn't any question of that. I'll never forget the old principle of L.A. High when I came up to him, you see in order to go to the University you had to have the principal's recommendation of fifteen recommended grades and so on. He says your too young you don't want to go. I says 'Oh come on,' he couldn't help himself, after all I was just barely fourteen (15?). Alright. There comes the next, I was gonna go, my mind was made up, I was going to college, I was gonna be a teacher, I was gonna major in Mathematics and Spanish. This is to be a high school teacher. And so, my sister was going into USC and my brother was going to USC but I said 'No, I won't go.' I waited at that time, they were just opening up the southern branch of the University of California, that's UCLA, it was only first two years and I waited. Then, I got a little anxious, because Berkeley opens up in August, UCLA was open in September like the rest of them, but Berkeley always did earlier. So, I decided to go out there, I never knew what a University was, and I says 'here I want to get into here and here.' They said, 'well, you have to wait six months,' I says 'the hell I'll wait six months.' I didn't know what the difference was. And, my father, while there was a railroad strike, so we had to take the boat up to San Francisco. And he put me into a family in Oakland where I stayed.
AL: So, he send you, you went alone to meet a family?

AN: No, no. My father accompanied me up to there on the boat. You see he had some friends in San Francisco which are still our friends. They found a family for me to live with in Oakland. And then he took me out to the University five weeks late. And remember, this is the first semester after World War I, when there was the big overgrown--they had ten thousand on the Berkeley campus. So, I came in, what can I get in? I got into two histories, and two political sciences. They wouldn't let me into Spanish cause I was too advanced and had to wait six months so I took some English. And I took some mathematics and all I could get into was analytical geometry.

AL: Yoe.

AN: That's alright I had trigonometry. And that was taught by some TA that same in that they had to bring in a hurry because they had overflow in the University and that's an interesting thing. I always learned by example and by seeing. Somehow or another my imagination doesn't carry through poetry, that's why I'm not a great poet, I don't like poetry too much. And, I had a hard time in analytical geometry. And I was homesick too. We got through and had our finals in the first weeks in December and this was in the old time, and all my courses were in the first two days of the final exam period, except mathematics came a week later. I was (trying to get him) to let me go home, he said no. Well, I waited around, I was the first or second out of that course and as I walked out, I never remember, I don't know who he was, his name was Youngfellow, he was kicked out, I know right afterwards. He says, 'what did you get for this answer?' and I says, 'this.' He says, 'well, I didn't get the same answer.' I didn't flunk, I never did forget that time. Got four "A's", no I got four one's. That was the way it was that time, and I got a three in mathematics.

AL: From this TA.

AN: Yea, that's my first grades. And so, I got interested in different things. Forgot my Spanish, now, the two history freshman courses, one was the brand new, first time ever given anywhere in the world, (Herbert Eugene) Bolton was trying out his "History of the Americas ". In that class which
was held in Wheeler Auditorium, which sat about ten to eleven hundred seats, we sat on the floor if we didn't get there on time. And Bolton lectured, he wasn't a great lecturer but he was an interesting man, very much so, we were under TA's you see. We had two lectures a week and then section leaders, who examined us.

AL: Was this your second semester there?
AN: First. Very first year.

AL: This was nineteen-
AN: 1919. I didn't get there until September, it began in August you see.
AL: Right.

AN: This is 1919. And, my father was with me the very first time I got on campus. After he got me placed in there and of all the things in the whole world, the head TA, was a man, (William C.) Binkley, and that Binkley when he saw my father, he said, 'Hello Mr. Nasatir' and to me he didn't say Abraham or anything of the kind, he says, 'are you asking me for KC Powder books?' and it immediately came to me. He was the grocery clerk in Santa Ana for his uncle where we use to go in and get all kinds of books and everything. About a half of block from myfather's store.

AL: So he recognized your father.
AN: Oh yea, cause I was a little kid.
AL: Isn't that something.
AN: He was the head TA, I didn't have him, I had another one. I've known him of course ever since, he became a very, very distinguished historian of the Texas revolution. My own one was a different one, my own TA was a fellow named Kuykendall, whom I shall never forget. He was at least six feet four, thin as a rail, who when he came into the classroom, and they had a desk about this high, he would put the pulpit on top of that in order to get things down to it. Oh yes. And he never finished his Ph.D. Binkley did and the rest of them did. He went to Hawaii and organized the Hawaiian Society and became the greatest of all the historians. And I'll never forget him. That was my first experience and that's where I got interested in alot of the stories and a few other things in history. I missed the greatest historian in what we called the History 4, that was
History 8, my other freshman course was what we called European Civilization course that we have here as well. That was given by (Karl C.) Leebrick whom I got to know very well. But he was a poor substitute for the greatest man of all, Henry Moore Stevens who died about three months before I got there. But Bolton, of course, had already made his name and was just now coming out. And then I got next to him very closely, and --oh, the other course I had taken, I was trying to figure, was economics. See, I had two courses in History, two courses in Political Sciences, and Economics. It wasn't until the second semester that I took the English.

AL: Now were these like pre-requisites are today?
AN: They were the fundamental courses, they were the pre-requisites for everything. But I didn't care, that's all I could get into.

AL: And you were going to take them.
AN: And that's how I got balled up in the Social Sciences. You see, if you go into college in 1919, you are suppose to be in the class of '23. My class is '21.

AL: That was pretty fast.
AN: There was a reason for it. It really should be '22. The second year in my college on the campus I was taken up with different stuff, I was already interested in history and I knew I'd be in Social Sciences of some sort. Still working for some kind of a high school credential, that was my purpose during the time. I didn't know what a Ph.D. was. At the end of my freshman year, up there, 1920, they had, the last step of your Ph.D. --is what we call the final public examination, public examination. Where your committee examines you on your thesis and its open to the public, they can't ask questions. That's the first time I knew what a Ph.D. was and I went to see it. They had three in history at the time. All three Bolton's at the time, Ripey who I know and who may be alive, Coan who's dead and Binkley. I went, and that's the first time I knew what a Ph.D. was. The second year, of course, I took the regular things and I'm working for a high school credential. We didn't get it in history, we got it in, well, we had to get three majors and a minor, and outside your field. And that was the requirement for a high school teacher, for secondary at the time.
And so it came out that I was in history, poli sci and economics and my outside one was in public speaking. Which is either public speaking or English, they came together, a combination at that time. That's what I got. I graduated in December of '21, that's why it isn't '22. Cause the end of the semester was in December of '21.

AL: Right.

AN: I was in the '21 class and I was the reader for Bolton's upper division class, in my senior year. During that time I knew him very well.

I got the Bachelor of Arts in December of '21.

AL: And also the credential?

AN: No, the credential takes the fifth year. And that's in '22. And what I did with the credential is as I told you I got it through in History, Political Science, Economics, that's what I got it in and got that at the end of summer. It think it was summer of '22. Yea, that's when I got it, 1922. The very interesting part of that is I did my practice teaching at the University High under Miss Mary Ross who later went on to become a very good friend and associate and she was one of Bolton's students in and she was one of Bolton's students in Georgia. And I did some work in Europe for her later on and they just put up some kind of memorial up for her, the Georgia did and asked me to contribute some thoughts to her. I taught as a young kid, I wasn't yet eighteen and a small fellow--I did grow up. I forgot to tell you, that was one of the most interesting things in my life. I went to Berkeley, I was in knee britches, size 15 boys suit and I'm sure that they all thought that I was a precocious young kid crossing the campus using the library. But I never was touched, never worried by anything of the kind except that I was interested in public debating and was a member of Congress Debating Society on the campus there but not a campus debater. But I grew up in the first youear from about four foot ten or elenent to about five foot five, to what I am, anyways, from a fifteen boys to a thirty-six men, in the first year or so. Now when you became a graduate freshman they always identified freshmen by a blue registration card, everthing else was red at that time. That ment I got a blue registration when I was a graduate and four times they threatened to throw me into Strawberry Creek for
hazing, not when I was a freshman but when I was a freshman graduate student. The boys saved me finally, some of the boys knew me on campus. But it's one of those things that happen—that's the way they use to haze them, they'd throw them in Strawberry Creek at the time. Sure. Let's see what else. Of course, as a graduate student I entered the seminar, Bolton's seminar and an M.A. I knew what that was and did get a topic, did get my Masters Degree in December of '22. I kind of thing I got my High School Credential at the same time.

AL: So you went for both.

AN: Oh no, you always did it together, part of the thing.

AL: Had you abandoned the idea of teaching by this time—for the high school level?

AN: No. That was part of it. By now I knew what a Ph.D. was, from December of '22 until the end of that year, May, making it '23 I was now interested in a Ph.D. And I became a teaching fellow for Bolton and I finished all my course requirements for the Ph.D. and in 1923 I had my committee made and 23/24 I was a teaching fellow. And, I was ready and took my exams for the Ph.D., at that time I had the qualifying examinations of seven professors. That was the real one. And I also had to know French and German. And now you get the story of what I gave you here (Dr. Nasatir refers to "Adventures in Scholarship"). I went in to learn French, you see Spanish I knew and need it for my field. But you had to know French and German, now it's different, you get anything you want.

AL: You're lucky if you get language now.

AN: Now they still require you to take a language, but they now allow you to take French and Spanish. But in my day you couldn't do it you had to take French and German. If you want medieval, it had Latin in addition and in my case it was Spanish. I went into summer session, took French A, summer, and went into Dr. Paetow who gave it. Paetow was one of the greatest professors internationally and he is a medievalist. And he didn't know who who you were, he was a man—there are lots of stories about Paetow. He asked me what I wanted to take, he gave the French and German exam. I said, 'Oh, I don't care, I had read the History of France.' and I'll never forget it cause I was going to France at that time and it was just
before commencement day. He brought down a volume that I took my French examination in, it was in 15th Century French history which I didn't know the history let alone the language. And it was the book of Longlois, who was the head archivist, and I met him later in France. Back in there, Paetow said to me, he said, 'Nasatir, is there a subjunctive in French?' I said, 'sure.' He says, 'it's funny, you translated all of this in the present tense'. He said, 'I tell you what I'm gonna do with you, Nasatir' he said, 'I'm gonna pass you in French cause your going to France'. I was just on my way, 'and I know you'll learn it.' And that blue book with his signature saying that on it, I still have it. Now, in 1923 to '24, when I took my examinations, when I took my Ph.D. examinations which was make it or break it, the hard on. There's an interesting story there, maybe I can tell that, maybe I can't.

AL: Now you had already arranged to do your initial research in France by this time, didn't you?

AN: No, no. I'll come to that next. That starts from my Master's degree, from my Master thesis. But this is the end of the semester and a hard time to have my committee examinations. I think I can tell it to you though. I first of all with Professor Paetow who was going off, and I had no trouble cause I knew it very well, and Professor McCormick, I had no trouble but then they had to bring them all together, the other men. And at my examination they showed up except for the special one, but the rest of them, they showed up at three o'clock in the afternoon, suppose to be a two hour exam, something like that. Present were my Professor (Edward M.) Sait, Russell were the two political scientists. Professor Sait, a very distinguished man, I had been his reader at one time, and I had no trouble with Professor Sait. But, Professor Russell, who is in International Relations, I took his seminar, I'm not too well in it but got the most I could from it. But, Bolton who's my chairman, I said, 'Chairman, what do you want me to tell you?' He said, 'if you don't know enough to get by with me, you ought to be ashamed of yourself.' Normally the chairman he sometimes asks questions, Bolton never asked anything but just before the last one, Russell said, 'Nasatir, I want to ask
some questions,' he says, 'how about giving me the history of Spanish Colonization.' I says, 'well, just give you the general facts?' He says, 'yes, that's all I want.' So I began to tell him about occupations of the islands and then the expansion into Florida. Bolton stopped me. 'Russell have you ever heard about the international relations about that?' 'No.' So, for forty minutes he and Russell began talking and the chimes on the thing rang at six o'clock. I had my hardest time with Russell, my hardest time. And I'll never forget when I came out, I said, 'Bolton, what's the results,' 'ah, just forget about it.' He never did tell me that I passed. Now, you come to the other part of it about me going to France, you see cause that came right afterwards. I have only one explanation, they offered me the Native Sons Traveling Fellowship which was granted and given by the Native Sons every year. And, generally to go to Spain, that's what its for and granted by the Department of History through the University of course. Why they gave it to me, there is one explanation that I know of, that I was so young that they wanted me to grow a year older, that is all I could find out, I did. Now wait a minute, I had my high school credential, and I called up my father and I not only had my high school credential, oh, I got that in December of '22 with my Master's degree and I had a job in Marin County.

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I said, 'Dad, I got a job as you know and I got a fellowship.' He says, 'listen, your old enough to make your own decisions, I promised you that I would support all my kids until they got a job.' Which I did, but I said, 'I want to go, I'd like to take the fellowship.' He said, 'of course I'll help support you, go ahead.' Professor Sait said, 'fine, how much ya get?' I said, '1500 dollars.' He said, '1250 dollars will get you the bridal suite on the Aquitania.' (AN laughs) He was kidding. Now, I had for the Master's thesis, the subject I wrote on was the "Chouteaus and the Indian Trade of the West." And it was agreed that I would write on the same topic for my Ph.D. But to improve it that's why I'm going to Spain--on the Spanish period. You see my thesis went from 1763 to 1852. But being of French abstraction as well, I wanted to go to France. But there was another reason why I wanted to go to France. I felt that I had a duty as a Native Son to California to do something on California. And my predecessor, as the Native Sons fellow who was Lewis Lesley, who taught here. Lewis told me, he says, 'Abe' I said I'd like to do the French in California, he says, 'well, they wouldn't let me in' just like that. He says, 'I couldn't get in the foreign office, where in the hell do you think you're gonna get any stuff on it?' So I just let it go. Lewis was a good friend of mine, he and I entered the very same day on our graduate work although he was graduated from Stanford and although he was older than I am, year before and had taught at St. Louis for three years. And I always behind him.

AL: What was he researching in Europe?

AN: I was on the Chouteaus which is the Missouri and he was on the upper Missouri. That was his thesis then, he went over there, he knew French very well by the way. No Spanish.

AL: Was this through Bolton's guidance?

AN: Oh yes, sure. And he wanted to go over there, he went over there but he couldn't find anything, in Spain nor in France and he knew French well.