

Maureen and Mike

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This transcript represents the nearly verbatim record of an unrehearsed interview. Please bear in mind that you are reading the spoken word rather than the written word.

**Oral History Number: 225-001, 002**  
**Interviewee: Alexander Michael Stepanzoff**  
**Interviewer: Richard B. Torgerson**  
**Date of Interview: January 26, 1989**

*Note: Jo Stepanzoff, the interviewee's wife, comments occasionally throughout the interview.*

Richard B. Torgerson: This is tape number one side A. Interview with Alex Stepanzoff. The interviewer is Rick Torgerson, and the date today is January, 26, 1989. It's Thursday.

Alexander Stepanzoff: Hi.

RT: Hi, Alex.

AS: I was born in Harbin, Manchuria, China, where my father was an official of the Russian Imperial government. My interest in music was aroused early in my childhood by the marching military bands passing frequently by our residence. On several occasions, at the early age of five or six, I would follow the military bands until our servants would find me, because I would be lost and because Chinese bandits were kidnapping wealthy Russian children and holding them for ransom. My parents were worried whenever I disappeared, and one thing they knew was there a military band playing in the parade or wherever it is, and if they, say, just passed our house, "Find him. Find the military band"—usually it's the infantry. So they could go ahead and find me.

RT: Then they could find you, is that right?

AS: They found me. I followed right next to them. [laughs] I didn't know anything about it, but I liked it. I liked it. We didn't have grade school then, in Harbin, Manchuria, at the time, but as soon as I passed entrance examinations to a private gymnasium, which is a little bit higher than the high school, then I joined the band. I wanted to play the baritone, but our strict military conductor told me that the band needed French horn players, and I was to play French horn, period—no choices.

In Russia there always was contest among the school bands, like it is for football, basketball, or track over here. There it was music, and so that everybody was getting whole semester, or maybe whole year, getting ready for the music festivals and they went in those contests. I remember when the band director told me, "You are to be first French horn player in our band"—because all our horn section graduated—"The first number we're going to play is "Overture" from *La Traviata* by Verdi, and you know...I want to show you the music, I am not going ask you to tell me whether it could not be done, because it must be done. But this is what it is," and it began with that introduction, [sings] and I thought I could never learn. The main thing was, those military people were...you try to talk or disobey—out. Out of school! Not only

out of the band. Throw you right out. We had big school, our school was bigger than the University [of Montana] when I came here. So, there was no fooling around about that.

I did learn it, *La Traviata*. I would come home and practice and practice, and finally the family would say, "When is he going get out of the house? Do we have to listen to you practice?"

My mother would say, "Well now, remember as the weather gets warmer, we have a summer home on the River Sungari, and we are going send him there to practice." [laughs] I was going back down to there to practice, but for sure I had a responsibility and for sure I didn't have any excuses. That's what he told me to do and he said, "That's what I expect," and I did. But at the same time, evidently, I was quite gifted in sports, and our administration said, "We are not so much interested in you being the French horn player for our band, which is wonderful, we are looking for you to eventually get into the Asian Olympics and win it for our school your last year in school." I was trained by the Olympic Champions Russians, wrestling, for three years—weight-lifting and all that. In 1921, I won. As you can see, all those medals and all that.

RT: That was the Asian Olympics?

AS: Yes. The reason was, because at that time there was lot of war going on in the world then. So in Harbin they had to limit themselves to some Russian, Chinese, Japanese—people like that—that could there. 1921, there was still Russian Revolution and all that stuff, but Harbin where I was it was, for my father to develop Manchuria, Harbin was the hub of it all. So that that's where the big actions were, as far as the Russians are concerned. Imperial Russian, not the Communist Russians.

RT: So you didn't feel any of the communism at that time?

AS: No. That's how, eventually, I came to the United States. When I won the championship, then the representatives at YMCA—and I wrestled there too—and some American athletic directors who were at this contest saw me, and they asked to think seriously where I was going to get my university education. Well, I told them it has to be between Germany and the United States, not Russia, because my father, being with the Imperial government, no way—to go back down there. They said, "Look, if we offer you some inducement to come to United States, and if you do come, we probably will get you scholarships. Would you consider that?"

I said, "Well, yes. I have no other place to go but either United States or Germany," and no German athletic directors approached me so I said, "I consider that." That's how, then, I went with 35 Russian students to United States. On the way over, they asked me if I would be willing to meet in Japan, Yokohama and Tokyo, their wrestlers there. I said, "You guide me, and I'll do whatever I can," so I began to study judo seriously. When I got down there, I won both places.

When I came to the United States in San Francisco, they had a committee which had about 200 foreign students trying to get into universities—American universities. These people were

telling me, Now look, Alexander, because you are the champion wrestler and all that, Stanford would like to have you, the University of California would like to have you. But we have a personal letter from the president of the University of Montana [Charles Clapp] which says like that "If I could get Alex Stepanzoff to come to the University of Montana, we will take care of him, and you may as well tell him that we will just adopt him."

I said, "University of what?"

"Montana."

I said, "Where is it?"

They said, "Look, you just [unintelligible] there is a state, Montana, and that's the University of Montana."

I said, "Why would I go there, when I could go to Stanford right here or University of California?"

They said, "Alex, your father was a prominent man for the Imperial government. You are a distinguished athlete. In the Bay Area, we have a lot of Russian students that got away from Russia like you do, whose parents were somebody, but they confiscated their properties and all that." He said, "You met with them twice on the weekends."

I said, "Yes."

"What language did you speak with them?"

I said, "Russian."

They said, "Now look, if you're going to Stanford or University of California, the easiest language for you will be Russian, but you got to remember that you want to go to the university in America and you got to learn English. Now, University of Montana is not Stanford and not the University of California, but the president is going to take personal care of you and there will be no Russian students. You would have to learn English, and you just think twice before you say no."

The next day I thought, There is some truth in that, because I had known too many people in the Bay Area for partying and everywhere, and just like meeting a person, you know, what's the easiest language to talk, well, the language you know best, Russian. So, I accepted. They said, "We'll take you over." I came over here, and do you know that that president of the University of Montana followed me through my years at the University like father to his son. Nothing I needed that he wouldn't see to it that I got it. Whatever it is. Any work, anything. First he took me in his office. He was about 260...no, about 240 pounds—very big man—and he told me to

begin...Of course, at home we had servants and all that, and he told me...to begin with, he says, "Alex, you never worked in your life, did you?"

I said, "No."

"Well here in America, we work."

That was news to me. I came to University, what do I have to worry about work? He said, "You know, I worked my way through college. I got doctorate degree from Massachusetts Institute of Technology." He said, "Don't be ashamed. Lot of students are working through." So, I had to learn that.

From there on he gave me a Rhodes scholar to teach me English. He put me in a dormitory to be with the students. He did everything, you know. Evidently, he had it in his mind...Second year that I was beginning to learn more, he called the director of the physical education department and he said, "Schreiber"—you know that's the gymnasium, the old gym. Schreiber [W.E. Schrieber]? He was from Wisconsin. Big guy, about 220 pounds. He said, "We belong to the Pacific-10 Conference and we know we get hell beat out of us in football, track, and basketball, and everything, but they have at Stanford a Pacific-10 Conference champion wrestler. His name is Blumenthal. I want you to challenge Blumenthal to come to the University of Montana and meet Alex Stepanzoff."

Schreiber nearly fell over. He said, "What are you trying to embarrass me in that too?" [laughs] But he did not know who I was, Schreiber, only Dr. Clapp knew who I was, pictures and all. So when I met Blumenthal, I pinned him down in 39 seconds. So when my daughter said, "How could you never go to University of Montana when you get a scholarship to Stanford."

I said, "Alegra (?), Stanford came to the University of Montana, and I graduated in 39 seconds." [laughs] I pinned him down.

Then the newspapers began to write [unintelligible]. They wrote before the match, "Built like a Greek god" and all that stuff, and they didn't know who I was. Well anyway, that's what got me to the University of Montana.

RT: Can I back us up just a second? You left Russia in 1921?

AS: '22.

RT: '22. There was still an imperial government then?

AS: No, no. 1917, the Communists got in power, but they didn't get to Harbin, Manchuria, yet. It took them a long time. There was a civil war that started over there from Moscow going

through Siberia and all around that. That took several years. They did never got into Manchuria when I got out, because if they did I would have never got out.

Jo Stepanzoff: [unintelligible] start moving again.

AS: Yes.

RT: Your family, your father, knew that this government was encroaching upon the Imperial government?

AS: The Imperial government was overthrown in 1917 by Lenin so then whatever semblance is left like my father and all that, that's only left over from the old regime—imperial regime—which no longer existed.

RT: But in Manchuria it still existed for them. They could still have powers over there in Harbin?

AS: Yes. Although they didn't have to put up with them as much as they did under the Imperial government, because the Imperial government had a club, in case...but here they would have to be more diplomatic. But not until communists got through Siberia to Manchuria, which was around that time, that my father said to me and my brother, "You got to get out."

RT: Both of you left the country?

AS: My brother came about the year after I did, but he went to University of Oregon.

RT: So he made every effort to get you out of the country.

AS: Absolutely. Either the United States or Germany, but when I was offered that in United States, of course, I went to the United States.

RT: Did you ever see your parents again?

AS: Yes. After graduation, I went back to Manchuria, because Communists were not controlling it yet, then. See, Manchuria was a kind of place that Japan was very much interested, and they kind of marched quietly and diplomatically through Manchuria to the border of Manchurian Siberia. They stationed some of their troops over there, so that the Russians knew that if they would try to get into Manchuria, they got Japan to battle. So that was the buffer, but we didn't know how long that would last. So the idea is, get out, and we did.

RT: Okay. You came to the University of Montana in 1922, right?

AS: Right.

RT: How much more wrestling did you do you? You wrestled all through college then?

AS: No, because there was no competition for me as far as University of Montana is concerned, the wrestlers, there was no competition. Once they found out who I was, then I didn't want to wrestle, because few times that I wrestled...and these people were my friends. One time in the wrestling room in the old gym, I noticed during the tournament the whole place was packed with women, not men. I thought, What's all this? When I got my opponent in a predicament that he is finished, before I put any kind of a pressure or anything, I would say, "Well Jim, you know, that's the end of you. Why don't you lie down like a nice boy, and don't let me punish you?" [laughs] They thought that was really a hell of a way for a champion wrestler to deal with his opponents. Well, I didn't want to hurt anybody. So this is why the School of Journalism, women, were assigned to go and watch one of my matches. They said, "You will see what the gentleman Alex is. He wouldn't even punish his opponents." I was sure I would win, and I didn't want to do anything which would harm a good friend of mine. Then I quit.

JS: Are you ready for more beer, sir?

RT: I think I'm fine, thanks.

JS: All right.

AS: I quit right then. No more. Then we got in, even more, into music. Eventually, of course, Dr. Clapp saw to it that I had jobs everywhere. I didn't have to look for any. He found them. Then eventually, I was proctor of the dormitory, South Hall. Then I was assistant director of the University band. I played in it. I played also in the University symphony.

JS: Well let's hear your story, sir.

RT: This is a tape just for Alex now.

JS: I've heard it so many times I could have [unintelligible].

AS: So that was the part of the University, then when I graduated—

RT: Let's see, when did you quit wrestling? It was about your second year or first year?

AS: Right, about 1923.

RT: 1923, okay.

AS: Simply because at the time...Two things, there was no competition here, and I didn't want to punish anybody because I don't like this thing. Do you ever see boxing? When the guy is a groggy and the other guy goes in to finish him. I don't like that. Whenever I see the great

matador, and I met two of them, finishing the bull—stabbing him. I don't like that. To me, wrestling was a sport that you have to be physically fit, you have to be smart and all that. As far as the cruelty was concerned, I was not interested, and that's why I didn't do that in Japan. Ask the guy would you want to lie down—all of them. One of them in Yokohama threw me out in the second row. I came back and finished him right then and there. I didn't take chances, but here where people in the University, so to me they meant a lot. So when I graduated from the University—

RT: When you played in the band in the orchestra, you played French horn?

AS: Right, yes. Surprisingly, this is recorded, but you don't have to...I was the only man paid by the University Symphony. Not the band. But I was the only French horn player, there were no more. [laughs] Professor Weisberg [A.H. Weisberg], who was the director of the University Symphony begged me, and I said, "I don't have time," and all that stuff.

He said, "Well now, Dr. Clapp told me that you have to work. You just have to work. Well, suppose we confidentially pay you?"

I said, "Whatever you want to do."

RT: So you got paid for playing in the symphony.

AS: But nobody was paid then. Down here you have first chair guys. Back down there you don't care whether its first chair or whatever it is. Nobody gets paid in the University Symphony. You took it as a part of whatever you did, whether School of Music or whatever it is. All your violinists play the violin. You did something else, or you did something else. Weisberg was graduate of Leipzig Conservatory in Germany. [unintelligible]

RT: You were assistant director of the band?

AS: Yes, with Hoelscher at that time. What he did, whenever he couldn't come in or anything like that, he would tell me, "Will you take it over?"

RT: Why did why did he choose you?

AS: Why did he choose me? I think, because I already had the International Club Orchestra, which I directed.

RT: Why don't you tell me about that? There's a University Orchestra and then there was this International—?

AS: International Club Orchestra. You see, that's where the trouble about talking too much, because you know this is a live history of mine. All right. The International Club, I organized it.

Three years ago, it was its 60th anniversary, couple years ago. Forty students came here with cameras and all. I said, "What's going on?"

"This is the 60th anniversary, and Alex, we are going to dedicate it to you." They had a booklet I didn't want to bother you, because I didn't want to show you the Alexander dedicated little booklet which ended like this, "If it were not for you Alex, there wouldn't be the International Cosmopolitan Club at the University. You started with few, today we have our 250 banquet all full of people." I was sitting with Bucklew. Remember him? President Bucklew?

RT: Neil Bucklew. Yes.

AS: Then everybody stood up and yelled, "Alex! Speech!"

I said, "Hell, I'm not talking with you, period." I talk so much everywhere else, so I didn't talk like that in public. I don't want to. Privately, that's okay, but not in public.

Finally Bucklew got up, and he says, "Alex, you go ahead and say something."

So I got up, and you know what I said? "I'm so happy to see so many of you here at this banquet filled to capacity. I want you to know how thrilled I am to have started something and your tribute to me is magnificent. I assure you that I could have read that in my obituary." [laughs] Here he goes, talks about reading his own obituary. That's all I said, and I sat down. No more.

RT: This International Club, though, was—

AS: Foreign students.

RT: —foreign students. You decided to organize the foreign students.

AS: Right, because not only did I have the foreign students, but I also brought in American students. I also brought some people from town who may have been of foreign descent, like you said, that violinist Jarussi (?). You know, that's not Joe Smith, that's Jarussi. [laughs] People like that. I organized a good group. You know what the problem was? We had the biggest crowds, not the University Symphony.

RT: You didn't just play music, you also met together for other reasons?

AS: You mean the International Club?

RT: Yes.

AS: Well, this is only side [unintelligible]. That's a side part of it, like City of Missoula and Missoula Symphony, or School of Music and University Band. This is part of it.

RT: You weren't responsible for the whole club, you were you—

AS: I was the president. I was the founder. I wrote the skit on "Humanities of all nations." I danced Russian dances. I did everything, along with the rest of them.

RT: Okay, okay. I'd better [unintelligible].

When did you actually start the Club, what year?

AS: 1924.

RT: '24. Then a couple years, two years later did you say?

AS: Yes, a couple of years later I organized the orchestra. Then, of course, Dr. Hoelscher knew that I was directing the orchestra. Of course, he asked me to take care of it. I told him I would be happy to do it, whatever he wanted to. That's how I got it.

RT: That was about your last year in college that you—

AS: No. I was here for another...Well, just about last year in college when I was with the band, but not with the International Club Orchestra.

RT: And you started the orchestra in—

AS: About '24 then, and I had them for three years.

RT: Then you graduated?

AS: Yes.

RT: You graduated what year then?

AS: 1927. I took one year of postgraduate work.

RT: Here?

AS: Yes. Then...you see, that's why I talk so much. Eighty-some years, when do you get to be 86, you better have some history. Then, when I graduated...Now remember, all this time President Clapp was the...I didn't know. Things were moving. Then professor, after my graduation said to me, "Alex, you probably don't realize that Dr. Clapp was behind you every, every time that something had to be done for you. All the time he said he'd never quit. Never." Then I want to

thank him for everything, and then I was going to University of Washington to get my master's an international trade.

Dr. Clapp said to me, "Alex, Professor Hoffman (?), who is a member of your International Club, professor of French and you're his A student, he's going on a sabbatical leave to Paris France to study at Sorbonne. Figure it out. Go there or leave it."

"France?" I said, "Why would I want to go to France?"

He said, "Because Professor Hoffman is going there, and he is going to help you there as much as I was helping you here. You're not going to be on your own."

I thought, well, under the circumstances, I go. I did go, and I stayed there about nine months. Hoffman was with me constantly over there. His family was there. His wife was Flemish, and they spoke French, naturally.

RT: Did you did you already know French then?

AS: Some French, but I was his A student. You know what I told him? I say, "Monsieur Hoffman, how come an A student can go into the restaurant and order?"

He said, "Monsieur Stepanzoff, when you come to see me, no more English." [laughs] That struggle and struggle--French, French. He said, "Furthermore, no hotels. You are going to stay with a French family, and you learn." That's what I did. Believe you me, I didn't talk much [unintelligible]. [laughs]

RT: When did you first start speaking French then?

AS: Well, I worked so hard, and I learned English over here till midnight and later. I did the same thing over there for three months. I just pounded, pounded everything—learning. Then I went to lectures, and coming back to the French family [unintelligible] that's all I could hear. I couldn't hear any English. There was no English, but you just think of what happens next and that's why he's talking too much. I thought, Now [slaps and rubs hands together] I'm through, and I'm coming to United States. You know, what Dr. Clapp said to me?

"I'm so proud of you. Professor Hoffman wrote to *Kamin* and the president." He said, "I'm so proud of Alex doing so well here." The President Clapp wrote me like this, "Got one more advice for you, 'See the world.'"

[End of Tape 1, Side A]

[Tape 1, Side B]

RT: Okay, so—

AS: He said, “I want you to see how people in the world live and learn whatever you can before you get married.” He said, “If you get married, you may have a family. When you get a family,” he said, “Alex, you may not be able to do it again. So do it now.”

So I did.

RT: Where did you have the finances, first of all, to go to the Sorbonne, and then also—

AS: No, I didn't go to Sorbonne. I went to a college called *L'École Viande Francaise* (?). I went to that. I worked a lot here through. Dr. Clapp gave me several jobs to do that were well paid. For instance, we used to have an old heating plant over here, and they had to carry out clinkers from the basement two floors down below outside, and the trucks would pick them up. They couldn't hire anybody for any money to do it because it was physically almost impossible. You're like a Chinese coolie. They have two pockets over here, and they [unintelligible] over your neck over here. Then you have to go two flights, dump them, go down. The two German engineers that were managing the heating plan told me, they said, “Alex, you are the Siberian king, and we are going to pay you twice as much as we would pay anybody else if you will do it.” So I worked, and I saved a lot of money because I had some other work which was easy.

Dr. Clapp appreciated that. He said, “To think that you come from a family with servants, and to go ahead and do what you're doing, I didn't ask you to do that, but I'm so proud that you did.” He said, “If you can, stay with it, it's good for us—for the University—and it will be good for you.”

That's another thing; I probably got his full confidence more and more. So I was saving a lot of money, and of course my parents were sending me some to begin with, but then Dr. Clapp said, “Don't let them send you too much money.” So that he was restricting me on what I could get. He said, “You got to work. If you need little supplement, get little supplement. That's it. But you work.” So, that's where the money was coming from.

RT: For France, and then even to go and see the world.

AS: Right, yes. Well, I didn't go first-class. I went like a tourist about the cheapest way I could go, but I was comfortable and I took the French boat which gave me an opportunity...I was in Saigon where Vietnam is now. I was there. I was a lot of places.

RT: Do you remember any experiences from that trip?

AS: Oh yes. I know you like to talk a lot, but there is going to be no interest, because I was offered by *Newsweek* magazine, by *Time* magazine, by *San Francisco Chronicle*, even NBC, to appear on programs or write about my experiences. Because after that, when I got back to the United States, then Dr. Clapp said, "Why don't you apply to whatever you want to apply to, and let me write them letter of recommendations," after I came back from a trip around the world.

RT: That was a year-long trip, was it?

AS: No. It took about six months.

RT: You were by yourself traveling?

AS: Yes. Always. He told me to be by myself. Don't dare to do it with anybody else. [laughs] Then in New York, I went, and I looked at different banks. Chase Manhattan and Rockefeller's bank, had this sign on the front door of the main offices "Banking hours: 10 a.m. to 2 p.m." I thought, geez, that'd be a good job. [laughs] I went to apply, and I had a recommendation from Dr. Clapp with me and they hired me right there. They wouldn't even let me go home.

I said, "What do you mean?"

They said, "We're merging with another bank—Equitable Trust—and we would like to have you get started."

I said, "I'm staying with my friends in New Jersey, Roselle Park, because their son was with me at South Hall dormitory."

They said, "We'll take care of it."

So a great big flatfoot guy about six feet four comes in, he said, "Well, we'll start you adding up checks." I never had any experience. So I looked at the check and I go like this, and you know how those people that had been there ten years they just go automatically, but I was that slow.

Then he comes in at five o'clock, and he said, "Did you have your supper?"

I said, "What?" Reading that from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Already was nervous when I would go home.

He said, "Did you have your supper

I said, "No."

"Well," he said, "get something to eat. Our bank has regular dining facilities, so go and get something to eat now. Have your dinner."

I thought, What's next? I have to take a train back to New Jersey. I came back, and then he comes to me, and he said, "What time is your last train?"

I said, "Midnight."

"Well, you better go home, and catch the train, but let me tell you something; tomorrow you're not going back home. You're going stay in the hotel with so many of the other people here because we're in a rush to consolidate the two banks and everyone's working."

I thought, from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.? I learned my banking there in a hurry. Then—

RT: Just one second. When you graduated from the University of Montana what was your degree in?

AS: Bachelors with one year of graduate studies.

RT: in business? Economics?

AS: In business. Economics, business and economics.

RT: Okay. All right.

AS: Now, then I go to the bank.

RT: This is about 192—

AS: '29, just before the crash. Few months before. Three months before the crash, I got in. I got into a department, in a division, and I knew all the guys there were from some big schools—snobbish and all that. "Say, Alex, what university did you say you graduated from?" I was too innocent to not understand at first. I didn't know.

I said, "Oh, I graduated from the University of Montana."

"Oh, Montana, that's where they raise cattle, sheep, and hay."

I said, "I guess so."

They would kind of laugh, and I didn't get it.

Then few days later they said, "Hey, Alex, what the university did you say you graduated from?"

I would say, "University of Montana."

“Oh, that's right. That's where they raise cattle and sheep and all that that.”

I thought, Wait a minute. Then that happened, a few days later, “Hey Alex,” and all these guys are all “hehehe,” you know, and I got the message.

I went to the executive vice-president, and I tell him, I said, “Are you a member of the New York Athletic Club?”

He said, “Yes. Why?”

I said, “Is it possible for you to get one of the training rooms over there?”

He said, “What for? You're going to train?”

I said, “No.”

“What are you going to do?”

I said, “You know those guys are from Yale and Harvard and Princeton—the Ivy League boys?” I said, “They make fun of me because I'm from University of Montana.”

He said, “What are you going to do?”

I said, “I'm going to beat hell out of them.”

He said, “You can't do that. We'll have to fire you if you do that.”

I said, “How much longer am I going to put up with it?”

Then he told me, “Let me tell you something”—he was like Dr. Clapp—he said, “Alex, instead of fighting and arguing, why don't you go to Columbia Graduate School and get your master's?”

I said, “Yes, but I just got married.”

He said, “We'll keep you. We'll give you night work. You don't have to worry.” He said, “This bank is 24 hours a day, not for public, but our departments.”

So I said, “I'll try.” Then I told Jo what I'm proposing to do.

He said, “You go down to Graduate School vice president and find out what your classes would be.”

I came back, and I said, "Okay, if I go there about nine o'clock, my classes are not one after another. It's here in the morning, later in afternoon."

He said, "Okay, when's your last?"

I said, "Five o'clock."

He said, "When are you going to eat?"

I said, "I got to eat in the cafeteria, because where else would I go in New York? That's too far to go home or anywhere."

He said, "All right, you're right, but the Express subway goes from Columbia University to the Wall Street. How long will it take you?"

I said, "25 minutes."

"How long will it take you to eat in the cafeteria?"

I said, "25 minutes, or half an hour."

"Okay, last class at 5:00. Alex, you begin work at 6:00."

I said, "I do, okay. How long do I work?"

He said, "Well, how long do you want to work?"

I said, "I have no idea. I don't know how the classes will be and all that."

"Why didn't you start the full shift, and work until one o'clock in the morning?"

"Then!" I said, "I got to take a subway back home at one o'clock, and then by Columbia University on Riverside Drive. That's half an hour."

He said, "Well, you're physically well-built, and I think you're mentally well-built too." He said, "So let's see what happens, we'll try it that way. We can always shift."

I said, "Okay." So that's the way. I get home at 1:30 in the morning. Jo is already in bed asleep and all that. That lasted over 12 months. I took summers studying. No vacations. Nothing. In something like the whole year, more than that, not just a school year, I was through with the master's. I went to the vice president Cain [Charles Cain], I said, "Here I am. You can congratulate me."

He said, "I knew that. Now," he said, "you can work with me. You don't have to go back there with them."

I said, "Now, Mr. Cain, I want to know one more thing."

He said, "What's that?"

I said, "How many Ph.Ds. in banking and finance do we have at Chase Manhattan Bank?"

"Why?"

"Listen, I'm curious."

He said, "Well, we have an economist from Harvard University, and we have one in investments who is 63, will be retiring in two years. So what?"

I said, "Mr. Cain, two years hence, you will have the youngest Ph.D. in banking and finance."

"Not you!"

I said, "Me."

He said, "Did you talk to your wife?"

I said, "No. I want to ask you first what you're going to do."

He said, "Are you willing to do that for two more years or whatever it takes?"

I said, "Yes."

He said, "Talk to your wife first."

So, I told Jo, I said, "Here is the situation, do you want to be the wife of a clerk, or do you want me to move up? There is a price."

Well, when I took my doctorate there were 14 people examining me, and the first question was by the...I graduated with Milton Friedman, you know, he's a Nobel Prize winner—together.

RT: He got his doctorate there at the same time you did?

AS: Yes. You know he wasn't that famous then. [laughs] The first question that he asked me, he said, "Would you go to the blackboard"—Wesley Mitchell, and he was the smartest guy—"and prove the theory of castle on money and markets."

I thought, Come on. If I go to the blackboard, they can shoot at me there. So I recovered like getting the punch.

I said, "Dr. Mitchell, would it be possible for me to explain it to your first orally?" Fourteen guys are there examining me. "To explain it to orally the theory of castles, and then if you want some additional proof, I would be very happy to go to the blackboard."

He said, "I don't care. Go ahead."

I thought, At least they can't pin me down to the blackboard, because down there you have to write, and then they got you. I thought, I'm not doing that. Well, after I recovered, I finished. When I got through with all of those guys, then they said, "Would you step out for 15 minutes, so we can take vote?" When I was there 15 minutes, they said...You can't flunk, such sacrifice. How would it be possible to react to something like that? When I came in, Dr. Mitchell extended me his hand, he said to me, "Alex, congratulations, you passed."

"Oh, no!"

He said, "Yes." He said, "Now what do you want to do?"

I said, "I want to go back to the bank." I went back to the bank, and I told Mr. Cain what happened.

He said, "I knew it. I knew that you would do it." He said, "I'll tell you, we just lent Soviet government 250 million dollars."—that's in 1932—"250 million dollars for their business developments. You know the Russian language. You just finished Columbia Graduate School. We want you to go to Moscow, and we want you to do research on Soviet banking and finance. We will have Ambassador Bullitt [William C. Bullitt] contact you, and we already contacted the State Department and everybody will know the Columbia Graduate School. We want you to go over." So the first time, I went with Jo.

RT: Now, wait a minute, you've been mentioning your wife, but you haven't talked about how you met her.

AS: Oh, right here at the University at the International Club. She was Secretary of the International Club. Right here.

RT: When did you get married then?

AS: In 1930, and she came to New York.

RT: Right after you got done with your trip?

AS: Yes.

RT: You had her come out to New York?

AS: I was there already with Chase Manhattan. See, I got into Chase Manhattan in 1929, but she didn't graduate until 1930. Once she graduated, she came over, then we got married.

RT: When the crash came, did you ever fear for your job?

AS: Ah, isn't that something? They were laying them off. Oh! People were committing suicide, jumping out of the buildings, and I never will forget. The trouble with this is, somebody said, "Alex, there is a book and book and book of material in your life. I tell you, you wouldn't write, you wouldn't do anything with anybody, you wouldn't have *Newsweek*, *Time*, or anybody, to do anything, but individually you would."

I said, "Well, what good does it do individually, just that one guy knows, and nobody else." I said, "I don't want anything public." When NBC called me up—and you remember the program used to be something about interesting people or something like that—they call me up from New York. They wanted me to be on that program. I said, "I don't think I'm interested."

They said, "Well, you've got a lot to tell people."

I said, "Individually, yes. Publicly, no. Not interested." So I refused all that.

RT: But anyway, they laying people off.

AS: Oh, yes. My wife was laid off. She was with American Telephone Telegraph Company, and they laid 3,000 people off by the tenure. All those people that were there less than three years were laid off.

RT: And at the bank at Chase Manhattan?

AS: They didn't do that to me, but of course they were letting a lot of people but they kept me. That's another thing I can tell my daughter or anybody, "Remember one thing, when things were tough, I wasn't laid off," okay! So I stayed with them. So what do you think I asked when that all got settled down, that I was to go to Russia? Vice-president Cain, said, "Now, how do you feel to be the only one at Chase Manhattan Bank to go there to represent us?"

I said, "Yes. I have a feeling"—just like Luther King—I said, "I have a feeling." [laughs]

He said, "What is it?"

I said, "Is the Ivy League still functioning over there?"

He said, "Yes. Why?"

I said, "You mean all those highbrows from Harvard, Princeton, and Yale?"

He said, "Yes, They're there."

I said, "Mr. Cain, I haven't seen them for over three years. As far as they're concerned, I am no longer with the bank, right? They don't know. I'll ask you a favor."

He said, "What's that?"

JS: [unintelligible]

AS [responds to JS]: If you want to, go ahead.

I said, "I want you to take me down to the Ivy League, and this is going to be the story. They will all say, 'Alex, where were you?' I will tell them that I was with the bank, that I was doing some graduate work over there. Then they will say, 'What are you doing now?' Then I said, 'You tell them what I'm going to do now.'"

He said, "What's all this about?"

I said, "I'll finish the sentence, okay?"

"Alex where have you been?"

I said, "I've been working night shift."

"What are you going to do now?"

I said, "Mr. Cain, what am I going to do now?"

He said, "Oh, for you, you don't know, but," he said, "we're sending Alex to Russia to do research on Soviet banking and finance for us, because we just lent Russia 250 million dollars and we want to be sure that we know more about the system."

"The hell he is."

I said, "Now boys in Ivy League, see, 'When they need brains they don't go to Ivy League, they go to the University of Montana where they raise sheep, cattle, and hay.'"

Mr. Cain said, "What the hell is that?"

I said, "Mr. Cain, they've been torturing me with that three years ago, and I thought I'd hand it back to them." [laughs] How do you like that? Then when I got from trip from Europe—and I made several trips before—some of these people became executive vice-presidents and they would invite me to dinner in executive suites.

RT: This is in Russia?

AS: Chase Manhattan. To open up draperies and see the Statue of Liberty on the 22nd floor. The waitress comes in—this is the executive administrative mansion, so to speak, on the top floor—"What would you like to have for your lunch?"

I would look over there, and they have roast beef and...250 or something like that.

I said, "Gee, I don't know what to order. It's kind of expensive. What do you mean 250?"

"Alex, what are you talking about?" the vice-president said.

I said, "Do you charge 250, or two dollars and 50?"

"Alex, those are calories. They got nothing to do with price. Each one shows you...He said, "There's no money involved." He said, "It's so many calories." So at the end, you decide how many calories they want to have for lunch. You add it up. They'll add it up for you. Anyway, I was their guest several times.

Then her father owned Bon Ton bakeries and Bon Ton flour mills in Bozeman, Montana. Then he—

RT: Your wife's father?

AS: Right. Then he was building one in Billings, Montana. He kept on after me, "Why don't you give up New York? What do you want to be in crowded places like that? We have an opportunity for you right here. Why don't you come?" He would take me to Glacier Park and Yellowstone Park and everywhere. He couldn't sell me for several years. I woke up in his beautiful place and the brook was running by, and just like in that symphony, the 6th—

RT: Yes. Beethoven's 6th.

AS: That record is right there, number one. For me, I play kind of music, but for my audience, I know better. Eventually, I knew he wanted here back home. So I knew I had to consider something else. I told the vice-president, "I may have to ask you for a leave of absence, for 30

days." Then...well, you wouldn't know. You know Skaggs drug stores, over here, Skaggs. Well Skaggs owned Safeway stores all over the country.

RT: Skaggs is now Osco, but before they owned Safeway?

AS: So, Mr. Graf—Eugene—he was intelligent. He invited, in Bozeman, Mr. Skaggs for dinner. He was a multi-multi-millionaire. Skaggs and Graf—her father and I—had dinner.

Skaggs said to me, "Alex, why wouldn't you want to come to Montana?"

I told him, "Why should I? What do I do? This is baking-milling business, I don't know anything about it."

He said, "He doesn't need anybody in that business. He needs a management, and you would be it."

I said, "Well, I'm not interested Bozeman. I'm not interested in Billings."

He said, "Okay,"—Skaggs is talking, not Mr. Graf—he said, "Gene, build a plant in Missoula."

Graf said, "Would you be interested if we build a plant in Missoula?"

I said, "Hey, [unintelligible], Missoula be the only place in Montana, but that doesn't mean that I would be interested in management of baking business and all that."

He said, "Now, wait a minute."

Skaggs said, "Gene, one more proposition. Say, Alex, if Gene will build the plant over there and give you half interest of the ownership and you don't have to pay for it, would you consider?"

[laughs] I said, "You people decided to really to get me. Brilliant."

He said, "Well, we want you be with us." He said, "We at Safeway give Gene Graf exclusive on flour, bread, and everything." So he said, "Now, by gosh, Chase wouldn't give it to you."

I said, "Okay. I'll see." Went to Chase, told them about it. They told me, Alex, working as hard as you did, getting as far as you did, got to be something wrong.

"When you leave me," the vice-president said, "will you mind stopping on the sixth floor, before you leave the building?"

I said, "Sixth floor? Hey, that's medical. What do you want me to do there?"

“Have your head examined.”

I said, “I did at Columbia! Passed!”

He said, “How could you do it?”

I said, “It’s not me.” That’s how I happened to come to Missoula.

RT: Let’s backtrack now, because for a number of years then you were doing research on Soviet banking?

AS: Not years. Just some months.

RT: A few months. Then you made some trips then back?

AS: Back again. Next year I was back again, but that time I went by myself.

RT: Now let’s see, how many times did you go back to the Soviet Union after are you went to—

AS: Five. In connection with my research twice, but then it was after that three times on my own.

RT: Three times after that, after those two times? Then, before you became employed by Chase Manhattan, had you gone back to see your parents in between?

AS: I did. In 1929, I went.

RT: On your tour, when you took a trip around the world, you saw your parents then? Then worked with the bank?

AS: Right. Yes.

RT: Can you talk about your some of the experiences you had on them on those two trips that you took to the Soviet Union with the bank?

AS: Experiences? Listen, you said, I know you like to talk too much, there's no end to it. This is why these people asked me.

RT: Yes, but they wanted to...they wanted to lose you, didn't they?

AS: That’s again—my wife heard that so many times I don't blame her—the way it went was just like this, again, I come in with my wife the first time. The guy who was right next to Stalin...Now, you know that I wasn't sure I would get out, and I told the Chase Manhattan, State

Department, and Columbia Graduate School, I'm not going. I said, "Stalin is so brutal that, well, you talk about Hitler. Well, that guy is ten times more brutal than Hitler. I'm not taking any dumb chances."

They said, "Don't worry. Our Ambassador, Bullitt, will take care of that."

RT: This is 193—

AS: 19 about '32, something like that. Which year were we in Russia, first time, you and I? 1932? [speaking to JS]

JS: I don't remember.

AS: You don't. Well anyway, Jo, you heard it so many times, I don't want to bother you, because I know you'll interfere but he wants to know

RT: Yes.

AS: He's asking, and you may just as well—

JO: Write it all down?

AS: Yes. You might just as well go ahead with your work, because I told him that it's always...[unintelligible] but you can at least testify that that's correct.

So, we arrived order, and the Commissar of Public Finance next to Stalin—

JS: Did you want a paper and pen?

AS: No he's got a recorder.

RT: It's recording now.

AS: Okay, Jo.

RT: You're on tape Joan.

JS: [unintelligible] the first time in my life.

AS: Jo, here, if you want to abbreviate it, don't interfere.

Now, we walked in—she can be a silent witness—we walked in and the guy welcomed me, but like mafia welcomes another mafia. I was sure, I knew, that he knew my background. KGBs are

very smart guys. He told me, "Please sit down," of course it was in Russian, and of course, Jo doesn't speak the language, so never mind.

JS: I do too [unintelligible]

AS: [unintelligible]. So we sit down, and he said, "Well"—now he was a guy, Jewish-Armenian type of a guy, about 130 pounds, was about five feet five—he said, "Comrade Stepanzoff, I want you to know that you are here at a horrible disadvantage—

[End of Tape 1, Side B]

[Tape 2, Side A]

RT: Okay, so you were greeted by the Commissar?

AS: Yes.

RT: What was his title?

AS: Commissar of Public Finance, and Jo was sitting here and I was sitting here. In Russian he said, "You know that you are at a terrible disadvantage coming to Russia."

I got the message. I thought, We'll see what shall I do with you before you do anything with me. I told him, I said, "Disadvantage." I said, "I really don't know where to begin, but let's begin with this." I pulled out two of my gold medals out of my pockets, threw them on his desk, and inscription in Russian.

He said, "So! You were the champion wrestler and weight lifter."

I said, "Well, looking at you, I don't think I should have much problem. Should I?" I said, "That's to begin with." Then, I said, "Furthermore—we settle that one secondly—did you ever go to college?" He pounded his fists on the table, and Jo jumped.

He said, "Stalin, didn't go to college!" I knew all that.

So I said, "Really? I don't care—"

JS: Do you want some more beer sir?

RT: I'm fine, thanks.

AS: I said, "I really don't care whether you did go to college or not, but I want you to know that I have all the following degrees for the record. Okay?" Thirdly, I said, "I never was a coward. You can put that in record." So, I said, "Do you want to proceed?"

He said, "Yes."

I said, "One more thing, I just passed my doctorate. One of the men that quizzed me was Professor Vladimir Simkovich. Can you recognize his Russian name? He ran away from you 15 years ago, and he's teaching at Columbia—Karl Marx, communism, socialism, and Christianity. I took one semester of that, okay, coming here. Now, I can assure you that you, being Commissar of Public Finance, you can ask me anything you want about communism. Then would you give me an opportunity to ask you, because I can assure you now that you will flunk." That's the way we started.

He said, "Your trouble is over there, that you are on the Wall Street, and you exploit the poor people."

I said, "Now wait a minute, you're a Communist." I said, "Pure communism is from one according to his ability to one according to his needs. Now you're a single, younger man, and there you can see through your window, another man sweeping streets. He may have a family of five or six—St. John the Ivan, yes—he should get five six times more than you do because of his needs, but you and I know you are getting the money. Not him. Okay? "Go ahead further," I said, "with any question."

He said, "Did you see our subway? It is better than yours."

I said, "Agree." I said, "But remember, your subway, you're charging."

He said, "You're exploiting the working people."

I said, "Wait a minute! You charge me 30 cents on in your subway. Sure it's beautiful. Your subway was built by prisoners and slaves. Our subway by union workers. You know how much it cost me anywhere on a subway? Five cents. Five cents." So I said "Where the Wall Street?"

When I got through with that, he stood up over there. "Stepanzoff, Comrade Stepanzoff, how are you returning?"

I thought I may as well [unintelligible] that one too. That's the kind of guy I was built. I said, doing with underhanded like he was, I said, "Well, I'll tell you, I think I'll take the Trans-Siberian Express, which is [unintelligible], then I take the Chinese Eastern railway that connects Siberia and Manchuria, that my father had something to do for the Emperor Nicholas." I thought that would really stump him. Then I said, "I go through Japan back to the United States."

He said, "Comrade Stepanzoff, Siberia is a big country. Don't get lost."

I said, "Comrade, you borrowed 250 million dollars. You may need more money. Your government may need more money. Don't lose me, okay?" That's the way we left, and Jo left with me.

When we got to the hotel, she said, "I'm leaving. They are going to do something to you."

I said, "I'm taking a chance. I don't care."

So, we sat at the table to have dinner, and she said, "That man just moved with his back to back chair to you."

I said, "Don't worry. That's the KGB, certainly, [unintelligible] he's listening. Don't worry about it." So she left, and I stayed. I told Ambassador Bullitt.

He said, "Now, look Alex, we admire your bravery, but don't get us involved! You know they are what they are." He said, "Your background, your father and all."

I said, "Anything I hate is somebody hitting me, and I can never get them back.

He said, "Well, in diplomacy, you do that too, but you don't go and hit them." So next day—

RT: Let's see now, your wife, then, went back to the States?

AS: To Munich, Germany.

RT: Oh, she went to Germany

AS: Yes.

RT: She didn't have any problems getting out the Soviet Union?

AS: Oh no. No, no. She just flew back, but I went back...That's when I saw my parents. I went back also another time, I saw them. I went back to Harbin, Manchuria. Then I went another time. Chase wanted me to go.

RT: This is all during that what six or eight month period that you—

AS: It took me about two years, to go back and forth. I was there several months, then I came back. After a while, I was back again. The next year, went back again. Well now, they wouldn't give me a visa. You know what visa is? No visa. No denial. It just takes time to get the visa. I got the message. You don't have to be that stupid. Called Chase Manhattan and said, "We're getting a problem getting visa."

"Why?"

I said, "I'm too smart. They don't want anybody like that. They'd rather have my dumb professors. They were there before."

They said, "Things look good to us."

I said, "Do you know anybody who spoke Russian?"

"No."

I said, "Well, how would you know anything about it?"

"They gave us the interpreter."

I said, "Who did?"

"The government."

I said, "Oh, you got it. The government gave you a message too." I said, "It's okay." Anyway, I came several times over there, and [unintelligible] hadn't go it. Last time I went there I said...oh my wife said...Last time I went there, I said, "I'm going to tell you something. I'm leaving anyway to the Soviet Consul in New York, and you better get the visa, because I am leaving at midnight. My wife was with famous psychologist, Dr. Alfred Adler, for three years. Have you ever heard of him? Freud, Jung, and Adler? They're three biggest guys. She pleaded with me not to go. I said, "No, I'm going to finish. Just have faith in me."

RT: When was she with Dr. Adler?

AS: Dr. Adler.

RT: Right around that same time?

AS: Yes.

RT: She was in Germany for a while, while you were in the United States.

AS: Yes, but then when we come back, she was with Dr. Adler, writing his speeches, because his [unintelligible] was worse than mine. He was lecturing to doctors. He's Viennese famous psychologists. There are three as I say: Freud, Jung, and Adler.

RT: After she left the Soviet Union the first time, she went to Munich.

AS: She went to Munich. Right. Then from there got back to New York.

RT: And then, from there went—

AS: To work for Adler.

Okay. But this guy [refers to himself] decided to go a second time. So I told the Soviet Consul in New York, "I'm leaving at midnight. I got to have a visa. Now we were talking like mafia boys—you stop me and see I'll stop you. Sarcastically, I knew what he was doing, which was [unintelligible] with me. I thought that I was as intelligent as he was. I knew what he was doing.

So Jo called me at the bank at about three o'clock, and she said, "Alexander the Great, why don't you give up that trip to the Soviet Union at midnight."

I said, "Little girl, we still got 120 minutes until five o'clock, before they close the consulate. History may take place. Don't worry. I'm prepared to go."

Four o'clock, I get a message, "Stepanzoff you can pick up your visa." So, I went down there, and this guy—now remember what he said in Moscow, "Siberia is a big country. Don't get lost?"—he said to me, "Well, we got your visa. You can go to the Soviet Union again. How are you coming back?"

I said, "I'll take the Trans-Siberian Express then Chinese Eastern Railway, and then Japan."

He said, "Remember, Siberia is a big country. Don't get lost."

I said, "You know, you're repeating exactly what the Commissar of Public Finance told me in Moscow. So you got that message too?" Well I said, "Don't lose me. You're right here in New York and so is Chase Manhattan. Be sure that I get back, okay?" So I went.

There are more stories to that. On the border...I told you that the Japanese were getting into Manchuria. On the border, the Japanese Secret Service caught up with me—immigration officials. [imitates Japanese official] "Passport. Alexander Stepanzoff. Russia."

I said, "Russian name. American citizen."

"Coming out of Russia?"

"Yes."

"Occupation?"

I said, "Student." I didn't want to say that I was Chase Manhattan." I said, "Student."

"What school?"

I said, "Columbia Graduate School."

Then he kept on asking like that. He said, "Do you have any proof?"

I said, "I don't have anything with me, no. Why?" He spoke English. Then I went. Took train.

Next year when I came back, who the hell do I meet back over there on the Manchurian border? Same little man. But by then I asked Columbia Graduate School, "Will you give me a letter or something I can show, in case I meet the same guy?"

They said, "Here is a letter, that you were at Graduate School and all that stuff. So, I got it."

I meet the guy, and he said, "So we meet again."

I said, "How unfortunate it is." [laughs]

"Are you still a student?"

I said, "Yes. I am so dumb, it takes me a long time to graduate." [laughs]

"Do you have any proof this time?"

I said, "Yes, for you, just you. I got the proof. Can you read this in English?" [laughs]

He said, "Yes, I read English."

I said, "Okay."

Then he said, "So are you coming out of Russia again?"

I said, "Yes."

"Do you like it there?"

I said, "Well, I have certain work to do."

He said, "For instance?"

I said, "Studying. You probably thought spying." So I went. Went back through there again. There I visited my parents again.

RT: That was, let's see, 1934?

AS: '34. Yes.

RT: Then you worked for the bank—

AS: Until about '35, '36. Then I went to Bozeman for a few years. Then I came here in '39, with the condition that they build a plant, and that I am in Missoula not in Bozeman not in Billings.

[Break in audio]

AS: Well you can always come back whenever you want.

RT: Okay. Thank you.

AS: All right what did you want to know?

RT: Let's see. All this time, from the time you graduated from the University of Montana until the point you went back to back to Missoula, did you do any playing at all? Did you just put the horn away and not play it or—

AS: Let's see...Right after I got through with the University of Montana, I didn't play any longer.

RT: So that was the end of your playing?

AS: That was the end of it, at the University. Yes.

RT: Did you ever hear the Sousa Band or—

AS: Of course. The problem is [unintelligible] there are so many experiences. Yes, I not only heard the Sousa Band, I met him.

RT: You met Sousa?

AS: I talked to him. And his—

RT: Was this in his last years in the '30s?

AS: Yes. It's about '20-something, toward the end—about '26 something like that. He gave a concert, and I was very much interested in him. Heard a lot about him.

RT: This was back East, this concert?

AS: Yes. His comment was that our programs, especially outdoors, are for the entertainment purposes. That's what the director of the Rochester band said...You probably can read it better here what he said.

RT: Oh, Donald Hunsberger, yes, yes.

AS: You've heard of him?

RT: Yes.

AS: He impersonates Sousa. He dresses up.

RT: He does?

AS: You see it? Oh, yes! Not only playing Sousa's music, but dresses up and tries to portray him exactly. He was in a picture.

RT: His quote here is, "Sousa made a direct appeal to the average person, not just the astute concertgoer. He just had that magical touch for putting it all together." Okay, that says in a nutshell the way Sousa approached his concerts.

AS: While in New York, while around the world, while in Europe, I went everywhere I had an opportunity to go. Concert bands like Franko Goldman at the New York Symphony, to the Metropolitan Opera. I was able to see the conductors like Stokowski, Toscanini, Karajan—that's his recording over there in Berlin—and all that. I always kind of took a note after conducting the international Club Orchestra and the band every so often at the University...I took time to note what are they doing and how they are doing it. That was always interested me.

RT: Did you ever have any formal training in conducting?

AS: No, but I was with a lot of people, friends of mine, that were somebody. There was always some discussion, why do you beat it this way or beat it that way or something like that, but no formal as such.

RT: With the meeting with Sousa, that was a brief meeting?

AS: Yes. Just telling him how much we enjoyed the program, and then just asking what makes it so successful. But remember, he had a terrific personnel. Look at Clark and all those.

RT: Yes. Herbert Clark.

AS: Oh! All those great band directors, they also could have great musicians. For instance, the present director of the New York Philharmonic said, "I'm very grateful to the conductors preceding me"—not the French one, but [unintelligible] Bernstein and all the other guys. He said, "My personnel was terrific, but also the conductors before me were terrific." He said, "It helps me a lot." When you get everything [unintelligible], you can work maybe, whereas otherwise you can't.

RT: Did you ever meet a good Edwin Franko Goldman, is that his name?

AS: Yes, in New York, at the Franko [unintelligible] concerts.

RT: His son is Richard Franko?

AS: No...Wait a minute. Edwin. Richard is the one that his son, isn't it?

RT: I believe so.

AS: Right. He was also conservatory, top guy on Peabody Conservatory Institute. Edwin Franko Goldman is the one I met. He played in Central Park and that is where Leonard Smith was the trumpet virtuoso. Do you know that not so long ago, Leonard Smith was the guest conductor of the Franko Goldman Band, which is endowed by [unintelligible].

RT: It still continues, the Goldman Band?

AS: Yes, but they don't call it Goldman anymore.

RT: Do you know what they call it?

AS: I forgot it. It's something in connection with the arts and whatever it is. They changed the name.

RT: When did you meet Leonard Smith?

AS: There in New York.

RT: In New York, okay. He's now conducting the—

AS: Detroit Concert Band, and he's a terrific Sousa guy. If anybody...this guy from [unintelligible] Minnesota] might be, whatever he is, but Leonard is the one that does everything. They even had a [unintelligible] now after Sousa and his grandson were down there, dedicated and all that.

RT: This in Detroit, you said?

AS: Yes. In Detroit.

RT: Back to your story then. All this time, from the time you stopped playing, music was just kind of a peripheral thing?

AS: Well, I was interested in music always, naturally. That's why somebody who tells me, "How about Pavarotti in comparison Gigli [Beniamino Gigli]?"

I said, "Well, ask me, I know. I heard both of them. No problem. You go to Domingo [Placido Domingo]."

I tried to take advantage of everything that I could. I used to play in the Missoula City Band long time ago.

RT: That's when you first came back here, to Missoula?

AS: No. When I came back, I didn't play, but I played when I was a student.

RT: Oh, that's right.

AS: I was the only student from the University or anywhere. The others were all downtown people, and they all belong to the union.

RT: But you didn't?

AS: I don't remember that. I think I did eventually. I got the card from from Petrillo, Caesar Petrillo was the little god, or did you know?

RT: Yes, way back then.

AS: He was—

RT: The president.

AS: Of the—

RT: Musicians Union [American Federation of Musicians].

AS: Musicians, and he was a [unintelligible]. If ten guys played, ten might be sitting down there doing nothing, but you pay them too. So it was quite a problem. But I am a member of the musicians union.

RT: Sure. Okay, so then we're back in Missoula. This is '37?

AS: '39.

RT: '39. So you started to help out with the management of this bakery?

AS: Yes. I established it. I started it.

RT: The name of the bakery, again, was?

AS: Bon Ton. We have pictures, but I didn't want to bore you with all that stuff.

RT: That's okay.

AS: Beautiful building. Too good for Missoula.

RT: How long did that last?

AS: Until '72, I think. Then I sold the property to Western Montana Clinic. They demolished everything, and now they have a parking lot on the site. Think of it, we spent hundreds of thousands of dollars building that damn thing, and they just demolished it. I said, "The only people who can pay for all that, doctors, because they'll charge the patients."

RT: Were you active in the in the company up until '72?

AS: Well, no. I sold, before that, my part of it to Continental Baking Company, and I became director of sales for the state of Montana with them until '72.

RT: When did you sell it to Continental?

AS: I think it's about 1966, but on one condition. They told me that I have to say with the Continental. I could not just quit, because the biggest accounts were mine.

RT: I see. So, you said, "Well, okay I'll stay a few more years."

AS: I did. Yes, I did. Remember music comes to me number one. So, whenever they have meeting somewhere, and Alex Stepanzoff can't come over and they say, Well where hell is he? They said, "You can't tell him anything, because he told us before, if there is conflict with band or anything, I'm staying with the band."

RT: When you first came back to Missoula, how did you get involved with the music again?

AS: For some reason in 1940...I think it's 1940, they asked me...They knew who I was, they knew my background, and they were limited, mostly brass instruments and all that. They asked me to become a band director. They have, probably, respect for my other ability, besides music.

RT: This was the Missoula City Band?

AS: Yes.

RT: Was it called that then?

AS: Yes.

RT: Or was it the Eagles?

AS: No, that was Missoula...There was an Eagles band too.

RT: Oh, there was?

AS: Yes, but this was Missoula City Band.

RT: Do you know anything about this Eagles band? When it started—

AS: No I don't.

RT: Okay. Okay, you can go ahead.

AS: I didn't want to get into that. So they just begged me, persistent, and finally—

RT: You didn't want to get into it get into it because—

AS: Well, I had just began—

RT: You were too busy?

AS: —the business. Sure. I was travelling all over. Merchandising, and all that. I didn't think I had time anyway. I didn't want to do it. So, they had a committee that finally just wouldn't give it up. Finally they wrote a card which says like this, "Enclosed is the card, stamped, 'Please say yes or no for the last and final time.'" I remember, Jo was [unintelligible] and I said, "Why do they ask me again? I told them I don't have any time," and I threw it to the wastebasket.

Next day, the committee comes in, "Alex, thanks a lot."

I said, "For what?"

"Well, you accepted."

I said, "I never accepted. What do you mean?"

"We sent you the card."

I said, "I know that. I throw it out."

"No. Where it's marked *yes*, or *no*, it's marked *yes*."

I looked at my wife. I said, "Little girl, did you have anything to do with that?"

She said, "Yes."

I said, "How come?"

She said, "You're born in music, and you should follow music." She said, "Never forget what you did with International Club and everything else, orchestra."

I said, "Well, for god's sake. Now, I have a responsibility." Then I took it over. When I took it over, I said, "We got to make changes. First of all, I don't want everybody be forced to become a union member. Secondly," I said, "you didn't have enough instrumentation for me, so," I said, "we're going to have women."

They said, "No we're not going to have women."

I said, "Okay, as the union, I want flutes, oboes, bassoons. You give it to me."

"We don't go them."

I said, "Well, then leave me alone."

Virginia Vinal?

RT: Yes.

AS: Was my first flute player.

RT: That's Dean Vinal's wife.

AS: Wife. One of the first six women that I took in. The union said, "We don't have them."

I said, "Well will you give me an opportunity then, to get them?" From there on...Oh, they wanted to play a concert with the International Club Orchestra at the Wilma, because we were so much better than the Missoula group, or whatever they were—not the City Band, but some group over there, orchestra they had. We were invited, and the union got madder than hell.

They said, "You're not playing down there."

I said, "Oh, yes I am."

They said, "By gosh we are going to have the union technician not pull the curtain or nothing."

I said, "I don't care. I'll pull it if necessary." I said, "I'm playing, okay?"

They said, "We're going to talk to Petrillo."

I said, "Let me call Petrillo." So I wired him like this, "This happens to be a music week in Missoula, Montana. It would be very important for us to perform to get people interested in music, and I would appreciate your consent to let me conduct the concert at the Wilma Theatre."

Petrillo, himself, answered, "I'm leaving it at your own discretion."

I went to the committee, and I said to the union, "How would you like the jump in a lake?" I said, "Your little god said to my discretion, and my discretion is we are playing a concert, okay?" So, I had that to do with a lot of them.

RT: Did you have a personal acquaintance with Petrillo? Did you ever meet him?

AS: No. We just mostly wired, telegrams and all that stuff. But, isn't that something? [laughs] Just like this, becoming director. I didn't want it to do, but my wife, she can deny it, she said "I'm proud that I made you do it."

RT: When did you become director of the Missoula City Band?

AS: Really, I became in 1940, really, but with me was a choral director. I think it was Clarence Bell at that time, who was University Band director. Then I took it over in '41 by myself so really it should begin 1940, something like that. But you lose time—1940, 1988-1989. You know, if I live long enough and if I conduct and if I'm healthy in 1990 the Mendelsohn is bringing in European festivals again. If I live long enough, that be my 50th year. [unintelligible] Vizzutti's dad said to me, "Alex you conducted longer than John Philip Sousa."

I said, "Wait a minute, let's not talk about that!" [laughs] I said, "You know who John Philip Sousa was. I'm glad I'm able to do what I have been, but you never know. We're getting up there." Then I heard different conductors, like sometimes maybe George Guterich (?) or somebody say, "Well maybe it should be a little bit different tempo, slower march, like Radetsky." I heard that conducted by a John Barbirolli. Have you heard of him?

RT: Yes.

AS: London. They would introduce him as John Barbirolli the one who conducts the Radetsky March better than anybody. I listen to that damn guy, and his tempo was a little faster than usual. So I don't know how you going to argue this business of...These conductors, like Karajan

and Schulte, they may have some respect for each, but their ego is also that. So, when you start arguing with somebody, "Well, I heard Karajan."

And they say, Well, you know..." Now, you take, for instance, the Berlin Symphony. We come in over there about shortly after seven because of parking, and all the guys go, [mimics tuning of instruments] and that damn thing goes for almost half an hour. We're warming.

RT: Warming up, yes.

AS: Yes. We were in Berlin Symphony, the orchestra comes in. They're all professional, they're all state employed and all that. The concert master comes out, not like your little man, and bows to everybody. He just revolved once, and he starts over there, he tunes them up quickly. Sits down. Conductor comes out, right away, no fooling around. Right there. You watch them and you wonder, well, is that the procedure? Before they used to complain over here that you can't warm up in the university building, because there was no room. Well, Wilma Theatre got lot more room, but still they come there and they would like to warm up. That's okay, but some people think that's a lot of warming up for them, because they don't play.

[End of Tape 2, Side A]

[Tape 2, Side B]

AS: —people like that, but when we're talking, we're talking about an awful long time ago. Of course, I knew a lot of band directors, the [unintelligible] directors in this region. Fechner (?) was one, but you know you get to go back 30, 40, years ago, [unintelligible] now there is. Of course, I knew Dennis—what's his name—Great Falls Band director?

RT: Dennis Verbel (?)?

AS: Verbel. Yes. He was there.

RT: And Arthur Mareck (?) was another? He was before Dennis.

AS: Yes, and the University Band directors, naturally I knew very well and some others through the state. You know the state goes over there. One time somebody introduced me over there. They said, "Alex Stepanzoff if our director." One hand went up over there [unintelligible], and they said, "Oh, I know Alex."

I said, "How do you know me?"

He said, "My dad used to play for you."

I said, "What's his name?"

"Fred Nelson"

Now, you know how far we go and the other girl, over there waves, and she said "I know you, because my mother used to play for you and she was band director somewhere else," you know, like that.

Then way up in here, another girl is waving, and I said, "What is it?"

She said, "Mr. Stepanzoff, my father and mother were not musicians, but my grandfather played for you."

I said, "Oh no, what's his name?"

She said, "Fay Guy (?), he's a trumpet player."

I said, "That was a long time ago."

She said, "I told you, he's my grandfather."

So, when you go...So I said, "We stop right there. No more." When you go that back, you wonder...We go to different functions. My wife said, "I don't know many of those people."

I said, "You know, Jo, when we were in Switzerland on a tour, and the guy took us to the place and he took us to the cemetery, and the sign was over it like that "Enjoy while you can. You are where we used to be, but you will be where we are"—on tombstones. I said, "How do you like that?"

So [unintelligible] anybody, well...Knew a lot of people. A lot of people come to the band, who have been director somewhere else. "Hey, Alex, remember me?" Then I got to remember who they were and they're in music. lot of them became band directors that were with me.

RT: Let's see, I'm trying to think if there's anything you might want to add about the City Band?

AS: Well, we go through phases. There was a time, when during the war, we [unintelligible] men, so, naturally, I immediately was encouraging women participation. That's why the band became the size that it was. Sometimes we had over 70, 75 people over there. The discouraging part of the band is, while I was able to face many times such competent people, like Bill Manning (?) and Rosencrantz (?) and—

RT: These are people at the University.

AS: At the University, first chair people, that I never had the worry whether do we have a horn section, or whether do we have competent clarinet section to play something like *La Gazza Ladra* or whatever it is. And oboes, and they never could get good oboe player. As I told you probably, when Herbig volunteer one time, and I tried to play Italian [unintelligible], and everything went fine. Then we went to the concert, and then I went to him and nothing happened. Nothing! And you know what happened? He said his valves got stuck, and he couldn't do it. He felt so badly. Well what good did it do to me?

So I told Roger, "No more Italian [unintelligible] unless I get somebody like you to play."

He said, "Any time." He said, "I'd love to."

So, I'm handicapped. I don't have an Allen Vizzutti, somebody like that. With Allen, we played lot of things.

RT: Allen is—

AS: Clark's—

RT: He's now a student-player in Los Angeles.

AS: He's all over. He plays with Doc Severinsen, and he was in Philadelphia with some artists doing a concert.

Somebody asked me, "Did you hear of a fellow by the name Vizzutti?"

I said, "You mean Allen Vizzutti."

"Yes."

"Why?"

"He was in a concert with the orchestra in Philadelphia."

I said, "He was with me four years too." But, he didn't have [unintelligible]. [unintelligible] anything you want. Perfect.

Anyway, the clarinet section, not one, but maybe the first four chairs, who are [unintelligible], and these people like Barbara Koostra and people like that. Did you know Gibson?

RT: Lee Gibson?

AS: He was getting his masters or doctorate. Clarinet player, grade school director. Now he's in a bank. He was another clarinet player. So I had about four people like that, and I never had to worry. Not one. Four. Or if I ever saw, like a baritone player, Carl Smart and those guys, and this guy that teach foreign languages. I didn't have to worry. [unintelligible] and I know I can't depend. I can't depend on them. They are not there.

RT: When did you start taking high school kids in?

AS: I think, when the war broke out and the girls were getting in, then I took high school people too. I had to have them; otherwise I would not have a band. But I stayed with it, no matter how discouraging it was. Dean Vinal played with us. Lance Boyle play with us. Joe Estes (?), who was as good as Lance Boyle, he played with us. [unintelligible] sections like that, don't have to worry. Basses. We had four basses, some of them played as long as 40 years, and they were there. At the rehearsals. Competent. I didn't have to worry, but today, whenever I come in, I say, "What am I going to do now? How many new people there that have never done it." Then I feel badly that you or somebody like you, and I have to go say numbers. But I can help that, because I can't hear one instrument play. I got to figure out what can I do with this section? Are they there? Can they help? Because then it doesn't become a band if I get some...one instrument to do it, and nobody else can do it.

RT: I lost my train of thought here...

Do you think interest in bands, interest in playing musical instruments has declined over the years since you started taking over the Missoula City Band?

AS: Do I think the interest in playing musical instruments has declined?

RT: Do you think it's more difficult now to pull the band together because of a lack of interest?

AS: It is. I think that is true [unintelligible] because I know and I can respond. Directors of bands like our service bands, some with doctorate degrees in music would say...chairmen of the departments, they would say, "What a tragedy. We spend millions and millions and millions of dollars from grade school through high school through university teaching them, and then they drop it. The whole thing. Dropped. They're either too busy or don't care or their interests are somewhere else, but they are no longer kind of a dedicated type of people that would like to form groups, stay with it." I think it's decreasing.

RT: Is it because there are too many other things to do?

AS: Possibly, possibly. Then you have to be really interested. You have to practice. Not with the band, yourself, if you're going to be any good. If you don't want to be any good, well that's fine. Just forget it. Come down there whenever you want to. Just like Malachi (?) says, "I never touched a horn since August." Well, then you got to figure out what's the band director going to do? What can you do with people like that?

RT: Are there any things in the musical education that you received in Russia that you would like to see applied in educational system here?

AS: Well I don't know—

RT: Or can you compare the two?

AS: —enough about it, except that I say that the discipline of music training and music rehearsals and music performance and the individual preparations are very strict even in the army and military bands. Sometimes I was surprised, and I would ask my father, "Hey, Dad, what's he doing over there? The little cubbyhole where they're playing clarinet all by himself?"

"He's learning his part."

You don't go down there and say, "Oh well, I'll do what I can." Oh, no. You better master your part of it because they expect it, and if you don't, you're not going to be there. That's all. But you see, they have the discipline, and it's kind of inborn in them—strict. Especially if the military has anything to do with it. Not your military in America, but European, German militaries was the same way. They're demanding, and they should if you're going to be any part of it.

Another for instance, I've taught a player Sid Grabel (?). I don't know whether he practices. Sid used to be number one University trumpet player in the University Band, but you know he is not number one and not number two. Well, do the best I can, but then what am I, as a director, supposed to do? You play over there, maybe Cincinnati Bengals, and you say to me, "Hey coach we haven't got any quarterbacks."

"Don't you mind, the other guy on the line, throw the ball."

I say, "I don't want it. I know what's going to happen. We lose, for sure." So it's more difficult for me to manage, but I suppose it's true with some other bands and directors too. Unless, it's compulsory rehearsals. I don't know. Is the University compulsory?

RT: Yes.

AS: You're graded?

RT: We're graded. Yes. So everybody shows up.

AS: See, that's different. But then you decide if you give up, maybe there will be change in trend. I know George Goodrich feels strongly that we should go on. Well, his family [unintelligible], like his family and the younger boy. How could they tell, Dennis, I'll throw out Goodrich's. This is silly. You have people like that. They just should bury the hatchet and say, "Hey I don't like to sit next to you." Well, sit down where you want to? Right? What's the difference? Then, to behave...I told George Goodrich, I said, "George if the high school kids were doing that, I could understand," but he [unintelligible]. I said, "I can't understand."

RT: Okay.

[End of Interview]