ORAL HISTORY PROJECT OF THE FASHION INDUSTRIES

FASHION INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

BEATRICE COLEMAN
PRESIDENT
MAIDENFORM, INC.

THE FASHION INDUSTRY LEADERS

DATE OF INTERVIEW
Wednesday, February 23, 1983

INTERVIEWED BY
Mildred Finger
Beatrice Coleman is the president of Maidenform, Inc. This is a large company, still privately owned. Maidenform was founded in 1922 as the Enid Manufacturing Company, manufacturing brassieres and also ready-to-wear. In 1929, the company discontinued apparel. From a very small business, Maidenform, Inc. has become a giant of the brassiere and lingerie industries. Management is very professional.
How Mrs. Coleman's parents entered the brassiere business
Description of development of the bra business in the 1920's
How the Rosenthals divided their functions in the business
Manufacturing, advertising, sales force during the early years
Exports, licensing off shore production
How Beatrice Coleman learned the business by working in different departments
Description of the company's organizational structure
Diversification of product mix
1940's retail price structure
Diversification of production during WWII
Mrs. Coleman becomes president of Maidenform, Inc. in 1968
Listing of company's divisions, including private label division a discount store division
Why Maidenform, Inc. remains privately held
Relationships with department stores, specialty stores and others
Importance of market research
Description of manufacturing cycle
Importance of reorders
Explanation of design departments
How fabrics are bought for lingerie manufacturing
Present labor force at Maidenform
Sales management at present
Use of company catalogue
Opportunities for young people
Q: ....for the Oral History Library of the Fashion Institute of Technology, this will be an oral history interview with Beatrice Coleman, President of Maidenform, and daughter of the founder. The interview takes place on February 23, 1983. The interviewer is Mildred Finger.

Mrs. Coleman, would you start by telling us about your family; where and when they were born and when they started this business, and then we will proceed from there.

A: Well, my mother and father came to this country in 1906 I think.

Q: Their names were...?

A: Ida...Well, her name then was Ida Cohen and my father's name was William Rosenthal. They came to the United States in 1905, probably, they were married, perhaps, in 1906. They...My mother was a dress maker. She had been trained as a dressmaker and they moved to Hoboken, New Jersey where she made dresses, to order. This goes back to the First World...You know...The period of the First World War. In 1918, when I was two years old, there was a big snow storm in Hoboken, and the policemen asked....They lived in a private house...And the policemen asked her to shovel the snow. My father was ill at the time, and she shoveled the snow, and moved to New York, because she said she wasn't shoveling any snow for anybody.

Anyway....She moved to 141st Street, where she continued to be a dressmaker. I went to a small kindergarten called "Miss Helen Brochelle's Kindergarten..."

Q: About when was this? You were born about 1916.
A: I was born in 1916. Okay? So this was about 1920, let's say. I went to this kindergarten, and the teacher--her name was Miss Helen Brochelle....

Q: Do you know how to spell it, since you've given me the name?
A: I don't have the vaguest idea. I suspect it's B-r-o-c-h-e-l-l-e or something like that...She asked me what my mother did, and I said, "My mother is a dressmaker and she's very good," and that this woman should go and have her dresses made. My mother...I can't believe I was that aggressive, but anyway....She did. Now...She had a friend, whose name was Enid Bissett. Enid Bissett was working at the hat shop called Heller's on 57th Street. She spoke about my mother to Enid Bissett. Enid Bissett came up and had some dresses made and said to my mother, "You ought to come downtown. Wouldn't you like to? Heller's only has hats....(This was 36 W. 57th Street) They only have hats, and we could go into the dress business and it could be a sort of combination." And the thing was worked out. This was around '20; somewhere around there. And so that's what happened. They went into the dress business at 36 W. 57th Street. That building has been replaced by a skyscraper, but only fairly recently.

Enid Bissett had been a dancer; she had a very lovely figure and at that time everybody was wearing what were called "boys' form" brassieres, which were really binding, tight bindings--really destructive of the bosom, because they were really worn tight. And she would not wear something like that. She'd taken what was a boys' form brassiere, cut it in the center, and made some little gathers, so that it was, in effect, a very soft little brassiere.
Now, my father was in charge of the workroom for them, cutting patterns for them, and so on and so forth. And the dresses used to be tried on Enid Bissett. And he said to Enid, "If you want to wear a thing like that, why don't you let me make you a decent one?" And he made one up with, I think it was "swami" at that time, with an elastic center, and that was the original Maidenform brassiere.

Q: I'm sorry--What's swami?
A: It's a fabric that used to be used at that time. It's a sort of a jersey. S-w-a-m-i. Okay? They started to...It looked pretty good...

Q: Do you have any idea how much money they put into this?
A: Originally? ...Into the dress business? No, I don't.

Q: Into the lingerie.
A: No. Because there is no lingerie yet.
Q: Oh. Okay.
A: See, you're ahead. You're ahead of yourself. Because what happened was, they gave the brassieres away. There was no money involved. Because they were making very expensive dresses. This was the same kind of place as Bendel's, and Milgrim's was there at the time; Jay Thorpe, a whole lot of people like that, in the dress business. That kind of thing. It was called Enid Frocks.

They gave them away. And then finally it really got to be a nuisance. There were too many. So they started selling them. And finally, in about 1929, they gave up the dress business and just went into brassieres. That was quite a wrench. Because they had been supported by the dress business. It
was really taking a chance. As it happened, so many people went broke in 1929 who were in the dress business, it was a good move.

Now let me go back... They got tired of giving away the brassieres because it was a problem. So, in 1922, Maidenform (which was not called Maidenform then; it was called Enid Manufacturing Company) was incorporated, and this is where the business really started. At that time, with a capital of $4,500. Okay?

Q: I'm not clear now. What relationship did that have to the dress business on 57th Street?

A: They were in the dress business. They invented the modern brassiere, which did not exist at that time. Women either wore a boyish form, or they were still wearing a corset covered with, you know, things that they wore. There was no brassiere in existence. There was a lingerie business, but there was no brassiere business. The modern brassiere did not exist at that time. They gave it away, and then they started to sell it, with their dresses. All these dresses were made to order. Originally. Finally... They eventually went into the wholesale dress business. And then they went out of the dress business in 1929.

Q: However, the 1922 date... means... that Maidenform...

A: That's when the company was incorporated. Because the company has been in business 60 years. Sixty-one years...

Q: Your parents were involved with both.

A: With both, but the brassieres were a minor part, okay? Now, at that time they also started making some lingerie--step-ins, skivvies, different things. They were all colors, they were all silk, they were very soft and very pretty. And I can remember all this because I used to go down to the
shop after school.

Q: Where did you live in those days?

A: Well, when I was eight years old...In 1924 we moved to the seventies...West Side, in the seventies. And I was going to school there, so I would come down. And I was going to Chalif Ballet School across the street. So I would go to my ballet class and then come to...

Q: I'm sorry...How do you spell Chalif?

A: C-h-a-l-i-f.

Q: I haven't interviewed many women, so I don't know...Anna Potok is the only one.

A: All right. So, that's the way the business started. Now, after a few years...They kept adding another floor; it was only a five story building and there was a problem about having enough manufacturing space. In 1929, as I said, they went out of the dress business into the brassiere business, and they opened a factory--Well, it wasn't a factory; it was somebody's house. It happened to be my father's sister, who had a three story house or something in Bayonne, New Jersey. She needed work, his brother needed work, so they opened a sewing floor there, and that's how it came that our headquarters plant was in Bayonne, New Jersey...And that's how we came to be in Bayonne, New Jersey.

Anyway, the business grew. There was more...Originally there was...First there was one salesman, then there was a second salesman. The day's production would be brought back in one briefcase...But then, of course, it got bigger and bigger...Now, I'm not quite sure of some of these dates. I don't think anyone else came into this business until the thirties. I think Bali somehow came in...They made them before the war. Most of the people in
this business came in after the war.

Q: Yes. You're talking specifically about the bras.

A: I'm talking about the bra business. I'm not talking about Warner's, who were in the lingerie business, or anything like that. I'm talking just about the bra business. I think Bali was one of the early ones. They must have come in, say, around 1935-36.

Q: And there were some others, like Komar, who came...Who started on the Lower East Side, but they made half slips and...

A: Nothing to do with this. Anyway, the point is that Maidenform really--and I would say that my mother was largely responsible for this--this was...I don't know if you've looked up Jane Jacobs, she gives mother some credit for having created an industry. There was no industry here. We were the first ones to put in a piecework system. Originally, every brassiere was made...One sewing machine operator would make a whole brassiere. That's the way you make samples today, but that's not the way you....

Q: You do piece work...

A: Yes, you do piece work, and we put in piece work plus an incentive system. We also were unionized...Now, see, unfortunately, I don't know that date.

Q: I have a lot of things about things like the union and so on, which we'll get to, but if you'd like to continue....

A: See, originally, brassieres were soft little brassieres that were very much like some of the brassieres that you see around today, because they were in color. The big color at that time was tea rose, that was the basic color. White came in much later. Probably after the war it started to
be important. Actually, through the thirties, you started to see things like broadcloth, very fine broadcloths. And when we made satin brassieres, we used silk-satin. You could have a brassiere in silk-satin for a dollar. Do you believe it? Retail. We made garter belts... But that was also... They're back now.

Q: Could we just stop a little bit...? You came into this business...
You went to college. You went to Barnard, right? And you got out, according to this...

A: In '38.

Q: In '38. Did you join the business right away?
A: Yes.

Q: Uh huh. Had you always been interested?
A: I wasn't the least bit interested. You must realize, this is the height of the Depression. I only knew one thing: I did not want to be a schoolteacher, and that was it, but I had no particular desire to do anything, except that I had to work, because my mother worked, and I assumed that women worked. It didn't occur to me that maybe women didn't work. So they said, "Well, if you want to, come in." So I did.

Q: What was the level of the business at the point where you came in? What was your volume? What was your product mix?

A: The product mix was largely bras and garter belts. That was the main thing. But it was mostly bras. We were in the brassiere business for a long time. We haven't been in the lingerie business, really, that long. We went into it once and came out again. Basically bras... I can't tell you the volume. That I would have to look up. I haven't the vaguest idea what it
was when I came in. It was relatively...Well, it was the biggest brassiere business, because there was nobody else there. No competition. It was later on that...Actually, Lucien Warner, I think it was, who said that he hadn't realized that the bras were going to amount to anything, so they came into it fairly late. Meantime, there were many innovations, which were...My father was responsible for them. He really was the great designer in this industry.

Q: How did your mother and father split up their functions?
A: She did the business, and he did the creative work, which was a role reversal for that time...But he was really a great designer, and he came up with such things as inserts. You don't see that now so much. With stitched inserts. He had, very early, he had elastic shoulder straps, which we gave up and Warner's picked them up. And such things as an adjustable back, adjustable shoulder straps...A whole lot of things. Strapless brassieres.

Q: Had he had training in this in Europe, or over here?
A: Well, he hadn't. But what happened was he was doing contracting in dresses, so he knew about patterns and he worked it all out from scratch. Which was a pure creative job, right from the beginning.

Q: He developed his own technology.
A: He developed his own technology. He worked very hard. He was trying to make a seamless brassiere, a seamless molded brassiere. But given the fabrics of the time, he couldn't do it. He was trying to do it with nylon, and the nylon melted. The thing became stiff. But he really was the great creator in this particular industry.

All right. The industry gradually went to broadcloth because the pointed brassiere came in, and all these women wanted a lot of support and a lot of
point, and you can't get that with a soft fabric. For a long period it was
the broadcloth, almost a white broadcloth industry for a long time. After the
war, a lot of people came in--like Latex and...

Q: When did you move from 57th Street downtown? Could you tell
me that? When did the business move...?

A: The business went to 245 Fifth Avenue, and that must have
been in the late twenties. From 245 Fifth Avenue we went to 200 Madison
Avenue, and from 200 Madison Avenue we came here (90 Park Avenue), and we've
been here for 15 years. And we were on Madison Avenue for about the same length
of time.

Q: Because Madison Avenue really became the center didn't it?
A: Not for us. It's not the same thing. This is not what we
call a Madison Avenue House. Because we come from the brassiere industry,
which is a different thing. It's just not the same. It's not the same....
All the brassiere companies are much larger than the majority of the Madison
Avenue houses simply because of the number of sizes, and the fact that you
have to manufacture way in advance. I mean, we manufacture...We're manufact-
uring well before we've shown the first piece. So we have big inventories.

Q: Yes, you're a stock house.
A: Uh huh. So it's more like the shoe business...

Q: And like the shoe business, a run of sizes for you means
10 or 11...

A: That's a basic unit. But in those days we used to go up to
Size 54. In the early...After it became a slightly developed business, we'd go
up to Size 54.
Q: Starting at 32?

A: Yes...Starting at 30 even, or 32. This is interesting.

It was actually Warner's who invented the A, B, C idea. Before that, what we used to do is we had a different brassiere style for every figure. We had a little brassiere for teenagers which was called Adagio, and then the thing got bigger and bigger and bigger, so that the big brassiere, which had darts in it, would come in a Size 54. The little tiny brassiere, which was called Adagio, didn't. That only came in, say, a couple of sizes. Two, four, six--something like that. Each cup size was really a different design. And then Warner's came along and came up with the A, B, C idea, which caught hold, and then everybody started doing it, including us. At one point, I think this might have been in the fifties, I don't know, we came out with a sleeping bra, which had elastic shoulder straps. It was very pretty, lacy, successful. And then Warner's took the elastic shoulder strap and put it on daytime brassieres, for which I give them credit, and that's how the elastic shoulder strap, you know, became current.

Maidenform, right from the very beginning, was advertised. Almost from the very beginning. In the beginning we used to do these tiny little ads which would say something about brassieres and write to 36 West 57th Street, or whatever. And then we started putting in ads the first advertising agency was called Arthur Rosenberg & Company, and it had quarter page ads, line drawings. And then in 1949 (we're skipping ahead) we went from Arthur Rosenberg & Company to Norman, Craig & Kummell, and at that time we had 10 salesmen. That I know. Because one of the first things they said was you must increase your sales force, to have 100 just for the Maidenform bra line. We did increase it,
and they came up with the dream thing. At that time...Actually, my husband was in this business too. He was the advertising manager...

Q: He was the advertising manager. He was also a medical doctor. Did he practice medicine?

A: Yes, he did. Until he went into the army, and he was in the army for five years, and when he came out he didn't go back. He'd had it. He was in the medical corps. He was an ear-nose & throat man, and he decided he didn't want to go back to medicine, so he came into this business. In 1949, he was the Advertising Manager, and the agency came around...Well, they had a couple of campaigns and then they came around to the dream theme which he thought had great possibilities, and we used it for 20 years. It became famous all over the world.

Q: "I dreamed I went..."

A: That's right. I'll show you the ads if you like.

Q: Why don't you just mention a few of the themes.

A: Well..."I dreamed I was wanted," which was a very cute ad looking like a "Wanted" poster. "I dreamed I went to the moon"; "I dreamed I went shopping" was the first one. "I dreamed..." I mean, you name it. I'll show them to you. There's dozens of ads. It ran for about 20 years. It's one of the great campaigns of all time.

Q: Yes. And that lasted from '49...

A: From '49 to approximately '69. Then they gave it up, because it didn't seem to go with the sixties, you know. A little problem with the sixties. And at that point, we floundered for a couple of years, and
then we came up with this last campaign, which we have, which is quite successful.

Q: And which is still continuing.

A: And which is still continuing. Only, you never know how it will turn out. Basically, it's the same idea. It's presumably a modern version of the same basic theme.

Now. We are also an exporter. Our first export in the market was...Actually, it was Cuba. We exported in 1924. We started exporting then. And then very early on...As a matter of fact in '55--how many years ago is that? We exported to Puerto Rico. Puerto Rico was originally an export market for us. Gonzalez-Bodine, which is now celebrating its 100th anniversary in Puerto Rico, has records...They were asking us the other day. We didn't realize we had been selling to them for 55 years. As a matter of fact, the man who originally sold it to them, the Puerto Rican man, is still around. He's quite old, but he's still around. So we had gone on, and exported to as many as 100 countries. Right now, it's more like 60. We also have a few licensees.

Q: Now, that's very unusual, isn't it? Because in the garment industry, it's practically impossible to export. I mean, there are very few people who do. There are people who have licenses abroad, but between the duties charged in other countries, and so on, there has been very little exporting.

A: Well, we are the biggest exporters. Not the biggest as far as licensing is concerned, but in this industry, in this country...It's easier in bras. Actually, you have something more unique. Actually, the French are pretty good at exporting and so are the Italians, if you think about it.
Q: We import a great deal. We don't export.
A: Well, I think you're beginning to see it in Japan. I see things like Calvin Klein and...
Q: Those are licenses.
A: All right. Well, we tried...We prefer, frankly, exporting. Because it gives a lot of people work.
Q: Of course.
A: But, there are countries where you simply cannot, and we do have licensing arrangements in South America, a couple in Europe, and different places.
Q: Of course, that also goes hand in hand in some other industries, like the garment industry, with offshore production. Now what's your situation with regard to that?
A: We...Over half of our production, about half, is in Puerto Rico, which is not offshore. ... I know. I understand. And we're a union shop, and the ILG is in Puerto Rico too. Then we have...it's largely distribution now in Bayonne, New Jersey. We have a very small factory in Perth Amboy. We have a distribution facility in Edison, New Jersey; two factories in Princeton; one of them makes sleepwear and lingerie--daywear. And then we have, as I say, a number of factories in Puerto Rico, and we have a few offshore plants in the Caribbean. We are not in the Far East at all. But we have a few things in the Caribbean.
Q: To go back a little bit, in terms of things chronological--At what point did your parents retire or die or leave the business?
A: My father died in 1958. He did not....He had not retired.
He was 75. My mother had had a stroke in 1966, when she was 80 years old. But she was active. In fact, she was on a business trip when she had the stroke, which was really a massive thing, so she...She lived for some years, but she never really recovered. So she never retired either.

Q: So how did you advance in the ranks?
A: How did I do it? Well, when I first came in, I went to the factory, in Bayonne, and I served at a sewing machine. For a while.

Q: Had you ever sewn before?
A: No, and I haven't sewn since! I know. So there you are. I was not very good at it, I had to find somebody to rip out the stuff. But at least I learned what it is to sit at a sewing machine and sew. I know exactly what it, you know, feels like; what it means to do that kind of work. From sewing I went to what we call assorting. You know, after the patterns are cut they have to be put together. I don't know how much you know about...

Q: I know something.
A: All right. So I worked in assorting department for a while, and I loved that. I thought that was great fun. And then from there...I don't remember. Oh, yes. From there I worked on...We had a company paper...As a matter of fact, I started that company paper, called "The Maiden Forum," an in house publication. We also had a thing called "The Maidenform Mirror," which we ran for years. You may have seen a copy of it. We had volumes of it. It's a very good source of information, because it is chronological...

Q: What is it? A weekly paper?
A: It was a monthly. Now, "The Maidenform Mirror" went out to our customers. "The Maiden Forum" was for our workers. We stopped the
"Maidenform Mirror"...I don't know at what point....The "Maiden Forum" we stopped maybe 6-7-8 years ago, I don't know, and we just recently revived it. So that has some interesting things in it too.

So I worked on that for a while. Then I came to New York and I sat around and watched my mother, I guess. I worked in advertising and things like that. And then one day some of the executives came to me and asked me if I wouldn't like to be sort of a liaison person between the engineering department and the design department, because the way my father worked is he would go behind closed doors with the head of the design department and they would design something and no matter how long it took, they wouldn't let go of it. And when you have a fairly big business, things have to come out. So he wouldn't accept anybody, but they thought he would accept me. Which he did. And that's how I became involved with the design department and started to work there. Not designing, but, you know,...

Q: Do you have designers?
A: Yes. We have a lot of designers.

Q: All right. Now, at this point, you were still a bra company.
A: Yes.

Q: You had not yet gone into the other....
A: No. But it takes a lot of designing to get...In those days, it was all men. It was considered an engineering job, like building a bridge. Nowadays, of course, we have a lot of women designers because the look is different. It's all feminine and lacy, etc., etc. Anyway...So I started working with the designing department and it became one of my major functions, and I still deep in touch with the design department. It's something I love. I really
do. But there are a lot of other people around, because I have other things to do.

Q: Yes...You know, this business grew from zero to whatever it is today--well over $100 million...

A: That's right.

Q: And somewhere along the line there must have been a lot of managerial skills needed. How did all this come about?

A: Well, the first thing that happened was we brought in the engineers. We brought in the methods and standards. That was the first big change in the company. When we increased the sales force from 10, gradually on up to 100, that was another big change.

Q: I'm sorry. What was the first thing you mentioned? Methods and...

A: Methods and standards. In other words, putting in an incentive system. The piece work system. The incentive system. That required a lot of management. We gradually built up management. This is a very heavily...It's a very centralized business. It functions from the top right straight down. But, obviously, we have many, many people. We have financial people and manufacturing people and then engineers. This is an organization built up over the years, gradually, and it's fairly complex. Every factory has a manager; the manager reports to someone else. We have one man in Puerto Rico whom the Puerto Rican factories report to. He in turn reports to a man in our headquarters plant. So it's a fairly...Obviously it's not a one man operation. A one man operation couldn't exist like that. It took place gradually. There were certain key things, though. As, for example, the big change in the sales
force. So that now we have a National Sales Manager, four regional managers, district managers, salesmen. This is one of our great strengths. We have tremendous distribution.

Q: Now, are we still talking about...When do we start talking about some of the product mix diversification?

A: Okay. Basically we stayed a brassiere house for a long, long time. At some point we decided we would go into swimwear.

Q: I think it was about 1970.

A: 1970. So we went into the swimwear business. Well, we went into the swimwear business, and then somebody known noticed that swimwear salesmen only worked a short time, a short part of the year. So what would they do for the rest of the year? So, the next thing we know we buy a blue jeans factory...

Q: Excuse me. When you did swimwear, was it out of the same corporate facility...?

A: Yes. Yes, originally. And we had a separate factory in Puerto Rico.

Q: Then, as I say, they noticed that the salesmen didn't work all the time, so we had the brilliant idea, and we went into the sportswear business. We bought a blue jean factory in Puerto Rico, promptly took out all the blue jean machinery--which was a stroke of brilliance unparalleled in the...Oh, I guess it's not unparalleled...And started manufacturing sportswear. We had a fairly large sportswear business. And let me tell you, people were never less equipped to deal with Seventh Avenue phenomenon that we are. It's just not our thing. So we were in that for, I don't know, 5-6-7 years or something...
Q: Were you? As long as that?
A: I don't think...Maybe it wasn't as long as that. It seemed like it. And we got out. We were lucky...

Q: Did you attempt to do a sportswear business also from the same facility as, say, sales...
A: We had a separate factory. We had a showroom at 1407...the whole thing. It was not a rewarding experience in any way. I couldn't have been happier when we finally unloaded the whole thing, and got rid of it. As I say, we had a fairly respectable business, but it was not our dish of tea. It was a different kind of industry. And you have to know that business. So that was one diversification. Then we went out of that and then all of a sudden, what happened...The buyers in our department all started buying body suits. I don't know if you remember that. So, we have to import body suits. So we bought body suits. And that went on for a while, and that finally petered out. And then we had a lingerie... a group of...a brand...a pantie...I guess it wasn't a bikini at that time. And we made a hat...And we decided...It was a young group called "Perfections," I know it was before 1969, that's all I can tell you. Somewhere between...It was before 1969. This group...it was a very cute group...had a wide lace, so we made a bra, a pantie, contour bra, half slip, a short chemise...a chemise type slip with no pockets--which was a very young group...

Q: And a nightgown.
A: This was a complete coordinated group, including a nightgown, called "Perfections." As a matter of fact, we have just revived the name now. And that was another little flirt with the lingerie business. We made a
few...We made some junior lingerie, the whole thing went for a while, and then we dropped it. Because we were selling it in the bra department. Then, about five years ago, we decided to go into the pantie business. We decided, maybe, about seven years ago to go into the pantie business, eight years ago, and we have been very successful with the pantie business, but we approached it a little more intelligently. We went to buy a business first, and then decided not to. We decided that for the amount of money a going concern would cost us, we could do it ourselves and probably for less, which we have done.

Q: Oh..In other words, you have never really acquired. You have diversified internally.

A: Right. The only thing we ever acquired was our export business. The export business that ran our export business....The man in question died and we bought out the company. We've never bought anything else. So...

Q: If panties are part of what you call daywear....According to my records, you started that in 1978.

A: Yeah. I'm glad you have that date. So, that's been going along very nicely, and we have quite a nice panty business.

Then, after we were in the panty business for about two years, some of the buyers started saying, "Look, you can't just help yourself to the panty business. You've got to make some contribution to the lingerie business." Which I, frankly, was not very eager to do because...

Q: What do you consider lingerie, as opposed to....?

A: Half slips, full slips..Things like that. So I...Knowing the kind of business it is, knowing that there are some very good people in it; knowing that they have very good prices, etc., etc., I didn't see how we
possibly do it. Well, we came into it through the coordinate end. And we
have been quite successful. In other words, we have a bra called "Sweet
Nothings," which is satin and lace. It comes in four brassieres; there's a
garter belt; there's a half slip, there's a full slip, there's a chemise...All
coordinated. And the other thing...Something else is very important. Let me go
back a bit.

When all the brassieres were white broadcloth, a lot of them
were packaged. Then their...Warner's, I think it was, came along with the
hanging idea. Putting bras on hangers. Well, pretty soon, of course, if one
person does it, everybody's going to do it. So, everybody was hung--or most
people--and the department really looked like a laundry. There were all these
white brassieres hanging on the hangers, and the stores don't like that sort
of thing at all, as you no doubt know. Well, somebody started with a few
different colors. So, the things fed each other. Hanging brought about color,
and it worked very well, and it's been very good for the business. So we went
into color. Back into color. After all these years. Originally, we
started in color. So, we had gone very heavily into color and coordinates. And
that's been what we've been doing in the lingerie business, really, up to now.

Q: Incidentally...As you mention color of an earlier period
and color now, could we just talk for a second about retails of an earlier period,
and retails now? It's always interesting to know about the price structure.

A: Well, as I told you, we used to have six satin brassieres
for $1.

Q: A dollar at...?

A: Retail. And then the next big jump was when brassieres went
up to $1.50. We had a brassiere called "Alouette," which was...

Q: In the forties, or...?

A: Yes...That one lasted through the war. Almost to the end...
during the early forties. We had a number of combinations of broadcloth and satin. And gradually the price went up. The most famous brassiere of its time was Chansonette, which was a circular stitch brassiere. Which we made...I must have it down somewhere...I don't know how many millions and millions and millions. One of the best sellers throughout the world. We happen to know that a lot of our stores--or people in the Far East, for example--managed to survive during the war on that Chansonette stock.

Q: There is one style that you are recorded or reported to have sold 500,000 dozen of. Would that be it?

A: Oh, sure. That was probably the best seller of all time. Because the Circular stitch of this brassiere...It had a very peculiar shape, I must say. I never could understand its popularity. We finally discontinued it about two years ago, and we still have our Portuguese license and he still makes it, so occasionally if we get a request we fill it from Portugal.

Q: Very chic. Incidentally, you mentioned the war years. How did the war affect you? Did it affect your business?

A: What we did was...And then, of course, my husband was in the army so I was...I didn't work full time during the war. I was here and I was not here. He was stationed in New Jersey for a large part of the time, at a hospital down there. So I was in and out. I also had a baby running around. The business...You couldn't get a hold of fabric unless you manufactured for the war effort. Everything was on allocation. So you had a small allocation for retail...For your normal business, and then we manufactured bras for nurses and...
personnel.

Q: You did.
A: Yes.

Q: You had contracts.
A: We had contracts for that. In addition we made pigeon vests, would you believe it? It was fun. That thing was worked out by my father. Well, you can see one at F.I.T. In the exhibit...Is the exhibit still on? Well, in one of the cases, there is the pigeon vest that we manufactured during the war. And towards the end of the war we were manufacturing parachutes. Because that's what nylon was used for. It was all you could get.

We had plaid brassieres. We had a gingham brassiere...You pick up bits and pieces, any kind of fabric you could get your hands on to try to keep your business, to keep your business going.

Q: Because you were on allocation.
A: Yes.

....And of course it was a relatively small business to compare with what it is today. That's what we did there.

Q: Right. But after the war, you came back into the business full time, I assume.
A: Yes, yes.

Q: And continued to learn and to grow...
A: Right.

Q: And you became President
A: Well, my husband died and I became President

Q: Had he been President?
A: Yes, he had been President. And he... See, my mother became ill in 1966, so he took charge until 1968, when he died, unfortunately, and I've been President since 1968.

Q: Well, did he become President... Did he have managerial skills at all prior to his becoming President?

A: Yes, he did have managerial skills. But also, this is a family business.

Q: Yes. Right.

A: I make no bones about that. I wouldn't be where I am today if... I don't kid myself... If it weren't a family business. This business is so full of...

Q: Well, a family business doing $100 million is quite a big family business.

A: Yes, that's true. But it's still family... All I'm saying is that even in a business like this, I think that women have a long way to go. I don't have to go into that...

Q: Well, I think it's interesting. No, I'd like to hear about that...

A: Well, this is a very male dominated industry believe it or not. It's only recently that you have women designers coming in, in lingerie. And with lingerie, of course, women... There are a lot of women designers in that area, so that's how they started coming to brassieres too. But this whole industry is just plain male dominated. It's incredible. I don't fight anymore. I don't have to. But originally, I had to fight every inch of the way. In my business, I had to fight.

Q: Did that apply to sales staff as well?
A: We now have women sales people... We have some women...

Q: On the sales force.
A: Sure.

Q: How many divisions does the company consist of now?
A: Well, we have bras. We have... and coordinated panties. We call that one thing. We have lingerie, which is day wear. And we have sleepwear. So you have three divisions...

Q: That function relatively autonomously?
A: They're not really autonomous. Most separate is the sleepwear, or the panties, slightly. But we also do private label work and...

Q: All right. Let's talk about that a little bit. How long have you been doing private label?
A: Oh, for a long, long time.

Q: That was Sears and Penneys?
A: Yeah. Sears and Penneys. We also have a discount division, called Stellar... S-t-e-l-l-a-r... And that's fairly new, or relatively new. It's ten years old or something like that; maybe a little bit less. We make a separate line for the discount houses. But that's also part of the business. See, we're so heavily centralized that I can't really say... Nothing functions really separately.

Q: When I say autonomously, I don't mean autonomously in the sense that it functions without you, but that each division would have its own managerial team...
A: Well, it doesn't really. We have... It goes like this; it
really does. It's not like...We don't have a President of any of the...There's
one President in this company, and we have an Executive Vice President. And
then we have a number of Senior Vice Presidents. We have some Vice Presidents.
You know? We don't have many titles. Relatively few. It's not like an adver­tising agency. But the...For instance, the three people who manufacture...There
happens to be a new man in; the other man just retired. He is in control of
all the manufacturing, really, of all the manufacturing.

Q: So your Vice Presidents are functional people.
A: Yes.
Q: And therefore they don't have one division under them...
(cross conversation)...

A: Exactly. Right. We have a Marketing Vice President, and we
have the various departments. Inside the department, but we don't have a sep­arate company. We don't work like that. That was all the vogue at one point,
but somehow we managed to escape it.

Q: Let's talk a little bit about when you went public....What
did that involve?
A: We're not public.
Q: You're not public? You're privately held?
A: Uh huh.
Q: Still.
A: Yes.
Q: At $100 million, you're a pretty big private company.
A: Well, there are some bigger.
Q: Yes. Milliken.
A: I saw a list not so long ago, and I was quite impressed by the size of some of these companies.

Q: You've never been tempted to go public?

A: I've never been tempted. My mother was. But I wouldn't give you two cents for going public, personally.

Q: How did you feel about that and why?

A: I feel very strongly about it, because I think that the problem with going public is that all of a sudden all you think about is that bottom line, and...nothing creative. You can't do anything, you can't take any chances, you can't get anywhere. And, frankly, I think you make choices in this world. I'd rather be in control than have all those millions of dollars. That's all.

Q: How have you, throughout the years, financed this company.

A: Well, basically we have financed this company from what we have made. Now, obviously that's...We have bank loans, short term bank loans, and we have had insurance loans. But that's basically it. The only reason for going public, presumably, would be to get your money out, or to finance some big thing. But I don't believe in that. We run a very, very conservative company. Take no chances whatsoever. If we can't afford it, we don't do it. But, on the other hand, we pride ourselves on being a marketing company, so that advertising and marketing and things like that are very important to us.

Q: As part of that, let's talk about store relationships a little bit, because historically, it would appear that that particular aspect of business, in New York, has changed reasonably drastically. Could you talk
a little bit about that and what your store relationships used to be, and what the differences are between department stores and specialty stores and so on.

A: Yeah. Well...When we started, we were in very few places, because it was an unusual item, so we were in a few...We started out being in the department stores. As the business grew, and as it became a white broadcloth business, it also became something sort of hungry and you had to.... You know, businesses have to be fed. And we...There was a time...I don't know how many outlets we had--15,000-20,000--Specialty stores at that time controlled say 35% of the business. Nowadays, of course, they're down to 20% or less, because the branches, obviously have killed off the specialty stores.

When we were everywhere, including basements, for a while; the department stores of course, the upstairs departments, and many of them didn't want any part of us. At a certain point, we pulled out of that part and we decided to go a different route. Now, part of this was due to the fact (in perfect honesty) that the competition that was coming in--Playtex, specifically--had a wonderful deal on TV. I don't know if you're acquainted with this. And that meant that they were able to get all this free...free commercials. And we fought with them. We tried to compete with them. We even went a little bit on TV. We could not afford, as a private company, to spend our money the way they did, because we had to spend our money. They had this barter deal.

Q: I'm sorry. Would you explain the barter deal? I don't...

A: Spanel had picked up, during the war, all kinds of films. After the war, he exchanged those films and the use of the films to the new TV industry, in exchange for time. So he was able to drown the waves, the
air and TV waves--whatever you want to call it--with Playtex commercials. We had to pay our hard earned money to get the same time. At a certain point we decided we really didn't care to go that route. So we changed our business. Gradually. It was slowly. We left them with their packages and their TV advertising, and we decided to go a different route, which was the fashion route of the upstairs department. It's taken a long, long time but that's where we are. So that today, in Saks and Bloomingdale's and every place else, it's MaidenForm. There's no Maidenform in any basements anymore. But this was a long, hard pull. But that's what we decided to do.

We also didn't want to go to the Far East. We didn't want to keep competing on the lower level. We decided it really wasn't the kind of business we really wanted to be in, so we didn't want to compete with people like Exquisite Form, etc., etc., at the low end. Not with our brand name. And...I don't know if that answers your question about the department stores.

Q: Not with your brand name...But you said before that you do private label, and you do a special division for discounters.

A: Yes.

Q: And you don't care where they're put.

A: I couldn't care less. Then it doesn't matter. It isn't our name. It doesn't appear anywhere. Not the name of the company either.

Q: So that you're still able to sell without the use of a name, because your product has got to be a very good product.

A: Well, that's right, because...
Q: ...specialty stores and how the department stores had proliferated. Could we talk about...something about the input that retailers have had over the years, if they have had any, in your style and fashion presentation?

A: I think that we are relatively independent without being completely independent. We have a very large research department. We do a lot of research, we buy a lot research. The main input...

Q: I.M. ....?

A: No, not I.M. I'm talking about the big things. We have a very sophisticated...We are probably the most sophisticated in this industry, as far as research is concerned. Consumer research, I'm talking about. And I really think... We keep track of what the stores do. We keep track of what the consumer does. What she says she wants. It's very large. We spend a lot of money on that. The store input...as I told you before. Remember, that we were making pants, and they said, "You can't just make pants. You've got to make lingerie." Anyway. They sort of forced us into the lingerie business. For which I'm sort of grateful, because it turns out to be a very good business, for us. But we do not, for example...In sleepwear we show to buyers if we possibly can. It's a more fashion oriented segment of the business. Bras are not... They're fashionable looking, but it's never quite what buyers think it is. And because you manufacture so far in advance, you're sticking your neck out--you can't go by buyers opinions. First of all, we have 60 years of experience in the business. We have all this research. And, of course, we make mistakes. But basically, we're
the ones who have to stick with what we believe in and do the best we can. We market test and we wear test every product that we put out. Every brassiere and it's all...researched. We have a preference test and a wear test. And we have labs.

Q: I assume that when you do a first sample and then you duplicate, that your duplicates are also done in various sizes.

A: We don't do preference testing in various sizes, usually, because...we have a big brassiere or a big brassiere for big women, we might say give us a 36B or something like that...It's very difficult because you don't get big enough samples to try out every single size. And as popular as wire brassieres are, for instance, it's very hard to get a proper sampling of wire brassiere wearers. It's incredible but it's true. It's a little bit easier now than it was.

So, the store input, frankly, is minimal as far as bras are concerned. In sleepwear it's much more important. As far as lingerie is concerned, what you would want to get from the stores is, "Are you selling chemise length? Are you selling long ones? What do you anticipate?" The brassiere business is not a fashion business in the sense of being...Even coming in at the same time as dresses do. If you have strapless dresses, you do not have strapless brassieres that year. A year later you will have strapless brassieres. For the simple reason of the manufacturing time. The manufacturing cycle in our business--and that's fairly typical--is seven months. So...

Q: Seven months from when?

A: Start to finish. From the time you put it into the line. Now,
I'm not talking just designing, necessarily. But at seven months you decide...

Q: Distribution...

A: Yes. The whole works at seven months. So there has to be a lag...

Q: So that means that when you start to design it, you are even more than seven months, from the design....

A: Yes. If you decide to make it...It depends. Some things take longer. Seamless brassieres--which are the big thing in the industry right now--take much longer, because the technical problem of making molds. It takes much longer to produce a seamless brassiere in the beginning stages--there's a little bit less labor in it, but they're very complicated and difficult. So that's...

Q: And the people who developed those really need a high degree of technical skill, it would seem.

A: Um hum. But there are molders. We don't do all our own molding. Most people don't. We have some in-house molding, but...

Q: Molding is a process done outside by firms that...

A: ...that specialize in molding. Although we do some in-house molding.

Q: Where do those people, by the way, get their labor?

A: Where do they get their labels?

Q: Labor.

A: There's not too much labor...

Q: Oh, this is machine.

A: Machine. It's a machine process. You have a mold, a cone shaped mold and the fabric is stretched out, heated, and the whole thing is
pressed down on the mold and it keeps its shape, because it's polyester.

So, the basic point is that in this industry, fashion follows fashion. It is not a fashion leader, and it cannot be. It simply cannot possibly be, because of the manufacturing time and the cycle.

Speaking of cycles, we show two lines a year in the bra business and the panty business—November and May. But that normally, now, consists of about five brassieres in different colors...But it might be five brassieres but only say three brand new looking things. There've been times when we've had more; there've been times when we've had less. But that's about the norm. And in the sleepwear business, of course, there's five lines a year.

Q: Excuse me...For the bras...What would you think is the life span of the bra, which is really gaining acceptance? A good one?

A: Well, I told you our Chansonette was about 20 years.

Q: But that's extraordinary.

A: Now...Yes, I would expect a good brassiere to be five or six years old.

Q: Five or six.

A: Yes. Which is another advantage we have over the apparel business. The garment business. That's one thing that makes a big difference, in the way we deal with things. Why we can afford the inventories. On the other hand, if we made a mistake, we are stuck with the whole works. We don't go show it and then go manufacture it.

Q: Supposing you sell 500 stores, when they come in for one of your...

A: We sell many, many more than that...

Q: All right. But...How many? 10,000?
A: Yeah.

Q: All right. What...How many bras would you expect to sell, approximately, out of the initial order?

A: On an initial order? I can't do it that way?

Q: All right. I'm trying to see what role the reorder plays in your....

A: The reorder plays a big role. That's very important. This is a reorder business. If we don't get the reorders, we're not very happy. It's a big reorder business. We expect...On initial reorders...A good style would have a 4% reorder say after about six weeks or something like that. Although, we don't measure it anymore.... Incidentally, I couldn't say 15-10,000 anymore, because the branches are not sold individually. So it's many less... Than it used to be.

Anyway...We do expect a style to last, oh, five or six years at least. Some of them last longer, and some of them are no damn good and are just out. We stick our necks out much less than we used to. There was a time when we used to bring out 60,000 dozen of one style per season. We don't do that anymore. First of all we have a lot of colors, and second of all, we'd rather wait and see. We only have a certain amount of space in the store. You have to be very careful. You don't want to fill it up with something that's not a good seller. And it takes a while...

Q: Do you have stock taking units?

A: Yes. We're all computerized, you know. The computer reorders, etc., etc., You couldn't run this business without computers. I just thought you might be amused... or not amused, interested by the fact my mother and
David Dubinsky had a special relationship. It's very interesting, because they came from the same background. The same country. Same socialist thing, and one went one way and one went the other, but they were very good friends.

Q: By which you mean one went the union way, and one was a manufacturer...

A: They understood each other and we've often talked about it. I'll tell you a little anecdote which I thought was amusing. I don't know whether I should...I met Mr. Dubinsky after my mother died, and he says to me, "How do you do?" and I said, "You knew my mother." And he said, "Oh, yes. Yes, yes. I thought the world of your mother. Now tell me, what did she think of me?" And I said, "Oh, she thought the world of you too, Mr. Dubinsky." And he said, "Yeah, that's what I thought." I thought that was cute. But they really understood each other.

Okay. Now, I think I have to talk about...Let's talk about designers. The early designs--the broadcloth, etc., etc.,--were engineering, complicated feats apparently. In our industry we have designers; we have pattern makers, and we have graders. We have the three things. We're dealing in a very small area, and I have never ceased to marvel...

Q: Excuse me. You don't have cutters?

A: Oh, yes. But that's production. When I first really became responsible for the whole designing department--and it was my problem to get these lines out--it was...If my father wasn't there and I had to get these lines out, I couldn't see how, after I got the first one out, how I was going to get another one out in six months. You're dealing with such a small area. How on earth are you going to...? But I find that, twice a year, you somehow
manage. I guess they do in all businesses like this.

The engineering thing became less important in the sixties. In the sixties, we go back to the braless thing, which, of course, was the mania of the American press to some extent, because they're obsessed with bosoms. But the girdle disappeared and they didn't care to comment on it. Which was a personal thing of mine. You never read an article about how women don't wear girdles. All you ever read about was how come women don't wear bras. And that has remained. . . . But because women are physically more comfortable with a bra, they are physically less comfortable in a girdle. But, the nature of the bra changed in the sixties, and I really think we should take some special credit. Because, you know, we were worried about it, and all these constructed brassieres were going out, and somebody in the company—not myself—came up with the thing which we called Precious Little. Which was a little helanca brassiere with an elastic band. And we made it in a lot of colors and it really took off. It had a natural look. It was really this high, pointed bosom that was really being replaced by this natural line, and you couldn't tell if a woman was wearing a bra or not unless she was wearing something sheer. With that I think came the change in the way brassieres are designed, and I think this is what gave a lot of women who didn't have the technical background, possibly, a chance to get into this.

Incidentally, it is mostly...until recently we have usually trained our designers in how to make patterns and so forth. There's a lot of people, including young women, who have a lot of talent, but they don't necessarily know all the techniques, because it's not a very popular course at F.I.T. Of course they do lingerie and other things, but they all want to do
sportswear.

Q: When you were talking about designers for the bra collection, you didn't mention how many designers there are, so could you just go into that a little bit.

A: Yes. We have two design departments. We have a design department in Bayonne, New Jersey, which is our headquarters factory, and that's where all the problems are ironed out. If something is designed in New York, where we do have a design department, it is brought back to Bayonne for the final pattern work and grading. We have three designers in New York, who really spend all their time creating. And they also do work on lingerie. They do both. I think they're very talented.

In Bayonne we have five designers. Five bra and girdle (girdle nowadays meaning just panty girdle) and panty designers. We have one free-lance panty designer who is in New York, and at the moment we have one merchandiser and one designer in sleepwear. Sleepwear has been very complicated and difficult; we started with the Brooks line. Which was very...

Q: Donald Brooks?

A: Donald Brooks. He absolutely did the most gorgeous prints. It was a very expensive line and we got caught with that line just at the time of the '73-'74 recession. So the prices were wild. We had a $1,000 feather coat, for example, which we finally sold, but marked it $500. And we did have very beautiful things, but they were very expensive and that did not seem to work out. We have been through an awful lot of designers in sleepwear, there's no doubt about it. We have a very talented woman now. She's doing the entire line.

In panties, as I say, we have one in-house designer who perfects
all the patterns and when she comes up with something original we use it. And we have an outside, free lance designer who spends an awful lot of time with us. It's also a big color and fabric item. And, of course, we have a huge purchasing department, and various purchasing agents who have assignments to buy different fabrics for different products. They're not all doing the same thing. We have one person who buys lace, we have one who buys tricot, somebody else buys elastic.

Q: There's that much to cover? The markets are that...

A: Yes. Yes. Now, unfortunately there's an awful shrinking in this country. The elastic manufacturers, a lot of them are giving it up. A lot of people are giving up tricot. I'm rather unhappy about this. Some of them...The laces...in the lace area...such an expansion in lace in lingerie and sleepwear in the last few years that there are a lot of people going into it, and lace manufacturers have connections with French houses and Scandinavian houses so there's a greater availability of lace.

Q: It seemed to me that I heard from...I think it was Marion Sherwood...not long ago that there are a couple of big firms that have given up laces entirely as trims. I mean, really, the giant firms. That doesn't seem to be the case...

A: I wasn't talking about trim. I think that she...

Q: Yes, she was talking about trim.

A: Lace trim. It may be so. I don't know. I'm not quite sure what she means. But there have been a lot of people going out of various parts of the industry.
Q: Do you... Is there not a lot of Japanese fabric coming in to the market.

A: There is, but we don't have it.

Q: But you don't buy it.

A: No. We don't go Japanese... What you can get is not... The American fabrics, except for something like ultra-suede, are much, much better. We have very good tricots. The American tricots are very good. Of course, French laces are very beautiful. But American tricots, as far as I can see, are the best. And also there is cost to consider. We have not bought any Japanese fabrics, but let me tell you. If everybody goes out of business, we may be obliged to. It's very difficult to buy fabrics overseas; it's very unreliable. The time element adds to time problem. So I'm not enchanted by the notion.

Q: When you mentioned Mr. Dubinsky before it made me wonder... Where are you now in terms of the number of people you employ, or do you work with contractors apart from your plants?

A: We don't work with... We have occasionally had a small contracting effort in sleepwear, but, of course, we don't have enough people there and sometimes we get caught, you know. Something takes off. Basically we don't work with contractors, and we employ around 4,000 people.

Q: Is that the same as or more than or fewer than you might have employed 8 or 10 years ago?

A: It may be a few less, but that's largely because of the changing nature of the business.

Q: With the molded bras.
A: The molded bra and the...Almost everything that's made now actually has fewer hours of labor in it, because of the fashions. We don't have a complicated stitching and you don't have all of that. We used to have multi-needle...We used to have a 12 needle machine that we used now we use single needle machines. That's changed a lot. Big change.

Q: I'm sorry. I'm skipping around a lot too, but there are things I want to be sure that we cover. When you mentioned sales force before, you mentioned that you have about 100 sales people.

A: On the brand.

Q: On the brand. Do they travel? Are they located in the marts, like the Dallas mart and the Los Angeles mart...

A: They all travel; they have a territory, although a man who covers the big stores may not travel that much. The man in Detroit, he covers Hudson's, he wouldn't cover very much else, because that's a tremendous amount of work, and he might have one or two accounts. And he would not travel a lot. But it depends on what the area is. We have a man who's in Maine and New Hampshire, now he travels a fair amount. Or, a man who covers North Dakota and South Dakota and some other state--he would travel a lot. And they are generally located right in their territories. If they happen to be in an area where there is a mart--such as the Texas men--they will go to the mart, the Dallas market. And another one will go to the Atlanta market...

Q: How does that affect your....The number of people who come to you in the New York showroom? Have you seen a change in the traffic pattern?

A: Oh, yes. There's not as many, but we don't need to see them here. See, we're lucky. We don't depend on market, except in sleepwear,
where we depend on it much more. It makes...They don't leave their orders during market. It's impossible; the orders are too complicated. One order will take four or five hours to write. What they do is they come in, they look, they see what's new, they go to other people. They shop the market, but they don't write orders. And what they do is generally....We don't even bring in a large sales force anymore.

Q: Does that mean that you send a duplicate collection to every salesman?

A: Every salesman has his samples...We have enough samples, let me tell you, to...what a manufacturer would...I forget how many hundreds and hundreds of dozens. It's incredible.

Q: That has to be a very substantial part of the expense of putting together a collection.

A: It is. And it's very difficult to do. Because the colors haven't come in necessarily. Every man has his samples, yes.

Q: Which contributes to the lead time that you need to produce a collection.

A: Yes.

Q: Could you talk a little bit about the catalogue that you do, because you certainly were one of the earliest to do a catalogue. A, well, the original catalogue was maybe four pages and they just had simple line drawings. The same ones we used in the ads. Nowadays we still have drawings, because I don't particularly like...I prefer that to photography, somehow. Because unless you get a great glamorous picture, you'd just as soon use
drawings in the catalogue. I don't know if you've seen a recent catalogue.

Q: I saw one in the file at F.I.T. They have one, which is kind of interesting to see.

How much of the business that you do is represented by the catalogue? Do you get a lot of volume from that?

A: What do you mean...? Store catalogues?

Q: No, I mean what you yourself have...

A: Oh sure, that's a means of getting business. The store catalogue, the catalogue that we use is simply so that if the buyer comes in, it's a reference for her. We don't use it as a selling tool.

Q: I see...You just give each buyer a catalogue.

A: As I say, it's a reference book, which is good for six months.

Q: You raised the question of store catalogues. Do you contribute to those?

A: Yes, we do have some. We don't have...Obviously we have co-op advertising. Probably a lot less than some companies, because we're very consumer advertising oriented, if you will. We feel that's important, what the consumer demands. You can be forgotten pretty quickly. As a brand, we believe in national advertising.

Q: And do you do most of your advertising....Most of your advertising is magazine advertising, as I recall.

A: Yes. We advertise in a few newspapers and do some photos at various times, and co-op advertising.

Q: Could we talk a little about how you feel about young people coming into the industry, and how they should do it?
A: Well, we have a lot of young people. We have a lot of marketing MBAs. They have, we think, great opportunities. They go into various areas—product development, marketing. As I say, we have a lot of research. And different things. And we use it almost as a pool. When we have some particular job...We have one young woman who came in as a marketing MBA from Columbia, and she has had a very interesting career with us. She worked first directly in marketing doing research. She even learned how to sew. She learned how to be a sewing supervisor. She was down in one of the islands in the Caribbean doing that. She came back. She is now working on budgets. And she happens to be a rather extraordinary young woman. I would say she's very bright and I think this is a great opportunity. But there are various things. An MBA in marketing is a useful tool. Of course, now, that's becoming a little overused degree at the moment. I think anybody with any designing talent has good possibilities. It's a good industry for designers. And I think that merchandising, some kind of a background in merchandising, is quite useful. Some store experience is an awfully good thing to have, too. I don't think you...I think it's a good thing to go to a manufacturer with store experience and customer experience, consumer experience.

Q: And one final question: How do you feel about the succession in this business? Here you are, a privately owned company, still. What will happen to it, one day, when you retire?

A: Well, I do have some family in it, and there are an awful lot of people in this company that I think are perfectly able to...It's an organization, it's not a one man thing. And I think they can very well go on.
And I hope my family will continue having interest in it.

Q: You have two daughters...
A: I have two daughters who have children. So even if they're not here themselves...

Q: Is either of your daughters in the business now?
A: No, but I have one son-in-law in the business.

Q: And what does he do?
A: He happens to be in charge of sleepwear.

Q: The most difficult division. Thank you very much. It's all been very helpful and very useful.
Transcripts housed in Special Collections:

1. No photocopying without written permission from the oral author or his designee. The Director of the Library will furnish addresses; the reader must write for permissions.

2. Written permission is needed to cite or quote from a transcript for publication. The user must send the Library Director the pertinent pages of final draft; the Director will assist in obtaining the final permission. The form of citation normally used is: "The Reminiscences of _______, (dates), pages _______ in the Oral History Collection of The Fashion Institute of Technology." No fees will be charged for published use. User is asked to furnish Oral History Program with a copy of the published work.

3. In order to see PERMISSION REQUIRED or CLOSED memoirs, the reader must obtain the written permission of the oral author or his designee. Contact the Library Director for addresses. The reader writes for permissions. Written permission if obtained must be presented when the reader visits.