ORAL HISTORY PROJECT OF THE FASHION INDUSTRIES

FASHION INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

EVE STILLMAN
PRESIDENT
EVE STILLMAN, INC.

THE FASHION INDUSTRY LEADERS

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INTERVIEWED BY
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Eve Stillman is a recognized fashion force in the intimate apparel industry. She entered the industry in 1943, joining the firm started by her husband. The firm then made low-priced, very middle-of-the-road merchandise.

Once Eve Stillman took over the responsibility of the firm, she made it into a high fashion firm, with originality and creativity of designs a major criterion.

Today, this entrepreneurial, privately owned firm continues strongly. Succession has been planned and a new management team is being trained.
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Q: Eve, would you be good enough to start your story by telling us where and when you were born, and tell us about your childhood and your upbringing.

A: Well, I was born September 1st, 1905, in New York, on 81st Street and 5th Avenue in Brooklyn. My parents were Russians immigrants. My mother was a dressmaker to the royal family in Europe, and came here when she was 18 years old. My father was her teacher. He was a true intellectual—socialist, atheist, omniverous reader, loved music. Tears come to my eyes when I speak of them. And the beautiful, beautiful home life that I had.

I am a twin. I have a twin sister. My mother had four girls; two sets of twins, and two boys. We were six children. My father, when he came to this country, struggled, as all immigrants do. We always had a comfortable home. He was a builder, in real estate. We...Mother struggled very hard. Our standards were always high. And so I more or less inherited that. And while we were just middle class—I would say almost lower middle class—we were never in need of anything. My parents believed in education and struggle and hard work. And all of us have achieved something in life.

I did without many, many things I wanted. I wanted so much to learn, to achieve; to have the better life, that I saw around me. Because we lived in a better community. It was in Seagate that I spent my childhood, and most of the homes were beautiful and the people there were very comfortable.

Q: Was this in the summertime?

A: No. I lived there until I was eighteen years old.

Q: So 81st Street and 5th Avenue isn't...
A: Well, I was born there, and then we went out to Seagate for the summer and then decided...my father decided this was where he wanted to live. He loved the country. My mother worked very hard so we could manage to have a nice home. And all the clothes we had, everything we wore, were made by my mother. And so she...We were all extremely well dressed, especially...I was, because I loved beautiful clothes. I would go to Fifth Avenue to the very fine stores and look at all the beautiful...the most expensive...And then my mother would come with me, she would copy it, and I continue to do it exactly that way today.

Q: Had your mother had any special training, by the way?

A: Oh, yes. My mother was a trained dressmaker. She came from Russia with the most beautiful clothes. As I speak, I visualize some of the things that she made. Those wonderful little satin aprons with all the ribbons. And late at night, until 1-2:00 in the morning, she would sew and make clothes for us. People thought we were much more comfortable than we were. And when I went to business, everybody thought I was a wealthy girl, because I can still remember all the outfits I had. Of all the four girls, I would say that I loved and demanded more than anyone else in the family. My mother had to work so much harder to please me and make the things I wanted.

I graduated High School and went to Wall Street as a secretary to a top executive of Standard Oil of New Jersey, and would always walk, go along Fifth Avenue, would always look at my boss and say, "Someday I want that life. I want that kind of background." And then I went on to Wall Street, to a brokerage firm called Robert Goodbody & Co., and I was...

Q: Would you spell Goodbody?
A: Hah?
Q: Would you spell Goodbody?
A: G-o-o-d-b-o-d-y & Company. And I was secretary to one of the top executives. And at some country place I met my husband, who was a manufacturer of lingerie, a business man. We were not business people. I have one brother who was a violinist in the Philharmonic. I have another brother who's an attorney. So I knew nothing about business. I just worked, came home, contributed to the house, and used the rest for my clothes and my holidays. But I always wanted more, and wanted to achieve more.

I never went to Europe. I never traveled extensively. It...
In those days, you had to be wealthy to do that. I then met my husband and married him and immediately retired and raised a family. I didn't marry very young. I was about 27-28 when I got married. And my husband went into business in the year 1929, so when I...

Q: What was his name?
A: Harry Stillman. We belonged to a country club. We had a beautiful apartment on the Drive. I had two children. A nurse, a maid, and I thought my life was just perfect. But one day, which was Thanksgiving the accountant called me and said he'd like to have lunch with me. This was during the war...

Q: The Second World War.
A: The Second World War. It was just about over. And he bought out his partner, who said, "This industry is going to be another rat race. I don't want to continue in it."

Q: Your husband bought out his partner.
A: Yes. That's right. It was low end; more or less sold to basements. When I...

Q: Excuse me. They made lingerie, too.

A: Yes. They made lingerie. Just nightgowns. Very inexpensive. And when I would try to help, my husband would say, "You let me run the business. You run the house."

Q: So you really had nothing to do with it.

A: Nothing to do with it. Nothing to do with it whatsoever. I came downtown to have lunch with the accountant, and he said, "I don't know how to tell you this, but your husband is out of business. His business has been going down since the war is over. When he traveled, and his partner was in production, they made a lot of money. They've given most of it back. It's...I can't even get a loan with the plant." I looked at my husband, and I said, "How could you do this without telling me? What kind of a woman do you think you're married to?" He said, "Oh, he's exaggerating." He said, "I'm not exaggerating. Now you, Eve..." He knew me, you see. He knew me from the club. He was a member of our country club. "Now you, Eve. You get down there and you run the business..."

Q: Where was the business at that point?

A: The business was at 33 E. 33rd Street. "You go down there and you run the business. You, Harry, get out on the road and begin to sell. Like you always did."

Well, I went down. I was a social butterfly, but now I worked. I did everything. I just worked from nerves and instinct.

Q: Excuse me. At this point you were about 38, right?

A: That's right. Exactly. Prior to...My husband went on the
road, and he had lost all his contacts, and he could not do it.

Q: Excuse me. Go back a little bit. When you said he had lost all his contacts... He had stopped going out, he was no longer taking care of the sales?

A: Yes. Throughout the war he never went on the road. We never had enough goods to sell, you know. There was an allotment of goods. And now he tried to come back, but he had lost all his contacts. He lost all his friends. And I knew nothing about this business, but I knew I had to survive. I was taking... supporting my mother. I had a widowed... My twin was widowed, and she was working here. My children were going to Dalton. I said, "I'm not changing my life style. I'll just make it." And it was hard work, determination, great curiosity... I walked the streets and covered every shop; every nook and corner to learn how a nightgown was made. I went to every store. I opened up accounts. Having worked for the Chief Statistician at Robert Goodbody, I could read a financial statement, and I knew that we were in a very bad way. I... somehow or other managed to survive. But always in the back of my head I said to myself, "If I could get someone to make petticoats, (because Anne Fogarty at that time was doing the full skirts; that was the rage)... that would hold up and stand out; a fabric that would not wilt, and make a connection on the West Side, I think that I could reach the stores. The better stores."

Q: What did you mean by a "connection on the West Side"?

A: Well, if I could connect with a designer. I had said to my accountant... I knew that Chevette, which was a lingerie firm (the Parnisses were part of that firm), prior to that one winter we were...
Q: Which Parnis do you mean?
A: Mollie Parnis' nephew....she is an aunt to Neal Hochman.
And his mother was in lingerie, and she was making the full petticoat, because his aunt had said to me--Gerry Parnis, when I met her--"My sister just gave me a beautiful silver set because I told her what to make in the petticoat." And on the way back to the hotel....to the house, I said to my husband, "Do you make petticoats?" And he said, "No, we're not known for it." I said, "You should make everything that sells."

That stayed in my mind, and I said to myself--because the next year this catastrophe happened to me--Never give up. Always say, "I can make it." I asked my accountant, and he said, "I'll try." I said, "Get me Pauline Trigere. Get me some designer, and I'll pay 5% royalty. So I know the silhouette." Well, he did nothing about it. And so...

Q: Was your accountant also acting in a way as a business advisor?
A: Yes, he was. Yes, he was. I was very close to him. Very close to him. He got credit for me when I couldn't get it. He believed in me. Immediately the business turned around. Because...It didn't make money because I only made what I loved. You can't always make what you love and say, "Don't figure it. Don't figure it. Just put it there. Give it the better lace!" and come out at the end of the year. It takes years to learn that you must know how to do the most beautiful, that which you are most proud of, but also survive. And that takes years. Because if you're truly a perfectionist, and you're creative, it's so hard to compromise. Even today, I give much more than anyone else at better prices. I want to be so good; I even want to be the best price wise.
Anyhow, getting back to that... The business turned around. I began to make money. I traveled all the way out to Albany where our factory was late at night. I piled up my car with piece goods so I could get... never said no. Took anything I could possibly... Any order I could possibly get. Bought fabric way over my head, and then couldn't pay the bills. I never thought about it. I must do it. I must do it. And then I decided to go to Europe.

Q: I think I'd like to hold for just a moment, before you start talking about Europe. Because I think it would be interesting if you could tell us the status of that business when you came into it. That is to say, because obviously it's changed a great deal since then. First of all, how was the business set up? Who did what in the business? Who did administration? Who did the selling?

A: Before I came.

Q: Right.

A: My husband did it all.

Q: And his partner did what?

A: Well, his partner did all the production and my husband did the selling, when they were set up. My husband was a very good salesman.

Q: And also, I assume, then, the merchandising....

A: They did it together. It was a small business. And the war...I would say it was a war baby, as they put the expression at that time. He did well because he went in just before the war, and then the war came along, and even though he was a newcomer, and he covered the entire country--their overhead was very small--they began to make money.
Q: They didn't use a designer I assume.
A: No.
Q: How did they get what they made?
A: They'd go to stores and they'd just knock off what they saw. Which is what people do to me today.
Q: Sure. Ah...
A: It's a business that doesn't exist today. It's an entirely new business. We don't sell anybody, any of the accounts he sold. Not a single one. It's "Eve Stillman" and has an entirely different image.
Q: I'm sorry. I didn't mean to interrupt you, I just wanted to make sure that we had that on the record...You said you started going to Europe.
A: I decided I'd like to go to Europe and see how the greats work. And I also wanted to see Europe. And I guess when I was younger I never thought...I was never too practical. "Can I afford it?" That never entered my mind. If I could do it, I did it. Somehow or other I survived. Never borrowed. Always paid back. But the desire was stronger than the practicalness of it. I think young people are that way. But there was a salesman coming in from Harper's Bazaar to sell me space, and I asked him would he give me a letter to Marie-Louise Bousquet in Paris, so that I would know how to...somebody could take me around.
Q: About what year was this?
A: Well, Anne Fogarty was at her height 25 years ago.
Q: Well, 25 years ago would be 1957, so that you're saying it was much after Dior, and....
A: Oh, yes. It was after Dior. Oh, yes. Because I remember I had a mink coat with square shoulders and I rounded the shoulders, and I was still at home at the time; just about round Dior. But I was in business about three years when I decided to go to Europe...

Q: All right. Because, you see, just to get the dates on this ...Dior's new look was in '47; Balenciaga chemise, really, basically, was mid '50s, so where did you fit into...

A: Around the mid-'50s. Around the mid-'50s. And Anne Fogarty was at her height in the mid-'50s. About 27 years ago. I...He gave me a letter of introduction, and he signed it, "Mr. Drake." I thought he was Mr. Drake. So that when I...I went to Europe...And I remember I had never gone to Europe, so that when I was playing golf with a very wealthy woman I said, "How do you go about making arrangements?" And she said, "Well, just go to the American Express and get my agent." And I said, "I'd like a trip like Mr. and Mrs. Landsner," and, of course, I had a trip that was upper-lower deck, and I stayed at the Crillon and had a suite...I didn't realize that there was any other way. That's incidental to the story.

Marie-Louise Bousquet was marvelous to me. She said, "Well, an American manufacturer. My heavens, she must be rich. She must be successful. So..." The French are very much impressed with that. She took me to Balenciaga. She took me to Givenchy. She took me to see some small makers. She showed me Paris. I went to her open house on Thursdays; we became very good friends. But when I came home I realized there was nothing there that I could take from, as it was quality workmanship and fine silhouettes. But on the way back I opened up Life Magazine and it said, "Anne Fogarty loves petticoats." In the meantime...
Q: Anne Fogarty loves...?
A: Petticoats.

Q: Petticoats. Oh...
A: Remember, she had four and five layers of petticoats. Prior to that, I said to myself, "How can I find the type of petticoats they make in the musicals, you know, in the different shows." And I went to Seventh Avenue, in the notions stores, and they showed me what they do; what they sell, for these big full petticoats. It was a wide fabric that Johnson & Johnson, the pharmaceutical people, made. And it was nylon so you could wash it, and it just never wilted. It just stood out. I took a few yards, because it was very expensive, and made the petticoat. I couldn't sell it in the showroom because people didn't understand it.

Q: You say people didn't understand petticoats?
A: No. They didn't understand. They just said, "Well, what is...?" Even my husband said, "What kind of monstrosity is this?" And I said, "It answers a purpose." Sell it. We couldn't. They would buy it here and there for windows. So I thought, "Well, now, I'm going to contact Anne Fogarty." I was very familiar with her clothes. I called her on the phone and I said, "Mr. Drake referred me to you. I have some petticoats that he thinks you would be interested in." Well, Mr. Drake was like Sesame open the door. I really thought this man was Mr. Drake. I didn't realize that a publisher would not also come and sell space. I walked in and she took me right over to her boss, and said, "This is Eve Stillman, sent over by Mr. Drake. These are her petticoats." And he said, "What do you think of them?" And she said, "I think they're fabulous." And he said, "Fine. Let's tie up
Well, he wanted a big royalty. I was just struggling, and whatever he wanted I gave him. And that was the beginning of Fifth Avenue and all the stores and my recognition as a firm--Eve Stillman, and the quality that I made. I was with Anne Fogarty for about three years, until the petticoats just dropped. And then we tried lingerie, and it was a tremendous success story. From a half a million we went to $2 million, in those days. I didn't...I was just like a movie star, making it over night. I didn't know how to make money. We were so low end that I couldn't understand how I could sell a petticoat that's going to sell for $20, and that's what they sold for in those days. So I never figured it right. But the whole world wanted that petticoat. I couldn't get credit, and Dorothy Shaver of Lord & Taylor called Johnson & Johnson and said good for me, because she wanted those petticoats. It was nothing for them to write an order of $25,000-$40,000 on those petticoats. We made a whole series of petticoats. One window would be Anne Fogarty, and the next window would be the petticoats. I would say that was a streak of luck. You must have luck with everything you do. Luck plays a big part. To be there at the right time. To happen to make the connection with the right person.

Q: To recognize the right person...That is really apart from the luck. I mean, you recognized...

A: But I knew so little about the industry that I didn't understand that it could be this important, and that she could be...She was, I guess, the number one name for about two or three years.

Q: Now, was there an Eve Stillman collection apart from....lingerie
collections...apart from hers? Or was that the entire business?

A: We...I continued the Eve Stillman in the moderate priced lingerie. That I couldn't sell the better stores. I just sold them my petticoats. But I was in. I knew them. They liked me. They saw my possibilities. They told me they thought I was very creative. Anne Fogarty just depended on me entirely. I didn't know I was creative. I could always sew. I loved beautiful things, and I always designed my own clothes. But I never had a formal education. I never went to designing school. I thought without that....Whenever I made a collection, I would go away that day, and a few people would look at it and say, "Well, what kind of a collection is this?"

Q: Did you sketch and then have a pattern maker do you models?

A: I'm not a good sketcher. I can just make a croquis. I can't make a beautiful sketch. I think I'm better now than I was. I had in those days...You got a dressmaker...We didn't have F.I.T., the skilled girls that we have today. How fortunate the young people are today where they can get the assistance that they need. So that you hired these foreign women who could cut and drape and I had a foreign woman, a dressmaker, and together we made everything.

Q: Did she work on the premises? With you?

A: She worked right on the premises with me. I would say that... I didn't follow the industry because I didn't like the standard of the quality. I only wanted to do the most beautiful things. No one ever, ever paid $2.50 a yard for a fabric in our industry. Our industry is price. I paid $2.50 for that wholesale. I paid $1.50 for dacron and cotton and introduced it in this market. I still am the innovator. I introduced all the polyester satin from
Japan. Nobody ever bought that kind of fabric. Today the whole market has it. I bought...I started Manila 25 years ago; 27 years ago....

Q: You started what?
A: I went to Manila. On that trip to Europe...That's why one must, if they want to achieve anything, do what their impulses tell them. I saw the most beautiful lingerie in Italy, and I said, "Oh, I must make this." I tried to do it in Italy, but there was a language barrier. And one day I walked into a restaurant and met a man and he said to me, "Miss Stillman, may I speak to you a moment? Years ago we made the 'Yolande' lingerie in Manila, and then after the war was on we had to close shop. Would you be interested in making lingerie with us again?" "Oh," I said, "That was the most beautiful lingerie..." It was the only silk lingerie in the industry. "Of course."
"Come up and we'll start."

Q: What was his name? Do you remember?
A: South Seas Trading.
Q: South Seas Trading.
A: He was an Oriental who sold the labor in Manila to American makers, and he would give you the labor, and he was a perfectionist; an artist. He taught me so much. He said, "Make it the most beautiful." And I started very small, and he was criticized for.."Why do you want to bother with the kind of volume she can..." And he said, "Because that girl has something. Her designs are beautiful. They're quality, and anybody can wear them, of any age." And he stood with me. I stayed with him for many years, but had to stop working with him because he tried to dominate the whole situation. If I needed goods and I wanted it on time for an ad, he would not do it. He would say, "You have to wait. They'll
wait for it." We just couldn't work together.

Q: How long did the association last?

A: I was with him for about ten years, and then when I had the difficulty...

Q: In the sixties or...?

A: Huh?

Q: Through the sixties, or mid-fifties on?

A: No... I'm only with... No, no, no, no... We had our big plant in Albany, so for many years we did our own work. Then when I went on to Europe and decided that I was going to work with Mr. Liperts of South Seas, I still continued with my plant. I didn't know how it would work out.

Q: I'm sorry, how do you spell Mr. Liperts?

A: L-i-p-e-r-t-s. Great man. He's very old today, but still continues. He's 89, and he still runs his plant, and works for other people in our industry. I don't work with him anymore. But I made it possible for him to continue, because other people followed up on it, in a small way. The person... The innovator always gets most of the business. Other people copy you, but it isn't... They haven't got the feeling you have. The need that comes from within. Which makes such a difference when you produce the product. I had a great difficulty...

Q: I'm sorry. But what were the years when you did the Yolande?

A: Well, it's... I would say... 19--... In the sixties. You're right. 1962, 1963, when nobody dared go there. I'm that way even now. If I want to do something, I don't look into it so thoroughly that it becomes dan-
gerous. Because nothing is positive...You must take a chance. If you're unhappy at your job, you must change. You must take that chance. I have a twin sister who was just the opposite of me. She never will make a change, so she's never accomplished anything. You must not be afraid. The whole world is waiting for you. And with every change you make you bring something that you have. When I had this difficulty...When I couldn't work in Italy and I started to work in Manila, it was a struggle even getting that going, because it was new, different, and people didn't accept it. It takes a great deal of hard work, energy, need--need is very important; financial need--to stay with a thing, even though it doesn't seem to grow. It doesn't grow but you manage to live by it, and that's incentive enough.

Q: Eve, tell me about your husband. He died....
A: My husband died only three years ago.
Q: Oh, just three years ago.
A: But he moved away from it altogether, and he did other things. I took over completely, because he didn't understand this kind of creativity and quality...

Q: So that he left this business about what year?
A: He didn't leave it. He stayed...He sold. He watched the production. He...I don't like to say it, but he became a minor part of the business, because he said, "I don't understand this kind of business that you're doing, but you seem to be doing well. You seem to be making money. We'll continue with it." But I would say that I took...I understand every phase of this business. If I had to get merchandise out of the factory--we have a factory, also, on the premises--it wasn't anything for me to carry the bundles
from one machine to the other. I didn't hesitate or think twice. If I had to take a box of samples over to, even Anne Fogarty, I couldn't get a cab, I'd walk right across to Seventh Avenue, and sometimes I didn't want to spend the money for a cab. Nothing was beneath me. Nothing was beneath me when I worked in Wall Street. If my boss asked me to clean the closet with the stationery, I did it, so glad that I could do something to show my boss that I can. I don't understand the attitude of people today. You learn from everything. Whatever you do you learn from. Something...You take something away, no matter how menial it is. But Europe inspired me. Fashion inspired me. Need inspired me. Need to live well was an inspiration. And...I love it. I love it. I love it more and more as the years go on. And believe me, it was blood, sweat, and tears.

Q: I'm sure...

A: And more than once I thought it was over. But if you continue to fight, and you don't take on too much help--try to learn to do everything yourself--you will always survive.

Q: You said that the Anne Fogarty licensing arrangement lasted about three years.

A: That's right.

Q: Okay. What happened after that?

A: Well, it was...One day I sent Mr. Kalish $20 one month and he called and said, "You can't have Anne Fogarty for $20." And I said, "Well, the petticoats are not selling anymore, and that's all I sold." And he said, "Well, I want a $20,000 guarantee a year or you can't have the licensing." I said, "Well, it's 4th of July. I'm going away for a week. I'll let you know
when I get back." And Mr. . . .

Q: You said you were going way for a week and...

A: He said, "Sure, you can wait." That week I thought about it. And my whole business was Anne Fogarty petticoats. The other was very small, because when I had started with Anne Fogarty I was doing about $400,000. When I was with Anne Fogarty I was doing over $2 million. I called Dorothy Shaver and asked if I could meet with her and she said, "You talk to Mr. Dawley," who was then Vice President. I went to see Mr. Dawley, and I told him the story, and I said, "I can't give them $20,000. I don't earn that at the end of the year." He said, "Are you happy with Mr. Kalish?" And I said, "No. I think he wants my business." And he said, "Then what's the question? By all means, go out completely on your own." And I said to him, "Would you buy my lingerie if I... If it was Eve Stillman?" He said, "Of course. We did very well with your things. You made them. You designed them. We know that. The product is good. You try it." And I would say that Lord & Taylor--Dorothy Shaver and Mr. Dawley--supported me all the way. They are still a very, very strong resource. I have a customer there, because I feel that I'm almost part of that store. I would sit in on all the meetings for the windows. They supported my lingerie. And in those years, if you had Lord & Taylor, you had the whole country. It was the most prestigious store in America. If you sold Lord & Taylor, Saks had to buy from you; Bonwit's had to buy from you. So I would say it was a great struggle, but a little by little I survived, and then when I went on to Manila, never, never for one moment relaxing; never saying, "Well, I've got it. What more can I do that's better? What more can I do that's better?" And it just grew and grew. And
I would say that it's only the last ten years that I really feel that I'm recognized and have made any money. Up till that time, I just managed to make a comfortable living. It takes years. Some people make it very fast, but then they don't hold it. I'm in business now 30 years; over 30 years. And I think it will be here as long as I live, and I hope it will go on. So that there's a compensation for a slow growth, as there is to...Do you agree?

Q: Yes.

A: Today I am in an innovator in this industry. Almost everything that's new comes through me. I would say that Manila is a great resource because anything I want to make can be made there. And so I do the things I love. I do hand embroidery. Fine tucking. Beautiful materials. All kinds of appliques, hand smocking. That which could not be done here at any price; we do not have that handicraft. And now, at this time of my career, I feel that what I've been doing all these years is still good, but you have to move into new directions. Lingerie today is an entirely different...is entirely different in a woman's wardrobe. The new freedom that women have; the lack of the inhibitions that years ago....The intimacy of the man and woman. Women want beautiful, sexy lingerie. It's an important part of their wardrobe. It doesn't mean anything to sell a robe and gown that's $150. You sell it in volume. I had one set this year that sold for $200 and I sold 6,000 sets. I couldn't deliver it, because it had everything that a woman wanted. It was beautiful. It was satiny. Lacy. Seductive. Easy to wear. Beautiful colors. Pink and blue is not important. That's only the classic. We use that for our classic lingerie. But we have a very, very large collection of couture lingerie.
Whereas years ago it would be one or two pieces, an a gown for $25, was like a gown today for $200....a gown and robe for $250. Or $75. And this is very, very beautiful. Women do not hesitate to buy it. It has become an industry where you can achieve a great deal of success, financially, and a great deal of recognition creatively. I love my work. I never dreamed I'd achieve all this, and I'm a wealthy woman today. And I like it. I like money. It gives you a great sense of security. It makes you independent. You also can help so many people who are in need, which is a wonderful thing. It weakens your children...You can't help that. My daughter will never be as strong as I am, because she didn't have to fight as I did. But as I look back at my career, I wouldn't want it any other way. And I say that the same formula to achieve real success is today exactly what it was years ago. A great curiosity, hard work, willing to do anything that's necessary. Willing to struggle. And a gift that God gives you, that school can't give you. Taste, creativity...School doesn't give you that. I've tried so many students. I cannot get anyone to be creative. The desire isn't there. I've now decided that...I have many, many students from F.I.T. But they stay at the table. They'll never come up with an idea...Or they'll never say...They don't dress. They don't go to the stores. They don't have the curiosity. They have the skills. What are we going to do to create curiosity in those students? If I give my Assistants L'Officiel or Vogue and say "Look at it, there's some wonderful ideas there." They'll look at it, and then never make a comment. And I say, "Go out to the stores...Why don't you go out to the stores and tell me what you saw that you liked. There's always something that talks to you." They come back and don't even follow through. They have
no desire... They think it just comes. It doesn't come. It's got to be created through curiosity. Where is that curiosity in young people? Tell me that, Mildred. Where is it today?

Q: Could we talk a little bit about what you've done with licensing since the Anne Fogarty days, because you were one of the very early people to act as a licensor. What happened after that? Whom have you done since?

A: Licensers sort of died after that. It's suddenly come up in the last few years, since we have these new young designers who have really promoted that as part of their business.

Q: Whom have you worked with as a licensee?

A: Chloe, and Zandra Rhodes. And I think they're both great, great talents. But I find that...

Q: When you say Chloe, you mean you've worked with Karl Lagerfeld...

A: Karl Lagerfeld personally. I deal with Karl Lagerfeld. A great talent. But my showings and his showings come at the same time, so while he's doing his collection he can't even talk to me. So the timing was off. They just gave you... He just gave me a few sketches, and then you do it, bring it, send it back, "Let me check on it." I found it almost impossible to do their collections and my collections, because while they give you the ideas--there's just so much you can do within a certain time--and you have to be creative with it. The first collection I made for Zandra Rhodes was sensational...

Q: What year was that?

A: Five years ago. That's about 1977. It was sensational. But I worked very hard on it. I took her prints and I had it reproduced in Japan.
I had to work over it and neglected my own line. Then I took on Chloe with it, and having to do two lines—and not willing to struggle as I did with Anne Fogarty, because Eve Stillman was important; when I did Anne Fogarty, I did nothing else but Anne Fogarty. I gave her all I could. I truly created only for her—I don't think that one can have...be successful with a licensing that is fashion. It could be belts or scarves. But when it comes to a real...a complete collection, they have not been successful. Because the designer cannot give it the time. It's impossible. Because it is creative, and the manufacturer, unless it is his whole business, cannot give it the time either. So after three years with Zandra, the first year was very successful. The second year I did not work on it the way I should, it was not...By the third year it was just about finished. Because she would run in, she tried, but she could not. It's not possible to make a collection in one trip in a couple of hours. And Karl tried. That's why they haven't followed through. And he couldn't do it. He was finished. He was spent, after he did his own collection. And when I would come there, they were still full of that collection and I'd just stand around and feel that I was in the way. I think they're both very creative people, but other than basic kinds of licenses, I don't see how fashion can ever, ever be successful. It isn't in this industry at all. Nobody has succeeded.

Q: Except, of course, for Chevette, the Christian Dior place...

A: That was his business...Chevette was nothing when he took over the business from his mother, and he's not a creative person, so the business went down. But I remember, I was offered Christian Dior, and Richard Shapiro was the merchandise man at Lord & Taylor, and I called him and said, "You know
I was just offered Christian Dior." And he said to me, "What's the matter with Eve Stillman? You've got a lot of talent. Just stay with your own self." And we were doing very well at that time. He needed it, and he gave it everything. You didn't even know that it was a Chevette. Now he's taken on and promoting Chevette, after probably 10 or 12 years, giving it everything. Running the business. And then...It's not an original statement. It's just a name...An awful lot of it is taken from me. An awful lot of it. Sometimes I look at it and don't know that it isn't mine. Yes. If I gave Zandra Rhodes, who I think is a great talent; and I think she has an individual message. She's an artist. And her materials are beautiful. There's a need for more than just, you know, plain fabrics. We can't seem to get the right...But I gave it all the time. Because she said to me, "Eve, it's going to be nothing if you don't do it." I think I could have had a great business with Anne Fogarty, but what would've happened to Eve Stillman?

Q: You mean you could have had a great business with Zandra Rhodes.
A: Zandra Rhodes. Yes. I'm sorry.

Q: And what would have happened to Eve Stillman...
A: I couldn't do it all.
Q: By yourself.
A: I couldn't get the talent here to do it. I tried. I had students come up, but they couldn't do it. Zandra said, "I can't work with these. They're lovely girls. They're just skilled people. They have no imagination." When you're young, you know, you become very much in awe of great names. I think that Karl Lagerfeld is the great talent today in Europe, because it's his whole world; his whole life. I remember interviewing him and I said, "What do you do for a hobby? What are your hobbies?" And he said, "Designing."
"What do you do in your leisure time?" "Design." It's his whole life. And he's truly... He never repeats himself. There's nothing... It's never too hard. I think he works morning, noon and night on this collections. And he's a man who can do so many collections. He does Fendi. And he does one other collection that is not known. In Italy. But... It's been said that now that he's leaving Chloe he will not be successful, because Aghion's editing makes it salable.

Q: Aghion is...?
A: ...the Directress there.

Q: Aghion?
A: Yes. Yes. I think editing is important. But he has Frances Patiky-Stein. And she's fabulous. She can edit it. She knows an awful lot about fashion.

Q: But as far as you're concerned, are you pretty well through with licensing at this point?
A: Oh, no. I won't take any licensing at this point.

Q: You're done with it.
A: Yes. I have a licensee in Canada. They do very well. I manufacture for him in Manila, and it's shipped direct. It's my styles in another country. And he gets it at a price... He's done very well. And we are discussing a licensee in London with Charnos lingerie.

Q: I'm sorry. Spell Charnos.
A: C-h-a-r-n-o-s.

Q: But that's different licensing as to... Your collection going to them. So they're licensing Eve Stillman. In a sense. It's not that Eve
Stillman is licensing a designer.

A: I would not consider it. Not at all. Because I think I had two great names, and I couldn't handle it. And yet it was very expensive. First of all, you must give a guarantee, though I think they would work with me without a guarantee today. You have to buy all of those fabrics. You can't buy minimum quantity. And the big stores are not supporting it. They can't afford to support it. Your big stores are very price oriented. And when it comes to those very expensive garments, they just buy for display. You can't live on that. So that I don't think any of them are going to survive in fashion. Oh, if I made a bra or a girdle or something like that and go on and on and on with it, I think that's great. Because they could just pick a color...But to give the time to really make a collection, I just don't have the time. I never stop...

Q: I would like very much to get your feelings about the way in which this business has changed with regard to store relationships, production, labor, financing, selling, advertising. In other words, all of the businessy things about your business. And, in addition, I would like to talk about how you go about developing a collection. We've got a lot to talk about.

Let's start with store relationships. What they used to be and what they are today.

A: Years ago. Up until a few years ago, the buyer was responsible for everything that was purchased. So she was very powerful. Whatever she decided, and from whomever she wanted to buy, that was it. Today it's entirely different. We have a merchandise man for each category in the department store. And that merchandise man is in complete charge of everything that
is bought. Nothing can be bought by a buyer, unless it's approved by the merchandise woman. She or he is Executive Vice President, and in charge of the entire department. She is responsible for the figures, not the buyer. So the buyer is more than shopper, in that she can stimulate the business and look for what she feels the store needs. And then get the approval of the merchandise woman. She hasn't the power that she had years ago, or the knowledge. That has changed entirely, so this feeling of friendship and preference is a thing of the past. She must buy what is best for the store, to continue being in this kind of position. You really have to work much harder than you did years ago. The buyer was really her own boss. She made all the decisions. She makes no decisions today. That position has become very unimportant by comparison. And the salaries are much less than they were years ago.

Q: Do you sell primarily to department stores or speciality stores or...

A: A combination. We sell both. We have five salesmen.

Q: You do?

A: Oh, yes.

Q: All over the country? And do they travel?

A: All over the country. We have one in California, one in Chicago, one in Florida, one in New England, and one down south in Dallas. And we have a Sales Manager, which is that young man you saw with the red hair. And we couldn't live without the small shops. And the small shop has become very important. While business hasn't been good, and there's been a tremendous amount of promoting in the large stores, the small shops
come in here and say they're 25% ahead, 40% ahead, because they have service. They can still charge on their credit cards, so they get everything a department store gives them, and more service. And most women today prefer--and men--to shop in the smaller stores. My opinion is that unless they begin to give more service in the big stores, they're going to have a problem. I also feel that the advertising today, while it's very important, we have booklets that we never had before. I will quote Bloomingdale's, who said that some of their booklets drew more business than their outlying stores. So the booklets have become a very big item, which you have to participate in.

Q: When you say "Booklets," you mean catalogues...

A: Those catalogues, yes. Those mail orders...Very, very big. That never was. There isn't a big store that hasn't got six or seven a year. Bloomingdale's has one every month. Saks has one every month. Covering almost every item throughout their departments. Even their couture.

Q: You're saying it's cooperative advertising.

A: It's cooperative. You say, "No," and you're not in it, you don't get the order. So that it isn't only what you what you make; it's also how much you contribute.

Q: When you talk about...

A: Competition is keen, because there is a greater effort to make the most beautiful things. And everybody is on their toes. And you do have some licensees that come out with some new things. So that you can't be as complacent as you were.

Q: But to get back for a moment to the catalogues...I would
think that catalogue selling has to be related to your ability to produce and to ship the stores, beyond perhaps their initial orders. Now, what is your production setup today, and how does that relate to your ability to ship? Beyond the initial orders.

A: Well, if it's a number that they... If it's a design that they have alone, ... we cut their order. We do not cut stock on it. If they need more they just have to wait. Generally, when we have a number operation, you can deliver it in two weeks, just as fast as though you had your factory here.

Q: Why did you discontinue your factory here? Because you did used to have one.

A: Well, my originally factory was in Albany, and was a very large factory. Then I moved my factory to New York, because it was very difficult for me to travel and operate and produce what I liked. I had it until a couple of months ago. I still continued this factory, making it as small as I possibly could. Where I used to have 60 machines, I now had only 20 machines. But recently my rent was increased, and I needed the space for shipping. So I went to the union and told them my problem, and they agreed that I could give up the factory if I gave severance pay. This was a tremendous thing for me.

Q: Was this ILGWU? Is that the union? The ILGWU?

A: Yes. It's impossible to be competitive and have a factory in New York. It costs me more to make one gown than it costs me to make a dozen in the Far East.

Q: Now, you've been in the Philippines, producing in the
Philippines, for a very long time.

A: Yes. For over 20 years.

Q: Well you now...Just to get it on record...When you started working in the Philippines, you were working through a company, and then.... How does all that go?

A: When I found I had no control, and unless I could find somebody where I could control my shipments and my production and my prices, I would have to discontinue in Manila. And I went there with the idea of discontinuing and finding another way, when I happened to walk into the...Well, it's a long story. I flew because there was an emergency...to Manila, to get my goods out for Christmas. And I went the fastest way, staying over in Tokyo and leaving luggage at the airport. When I got to Manila, my luggage was not there. There was a strike at the Intercontinental Hotel in Manila, and a young girl, who was a television personality, was at the desk. She got my clothes for me after two days, and we became friendly. I flew to Manila...I'm going back...I flew to Manila about getting my shipments out and found that they were on strike in my factory because they wanted to unionize. And there was all my goods for Christmas, and booklets, laying there. I worked for a week. I worked in the factory and then got everything going and then flew home. As soon as I flew home, I didn't get any goods again. So I flew back. When I flew back, at 1:00 in the afternoon---These are the things that happen by chance---I had my lunch, and then I said to the owners of the factory, "I'm going back to the hotel to rest. I'm very tired." I never caught up with myself. In two weeks I flew back twice. As I walked in I felt like having some ice cream. I walked into the grill, and there was
this girl, and she said, "Why, Eve Stillman, what are you doing here?" And I said, "I'm finished with this..."

Q: This is the young lady that you had met...?

A: Yes. I said, "I'm finished with this town. I'm pulling out." She said, "You're with the wrong people. I have someone for you."

And this is how I met these people, who never made lingerie, who were working for two firms in New York for over 20 years, making childrens' clothes. And she and I got together. We opened up a plant, and it's been heaven. It's my plant, though I do not own the machines anymore. And today, she owns it but she works for no one but me. I can get many times...If I need a garment in a hurry I can get it within one week. I run it. I price it. I know my costs. My costs are almost half of what they were in the other plant. So I have learned that out of every crisis comes an opportunity.

Q: Do you go to Manila?

A: Once a year. That's all. We are leaving the end of February, and now I've got a young man I'm training to go. Just once a year. I'm getting my fall line ready. I'm taking it with me. And we'll work it out. And I don't even have to do that. I can send it. Today the facilities are so great. You have a telex. Overnight you get an answer. Because you're one day earlier than they are. So you write your problems, you come in in the morning, and you have it. You have a carrier service; you send samples; the next morning they have it. You need anything in an emergency, you send a telex, and in two days you have it. It's as though you were working right here. Today, of course, the whole world is one big global world and the facilities are so much easier than they were. I now work only in Manila, and
in Jersey I have a contractor.

Q: What does the contractor do in New Jersey?
A: He makes all my quilted robes.

Q: All your quilted robes.
A: I'm known for that. I wish I...I am truly an American and feel this is a great country. It's given me everything. But I can't survive. And unless we do something we're not going to be number one. We're not number one anymore. I don't know what we're going to do about it. They all have organized labor. They're unionized in Manila too. So that I think that we're...The Far East is becoming number one. I used to buy all my fabrics here.

Q: Now how...I was going to come to that next. How do you handle...What is the process now? Do you make your samples here?
A: I must say this....As I say, everything sort of happens, if you're out in the world looking. I was walking along New Bond Street when I saw a shop with all this beautiful...

Q: In London.
A: In London. Polyester satin. And the colors that couldn't be made. And washable. It was only white, pink and blue. And when you asked this firm to do any other colors, they said "It's impossible." I went inside and it was so expensive I just bought a panty and a little slip. In a wonderful brown color. And another in a marvelous, marvelous lavender. I came back and I called the buyer of Saks and I said,"I have something here I want to show you." And she said, "Oh, I love it." And I said, "I think I could get the Japanese to copy it." And then I called up one of the firms, Marubeni,
and he came over and he said to me, "That's our fabric. We ship to London."
I said, "Why haven't you ever approached our industry?" He said, "Well, we're new here." This was about seven years ago. "We're new here, and we just never thought lingerie could use it. We are doing a little bit with the blouses." I started with it, and today I get most of my materials from Japan. Because I can get it in two weeks. The prices are a third less than here. The quality is superb.

Q: Do you ship it directly to Manila, or...
A: Directly to Manila. It's there in one week.
Q: So you get sample cuts here.
A: Yes. I get one piece here, like 50 yards. And the rest goes to Manila. So today I have continuity. In fact, today they sell the entire industry. For about two years I had it alone. That's why I have to now start being innovative all over again, because the whole industry is doing it. Not as good as I do it. Because it came from within me, and I know why I want to do it. But just the same, copies do sort of take over a little bit, and you begin to feel it.

Q: In terms of the process... You make your samples here. You ship your samples to...
A: I do all my creativity here. I ship them a pattern. We grade it here. We give them a detailed sheet, just how to make everything. And then they get the samples within two days; every Friday we send out everything. And then the following week I get a finished sample. Either it's right, or we make corrections. 90% of the time it's right. Anything I ask for I can get, and I ask for the best or the impossible, because the difference in cost is never
that great. I import all my laces from Paris, because I do have to pay a
duty, whether it's American or French. So I take the best of all countries
in the world. I find many, many pure fabrics in Switzerland. My pure cot-
ton. My pure flannel. I buy all my pure cotton, one certain quality that
is a fraction of what it is here. I buy all my pure silks. Pure fabrics
have become very important. We do a very large pure silk collection, pure
cotton collection...

Q: Your pure silks I assume you buy in the Orient.
A: I buy it in Japan.
Q: Yes. Right.
A: It comes from China but finished in Japan and shipped to our
factory.
Q: How about embroideries?
A: All my embroideries, all my trimmings and all my handwork is
done in Manila. Cottage work. Sent out to small makers in the cottages.
They still live like in the old world in Manila. They're wonderful people.
They're ambitious people. They send all their children to the States to be
educated. But they sew on small...A family will have five or six machines.
They take the work. Or they'll have a community of five or six little thatched
roof cottages. One takes care of the children and the other six....And one
cottage has a factory of maybe 10 machines, and they work for us.
Q: And then after the merchandise has been made, it's cut over
there, it's sewn over there, and finished over there....and is pressed and
shipped back over here for you to distribute from these facilities?
A: It is pressed, but we check it and press it again.
Q: And then from these premises--and you, of course, are at 102 Madison Avenue--This is your distribution center. Now...So you ship to the stores from here. What about your computer setup. You had mentioned computers before.

A: We have a very, very sophisticated setup. Which eliminates, again, the labor. I don't know how this is all going to be absorbed later. We have a machine, in our computer machine, that does all...We used to have to enter every order...It's put on the machine. We had to keep books on inventory. It's all done on the machine. All the accounts...Accounts payable...Everything is done on computer. All we have is people who feed the computer, and we have people who watch and supervise. You still need the human brain and the human touch, but it's eliminated about six or seven people in this organization. We have just bought what they call a Pitney-Bowes machine. We have a man who weighs every package, puts on the stamps, and then makes a record of everything. And follows up to see whether...There's a machine that weighs it, puts the stamp on automatically, writes it up, follows it through, gets it to the post office, advises the post office. It eliminated one man completely. We have a copy machine so that everything is...When we made our collection, we would type all our price lists and our collections, styles. Now we have a machine and we make one and it comes off and it's beautiful. I think....

Q: You're really using a lot of really advanced management techniques.

A: Oh, yes.

Q: What, then, is the composition today of your management
structure? Obviously I know you're the President and you're the head of the whole creative side...

A: Well, I do all the design and all the buying and the creativity. And we have a man who's in complete charge of sales. He's Sales Manager. We have a Controller, the man who...

Q: And he takes... He is the Sales Manager and directs the activities of your road, or regional salesmen.

A: He travels also. He's leaving this afternoon for Texas.

Q: Is he also the Administrator?

A: Well, I'm training him, because he also happens to be my nephew.

Q: Uh huh. Good! That's interesting.

A: As time goes on, he can be Administrator. And then I have a man who is in complete charge of production, and sees that everything goes out and sees that everything is followed through with the factory. I'm taking him now with me, and I'm leaving next month, as soon as I finish my collection. I hope he can go afterward. I'm trying to organize the business so that it can run without me. And the one thing I need is somebody creative. I just took on this PR woman. I just took her on. I also met her through one of those UJA affairs, and in conversation this girl said she was with one of the large firms on the West Side, and I mentioned that I wanted a PR woman. I'm going to try now to do more publicity on my name. She's just made a kit, pictures of my collection and is sending it to newspapers all over the country. She... While she's not a trained designer, she has such exquisite taste. I think she could be creative, and I'm going to try her.
Q: So you're really thinking of your succession in this business, by having a family member, fortunately, who can do part of the activity of the business. And you've got a production person. And you've got...You really have got a team in place, providing you can get, take care of the design element.

A: And maybe my daughter would come in. I have a very lovely daughter, who is an artist. She's a graduate of Sarah Lawrence and she has a Masters in Art from Columbia. She lives in Westchester now and is married to an attorney, and has two children. And I have left the business to her, and I hope that maybe she could come in here and become active in it. The children are small....But she walks around and looks for ideas for me, and she's very much interested. And my granddaughter, who's 13, plans to become a designer, go to Parsons, and she wants to be...And I inherited good health and longevity. My mother died at 91 and she was never sick a day in her life. I'm just like her I couldn't believe it when they said she was 91 years old.

Q: It’s very interesting. In other words, it's possible to have succession in this business so that it might remain entrepreneurial, as opposed to being bought by a conglomerate.

A: Absolutely. I wouldn't think of selling. I don't need it anymore. I don't have to struggle and work as hard as I did. It's become my life. It's a good life. I still love holiday. I went to St. Moritz over Christmas and New Year's for two weeks. I had a wonderful holiday. And though now I'm taking a trip, making personal appearances, I'm leaving for a week, it's still a holiday. I love people; I love to be with people.
Q: How long have you been doing trunk shows? I assume that's a trunk show.

A: These trunk shows? About four or five years. That's all.

Q: That's all. Because that is a way...

A: Because this industry has become a fashion industry. We are taking on all that... I had a fashion show last fall, and we had big... And I had it in all the big department stores and we're going to do it again in May. It was very, very successful. I want this industry to become recognized as a fashion industry, and it's not recognized as yet. Most of the ads are fashion. I just had... We had a gown and robe in the Park Avenue magazine with Elizabeth Arden, and for Elizabeth Arden to sell 300 sets, that's a lot. So we're doing it again, with the robe and gown...

... That is not a lot of money today for fine French lace, and satin. In other words, they pay something like $60 for two pieces. You see. That's become a magic price. That's almost what used to be $25. So that there are magic prices where you can sell volume.

Q: I'd like just to review with you how you develop your collections, nowadays. Forgetting the licensees who don't exist anymore... How do you start? By fabric? By design?

A: No... I know almost every designer's collection. I do go to their fashion shows. I go to the stores. I could tell you what every store has. So that Montana and Armani... I'm not inspired by Calvin Klein, it's more classic. I am inspired a little bit by... I'm inspired by everybody. But I find the Europeans are more inspirational. Yves St. Laurent... I wear their clothes. Years ago when I went to Europe, whether I could
afford it or not, I had a Chanel suit made. I had a Balenciaga coat made.
To learn how the greats work. I still do it exactly the same way. I fly to
Europe twice a year to the two major collections.

Q: Couture or prêt-à-porter?
A: Huh?
Q: Couture or prêt-à-porter?
A: Couture. There was no prêt...
Q: But I mean now.
A: Well now I buy prêt-à-porter. Like, when I was in Europe I
bought this suit, and it's a Chloe. I still think the way he did the collar
here. I'll do that. You see what I mean?
Q: Yes.
A: I take from fashion. Because I think to keep going and go-
ing and going, to be fashion, in lingerie, you have to take from what is
beautiful and cut it right now. For instance, black and white is important
this summer, so we're doing black and white. We're doing even a printed black
and white for the summer.

Q: Do you do two collections? Three, four...?
A: I do two major collections and two small collections. And
never stop making things for specials, for people alone. The big stores alone.
I'm just doing about seven numbers right now. So one girl is on that for Saks,
but I don't create like I do for the collection. I try to take from what I
have. It's not possible. Especially if you do the price. And you have to do
all that. If you really want to stay in business. And make money. Especially
with conditions as they are now. I think that there's a tremendous difference
in lingerie between the very moderate price and the better lingerie. It just looks entirely different. It is entirely different. And it's a different customer. It's the Yves St. Laurent customer, the Chloe customer, that's my customer.

I was in St. Moritz on this trip, and I was in a store. I said to the saleslady, "When the coat comes in, send it to me, I'm at the Palace. Eve Stillman." And three women were standing there. There were no Americans, one said, "Are you Eve Stillman, the lingerie designer?" I said, "Yes." "Oh, she's a very important lady." That has come through from the very fact that lingerie now is an important part of woman's wardrobe. She just doesn't buy something and throw it in her valise anymore. You'll see when you wear that robe and gown. You'll want it again and again. Because when you're ready for bed and you put it on, it's a wonderful feeling. And we've got to work very hard to keep it there. We've got to be very... I have a short set that came from a dress. It's the hottest thing this season. It's on the cover of Neiman-Marcus's collection...catalogue. The most important, spring. It's an ad with Saks Fifth Avenue. It's in another booklet, one of the smaller people. It's short. It's real contemporary. It's like the short dress. It's very sexy, but I would say, very good taste. Sexy and classic. It's very difficult to make, but once you achieve something...

Q: It's a magic formula.

A: A magic formula.

Q: Tell me...

A: And I have studied the technicality of designing. I can't cut but I can drape and I can do anything the girls can do, and so I think that they should do, at F.I.T., concentrate on a course in just sketching. I can't get
anybody to really make a sketch like Karl Lagerfeld. His sketches just talk to you, you know. I don't have that talent. I never was good in drawing.

Q: Just one last question. Do you find| that even though.... That with your salesmen in the various parts of the country that you... That this has changed the traffic pattern of stores coming into New York? Are they still as numerous as they once were, or are there fewer visits?

A: The different shows...Like you have a show in Dallas. It's so expensive to come here. People from that area, (other than the few big stores), all the small stores go right to the shows. That Dallas mart is unbelievable. Acres and acres and acroes--not blocks--long. It has every manufacturer in America, and it's an experience to go there. We have a showroom there.

Q: A permanent showroom.

A: Oh, yes. A permanent showroom. And my representative in Florida has three shows, one in Atlanta. So those people don't come anymore. Because he has the entire collection. And they live nearby. The store is nearby. It's eliminated a lot of traffic coming into...Other than the big stores, we don't have the crowd. Some people say they loved the trip. A lot of people don't. In California we have a showroom and we have shows. The big stores do come in.

Q: And when they want to plan their catalogues and trunk shows, I assume they do it here.

A: We have tremendous traffic. We didn't this show. I don't know why. I guess it's the economy. The economy is bad. How do you feel
about the economy?

Q: Ah...I would think your experience is probably a typical experience. And that the reason is that things are expensive, and that it is bad. Yes. But, New York is still apparently going to remain...the place to which people come when they need to make their promotional plans as well as the major buys.

A: If you're an aggressive organization you must come. You must come. When I go down to Manila, I go to Japan and look at all the fabrics and go all the way out to Osaka, to the Royal Osaka Hotel, and... Of course, there's something new now. All your big stores are going to Hong Kong and Osaka, and they're doing a lot of their own manufacturing.

Q: Are they doing private labels in this area, in lingerie as well? Because they're doing a lot of it...

A: Not as yet.

Q: Not as yet.

A: They're doing it in Japan though. They're all over there now, buying, and putting on their own private labels.

Q: For lingerie?

A: Yes.

Q: Lingerie...

A: Yes, yes. Sleepwear. Robes. In fact, yesterday....I worked with a buyer from one of the large stores who had just come back to Hong Kong from Osaka and said to me, "We ordered our robes and this time I ordered silk lingerie and cotton lingerie." I said, "You did? Are you going to buy from me?" And they said, "Oh, yes. Of course." Well, the following week he was
in the showroom again, and I was having lunch, and when I walked in, there were certain colors that I had bought for my silk lingerie, and I immediately said to the buyer, "I prefer that you don't see these. I don't know why they were out." "Well," he said, "Your assistant showed them to me." And I said, "He had no right to." And he said, "Why?" And I said, "Because you're a manufacturer now. You're manufacturing in the Far East." And he said, "I wouldn't copy your colors. Don't you trust me?" And I said, "No. I don't trust anybody anymore. And if you're designing and making lingerie in Hong Kong; you're bringing my things over there. I know it for a fact." It's going to hurt this industry and every industry when the store is going to go to the factory, and the manufacturer where we manufacture. They have asked could they come to Manila to see my plant, and I said, "No. Why would you?" "We thought maybe we could work something with them." And I said, "No, you cannot." But they can get into other plants if they want to.

Q: So that this could be the start of a trend?
A: They're certainly going to do mass produced merchandise that way. Sears and Montgomery Ward and those big chains have been doing it for years. And your department stores have to get into it. Your better stores. They now do their sweaters directly.

Q: Yes, they do a great many things...
A: They've cut out a lot of the sweater manufacturers.

Q: And you think now they're going to start to do it in your area?
A: They'll do anything they can. Presidents are over there. They go traveling in groups. I know another store that's leaving today. A very
large store out on the coast. They'll be gone a month. A month. That means they're going to be doing quite a bit of buying. I think they're going to get hurt. I think you can do sweaters. You can do blouses. But you can't do designer's merchandise. Where you haven't got the pattern makers. You haven't got the know-how. You haven't got the designers. And they come in and they don't fit. They're not made right. You haven't developed them. They're going to get hurt. They'll come in and the collar will be crooked or the collar won't be set right. It may be too wide... You can't do fashion merchandise. I said it. "You're going to get hurt. They won't fit. They're not going to be cut right. You don't know the difference between true bias and part bias. You're gonna hurt yourself." But they can do a lot of basic things. They can buy their shoes directly. Things that are not designers.

There was an article in the Times that said that in the very near future, firms that manufacture basics—like the liquor people—will not need salesmen. It will all be ordered by computer. When you need Chivas Regal or you're out of Cutty Sark, it will show on the computer, and you just press the button and you fill it in. That will go for anything that's just basic.

Q: But not for fashion, as you've described it. Thank you very much...You were just saying that to be successful you must have certain characteristics? In any profession...

A: You must have them in any profession. You must have a tremendous curiosity and desire to learn. You must have a high level of taste. Because that is one of the incentives of trying. And you must work very, very
hard. It has to come before anything else. And I honestly believe if you have those ingredients within you, you can't miss. Especially in America, I really believe that.
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