

# Molly Frounfelter's interview with Phil Stein

## Introduction

ME: Hi, my name is Molly Frounfelter and today I'm going to be interviewing Phil Stein.

ME: When and where were you born?

Mr. Stein: I was born in Escanaba, Michigan - 1922.

ME: What are your parent's names?

Mr. Stein: My mother's name is Fanny and my mother is 93 years old and still living, and my father's name is Alexander and ~~is~~ one of the restaurants we now own is named after him in his memory, Alexander's family Restaurant.

ME: What are the names of your brothers and sisters?

Mr. Stein: I don't have any sisters but my <sup>3</sup>brothers<sup>3</sup> are ~~Aria~~ Aaron, Larry and Mike.

ME: When were you married?

Mrs. Stein: In 1949.

ME: What is your spouse's name?

Mr. Stein: Rose.

ME: What did your parents do for a living?

Mr. Stein: My father had a small clothing store in Escanaba <sup>an</sup> and was open seven days a week and, and, ah, ah it really catered to in <sup>in</sup> the days an he was open for <sup>ah</sup> most of the 30's and 40's and 50's, ah catered <sup>business</sup> to a working class crowd, lumberjacks, a type of trade and um, did carry some dress clothes, but it was mostly catered to the lumberjacks who were very prevalent of there time.

ME: Where did you school?

Mr. Stein: I, ah, went to school, Escanaba Highschool and, ah graduated 1941, when I graduated, ah, from ~~high school~~ high school, World War II was breaking out and I, and I, ah, joined the service in the fall of, of ah, 41. While in the service, I spent 3 three and a half years in the infantry a medical club, um I was taking courses at the University of Wisconsin. Correspondant courses.

ME: What special memories do you have of growing up in Escanaba?

Mr. Stein: well, ah, we were growing up during the  
 ah... born in 1922, it was kind of depression years when  
 I was going to school and ah, ah, the money <sup>was not</sup> prevalent,  
 I mean it was not, it wasn't around. My father raised  
 four boys and ah gave us all an education, but ah it was  
 tough going ah, In the 30's and ah, ah I remember,  
 you know just going to school and ah, ah being on a win,  
 unde~~feated~~ <sup>feated</sup> football team in 39 and 40 and 41 we were  
 undefeated for 3 years. And being on the track team  
 um, and, ah we ah had a very good track team  
 and, and just doing what the average um, boy and  
 girls ~~today~~ is doing now. I mean, um going to dances  
 and I remember my senior prom and ah we all had  
~~bicycles~~ bicycles and we lived near the playgrounds  
 and um shoot baskets and ah, basically a normal  
 growing up periods in Escanaba but, I would say  
 that a little different then today, ah, because of the  
 fact that we never had too many cars for transportation  
 and a there weren't any tv and ah, my favorite Radio  
 program um was ah, "Jack Armstrong, ALL American Boy."  
 but it was a normal, normal bringing up, for a <sup>poor</sup> boy,  
 for my mother and father.

ME: What special features stand out in your mind about the city of Escanaba, from when you were younger?

Mr. Stein: Well Escanaba is a beautiful city, it is very laid out community, it's very well laid out community. It's got a huge park area on Bay de Noc and ah I always remember Escanaba, going down to the park and ah, going swimming and playing tennis and spending a lot of time at the park, in those days there weren't too many places to go, there were no teenage clubs or anything like that, and ah probably the high point of growing up in Escanaba, like I say was sports, for me anyway, and ah I remember Escanaba, and I still like Escanaba, but when you're born and raised in a community, ah you normally don't forget. I like Escanaba my two and my mother are still living there, so I guess go there quite frequently to see them.

ME: What things have changed in Escanaba, that you see today?

Mr. Stein: Well, the things that have changed in Escanaba, is basically the town hasn't changed, the streets are still the same, you still have Ludington Street, you still have a beautiful park

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Mr. Stein (con't): there, and an huge shopping mall, on the outskirts of Escanaba. But I would say there's not too many changes, the businesses have change, obviously, but some people are still in business when I was a kid living in Escanaba, the same people or else their sons or daughters are running it. But Escanaba has not changed to dramatically. I mean we ah, the number one eating place in Escanaba, or the better eating place is still the Ludington Hotel down by the lake, it's still a prestigious place to have dinner or lunch. And things have not changed there to much, I go, when I go to Escanaba, I drive past my old neighborhood and I still have fond memories of it.

ME: what kind of things do for entertainment when you were younger?

MR. Stein: Play tennis, like I told you football, basketball, As we got to be juniors and seniors in ~~high school~~ high school, you know, we would try to get into a dance occasionally, if we can get in and basically, you know, we normally had a girlfriend or someone you liked, and you probably had a date occasionally. Especially like I say in your Junior and Senior year.

Mr. Stein (con't): One of the highlights, I think was the Senior Prom. The point from being a freshman to a sophomore, getting into the upperclass and staying out of trouble, basically.

ME: Where did the kids like to hangout in Escanaba when you were a teenager?

Mr. Stein: Ah, there was an Ice Cream shop in Escanaba that ah, no beer or liquor, strictly Ice Cream and Sodas and light sandwiches, that ah we congregated in that place, ah good part of the evenings, I mean if we had no homework to do, that's where we would meet. They called it the Hob Nob, long out of existence, but that's where the kids would meet and get together.

ME: Do you any interesting or ~~ten~~ humorous stories to share about these early days in Escanaba?

Mr. Stein: Well, a lot of ~~ten~~ humorous stories, I remember going out with friends of mine who I graduated high school with, going out deer hunting with them, and that was a very big thing with me at the time, to go out deer hunting and stay at somebody's camp, on maybe a Friday night or Saturday night, not particularly hunting deer but hunting chipmunks or things like that, I mean we had a lot of

Mr. Stein (cont'): companionship with these friends of mine, boys who I'm still very friendly ~~with~~ today with, once with, some of them are gone, <sup>already</sup> they have died. I have very fond memories of them. And others are still very active, still alive and I see them occasionally. We just had a 50th high school anniversary at the a golf club in Escanaba and a lot of my classmates were there both men and women and it was great seeing them. We had a dinner and speakers and most of them look very very good, and none of us are kids anymore.

ME: How old were you when you found your first job, and where did you work?

Mr. Stein: My first job was at a grocery store, jobs were tough to get, like I told you before, in those days, I mean there were very few jobs. The jobs there were paid very little. My first job was in a grocery store delivering groceries for a dollar a day. And that was

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Mr. Stein (cont'd): only on a Friday night and Saturday, that was the only job I could find, but that buck looked pretty good to me in those days. That was the first job I ~~could find~~ had in Escandaba.

ME: Do you remember what the name of the grocery store was?

Mr. Stein: Uh, Johnson's Grocery store.

ME: What stands out most in your mind about your first job?

MR. STEIN: Well, number <sup>one</sup> 1 it was tough because in those days people would call up on the phone and order groceries, \$20 or 30 dollars worth of groceries whatever, and we packed them in boxes and would have to deliver them to their homes. What I remember is that it was tough going hauling these big boxes of groceries and knocking on the door and the ~~pe~~ people weren't home they would ~~be~~ leave a note and we would have to put the milk or meat in the they weren't really refrigerators, in those days they were called Ice Boxes and they



Mr. Stein: had ice to keep them cool and cool them off  
 (cont.) And refrigerators came later. I remember it was tough going but I enjoyed like I say money was tight in those days, but it was nice making my own buck or two dollars a week, which was basically what I made when I worked part-time. But it was a dollar a day all day Saturday.

ME: where you ever in the military or the service, if so please describe your experiences there?

Mr. Stein: when I graduated high school, 1941, World War II was just getting started and I was in the army by late fall, in 1941, and I had gone through basic training at Camp White Oregon, later transferred to a base in Missouri; and then of course we left to go overseas. ~~My~~<sup>One</sup> experience in the military which I can not forget, is, My brother Aarin was in the Navy he was at Farragut, Idaho and my other brother Mike was at another base in Oregon; we all happened to get a weekend pass and so we registered at a hotel and we all took separate rooms and the clerk says to I registered I says I'm Phillip Stein and Mike registers

Mr. Stein : and said I'm Mike Stein, and Aaron registered  
 (con't) and said I'm Aaron Stein. And he said "who  
 are you kidding, you guys are using fictitious names,  
 there can't be three of you guys"! but we  
 registered but it was kind of funny because we  
 all spent a weekend in Oregon, we all got together  
 and it was very pleasant. Anyway, after basic  
 training in Oregon and Missouri, I left for  
 Overseas, now like I say this was in 1942 when  
 I left for overseas and we landed in ~~the~~ Marseille,  
 France, which is a very tough area, we slept in  
 Pop tents for about a week before the Military  
 knew we existed and finally we got into combat  
 and like I say I was in the ~~Infantry~~ <sup>Infantry</sup> Medics. Infantry  
 Medics are when you follow the Infantry who are  
 doing the shooting and you are there to with a  
 red cross on your arm or a red cross on your helmet  
 and two bags full of medicine, one on each side  
 and you follow the Infantry and you help the  
 wounded and bandage them up, get them on  
 stretchers do what you can for them and of  
 course your a real target for the Germans  
 because the Americans were advancing and  
 we had this red cross on our helmet and ~~theirs~~ <sup>they're</sup>

Mr. Stein  
(con 4)

not suppose to shoot at the, any body wearing the red cross on their helmet, but that didn't mean anything to them, we ~~we~~ were targets and (Rose you're disturbing us) a few of our bodies got killed some women, I'll tell you later on what happened to me. We kept going and going and going into France, and of course America was winning the war, but we got the hell beat out of us many days, also, and had to fall back and there were a lot of dead, lot of wounded and the war kept going on and on and ~~on~~ <sup>on</sup>. When these Germans had a shell called The German 88, that hit the ground and ~~sharp~~ <sup>sharp</sup> shrapnel would spray all over so you had to hide somewhere in a foxhole, underneath a tank or where ever and hope for the best. But anyway as the war went on and we were winning it, but like I say we didn't win all the battles. (interruption) We kept advancing and like I say some of the battles we were winning some of the battles we were losing, we followed the infantry and, ah, it was hell, ~~it~~ it was not easy. Anyway after a year, I'd been in combat I was out with some other medica personel, when the guns started shooting ~~the~~ ~~the~~ ~~the~~ ~~the~~ ~~the~~ and these German 88'

Mr. Stein: start shooting and we were riding in a jeep  
 (con't) and, ah, there was about 15 medics and  
 the only thing you could do when all this  
 guns start shooting at you is try to go for  
 cover, get off the jeep, lay on the ground cover  
 your arms over your helmet so in case you  
 got shrapnel, the shrapnel would penetrate the  
 helmet, but at least it might hit your arms and  
 not kill you, in the head. Anyway, I got ~~total~~  
 wounded, had a big shrapnel wound in my  
 back, and of course I had a lot of medical  
 help, they were medical people around me.  
 Phil, Phil I'll look after you, things like that.  
 And they picked me up and put me on a litter  
 and they raced back to an ~~aid station~~ Aid  
 station. An Aid Station ~~is~~ was about 300 yards  
 back of ~~where~~ where the actual fighting  
 was going on. At the Aid Station they temporarily  
~~fix~~ fix you up and <sup>then</sup> they take up back another  
 mile where there was what ~~was~~ <sup>they</sup> call a Field  
 Hospital which is the operating hospital where  
 they actually operate on you, The Aid Station  
 would just temporarily help you and then you  
 would go to a field hospital where they had  
 to do some emergency ~~surgery~~ surgery, they would  
 do it there, Anyway they took me back to  
 the Aid Station and then to the Field Hospital

Mr. Stein: but my captain called me up on a  
 (con't) field telephone and he says Sargeant, I  
 was a Sargeat at the time an he says  
 I understand you know where some wounded  
 G.I.s are, I says yeah, but you know I've  
 just been hit and I was feeling pretty good,  
 I mean they had given me a lot of shots,  
 I wasn't in any to much pain, although  
 the shrapnel wound was quite large,  
 So I says you know if my buddies will take  
 me back to where I got wounded and we  
 were only about 200 yards away from  
 where these wounded G.I.s were, I said  
 I will show you where they are and then  
 I'll go back to the hospital and get fixed up  
 cause I had to get operated on because the  
 Shrapnel is in your body and they have to  
 get it out, so he said that's fine, so they took  
 me and put me on a stretcher and we  
 went back to where I originally got wounded  
 and we were maybe a block from where  
 these wounded G.I.s were and more  
 shelling came in a tremendous amount of  
 shelling the only thing they could do with  
 me or for themselves was to take me off the  
 jeep, put me on the ground on the litter and  
 you gotta lie there, you know, and hopefully you  
 won't get hit and again I say your covering your

Mr. Stein: hands over your head, but it was not  
 (cont) my day... I got it again, unbelievable,  
 I got wounded again and the ironic  
 part of it, the ironic part of the whole  
 thing, it was maybe 15, 20, medical personnel  
 that were going up to pick up those  
 wounded G.I.s and about 4 or 5 jeeps,  
 I was the only that got hit again,  
 I could not believe it, ya know. I got  
 wounded twice in the same day and again  
 I have automatic medical help, I can say  
 this its only a miracle that I'm living.  
 Because it did not hit any bones structure  
 the would paralyze me or kill me, so  
 basically what happened is they picked me  
 up again and took me back to the  
 Aid Station ~~and then~~ back to the Field hospital  
 The Field hospital ~~rescued me~~ did what they  
 can and they rushed me by railroad  
 train to East France where I spent 7  
 weeks in a hospital.

ME: After the hospital did you go home?

Mr. Stein: No, No, After the hospital, this was 1945 already  
 and I was coming out of hospital ~~was~~ 1945, and  
 I was sent back to my unit, and they were very

Mr. Stein : happy to see me again. They had a nice dinner for me that night, in the field. Then, in 1946, the war was coming to an end in 45, and there wasn't too much fighting mostly mopping up and then the Germans surrendered and then we stayed in Germany for about 4 or 5 months but then the word came out that we were going to be sent to Japan because the war with Japan was still on and we weren't too happy over that. What happened then is of course the atomic bomb that ended the war with Japan. In 46' we were sent back to the states.

ME: Did any of your brothers, had any of your brothers been killed in the war?

Mr. Stein : ~~Yes~~ No. Aaron was in combat in the midway in Sipan, he was in the Navy on board a ship. My older brother Mike was in Italy and that was a tough deal there, but he was not wounded, he had some tough fighting he also in the infantry. Not the Infantry medics, but in the infantry. And Larry, the youngest one in the family was still in school, he wasn't in the service till later.

ME: After you had come home from the war where did you get employed?

Mr. Stein : After I had come home from the war, I stayed in Escanaba for a couple months, but

Mr. Stein: there was really nothing for me to do (soon<sup>4</sup>) there. I mean my father didn't need me in the clothing store he was still in the clothing business, like I mentioned previously it was a small store so he didn't need me. And my older brother Mike was going to the University of Missouri getting his degree. And Aaron was home before I so, he had gone to Milwaukee and then got a job with some department store. So I decided to Milwaukee, there was nothing to do, I could have gone to school, entered a University, but I had quite of few courses from the University of Wisconsin, which I had completed in the ~~3~~ three and a half years I was in ~~the~~ the Service. Not basically 100% college education but I felt sure of myself. Basically I went to Milwaukee and got a job at the Boston Store in Milwaukee, in the Men's Department. And that's where I stayed until I decided to go into business here in Ishpeming.

ME: Where were you employed for the longest period of time?

Mr. Stein: I would say in the Boston store in Milwaukee, when I had got out of the service, I was probably there for six or eight months. That was not a long period of time I realize but I met my



Mr. Stein: wife in Milwaukee. She was director to  
(cont) Secretary of the Jewish center there.

And of course not knowing many people in Milwaukee and being Jewish, the Jewish center is like the YMCA or something like that where you met a lot of people and play basketball, take showers, volleyball and stuff like that, you know, it's social activities, so that's where I met Rose. And one weekend

I came home and I almost wanted to get in business and I was very happy working at the Boston store but, I came home to see my parents and my older brother was home from the University,

Mike and he had a date with a girl in Ishpeming and I had nothing to do that weekend, I had said hello to my parents and this was on a Sunday night, so he says "Phil why don't you come along with me" and I says "Mike what am I going to do in Ishpeming the only time I had been in Ishpeming in my life was to see a ski tournament." So come along, he says, you can go see a movie or something like that.

Anyway I drove with him to Ishpeming and oh, I met the girl he had a date with and I met the girl's father, so the girl's father said "Phil, you have nothing to do let's play a little gin." So we played gin and he was telling me about a store in downtown Ishpeming, that was empty and....

Mr. Stein : coincidence that I had gone with my brother, that he had a date with this girl, and when I got back to Milwaukee I called back to the store and Aaron and I decided to quite our jobs and start Stein's Clothing, in the end of 1946, in Ishpeming. So if I had not gone with my brother ~~that night~~ Mike, on his date, you know, it's very unlikely we would have wound up in Ishpeming.

ME : In as much detail as possible, please describe the main duties of your job.

Mr. Stein : Starting a clothing store in 1946 was very difficult. In first place, we didn't have any money outside of a couple thousand dollars saved up in the service and that wasn't a hell of a lot of money, pardon my french, but we had maybe two thousand dollars. So I got to the bank The Miners First National Bank, and I saw a very nice gentleman, Mr. Moss, who recently passed away about a year ago and I says, "Mr. Moss here's my discharge papers," and I says "I just got of service," and he looked it over and says "yes, Sargeant Stein, I got two Purple hearts for my wounds which looked very impresive and lot of medals over seas medals I got in combat, Combat Medical Badge which is very nice. And he says, "you have a very very fine military record," and I told him about my family in Escanaba, and I told him I needed three thousand dollars to start a store. He said, "Phil," he says, "I'm sorry

Mr. Stein  
(con't)

we can't give it to you, you don't have any collateral." "Well," I says, "ya know, how am I gonna get started if I don't have any money?" He says "I know and I feel bad, but I just can't loan you any money." So I was turned down for the three thousand dollars. I finally had to go to my father and loan the thousand dollars from him and he didn't have too much and then he signed a note for me at the bank in Escanaba where they knew for the other two thousand dollar. So, basically <sup>we</sup> started Stein's clothing with \$, 6 thousand dollars at the most. We got a start and it was very hard starting a store in 1946 because merchandise was hard to get, I mean the war was just barely over and you could not get denim overalls, and in those days they were wearing a lot of bib overalls you couldn't get those, you couldn't get white shirts, you couldn't get sweaters, it was hard to get work clothes, it was hard to get anything. So, we struggled for years with merchandise, trying to get merchandise from suppliers. And many times we couldn't buy direct, we had to go to jobbers, jobbers are people who buy from the manufacturer and they buy it, then you buy it from them, but your paying more money going <sup>by</sup> the jobbers, but even getting it through jobbers, was very hard to get. So basically we struggled for many years, with a very light inventory and no money to really buy it. We made it, obviously, it was not easy, and as far as the duties of what we had to do, we had to do the buying, we had to run

Mr. Stein: in to Milwaukee ~~and~~ and try to get merchandise, we had to do the book keeping, we had to stock the store, we had no help at all, for the first couple of years. Our first employee was, who we gave a few hours a week to was Paul ~~who~~ who is now at the TV station, he was our first employee, and I guess he worked on weekends, Saturday probably mostly, Friday night, Friday night or Saturday night. We managed to make it, but it was not easy.

ME: Did the Job require any special ~~training~~ training?

Mr. Stein: The job required training an, in first place you had to know how to buy merchandise properly. You could not over stock, in other words you couldn't buy 10 dozen dress shirts when you only need 3 dozen dress shirts. I mean you had to watch your dollars. It required training, not so much book training but training where you were not afraid to work. In other words we started, we were there every morning ~~at~~ eight 'ol clock, and we were there most nights til 6:30, 7:00, on Friday night we were open til @ nine. The training was basically self-train ~~I think~~, like I say with my education and Aaron's education, ... we ~~they~~ managed to survive, but as far as any, anything you could learn in a Tex book from a University or a highschool... it would really not help you too much.

Mr. Stein  
(cont'd)

I mean, in the book Keeping of course in those days it was all done by hand and in this day a lot of it is done by hand, but don't forget it's a computer world today, ya know everything is computers. But, it required basic intelligence to know how to buy properly and stock a store properly and be friendly and take care of a customer who is basically making your living for you, when they come in to the store, and I still feel that way today, when they come into the style shop in Ishpeming or Marquette, they come in they're doing me the favor coming in, I'm not doing them the favor waiting on them. Their the people making my living, for us. And if you don't treat a customer right in 1946, or treat them right in 1993, your soon to be out of business, because ~~that~~ they're the person <sup>who is</sup> helping you out financially and you got to treat the customer right, and I always felt that way.

ME: ~~After the success of~~ <sup>of</sup> Stein's Clothing did you open any other stores?

Mr. Stein: Yes. After we got started with Stein's Clothing, Aaron and I ran Stein's Clothing till about 1955, well we ran it after that, but my father passed away in 1955, and like I say he had a small clothing store in Escanaba and when he passed away, of course we ran it for a while. But, the location was not great, ~~it was not down on~~ it was not down on the Main Ludington street of Escanaba, it was up Stevenson Ave. So we decided to close that.

Mr. Stein : We opened up a store called Larry's clothing downtown, Escanaba. At that time in 1940-, in 1955, my brother Larry whose ~~was~~ ~~years~~ seven, eight years, about eight years younger than I am was in the Military, he was out in the Air force, so we were all in the four branches ~~of the Military~~ in the Service, he spent a couple years in the Air Force. He came home from service and like I say my father passed away, so we started Larry's Clothing. Naming the store after Larry. Aaron and Larry ran that store in Escanaba, successfully. And I stayed in Ishpeming and ran Stein's clothing, in Ishpeming. (pause)

After that, we had an opportunity to buy the largest store in upper Michigan, which was the Fair Store in Escanaba. That was a four floor department store with an elevator, basement, three floors of ~~an~~ a complete department store from everything, men's, women's shoes, gift items, you name it, complete store. So, we decided to go ahead with this purchase, although we were, we certainly didn't have the capital, but the ~~the~~ previous owner, Mr. and his family, and we had some money in 1965 to open that store. We ran Larry's clothing store from about 56' to about 65', 64' and then we purchased the Fair Store. Larry's Clothing then when out of business because Aaron and Larry were ~~run~~ running the Fair Store, in Escanaba. I still stayed in Ishpeming.

Mr. Stein  
(cont'd)

In Ishpeming, incidently, I had another discount store, a women's store on the other side of where Stein's was and so I had three different stores, in Ishpeming. At the time, they ran the large store in Escanaba called the Fair Store.

Which is the, which is going out of existence in a few more months. Were having a going-out-of-business sale and we're going to close it up. We may start a smaller store in Escanaba, but now Escanaba's not big enough to keep the other store. And Stein's Clothing, the Peninsula Bank wanted to buy the building, we had purchased the building from the ~~the~~ \_\_\_\_\_ brothers, and they wanted

the building for expansion and so we all sold. Went out of business is far as Stein's Clothing is ~~concerned~~ concerned. In the mean time, I had purchased the Style Shop, which I still have today, in both Ishpeming and Marquette. During this... at the time of the purchase of the Fair Store in Escanaba, in 1965, we were very ambitious guys, maybe a little too ambitious, but anyway we wanted to deversify, so, we got into the Big Boy resturaunt business (interruption)

Mr. Stein : anyway, in 1965, with the purchase  
 (con 4) of the Fair Store, which was a huge  
 undertaking, monstrous type of store  
 and a lot of detail, bookkeepers, and  
 CPA's and things like that, so, but before  
 that purchase came along, we were  
 negotiating to go into the restaurant  
 business, so we did get into the restaurant  
 business, Elias Big Boy Family Restaurant,  
 our first restaurant was in Marquette,  
 which is still there, the Big Boy in  
 Marquette. We built that one in 1965,  
 in the fall of 1965, that restaurant opened  
 up. And to the best of my knowledge  
 we were the first franchise restaurant in  
 upper Michigan, from a chain. In other  
 words, Big Boy is a National family  
 restaurant. Not like a McDonald's or a  
 Burger King where there serving basically,  
 and I'm <sup>not</sup> knocking McDonald's or Burger  
 King, I mean they basically got a  
 hamburger and a fish sandwich and  
 a few other things, I mean this is  
 Elias Big Boy Family Restaurant, you've  
 been in them, I mean they have, it's a  
 complete operation. So we started that



Mr. Stein (cont): we started the Elia's Big Family Restaurant, Marquette and from there on we were both in the restaurant business and the clothing business, we wound up with about twelve Big boys in Upper Michigan, including one in , Canada.

ME: Was Big Boy a success?

Mr. Stein: yes, Big Boy was success, it became a, I would say almost an instantaneous <sup>success</sup> ~~size~~, although we were very green as far as running the restaurants. Our first year at the Marquette Big Boy, in 1966, was our first complete year, we lost our shirts doing a volume business we lost money. My Banker, Sam \_\_\_\_\_, came to me and says, "Phil, you may know the clothing business, I'm sure you do, but you sure as hell don't know the restaurant business and I want you to get out of it, you don't know what you're doing in the restaurant, you lost \$22,000 dollars in 67, and I want you to get out of it, stick to the clothing business, which you know." I said, "Sam, I says, look I know we lost ~~our~~ our shirt in 1966, doing the volume business, but I'll guarantee

Mr. Stein  
(cont)

you one thing, if I lose money in 1968, I will sell the restaurant, and I'll get out of it." And frankly that is the only year, and I got a college education the first year running the restaurant, and the reason we lost money is way too much help, employee theft, bad food costs, the cooks were throwing out food, you name it, but that's come from an inexperience on the Stein brothers part, even though we had some basic knowledge, we were not knowledgeable enough to run a large volume family restaurant, and we did almost lose the family jewels, in the first year, and if we had continued losing money like that, I mean we would have gone broke. But that was the only <sup>year</sup> ~~money~~ we really lost money. And from that first start in Marquette Highway, we ~~open~~ opened our second one in Escanaba, S, Ironwood, Iron Mountain, Men, Houghton, S, Canada, Iron River, and we were successful there was a tremendous amount of work and we just sold the Big Boy Restaurants two years ago. We still are out in the restaurant business somewhat, we still have Alexander's Family Restaurant in Marquette and we have the Snack ~~Shop~~ and Ice cream shop in the the Westwood Mall.

Mr. Stein: But basically that's what we have left in the restaurant business.

Me: what was the most rewarding part of your job?

Mr. Stein: I think the most rewarding part of the career is not so much the money, it's nice to make a buck you ~~have to have~~ gotta have a buck to live with a wife and two beautiful daughters that I have, you have to make money to live. But, I think the most rewarding part of running the clothing business and running the restaurant is meeting people, which I love and being successful. I think that is more important to me than the monetary value of making a buck. It's nice making a buck, you gotta have it, you can't live in the world without being profitable, but meeting new people, hiring a lot of teenagers out of high school and still in high school, and getting them a job. With the Big Boy restaurants, when we had them at full stride, we had about 900 employees ~~together~~ together in all the operations, we were probably one of the largest employers in Upper Michigan. Hiring them, meeting them, and training them, I mean to me that's very rewarding.

(When I started the next question, (28) the tape stopped soon, so we just started on the other side.)

ME: What was the most difficult part of your job?

Mr. Stein: I think the most challenging part of the job was in hiring the right people to run your restaurants. Like I mentioned previously we had between ~~8~~ eight and nine hundred people working for us, in all of these different restaurants and in the clothing ~~business~~ stores, and hiring the right material type of person to run these restaurants, from the manager to the assistant Manager to the CO-ASSIANT manager to the proper book keepers, to keep a tab on everything. I feel I have one thing that has made me fairly successful in the business world, ~~and~~ ~~that~~ I remember everything, and I keep track of things, and I'm a detailed guy and I don't say that boastfully, because it's different running a clothing store like Stein's clothing, in Ishpening where you maybe have two, three employees. I guess running a Family restaurant, like Marquette that has a high, like maybe 80 employees in the summer time. But the most challenging part was hiring the right type of high schooler or college person working for you, and making they understand <sup>that</sup> the person coming in there wants a hot cup of coffee

Mr. Stein : and wants a smile and wants service

(cont'd)

and you give that coffee customer the same type of service, the same smile as if somebody was ordering the most expensive meal on the menu. That was a challenge, training the younger generation, and we had all the training, we had video tapes for them, we had ~~training~~ training, we had schooling for them and every thing like that. And the other challenging part was making sure your hiring the right managers and most of the managers were not in high school, but they were college educated, most of them, they had at least two years of college, I would say up to four years of college, some with master's degree. And motivating the managers because you can't be there 24 hours a day, when you're running an operation with 12 restaurants, you can't be all over, you can't watch every customer, the motivating the managers, so the manager takes care of the employee and making sure <sup>that</sup> they're running a good operation, like I say, my primary goal in life was not just making a dollar, I could have made that anywhere, I feel, but

Mr. Stein: in running an operation that was successful and making sure your employees were happy and making sure your managers were happy and giving the employees the medical benefits and the vacation pay and their ten minute breaks and half-hour lunch breaks and making sure they also got benefits as well as the owners, like ourselves.

Me: What family members worked for the same company or - (Mr. Stein: What family members?), yes.

Mr. Stein: Aaron, I, and Larry were a partnership in everything, my older brother Mike, we called him the brains of the family, he became a professor of journalism, graduated from the University of Missouri, went on to be a very successful author written about maybe 20, 25 books on journalism, World War II, foreign correspondants, many text books for high school and college students. Then he became the chairman of the School of Journalism at New York University, then became the, moved from New York, which he was there for fifteen years, then moved to California, where he became chairman

Mr. Stein: of California State University, for school of Journalism, and is still very active in the field of journalism today.

Me: Please describe what your co-workers were like.

Mr. Stein: My co-workers in the clothing and restaurant businesses, that's what you're referring to, (me: yes)

Mr. Stein: I always had a very good report with my co-workers. During my years of running the clothing stores and the restaurants and like I mentioned previously, we had a lot of employees, I think I got along very well with them. I used to sit down and chit chat with them, if an employee had a problem, I would meet with them, . . . .

Mrs. Stein (interrupted): Half the girls that go to Northern are there because Phil helped them out.

Mr. Stein (smiled): anyway if they needed a buck or a loan or something I always lent them or loaned them money. Obviously I didn't get along with everybody, but I'd say I got

Mr. Stein: along with 99 percent of them. There  
 (cont.) were some cases sometimes where you had  
 to fire a manager or let them go or  
 fire an employee because they either  
 stole money or didn't perform or were  
 rude to customers or whatever, I mean  
 everybody's not perfect when you have  
 eight, nine hundred employees you're not  
 gonna have a perfect ship. You're gonna  
 have employees that don't cut it and  
 managers that don't cut it. But I would  
 say we were very careful in hiring employees,  
 most the time it worked out, occasionally it  
 did not work out and we had to let an  
 employee go, but I had a good report with  
 them, and like I say, I was ~~not~~ older than  
 the average employee, ~~at Big Boy~~ the average  
 employee working at Big Boy probably was  
 an average age of <sup>maybe</sup> ~~ages~~ 19 or 20 and we had  
 older ones up to 40, 45, that was not the  
 average age of an employee working at a  
 Big Boy family restaurant. As far as the  
 employees working at the Style Shop we have  
 older gals who are, you know, in there 40's and  
 50's, and 60's, In fact I even go to one working  
 at 75.



Me: Could you describe some interesting or humorous events that have happened during your career?

Mr. Stein: Yes, there's been a lot of humorous events. One time on my, I've got two daughters, one living in Florida, and one in Marguerite, who's a deputy sheriff, so they, a, on my birthday, and I always have gone to the Big Boy from Stein's clothing, I used to leave about 11:30 go down for the lunch hour and as I was stepping into my car in front of Stein's clothing a limosine drives ~~up~~<sup>up</sup> with a driver in a beautiful black uniform, black gloves on, and Mr. Stein, yes, ~~Phil~~<sup>A Phil</sup>, we're at your service, I couldn't believe it. So he opens the back door, and I get in this huge, you've seen these limosines, this was a huge limosine, and I'm going down 3<sup>rd</sup> Street and I totally take it back, he says where would you like to go, I said I want to go to the highway Big Boy, I got my face covered cause I didn't want anybody to see me, I was really embarrassed by it. So we drove down the highway, he stops in front of the Highway Big Boy, and the girls at the Big Boy were all tipped off, so as I get out, and it's 12:00 and the restaurant is

Mr. Stein  
(cont)

full of people, right during the lunch hour, they're standing outside of the Big Boy going (he claps his hands) clapping their hands. I almost fell down from embarrassment. You know, they're clapping "Hey, Big Shot, Phil," driving up in a "limosine" so that was very humorous everyone enjoyed it, and asked the driver in for lunch and he took me over to the mall Big Boy, we had a Big Boy there, I had a Big Boy in the Westwood Mall he took me all over and he finally took me home. But it was quite an experience. And the customers of course, who many I knew by personally basis, as I walked in with a shaver, I mean they clapped and they had some balloons there for me and it was very pleasant I remember all of it. And there were a lot of humorous times or the personnel would have a Halloween Party, and get me a mask or something like that. We had Birthday Parties for employees and managers and we had seminars, which I spoke at, with managers and employees and we always had a good time, we had lunch or dinner together we had them either at the Ramada Inn or

Mr. Stein: the Holiday Inn and a getting new techniques  
 (con't) in the restaurant business. There were a lot of  
 and of course the executives would help me  
 broaden, my two brothers Aaron and Larry and  
 they have to supervisors, West Peterson and Billy  
 \_\_\_\_\_ lived in Escanaba, one lived in \_\_\_\_\_  
 and very tremendous book keeper named  
 Jerry \_\_\_\_\_, it's a gal. And we used to meet  
 for dinner and go over our problems and go over  
 our what we're going to do the following  
 month, rates, regulations, so it was very enjoyable,  
 I ~~loved~~ enjoyed it all. There were many very  
 good times and there were some sad times,  
 too.

ME: At any time did you feel like changing  
 careers? Why or why not?

Mr. Stein: No, I had no desire to change careers at  
 all. I liked the clothing business, I still  
 like the clothing business today and I'm  
 still in it although we're on a downward  
 trend as far as the clothing business. The  
 clothing business is getting tougher and  
 frankly I'm not getting any younger.  
 Although I feel that I would never want  
 to retire, but I never had any desire to  
 change fields. The clothing business was

Mr. Stein: challenging and still challenging today.

(cont)

The rest of the business is certainly very challenging and I really enjoyed it, I have never got up in the morning and felt depressed, ~~remember~~ as a matter a fact I was eager to go to work. And again I don't say this boastfully, I worked seven days a week, and I still do it, Sunday is no holiday for me, and Saturday is no holiday for me. I mean I'm on the go seven days a week and I enjoy it.

ME.: What were the <sup>biggest</sup> ~~biggest~~ responsibilities of your job?

Mr. Stein: The biggest responsibility of ~~of~~ my job?

I would say keeping 800 employees happy is far as the Big Boy Restaurants are concerned, watching your cash flow so you don't get into a financial bind in opening new Big Boys and making sure that you don't have too much inventory so it's spoiled as far as the restaurant business is concerned your throwing it in the garbage can and when you're a multiple ~~operation~~ operation like running, we one time had six clothing stores and 12 Big Boys so that's

Mr. Stein : 18 different operations, you had to be  
 (con't) coordinated otherwise you would soon go  
 broke ~~and wonder why~~ in one or the  
 other or else run out of cash or your  
 creditors or the bank would be on your back  
 if you never made your bank payments and in  
 this business world, 30 years ago or 40 years  
 ago, or 1993, if you don't pay your bank  
 obligations you're not gonna last too long,  
 and if you don't pay your creditors you're  
 not going to last too long. But getting it  
 coordinated financially so ~~you~~ <sup>we</sup> wouldn't  
 run into a cash flow problem, we were  
 not always successful in getting things  
 coordinated many times we did run  
 into a cash flow problem, serious  
 cash flow problems, and we had to  
 go back to the bank for more ~~money~~  
 financing. And you know, you have to explain  
 what happened, why you ran out of  
 money, and make sure if you're loaning  
 more money from the bank, that you're  
 making the payments, because if you didn't,  
 if you never had a good payment record, and as  
 one thing I have always prided myself on and  
 my brothers we have never missed a bank  
 payment, so we had a good credit rating, and a

Mr. Stein: good report with the local bank, ~~which are~~ and the out of town banks.

Me: Did you receive any special awards, for your job?

Mr. Stein: Uh, not really awards, Elias Brothers, who are national would have a yearly convention. In Florida or Detroit, Lansing or something like that, where ever, we had gone for one year and they had a big dinner at the end of the convention, for a three day convention and then the stores, your competing against ~~the~~ Lower Michigan Elias Big Boy stores, but they had things like, who had the largest percentage of sales increase, who had the largest sales, who had the best labor costs, who had the best food costs and so forth and so on and so many of times during those years where we attended all the conventions we would get a plaque from Elias Brothers showing that we were 1st in this, second in this, or there were first, second and third, so basically that was the, other than that there were no others. Being successful was an honor enough for me.

Me: Over the years what have been your favorite hobbies or leisure activities?

Mr. Stein : I would say my favorite hobbies through the years, number one - working, because I consider that a ~~to~~ hobby always have and always will, there is no strain on me to go to work, I work 16 hours a day, 15 hours a day, no strain at all, I enjoy it. But basically you got to get away ~~occasionally~~ occasionally and a visiting my daughter in Florida for a week every year. Going to Las Vegas and a playing the slot machines, I enjoy that, but, basically I enjoy Las Vegas because they have great hotels and great restaurants and great entertainment and I've been a nickel or dime gambler all my life, but I enjoy small gambling, but I enjoy the hotels and the ~~life~~ life, I enjoy going out to dinner, to the restaurants and during the years we've seen tremendous entertainment there, which I enjoy very relaxing, we spend three, four, five nights there, maybe once or twice a year at the most. And occasionally we've gone to London and Paris and I've taken a very short vacation about a week and getting out of Upper Michigan and enjoyable coming back.

Me: Have you ever been involved in any clubs or sport ~~leagues~~ leagues? if so please describe them.

Mr. Stein: Yes, I belong to many clubs. I belong to the American \_\_\_\_\_ the VFW, ~~the~~ I'm the former <sup>Upper Peninsula</sup> commander of the disabled American veterans. And I'm still active in, well, no active in the DAV, I'm a life time member. But I am active in Rodery which is a charitable organization and we donate money for Bay Cliff and Boys and Girls Softball and Bell Hospital, you name it, we're a charitable organization and that's enjoyable doing that. Actually, I belong to other clubs, but I don't attend all the meetings, it's impossible, but I do make it a point to attend every night, every Tuesday night, Rodery meetings.

Me: What special moments stand out about this aspect of your life?

Mr. Stein: Well I think the special moments of my life have been number one - I've never had a sick day (he knocks on the table) I'm knocking



Mr. Stein : on wood three times. I've never been sick a day of my life, outside of being in a field hospital in the army for 5, 6 weeks. I've never been ill to the extent where I couldn't go to work, you know, I mean I've knocked off a few hours when I had a cold or something like that. But I think I've enjoyed remarkable good health, in my life time. And ~~2~~ raising two beautiful daughters, being married to Rose has been a great wife. And having a great mother and father and three good brothers.

Me. Overall, what are your fondest memories of working days and your career?

Mr. Stein : My fondest memory of my ~~working~~ working days is that I would have <sup>really</sup> liked to kept it to the restaurant business. I was in the restaurant business and again I told you I'm still in the restaurant business but on a lot smaller scale. I like to have kept on into the restaurant business, and ~~and~~ opened up more Big Boy Family restaurants

Mr. Stein : they were great to run and I felt I was effect in running them along with my brothers and I could of kept on going but what you got to realize, like I mentioned earlier I'm no child anymore and you have to start letting go of some of the stuff as you're getting a little older in life, I mean I'm still very active in many businesses but I felt it was time and brothers felt it was time that we got of the Big Boy restaurant business and we ran them for 27 years, which is a long time in the restaurant business, the average life for a person in the restaurant business is not 27 years, you'll get out alot sooner but I've had fond memories of Big Boy Family Restaurants and many times when I'm driving to Marquette from Ishpeming I make that turn going in to the Big Boy and catch myself and I'm parked in front of the Big Boy Family restaurant. Everytime sheepishly I'm looking at it and I say no, I'm going Alexander's (laughingly). But I enjoyed the Elias Brothers who are in Lower Michigan, who are very nice, very great people and I enjoyed running the restaurant. And I enjoyed running the restaurants even though it was a strain many times. But, I've got very fond memories of the restaurant business, I've got very fond memories of the clothing business. And the clothing business is tough today. But, I've enjoyed that.

Mr. Stein: My first start in my business life was at Stein's clothing. I've ~~never~~ got fond memories of that, I've got fond memories of the people of ~~Chicago~~ Ishpeming, who got me off to a good start and without ~~their~~ <sup>their</sup> sales and without their help I would of never made it.

Me: Were you a member of a union, if so which one?

Mr. Stein: No, not a member of a union.

Me: If you had to do it all over again would you choose the same ~~care~~ career? Why or why not?

Mr. Stein: If I had to live my life over again I would choose the identical career that I started off with. With the clothing stores and the restaurants and if I had to do it over again there's only one thing I would change. I'm U.P. born and lived all my life in the U.P., outside of a short period I lived in Milwaukee, born and raised in Escanaba, lived in Ishpeming a good part of my life. The only thing I would do <sup>over</sup> again I would accelerated the Big Boys and opened up more Big Boys down state, where I had many opportunities to do it, but I didn't want to leave the Upper Michigan. But I would of accelerated the pace of opening

Mr. Stein: up restaurants because to me it was a thrill, I enjoyed it.

Me: In closing, do you have anything else you would like to add?

Mr. Stein: No, I don't really have anything else to add. I've enjoyed my life and hope can continue it for many many more years. Like I said previously, I enjoy working with young people, ~~and~~ I enjoy working with older people. And I think the business world today for young high school graduates or college graduates there's a tremendous opportunity in the restaurant business for ownership or management, the pay is very very good. And as far as the clothing business, if you sharp and know style, there's a great opportunity in the clothing business today also for young people. I think there both challenging careers and I think there's an opportunity for people to go ahead start off as a cook, and get to be a manager, assistant manager, and a supervisor and so forth and possibly in time opening up your own restaurant like we did, my brothers and I did not have a family background of money. My family were very moderate

Mr. Stein: as far as making a living they sent me to a school, and they made a living but it was hard going, but I enjoyed it all.

(Later in the tape Mr. Stein told another story about an event that took place during World War II)

Mr. Stein: Oh Molly, I was telling you, I don't have to look at her I've been looking at her for an hour and half, I was telling you ~~the~~ army where we were running into problems with the Nazis and there were heated battle, so one day I was with the medics and we were getting the hell, blasted out of us, we were really getting beat, the Americans were advancing and the Germans had these 88 guns and we were really getting blasted and whole units were being blown away and I was bandaging up wounded and taking ones away, and so forth and so on, it go to be about 4:30 in the afternoon, things stopped a little bit, shelling stopped somewhat but it was still going on hot and heavy and I got completely lost from my unit and it was getting dusk and I'm walking around there with two medical bags on, red cross helmet, I was hungry, we hadn't eaten anything since breakfast, and that was a miserable meal. And I was walking

Mr. Stein

in the Black Forest of Germany which are very thick with trees and everything, and walking around till it's just about dark and finally I see lights, and I'm so excited, I says thank god, I found, ~~for~~ I'm home! And I kept walking and walking towards those lights, half running and walking and I get within 50 yards of where the lights are where this little village was and I see somebody walking sentry duty and waving and I get closer and closer and about 20 yards away from ~~some~~ this guy and all of a sudden my eyes opened up to three times there normal size and I look at my uniform and I says, "Damn, we're wearing brown this year," and this guy got green on which is the uniform of the nazi soldier. I could not believe it! and he looks at me I look at him, and even though I had that red cross on my helmet and the arm band, ~~he takes the stop of his gun and~~ ~~starts~~ he stop of his, gun off his shoulder, he aims the gun at me, and I told you previously I was good in sports in high school especially track, and football and I used to run the hundred yards in 10.2 was my best high school time and which is still pretty good, and I wanna tell ya, I dropped those medical bags I had and he started shooting, must of made the hundred yard dash in 8 seconds! Because I knew I was a dead G.I. if I didn't get the hell outta there. And he click +

Mr. Stein: hit me and I headed for the woods,  
but it was a horrifying experience. I found  
my unit that same night about 1:00 in the  
morning, found some GIs anyway who gave  
can of food, but it was quite an experience.

- Molly Froun Fetter