



Karen Stein

Executive Director - 1975-78

Interview with Karen Stein (Norman Silber)
Atlanta, Georgia
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Prof. Silber: This is an interview with Karen Stein taking place at the ACCI convention on April 14, 1984. The interviewer is Norman Silber.

Karen, could you please begin by telling me how you got involved with the consumer movement?

Prof. Stein: I got involved with it through my schooling. I had actually entered college, if you really want to go back this far, as a child development major. I had worked with Head Start and with a number of social movements when I was in high school and had always been very active in that affair.

In school, I had to take a household economics management course. It was just on my schedule, I hadn't signed up for it. I didn't know how to get out of it so I took it. It turned out that I hated child development and this management course really captured my imagination. It was at the time of Ralph Nader, too. He was just rising to prominence. It was also the time of the youth movement, flower children, it seemed as if the whole field of consumer affairs/consumer protection was something that was socially important as well as personally interesting, so I just fell into it through a high school commitment, to just social movements in specific.

NS: Was it in college that you really got involved in consumer education?

KS: Yes.

NS: Where was that?

KS: That was at Cornell.

NS: Were there teachers at Cornell who were particularly influential?

KS: Gwen Bymers, of course, was there. She was the chair of the department at the time. Perhaps she had the greatest influence on me. I was very active in the department as chairperson of student activities and student advisory committee and had worked with her somewhat closely, so she was probably my prime influence.

NS: What sorts of things really excited you about the consumer movement then?

KS: It was the new civil rights movement. Of course, women's liberation was a little bit down the line. But, here was something that affected blacks, it affected old people, it affected wealthy people. It seemed to be a socially concerned movement that had direct relevance to everybody's life, particularly my own, of course, so it was personally intriguing.

The consumer activists of the past appealed as role models. They showed that things could be done, that the world could be made better in a very real practical sense. There was still work to do and it just seemed that I had an affinity for gathering that kind of knowledge for working in the community. I worked for a consumer protection association at a local level.

NS: What was that?

KS: A consumer complaint resolution type of office.

NS: In New York City?

KS: No. It was in Ithaca. I wrote consumer articles for a county newspaper. I had a column and a staff of sorts for that. This was all while I was a student.

In Chenango County, I worked on a social welfare project. This was a town where half of the town was \$1.00 below the welfare line and the other half was \$1.00 above the welfare line. The two groups didn't really like each other very much. I was attached to the mayor's office, trying to get these people together and understand their mutual situations which I saw as a consumer welfare problem. We weren't very successful.

NS: Was this while you were in college?

KS: This was while I was in college.

NS: Pretty extraordinary to be doing that while you were going to school.

KS: Yes. In fact, Gwen Bymers didn't agree with many of the things that I was doing. We ran into some problems there in terms of my philosophy and her philosophy of what a student ought to be doing with the consumer movement; what it was supposed to be like.

NS: Can you explain that?

KS: I still don't really understand her point of view so I really can't explain it very fully. She thought that perhaps one of her students, particularly at the graduate level, ought to be taking more of a scholarly and less active approach to consumer problems.

NS: You thought of yourself as an activist? Well, you really were.

KS: At the time, sure.

NS: This debate about whether to be an activist or a professional certainly is sort of a theme that runs through ACCI's history. When did you first get involved with ACCI?

KS: My first involvement, other than being a member, actually did not come about until I was hired at the University of Missouri starting in July with the knowledge that in that following April at the annual conference, I would become executive director. So I was not actively involved in the organization until I was, in essence, in training to be the executive director.

NS: That's quite unusual. How was it that you went to Missouri?

KS: It was the best job offer I had. I had three. It was the best, particularly because of ACCI. The job offer was not for ACCI *per se*. The position was for extension specialist in family economics and management. The board had negotiated with Ed Metzen that whoever he hired for this extension position—which would be with faculty status in his department—would also work on a part-time basis as executive director of ACCI. He was really hiring for extension with the knowledge that this person would also be attached to ACCI.

NS: You had just gotten your MS in consumer economics in public policy and the year was?

KS: 1974.

NS: Had you heard of ACCI in 1974?

KS: Oh, yes. I had been a member.

NS: Did you join right when you became a student?

KS: I don't really remember the year. I know the circumstance. I was doing a research paper and I was trying to find some sources. I was in the architecture library and I came across the *Journal* through the card catalog and I said, "Look at this journal, this is fantastic." I saw in the *Journal* that it said if you wanted to be a member to sign up and send in your check, and I did. So, it was just by happenstance. I hadn't heard about it through my curriculum or through the department.

NS: When did you first go to a convention?

KS: When I became executive director.

NS: You mean you had not been to a convention until you were executive director?

KS: That's right.

NS: Yours must have been some interview performance. Did you go down to Missouri to interview for the job?

KS: Yes.

NS: And Ed interviewed you?

KS: Yes. Ed, and Gordon Bivens was there at the time. Probably in terms of the ACCI hierarchy Ed and Gordon were the only two. Ed had complete control over it.

NS: What did Ed tell you about his leaving? I mean, why was the executive directorship coming vacant?

KS: I think it was probably, from what I remember, simply along the lines that he had done it for so long, it was taking so much of his time that he really needed more time to devote to his family and to his regular "real" job and was looking for somebody else.

NS: What was it like to move from Ithaca to Columbia, Missouri?

KS: It was a lot cheaper to live in Columbia, Missouri. Over the years, it was not my favorite place. I don't think the image of the friendly midwesterner is all that terribly true. Usually people grew up in the town or in the state. They went to the University of Missouri, then they became faculty at the University of Missouri and they lived and died in Missouri, and I think it was a rather closed society, not very diverse. Being from New York, I found that difficult over the years.

NS: How did the consumer activism of Ithaca and Cornell and the spirit that was there, differ from that which you encountered in Missouri; or did it?

KS: I really don't think that there was that much consumer activism going on in Missouri. At least, if there was, I wasn't that terribly aware of it. There was a small student group that got involved in some small projects but the times were different, too. 1974 was very different from '68, and things had quieted down. I don't think there really was any direct comparison.

NS: What was your job as executive director like?

KS: Basically, it was an administrative job in the sense of carrying out the wishes of the board and responding to the responsibilities of the office, making sure that things got done on time. I did not see it particularly as a policy-making position. I did not see it as being president of the organization, but simply as keeping things running on time, keeping things complete.

NS: What was the biggest part of that job?

KS: It was really very mundane things. It was the day-to-day keeping expenses; making up the financial statements; trying to increase membership; responding to requests and letters, basically from students who wanted information about specific topics; getting the newsletters out on time. That's what the membership wanted and that's what I saw this office as doing.

NS: Were finances a problem?

KS: We were in the red when I took over.

NS: In saying "took over," you mean . . .

KS: When I took over that office, when I became executive director in April. I remember that, somehow or other, we had gotten out of the red by the time I left. We never really had much money, but on the other hand, there was money for the things that we wished to do and to keep the organization growing. There wasn't a lot in reserve. It wasn't really an operating problem.

NS: What were the physical facilities like in Missouri?

KS: They were terrible. Every now and then we would have somebody come to visit ACCI headquarters and they would really be shocked. We borrowed space in the extension offices. I had my own cubicle with the other extension people. ACCI had a desk in a hallway of the extension offices. We had one desk, two file cabinets. For storage, next to this was a room that used to be a bathroom; the toilets were removed but the stalls were still there. The bathtub was still there. We had things piled in the bathtub and in the shower and in the stalls.

Just for operating reasons, sometimes we needed to spread out to get things done because so much of our work was just dealing with papers and shuffling things around, so we put a table in the laundry room which also belonged to extension. That was somewhat of a problem because that room really wasn't ours and one of the extension people used to get very upset and every now and then we'd have to pack everything up so she could do her work. Then we'd have to unpack everything.

It was very crowded. It made things difficult because it was very hard to be terribly organized when you were so cramped and did not have the space or facilities that you really needed. That was difficult, not particularly even for me, but for two part-time secretaries who really had to work there. We were dealing with the other extension people who were not very thrilled to have us taking up what precious little space really belonged to them and which they could have used. There were some problems with those people in trying to work out schedules and some resentments there. And these were my friends, yet.

NS: How were decisions made at ACCI while you were there?

KS: Decisions were made by the board. We had periods of some very good presidents during that time. The first board meeting that I had gone to was the one where Ed and I were basically sharing responsibilities. I was becoming executive director the day after the board meeting broke up but I was just taking the minutes and learning what to do and becoming familiar.

NS: Do you remember where that was?

KS: I believe it was Kansas City. It would be the 1975 conference. At that time, the president was not totally in control of the board.

Ed really ran that meeting. For all practical purposes, he was executive director and he was president, and I had understood that this had been more or less the way that it had been

because he knew more than anybody about what was going on and what was possible and what wasn't possible.

I didn't feel in any way shape or form that I could have that function, nor would I want that function. I didn't see this position as being anything like that. So, in terms of policy making or who got things done, I think perhaps my extent of it would be putting some ideas for consideration on the agenda that I knew about that perhaps the board did not know about because they were happening at Missouri, then explaining those policies and carrying out the wishes of the board. I was not a voting member of the board as executive director.

NS: You were taking the minutes for the meetings, you were at most of the meetings, you must have been to nearly all of them. Can you talk about how the board seemed to work? You said that Ed knew what was going on more than anybody else, but were they free-wheeling kinds of discussions? Had the politics been done beforehand? Were the votes pro forma?

KS: No, not at all. During those years there were some very controversial issues that seemed to be arising every year. It was very exciting. Everybody came to the business meetings because everybody knew there was going to be a fight. There were varying opinions among the board members at the time. There were no real easy solutions for the hard things. There wasn't any pro forma.

NS: Did you think of the board as having different constituencies? Did these people represent somewhat different facets of the consumer movement?

KS: Not at the beginning, but there was change during the short time that I was there. There was more diversity during the latter years. There was an old guard faction and there was an emerging younger faction and there were, perhaps, some differences there.

In the business meetings, when you saw certain people stand up to speak—and certain people would always stand up to speak—you knew exactly what they were going to say. It wasn't any great surprise.

NS: For me it would be. What was the alignment like?

KS: Again, it depended on the issue. One of the issues had to deal with whether or not we ought to accept funds from profit-making organizations— or even to be associated with them in any kind of active way at all. Part of that, though this was in a different year, involved voting rights for people who are with profit-making organizations.

In favor of not associating with profit-making organizations were many of the people who had been with ACCI for many years, almost the founding members: Dick Morse and Father McEwen, I remember distinctly. I think Stewart Lee, also, but I'd have to check up on that. That crowd still exists. If you go out to the hallway this year, you'll see that same crowd who had been dealing with the consumer movement when nothing could be taken for granted, who really had done the groundbreaking work, who were perhaps more skeptical of real cooperation being able to exist. They were adamantly opposed to ACCI having anything to do with profit-making organizations.

I think the younger members saw this as an opportunity for ACCI as long as the control rested solely with the board and that rigid rules could be set up to insure that. There is nothing wrong about accepting funds as long as we had control of the funds. And we weren't afraid of that possibility.

NS: Who were the younger people who were really saying, "It's about time we took a different position"?

KS: On the board. I believe Carole Makela, Carl Hall and Mary Dee Dickerson were among those in favor of association.

In terms of the membership, there were people standing up at the business meeting who really didn't have the power within the organization. Perhaps that's why I don't remember them now. I could think of people whom I know now who probably might have been those people, but I can't say for sure that they were.

NS: Where were you in this?

KS: I had no vote whatsoever. My personal feeling was that I saw no problem with it at all. I saw it as a means for ACCI to be able to accomplish certain deeds and good things for this organization that it simply would not have the funds otherwise to do. I had enough faith in the board that this would work and they would not become co-opted.

In one sense, we lost some good things, too, because those present at the business meeting did vote not to have any association. We had been associated with *Changing Times* which had supported some research awards for us. Nobody meant for this award program to stop, but it did. It had to be by virtue of this vote.

NS: Why?

KS: Because this is an association with a profit-making organization. We could not accept their monies any more.

NS: Do you remember the vote? I know you don't remember the precise details, but do you have a feeling about that meeting? Do you remember whether it was a ferocious dispute?

KS: It was a ferocious dispute. During those years, the business meetings went on for hours and hours. Many people got very upset, heated, about them. We used to have banquets at the time. The banquets used to be three hours late. In one sense, it was exciting because at least people were thinking and doing it so passionately.

Now, business meetings were basically, "Here's the treasurer's report, here's that report, etc., isn't it nice, everybody go home." Perhaps that's easier to work with, but it's not an exciting time. I think some of those decisions were not terribly good, and in fact, we have reversed some of them. We do accept monies from Shell, for example, and this oral history is one of those products of that.

NS: You were talking about the question of the voting members, business vs. non-business membership. You, yourself, came more or less from that '60s consumer impulse. Were there others like you in ACCI?

KS: Not many at that time. It wasn't until about 1976 that the people like me—now I can name them—started coming to the conferences, and have been coming steadily since then. Actually, 1976 was only a year after I came in, though I count that as 1974. It took them some time to be able to gather some votes and influence. It was a different crowd in 1970-75. Those people are still here but not in as great numbers. I was talking to Marge Merchant yesterday and said, "I don't know anybody here, and I used to know everybody."

NS: I'm really interested in learning more about the new group that you're talking about. Who were they, and their backgrounds, and how did they get there? How did they get to ACCI, and once they got there, were they comfortable?

KS: I think these are people who see ACCI as not exactly having a different function, but serving a different purpose for them. I think the old guard group loves ACCI as an

organization, feel very passionately about it as something good for the country, for the society.

The newer people see ACCI more as a place that allows us to present papers, to publish. It's a research forum, to a certain degree, to learn about what everybody else is doing and to gather information, but even more important than that, to be able to gather the credentials that allow us to continue in our career.

Perhaps those altruistic reasons for ACCI have changed. Now it's used more as a professional base for personal and academic advancement. I don't think the younger people have this dedication to ACCI as an entity in and of itself other than as a professional association.

NS: And you think those earlier people had it as really a primary identity?

KS: Yes.

NS: Are there any new people joining for whom ACCI is really that kind of a primary association?

KS: There may be. I don't know.

NS: For example, how do you see yourself?

KS: I see myself in the middle, perhaps with a foot in each camp because I come from a different situation than other people who are in my age group. I use it, too, as a place to present my papers and to get publications. I have presented many papers here.

Since I left ACCI as the director, I found it very useful. If ACCI didn't exist, I don't know where else I would go. It is really the primary association for people who are in my field to present and to publish. So, it serves that very important professional function. I also feel a stronger loyalty to the organization simply because I know more about it and I understand somewhat more about its history than members who come to present and to listen. Yet it's hard, because there hasn't been anything to think about or fight about these past couple of years; it's been so quiet. It's good, it's healthy, because then you can just quietly grow and you can exist, but there's nothing to become impassioned about.

NS: Do you think that people feel that the decisions that were made really can't change; that the questions that were open really have been resolved pretty much? You said it's sort of settled down to that kind of an academic organization as opposed to an advocacy organization.

KS: No, decisions have changed. The entire membership, by way of a mail ballot, I believe, indicated they were in favor of accepting funds from profit-making institutions just a year or two ago. Of course, most of the members probably had no knowledge of the fierce debate on this issue in 1976-1977. The business meeting at which this change in policy was announced doesn't even really stand out in my mind. It was more or less presented as, "Of course this is the thing to do," which is the way we tried to present it many many years ago, and nobody really waged any strong objections. Perhaps Dick Morse stood up, perhaps Stewart Lee stood up.

NS: Are you saying that it was more of an advocacy organization when there were business members who could vote than it is now—that it's a different organization?

KS: I don't think it was ever an advocacy organization. I think there were people who felt very strongly about the consumer movement as a movement, but I don't think ACCI was ever meant to be an advocacy organization, at least in the past 10 or 20 years, because it is non-partisan.

If there are certain issues that are clearly in the consumer interest, we have passed resolutions. We have asked presidential candidates—I believe it was in the 1976 election—to send their

consumer platform, and we published that. But I don't think ACCI has ever, in the recent past or in the midway past, taken an advocacy stand on anything other than in a supporting role.

NS: How would you talk about the roles of people who were board members in other organizations when you were on the board? Were people advocates in their other lives and who came to ACCI and put on their non-partisan hats?

KS: I think, for the most part, these people were still academics in their other lives, but perhaps 10-20 years previous to being where they were at the time that I knew them on the board, were advocates in their own way. Not in a Ralph Nader way, perhaps, but in the sense that this is an important movement, this is something that calls for active support and never really trusting that it was ever going to stand the test of time unless that vigilant watch was out there.

NS: Did you ever feel threatened by business influence while you were executive director?

KS: No, but, I was in favor of the resolution to strip the voting from business members, only because I had seen what happened in AHEA (American Home Economics Association), with the HEIBs (Home Economists in Business). It's becoming harder and harder for academics to travel to the conferences, and yet business people, for the most part, were getting their ways paid, at least in AHEA. What happened, of course, was that you would have a whole business meeting full of business people with very few academics or educators being able to come. This has never happened here, but perhaps it was the threat of that or the thought of that.

Surprisingly enough, at the business meeting I remember Dave Schoenfeld and perhaps some other business people, were the ones who felt the most magnanimous towards this resolution. They saw the reasoning and they didn't mind at all. They still had impact, through being able to talk to the board of directors, being able to make their suggestions. They simply did not vote or would not vote at the business meetings, and they didn't feel that this was any kind of terrible thing. If anything, it was the academics who thought stripping anybody of their voting rights was a terrible thing to do and something that perhaps could, if not tear the organization apart, was perhaps not in the interest of the fairness inherent in the consumer movement, which was an interesting unexpected development.

NS: I've heard it said that it might not have been totally disinterested, because many academics had business relationships or consulting relationships that they were concerned about.

KS: But as long as their primary employment was not in a profit-making organization, they would still retain voting rights. Their primary place of employment was the criteria, so consulting wouldn't have made any difference.

NS: We talked about the business vote and this newer group. Why don't you think that Ralph Nader and the consumer activist leaders and environmental health, for example, or other fields, joined ACCI?

KS: I think they see other organizations as being more appropriate to their purposes, that were designed to be more appropriate either at the grass roots level or CFA, or state organizations. I think ACCI has always been set up as a primary place for the dissemination of information and never really had, as its primary purpose, an advocacy function in terms of very active initiation of action. It did not have this purpose; there were organizations that did.

NS: So you don't see that as a loss?

KS: No. As long as these other organizations still exist and as long as ACCI is still associated with them in terms of support.

NS: CFA and Consumer Assembly—I guess these groups were formed while you were active in

ACCI about this time.

KS: CFA had been in existence for quite some time.

NS: 1965, '66, maybe '67 was the meeting. It was 1973, I think, that the meat boycott happened, and really a lot of these things took off. How would you assess the influence that ACCI had on the rest of the movement, on people of CFA and other consumer groups; how would they regard ACCI?

KS: I think they probably regarded them as a bastion of academics who could be counted on if there was some supporting research that could be done, if there was some recent testimony that would be helpful to their cause, that there was a group of people who could be called upon other than the grass roots people who could be very impassioned, but perhaps not prepare that expert testimony that would be palatable to the congressional committees and what have you. So, I think they saw us basically as what we were, which was that we were open to everybody and certainly our membership stretched across all kinds of spectrums of people, but basically an academic organization.

NS: Do you hope that the research you do is going to be used both at the lawmaking level as well as the individual consumer purchasing level?

KS: My work has basically been on a public policy level. My work has never been at the direct consumption level—the how tos, the credit buys and purchase decisions and quality price considerations; you know, the very micro consumer issues that have to be very useful to the individual.

NS: So, you've been really concerned with generating information that other people would use to pass laws and change consumer behavior?

KS: Or methodology, right.

NS: ACCI began publishing the *Journal* in the late '60s, really. You said that the *Journal* itself was what got you excited about joining ACCI. What do you think of the *Journal*, and how do you think it served ACCI?

KS: I think very highly of the *Journal*, particularly if you see what other kinds of consumer journals are available. In terms of the issues that it covers, the language that it's written in serves the purposes of people who are both interested in consumer education, consumer policies, and consumer economics.

For example, I think the *Journal of Consumer Research* is still more a marketing journal regardless of what it says. *Consumer Policy* is good, but again, it has a very limited circulation. I think our *Journal* really does a fine job.

NS: What do you think are the basic services that ACCI provides that really attract the people who are members?

KS: No doubt that it is the *Newsletter*. When I was executive director, we did our first membership survey of who these people were and what they wanted and how they rated the various services. At that time, and probably still today, overwhelmingly it's the *Newsletter*. The short resource list and descriptions in it are just extremely useful to students, people who are teaching, to business people also, and it's something that's updated every month.

NS: What distinguishes the people who are active and come to the ACCI conferences from the people who don't?

KS: Again, it's the same answer. Most people who come use the ACCI for their own professional purposes.

It's become a social place, also. Perhaps all conferences are, but our group is small enough, you know who comes here. Three hundred, 400, sometimes 200 people; it's not like the American Economic Association. You go there and people are in six hotels and there's 2000 people. You never really connect with anybody, you don't really get to know anybody. This conference is different. It's a way to meet people whom you only see once a year, and yet you can pick up conversations as if you saw them last week.

If you're an academic, your occupational reason for being here is that you must be here in order to advance in your field by being active in terms of presenting. And, for some people, that old old loyalty that this is their organization—it was in 1950 and was in 1960 and it's going to be in 1990— keeps them coming. They don't present; they just come here because it's theirs.

NS: Do you think that the character of the meeting has changed in any way?

KS: Not the character of the sessions. I think the sessions and the way it's run have been remarkably steady throughout the years. If anything, I see less fooling around that I used to see. I can remember when the sessions used to be very poorly attended because everybody was out in the hall having a good time. I'm still surprised when I walk into sessions and there are people in the sessions when they are supposed to be in the sessions.

I can remember when people used to say terrible things about the conference because we used to hold them near the airport instead of downtown. People wanted to be downtown so they could go out and have fun. So, if anything, I think people are more serious now about attending the sessions and learning new information.

It used to be that nobody would miss the business meetings. Now, there's no real big reason to go.

NS: Do you think that there are people who are consumer professionals who could come to ACCI except for their feelings that the meetings aren't productive or something of that sort? Are there a lot of consumer professionals out there who don't come to ACCI?

I assume that when you talked about the *Newsletter* being a service, there is that group of people for whom it's just because they're in business or they're someplace, but people who are really devoted to consumer education who just don't come.

KS: I'm sure there must be. Obviously, there's more than 200 people working in consumer affairs than show up at this conference. The same people again, and every year you'll catch a new 30 faces or what have you, and maybe they'll continue coming and maybe they will not. Probably the only people who really have a strong incentive to come are the people who are going to be using these research results in their own work, who need to be informed, who need to maintain those contacts. If you don't need that, there's no real reason to come. It gets terribly expensive; it really does. Many people, especially nowadays with money so tight, just can't come.

NS: What's happened to the high school teachers?

KS: They're gone. They were never here strongly.

NS: What was it like when you were executive director?

KS: They were here to a larger degree, so we're talking about 3% as opposed to 0%. At every board meeting, there was always, "What are we going to do for the high school teachers? How

can we get them more interested?" and it just never worked.

I can't really recall, but perhaps there were more sessions at that point on consumer education at the high school or at the elementary level. Those things have just dropped, because if we don't receive those papers, we can't put them on the program, so perhaps it's perceived more as a university level organization, which is correct.

NS: Do you think that these people would get something if they came to the meeting of ACCI? Should leaders of consumer groups be invited to attend ACCI consciously, specifically, "Come to an ACCI meeting and you meet...?"

KS: I think that it's almost a vicious circle because the program that you have is in response to the papers that you get and the people who you know are going to be coming, so when you direct it that way, you get those kinds of people. It's always nice to say that everybody should come; everybody will get something out of it. Perhaps the way that it's focused now, it's true that high school teachers could spend whatever limited funds they have more constructively by going to other kinds of meetings, as could consumer activists. I don't mean to say that it's polarized, because these organizations are not in competition with each other. Maybe that's good because there are different functions and different purposes to each organization.

We feel we can be more supportive of each other because we're not stealing each other's membership. Everybody is open to go wherever they wish to go. Perhaps it would be nicer to have a broader base, but perhaps by broadening our base also, you tend to become almost too general and then you lose people.

NS: Do you think in some sense of ACCI as basically having achieved its potential?

KS: Oh, it's gathered that group, it's got together that group of people. Perhaps it's narrowed itself to that group of people.

I can remember many years ago, we had many more representatives from business coming, and they don't come to that degree any more. Perhaps again, that's still a function of the sessions. Perhaps it's a function of now there's SOCAP. Previously there wasn't SOCAP, so perhaps they found a better place for their own purposes.

NS: But isn't their perception perhaps that ACCI isn't as influential as other groups where they feel they do need to go to the convention—you said SOCAP, for example?

KS: I don't know if ACCI was ever that influential. Perhaps it had a monopoly and that's why people came. It depends on what you mean.

NS: It's a good time to talk about influence. What influence does ACCI have outside of ACCI?

KS: I think it has respectability, that by having an ACCI representative on your own board or in your commission or in your governmental fact-finding or what have you, that it increases the credentials of that organization. We're basically known as academics, and that image conveys logic, knowledge and fairness. I think it's respectability, it's credentialing.

Certainly nobody is going to change their mind because ACCI says to do so. CFA, of course, gives out their ratings of presidential and senatorial candidates, but it's not really an individual membership organization. CFA is, of course, an organization of organizations, so individuals who are simply interested in knowing the consumer voting record of people that they may be considering for office can get that information from CFA for a fee, I believe, but they wouldn't just normally get it.

Perhaps we were influential in terms of asking for the consumer platform of the presidential

candidates at the time that we did and then disseminating that information without anybody really having to ask for it. I'm not sure anybody should vote for a presidential candidate solely on their consumer platform, but to some people it is a very important component because it does relate to other kinds of political issues, and so perhaps it's influential in the information-giving aspect.

NS: We were talking about influence and you were saying that ACCI has a kind of limited influence in the political sense but that it adds respectability. There wasn't a profession of consumer educators in 1959, but over the last 25 years, there has grown to be a profession of consumer affairs. Do you think ACCI can claim some role for that?

KS: Yes, definitely. This is the organization that people know, that they can come to join and to meet other people. This is the organization that people use for their own advancement and to learn from each other, and it's a place where you can perhaps find a mentor. It increases one's sense of belonging to a profession.

NS: What do you think have been the critical turning points? You mention the business voting issue, but what do you think of the other milestones or critical points in the growth of ACCI since you've been there? I know you can't speak to the earlier period.

KS: I just know from the history, which is as much as you know, I am sure. There is a difference between turning points and growth.

NS: I mean, in the points at which the organization might have foundered or the points at which the organization might have achieved enormous, or did in fact, achieve enormous gains, made strides.

KS: One of the things—and this was fairly easy to accomplish, though it took many years to do so—was the opening of the ballots to all members of the organization rather than to just those people who attended the business meetings.

It used to be that whatever decisions had to be ratified by the membership were ratified only by those people who attended the business meeting. That was quite unfair to a very large extent. In one sense, it was nice because those were the people who, of course, were most interested in ACCI, who were most supportive by being there at ACCI, who can get the information in detail, and so who were perhaps most informed.

NS: These were the intense members.

KS: Yes, and it was good in that sense. It was unfair in the sense that there were some people, simply because of situations—because it is expensive, because of whatever reason—could not be there, who might have had the same interest, but just couldn't be there and were not allowed to vote or could not vote on anything. The problem was, how do you balance this fairness between letting all members vote and the information of having an informed membership vote? That, perhaps, is why it took so long to move to where we actually did move, because it's a very serious distinction, and while in your heart you may feel that everybody should vote, we were really voting about very serious kinds of issues.

How do you get people to have the information in detail or in the quantity that they need to make an informed decision rather than just saying, "This is how I feel at the moment," when you are talking about something that might affect very important directions of the organization?

NS: Did it change the composition of the board?

KS: Yes.

NS: How?

KS: To a great extent. It used to be that the board members were elected by the board. Now, what was good about that—and this was good—I remember when I was in office being sometimes instrumental in suggesting who would be good board members because these were the people who had made inputs, who were calling in the office, who showed interest, who knew what they were talking about, who really had the interest of the organization at heart because, at that point, there was nothing in it for them, truly. Therefore, you were able to put people on the board who knew something about ACCI. Unfortunately, what happens, is that that was a very small group of people.

So, the same people would go on the board, go off the board, on the board, etc., they'd be on the board for ten years—that's an exaggeration—but the point stands. Certainly there was some popularity dimension in it. There were people who were more popular with the existing board. If you didn't like somebody that was a real "noodnik," get them off or don't put them on the board in the first place. Who wants them.

You were able to control. It was good in the sense that you were able to get certain people who you knew would work for the organization. It was unfortunate that they were a small group of people and perhaps that's what turned other people off.

By opening it up to the membership, you run the risk that people are voting for either a name that is familiar to them, for whatever reason, or all they may know about the person is a blurb about three inches long. Perhaps these are people who are running for ACCI because they're really dedicated and interested in ACCI. Perhaps it's because they need it to put on their resume. Who knows? Still, it's worked out very well.

NS: Who might never have been on the board but for the mail ballot?

KS: Everybody.

NS: I mean people who wouldn't be natural nominee selections by the group?

KS: Let me think. As it turns out, some people who have been selected to the board are those people who have been the emerging members. After a number of years, they probably would have gotten on the board anyway even without a mail ballot. It might just have taken them a little longer.

Roger Swagler might be in this category. Ron Stampfl might be. I'm sometimes surprised at the people that have been nominated. You can't say that if they weren't elected by the membership, they never would have been put on the board anyway, because it is still controlled somewhat by the nominations committee. Sometimes people are nominated who seem to have had very little connection to ACCI either through function or past experience, and yet they perform just as well, if not better perhaps, because they come in without any preconceived ideas or relationships. Perhaps past connections don't make any difference.

NS: That's interesting. Was that mail ballot initiated while you were executive director?

KS: Yes.

NS: And it was in response to the membership. Do you think that there were members who really brought that up? Or was it the board that was concerned about its non-democratic nature?

KS: The board had been talking about that even before I came to sit on the board in 1975.

NS: And it wasn't developed from the group up, it was more like from the board down?

KS: There may have been some comments here and there, but I think that, for the most part, it was instigated by the board and it was just a matter of how to work it, and it took a number of years to get to that point.

I don't think there was ever any awful groundswell from the membership— "This is terribly unfair, and you don't allow me to vote by virtue of mail, I'm leaving,"—so it was something that the board felt was important to do. It was just a matter of, how does one do it?

NS: Were you around when the fight over the location took place? Can you tell me your view of what happened?

KS: Sure. I was leaving the University of Missouri. This was in 1977, because I left in 1978, so it must have been in the Fall of 1977.

Obviously there had to be a change of some sort. Somebody new had to become executive director, and it seemed that this was an appropriate time to re-examine what could be done to improve the conditions of the organization— anyplace, either at Missouri or someplace else.

There was also a time when things were just piling up; the extension staff was bitching a hell of a lot more than they used to. Of course, every year we had more and more files, more and more papers, and things were just becoming crazy, and it seemed, why not reexamine our needs in terms of facilities and time commitments. It was not that smooth. It was, "Let's see if we can get something better here or there. What difference does it make where we are as long as it's good for ACCI?"

I had raised this in a memo to the board for consideration at our next board meeting along with my notification that they were going to have to start searching for a new executive director, and perhaps we ought to search for a better quality headquarters for it also—regardless where it may be.

So that's how it started. In essence, I think I did instigate it. At that point, things just snowballed into a really horrible situation. I think Ed saw this as a personal attack and he was terribly upset about it. I don't think that it was purely on behalf of the organization that he was upset. I don't think anybody could be upset on behalf of the organization because all we were saying was, "Let's see what we can do; let's see how we can improve things," or if things could even be improved anyplace, if we have any choices or any options.

So, I presented this to the board and they agreed that it was an appropriate time to see how things could be improved—to examine ACCI's current and future needs and see how they could be best met.

NS: Ed was not on the board at that time?

KS: No. Perhaps he had just gone off, is that right?

NS: I think so.

KS: I think his last term on the board was 1976-1977.

One of the things that the board set out to do was to say, "What would be ideal requirements for us, what's missing or what could be improved? Mostly it had to do with physical facilities, as well as more time commitments.

One of the problems with my position had been that while I was hired with the understanding and the agreement of the Extension deans, and with Ed that my appointment read "100% full-time employment, Extension," it would be really a 70/30 type of split. That agreement was never held to in any way, shape or form. It said 100% Extension. I was 100% Extension, and ACCI got in as 130% Extension. You could do it, but it wasn't ideal. Perhaps we could look for a situation where you didn't say 100% if it's supposed to be 70/30, 60/40, 50/50—whatever it needed to be.

Let's try to negotiate with that definite split so that a new executive director would be able to firmly commit time to ACCI activities. We thought that was helpful. So, it was basically a physical improvement we were looking for as well as an appointment approval, and what should the executive director be doing, and what kinds of things should he or she be spending his or her time on, and how much time does that take? So, it was just a re-examination of what could make us run better.

Well, the upshot of that was that we got together a certain set of criteria: what would be desirable, what we felt would be necessary for ACCI to be even more effectively run. We opened it up for proposals to see who in this country would want us and would be willing to allow those kinds of concessions to us. That was basically the process.

NS: How did you notify schools that you were in the business of looking for a change?

KS: We probably did that through a separate mailing to everybody, to the membership. I vaguely remember this and this is probably what was done. I can't imagine what else we would have done. Perhaps you could go back through the minutes and check that out. There was an announcement of availability.

NS: I gather there was a committee appointed.

KS: Yes. Proposals were received and some of them were simply not appropriate or any better. Some of them were viable, worth looking at. There were many elements of interest; many universities were interested, but when they heard what we would want, they could not come forth with that. Throughout this entire process, Ed was still extremely upset about this.

NS: Are you saying he was upset from the beginning?

KS: Yes, from Day One. The board had voted to keep these negotiations as a private matter. One of the reasons for doing that was that we thought that certain universities would not want it to be known that they were negotiating with us because there might be other organizations that would have been interested in that same kind of deal. For that reason, the proposals were kept within the board, and I think that upset Ed a great deal, also, as well as some other members.

NS: Did all the members receive any notice?

KS: It's my recollection that the invitation to extend the proposal went to everybody.

NS: Signed by Helen Goetz?

KS: Probably. I really don't recall.

NS: So the proposals came back from about five schools that were serious candidates. Were you on the group that went visiting?

KS: No. I think Carl Hall was there, and Carole Makela.

NS: I can find that out.

KS: I really don't recall who, but three or four members from the board went visiting.

NS: Were the reports prepared independently by these three or four people?

KS: They reported their decisions back to the board for a decision as a whole, although each board member voted individually for the headquarters of his/her choice. Missouri, of course, was in the running. It came down to Texas Tech and Missouri.

NS: Were you at the board meeting when the decision was actually made?

KS: Oh, sure.

NS: What was the board meeting like, do you remember?

KS: There were lots of conference calls about this. I think that the vote might actually have been taken at a conference call instead of at a physical board meeting, because at that time, we met as a board only once or twice a year. Of course, we could not make the decision two days before the board meeting, so I think this might have been through a conference call.

Everyone on the board was very concerned about this decision. In one sense, it was tied up with a loyalty to Missouri, but even more than that, a loyalty to Ed and the fact that what other universities could offer us would be unknown products. Perhaps the promises this year would or would not be there next year or in five years.

In terms of the logistics of the move, I don't think anybody was really terribly concerned about that. It might be difficult for a few months, but so what, then things even out.

In terms of some members, I can recall talking to somebody who was very influential in the organization. He was not on the board, but very active at the time. His opinion was well respected and he said, "You know, all I really care about, ACCI gets me the newsletters, gets me the journals on time, that the meetings are interesting and I couldn't care less where the headquarters are. That's paper shuffling, and it doesn't affect me or any other member at all. Anyway, as long as the work is done, who cares where it's done from?" I think that might have been a prevalent attitude among members who didn't feel a loyalty to a particular institution or particular place, but simply to the fact that this organization does good things and wanted those good things to continue.

NS: Something like the way you felt.

KS: Absolutely. Where could the work get done best and where could the responsibilities be best divided?

NS: Did you see it in any sense, as a vote on control by Ed Metzen of the organization?

KS: There were some members of the board who felt that way. I don't think anybody would have voted to move it out of Missouri to a place where the proposal was not as good, if not better, simply to remove locus of control, to get some new blood, some new thoughts in running it.

I don't think anybody, regardless of their feelings of whether or not Ed did control it, would have done that because it would have been detrimental. I think that there were some people who felt that, as long as there was as good if not better proposal, this would be an additional spillover, and that would be healthy.

NS: To the degree that there was some kind of philosophical component to this issue of what ACCI was about, what would you say that the values were? What did it mean to say that Ed

Metzen is controlling? What was the policy that would have changed? What were the things that people were thinking was wrong with ACCI to the extent that ACCI had problems?

KS: I think it was almost historical that in reality, Ed did not have the control or the influence that he once had. In my first year or so, it was there.

NS: What makes you say that?

KS: I was unsure of what things to do, even small things. I wanted to get the mailing list computerized so that we wouldn't have to stand there and stamp everything out. It would save us money in the long run. It would save us a lot of time, but it was something new. It was something different from the way Ed had done it, and he said it would never work; don't even try it. Fine, we'll do it anyway. And it was fine, even in terms of hiring secretaries. I wanted to hire my own secretary. He said, "Don't hire this one, hire that one." I hired one who I wanted, and it was fine. So, just in the small operating procedures, it was a little hard for him not to be there and have the final say. He was all right after the first year or so.

I think some people felt Ed was in the center of a circle that still seemed to dominate ACCI, and by removing it to a completely different circle, that perhaps this would broaden the base of appeal. I'm not sure there was anything more than emotion in this feeling that it was better to have it moved to a different environment to see what could grow out of that.

I don't think there was anything dangerous that Ed was doing, nor was there anything terribly detrimental. I think it was an emotional feeling that it was time for new people, new changes; see what could happen. But much more important than that emotional feeling was the practical reality of ACCI needing better facilities and more of a time commitment by the executive director than it presently had.

NS: What about the other side? Do you think that there was anything in the vote that reflected the attitude that ACCI needed to adopt another relationship with business or a different relationship with business in line with the things you had been saying earlier?

KS: No. I really do believe that regardless of how people might have emotionally felt about Ed, regardless of what might have been gnawing at the back of their head, the decision was made on the proposal itself, and what was better in terms of facilities, and what was better in terms of having somebody be responsible to the organization specifically.

NS: What happened after that board vote?

KS: What happened afterward was that the board had thought it was settled. We had gone to the Chicago meeting in April having it on the agenda, not really anticipating any kind of fight at all. My secretary at ACCI headquarters called me up at the board meeting and said, "I think you should know that Ed had come down and is going through some materials."

Meanwhile, before I had left, Ed had asked me for copies of the proposal and what was in them, and what have you, and I gave it to him. I'm not sure that I should have done it, or if it was my role to do that, but I did. Regardless of ACCI, he was also my department chairperson with direct authority over my "real position" at the University of Missouri.

NS: So, you actually were showing him everything as it came in?

KS: No. After this decision was made and we had thought that it was a final decision, he had asked to see the Texas proposal and I showed it to him. I don't think I showed him any correspondence; it was basically just the proposal and what was in it. He did ask for that and I did give it to him.

So, my secretary called up and said, "I think you should know—I forget what Ed was doing, but he had come down and gotten some more records and was organizing some kind of movement—be prepared that he's going to do something." So, I came back to the board and I said, "We should be prepared that Ed's going to do something."

In fact, what he did was prepare a document supporting his position that Missouri's proposal was better and then distributed it to some ACCI members at the conference. He also gave copies later to the board. He had a lot of problems with the proposal from Texas Tech that we didn't have problems with, and was, in essence, gathering a movement to the effect that he was going to bring this up as being a membership issue and not a board decision.

Now, how it became a membership issue and not a board decision, let me try and remember this. I'm cloudy on this. Perhaps it was a decision that the board was presenting for ratification. The board had not anticipated, up to that point, that with all the research that had been done with the visitations and what have you, that anybody would question to that degree the board's integrity in doing what the board felt was best for the organization in terms of this concrete type of evidence. So, perhaps it always was a membership ratification; I really can't recall.

NS: I know it is in the bylaws at the time, that it was within the authority of the board and not the membership.

KS: How did that get switched around, do you recall?

NS: I only have positions of different people about that, so there are different points of view of how that happened and why that happened.

KS: I do recall taking the Articles of Incorporation and the bylaws to our attorney at the time to try and clarify who had responsibilities for what, and I think it was on that attorney's opinion that we had decided that it was a board decision, and I can't recall what happened there; how the control was lost.

NS: Do you remember the membership meeting that they took it to? I'm sure you were there.

KS: Not clearly.

NS: And how somebody brought it up at the meeting? Somebody said, "I wish to raise the issue of the location. . ." Is that how it happened?

KS: I'm sure it must have.

NS: Was it Ed Metzen?

KS: I don't recall whether it was Ed or if it was somebody that Ed had gotten to do it. It wasn't anybody independent of Ed, let's put it that way. Whether it was Ed or not, it was a set-up.

NS: Was the board solidly behind the decision that it had made?

KS: There were some dissenting votes. The vote was 7 to 3 in favor of Texas Tech. Two of the three people who voted for Missouri received their PhDs there, under Ed. It was not unanimous at the time that the initial vote was taken. However, at our board meeting, it was decided that we would present a unanimous front and that we were behind this decision.

NS:: That included people like Marjorie who were on the board and the others?

KS: Yes.

NS: It could have been done as a motion to reconsider, couldn't it?

KS: I'm not trying to be cagey here, I just really cannot recall.

NS: I don't think it was done as a motion. It was not a motion to reconsider. They put it to a membership vote.

KS: That, I remember.

NS: In other words, it wasn't that the motion was to have the board reconsider its decision, the motion was to have the vote taken.

KS: The membership made the decision, that much I remember. I also remember that there was one of the largest, if not the largest, group of University of Missouri graduate students there had ever been at any conference, and the vote was close. The motion to reverse the board's decision won by 10 votes or so.

NS: That was in Chicago?

KS: That is what I believe swung that vote, just a very large U. of M. constituency.

NS: Can you talk a little bit about the fallout of that whole controversy?

KS: One thing that happened was that our facilities were upgraded. In essence, Missouri had agreed to do things that made it an acceptable home. Perhaps not better than Texas Tech, but certainly far better than it had been while I was there. There was more room that was granted, further storage room. I think Mel had much more of a distinction than I had in terms of what percentage of time could be devoted to ACCI activities, within certain limits. You're not going to say, "Well I'm on my ACCI time," but the recognition that there would be specific release time for him to devote to ACCI and those things that were necessary. Those were things that happened. I don't think they would have happened unless this whole thing had come about.

NS: Do you think you would have stayed at Missouri if the improvements had been made earlier?

KS: I couldn't. My position in Extension was eliminated.

NS: I see; that was the reason you left Missouri?

KS: Yes.

NS: Was it the fact that you were leaving that precipitated this in the beginning?

KS: Yes.

NS: Would you have been happy to stay at Missouri if your position hadn't been eliminated?

KS: Not really. The people who had hired me had left, and we had gotten some new administration. I was hired as a public policy Extension specialist. The people who came in didn't particularly care for public policy and wanted Extension to go back to teaching people how to do canning and drying flowers, which I did not know how to do.

In essence, everything that I was proposing on the Extension side was running into a lot of difficulty. In fact, the entire public policy component was eliminated, which is why my position was eliminated—just would not exist any more. Even if the position had not been eliminated, if

I had any sense, I would have left because it was not good for me professionally.

It's almost unfair to give ACCI to somebody who is untenured and a young professional because they will not be able to do those kinds of activities that will allow them to advance. You just won't have the time to publish, to do research because you're doing this administrative work and it doesn't count for beans in one's academic career. I'm much happier now.

NS: Final question. What are the things that you're proudest of about your relationship with ACCI?

KS: I think just administratively that we were able to help ACCI proceed more smoothly by differentiating the role between executive director as administrator and executive director as somebody who runs ACCI. Things became more efficient, more time was spent on the budget and on financing, so that we did get into the black during that period of time.

We were able to conduct more membership services like that survey and respond to needs, so that we were being more efficient in producing what the members wanted and cutting out services that apparently nobody felt were really all that terribly important.

We resolved some potential legal problems by becoming incorporated and paying some back taxes which were owed from before I became executive director. We were also granted a partial forgiveness on other back taxes.

We procured the first ACCI contract with the U.S. Office of Consumers' Education. That brought in some extra funds and strengthened our tie with that agency.

As soon as Marge told me about this interview yesterday, I was trying to think, "Well, what did we do?" I know that on my last day I made this whole speech and I listed some of them. I couldn't remember any of them.

As paradoxical as it may be, I think that ACCI is in a better position now just in terms of its physical functions and the executive director's job definition by virtue of this fight; that if the fight hadn't gone on, it still would have been that mish-mash of you do ACCI on weekends and nights when you can get to it.

I wish I could remember more. There were more things at the time just in terms of getting the attorneys to actually work on the bylaws and straighten them out, getting the membership vote to operate more universally through a mail ballot.

There was real progress in trying to establish student chapters. I think there were small things that perhaps just made the organization better. Perhaps, just by my being younger and associating with somewhat of a younger group, perhaps that gave more encouragement that the younger group can become more powerful—if you want to use that term—in the association.

On the other hand, it acquainted me quickly with people who were and are very important in the consumer movement. When I took this job, there were other jobs that I had been offered. One of them was, in fact, a job I had wanted my whole life, but I took this one instead because I knew that just personally for me, I would find myself in a situation where I would get to know people; that otherwise it would have taken me years to develop those kinds of relationships.

Unfortunately, in terms of what happened over the relocation movement, I think there still is some, if not bad feelings, unhappy feelings. It's been seven years and they still exist. You can feel it. That's unfortunate, but I still think that we have a better situation in Missouri because of that, and I still believe very firmly that the organization doesn't belong to any university or any place, and we ought to be where it's best for us.

NS: Thanks.

KS: You're welcome.

ADDENDUM to the Interview
Karen Stein
August 24, 1984

When I came to the 1984 ACCI conference, I did not know I was going to be interviewed for this oral history. If I had known, I certainly would have tried to refresh my memory so my views would be much more complete, particularly concerning the relocation issue.

After some time to think about it, this is how I remember things now. The announcement of the relocation was somewhere around the middle of the business meeting agenda. The board felt that first their activities during the past year should be described, along with their assessment of future needs based on desired activities. This would allow the board to put the relocation decision in context with anticipated growth. Meanwhile, we had been informed that Ed was organizing some well-respected members to dispute the relocation decision. He had previously come to a board meeting to ask that we reconsider. After discussion of the request, the board decided to stand behind its decision.

At the business meeting, as soon as the agenda was adopted, Fr. McEwen moved that the announcement of the relocation should be the first agenda item, and then that the relocation decision be rescinded, that no action be taken until the issue is brought before next year's annual business meeting. Now, the parliamentarian was just an ACCI member, not certified, and ruled the motion out of order since the bylaws state that relocation is a board, not a membership decision. McEwen appealed the ruling, and the membership supported the appeal to allow discussion. The ACCI membership was always in favor of discussion.

Now, whether members can overrule a ruling by a parliamentarian, I don't know, and neither did the board or our parliamentarian-member at the time. If I remember correctly, that's how we lost control of the meeting. From then on, the board made it a policy to have a certified parliamentarian at all business meetings. It was a well-crafted motion. It did not state that Missouri was a better home for ACCI than Texas Tech; only that the relocation *issue* be brought before next year's business meeting. Still, it had the practical effect of ensuring Missouri as ACCI's home. It would have been silly to train Mel as ACCI's new executive director, only to have to train someone else a year later.

More importantly, after this experience, another university would have to be crazy to apply for ACCI knowing what had happened this time around. As Texas Tech's associate dean told the board, they only wanted to offer ACCI a home which would be supportive of its present and future needs; it was never their intention to enter into battle with another university.