

OBITUARY

Stanley Stein
1899-1967

At some time during our lifetime each of us is faced with disheartening situations. For some, only the word "tragedy" can be truly expressive. Under particularly stressful conditions some may falter. Others not only overcome misfortune, but somehow transform it into brilliant productiveness.

Personal tragedy came early to Stanley Stein and remained with him during his lifetime. Certainly he faced countless discouraging moments, some of which were measured in years, but out of these dark moments there emerged a startling example of courage, determination, and accomplishment.

Texas was the home of Sidney Levysen, and pharmacy was his career until 1931, when the disease that was to alter his life completely caused him to seek treatment at Carville and to assume the name by which he will be remembered—Stanley Stein. Soon afterward Stanley became a spokesman for patients with leprosy. There were a number of reasons for his doing so, but each would seem to have a basic origin.

Discrimination is a word familiar to everyone, and he who is discriminated against is most acutely aware of its meaning. Perhaps the ultimate example of the reprehensible practice was the attitude of society toward "the leper." For over 2,000 years anyone thought to have leprosy was automatically shunned—irrevocably so. The bells, the banishment, the caves, the stonings, the macabre burial rites—these were commonplace during years gone by. But even the 20th century, "the age of enlightenment," was not much of an improvement. Patients continued to be ostracized, along with their families. Isolation was required. Rights and privileges were revoked. The alternative for the patient was to hide. Treatment was relatively ineffective and, for many, the disease progressed to the point where they could hide no longer. They sought help, usually under an assumed name; they lost hope; they passed on. After they were forgotten, what

could be done about this deplorable situation? Stanley Stein did not know, but he was determined, he was intelligent, and he was capable. He embarked on what has been termed a crusade—his achievements were remarkable.

The year 1941 was the year that sulfones were first prescribed for the treatment of leprosy, and it was also the year that Stanley Stein established the STAR, four years after he became totally blind. The publication enabled him to accomplish more for his fellow patients than any other layman in history. Stanley did receive a great deal of assistance from patients, from staff members, from persons throughout the world, and from various organizations that are well known to readers of the STAR. But frequently he fought his battle alone, or at least it appeared to Stanley that he was alone.

The story of his life, a recounting of his efforts, and his overall impact cannot be summarized with any degree of completeness in this writing, and, in fact, many years may pass before his impact can be truly assessed. In any event, Stanley set out to improve the status of his fellow patients and the patients yet to come. He devoted his life to this task, using his mind and his voice in the way he knew best, with dedication, with vigor, without hesitation, and without fear.

To quote the January-February 1968 edition of the STAR, Stanley helped to effect a number of changes and programs, including "removal of the barbed wire from the Carville fences (fences still exist, primarily to prevent stray cattle from entering); establishment of a branch post office at the hospital; telephones for patients; the right for patients to vote; repeal of the Louisiana law that designated Hansen's disease as a quarantinable contagious disease; abolition of compulsory segregation (patients are admitted to Carville only on a voluntary basis); repeal of the interstate ban against Carville patients using public transporta-

tion; abolition of the Carville jail for 'absconders'; repeal of the ban against marriages between patients; the establishment at the hospital of branches of such national organizations as the Forty & Eight, American Legion, and the Lions Club; persuasion of encyclopedias to correct outdated, erroneous, and unscientific entries under 'leprosy', and to add 'Hansen's disease' as a cross reference; continuing the campaign against use of the odious word 'leper'; and transformation of the STAR, originally started as a local morale builder like the Carville Little Theater Group (also created by Stanley Stein in his first year of residence), into a world-wide educational influence."

Much progress has been made, due in large part to the continuous efforts of Mr. Stanley Stein. It is incumbent on us to develop further the concepts in which he so fervently believed—that leprosy, or Han-

sen's disease, as he preferred to name it, be thought of not as a dread disease but as a disease of relatively low communicability that can be cured, usually without residual, provided the diagnosis is made early and appropriate therapy instituted. Even the patient who has been diagnosed late and does have some disability can be rehabilitated. But rehabilitation is of no value if the patient is not accepted by the community. Stanley fought for this acceptance, for enlightened understanding, for existence as a human being. We must continue his battle.

He is gone, but none among us who knew him well will forget this man called Stanley Stein.

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