

Chapter 10

Summers at the Beach

I was born on June 29, 1911, six months after my grandmother Liebele Edlavitch Dunn died. It was inevitable that I was to be named Libbie Ella, in memory of Liebele. Hence, I was the first “Libbie Dunn” in our town, but as each Dunn brother married, and the first child in each case happened to be a girl, it came about that there were four Libbie Dunns living in the small town. Within the family circle this was never a problem, for we became known by the simple expedient of attaching our particular father’s name to our own. I was “Libbie Morris’s,” then there came “Libby Meyer’s” a year later, then “Libbie Eddie’s,” and finally “Libby Max’s.”

When my parents built the Hadassah cottage at Sound View, Uncle Meyer and Aunt Annie already owned the cottage next door.

Later, as their family grew, they bought a larger house across the street, and rented out the smaller one. In fact, while our house was in the process of building, we stayed with them for a few weeks, so that Mother could supervise the building operations. Libby Meyer’s and I became close friends, a relationship which lasted until her early, tragic death from multiple sclerosis.

A few years later, Uncle Max and Aunt Bessie built a house down the road, where they lived every summer. Since there was almost a ten year difference between me and their Libby, she and I did not see much of each other at that time. Aunt Gertie and Uncle Eddie rented a place on the same street for a few summers, so that at one time all four Libbies were staying on the same street in Sound View.



I must have been eight years old when we moved to the beach



Not all rides to Baltimore were as spacious as this one, a posed photo of Max and Meyer (in the back; the driver must be a friend of theirs).

for the first time. Naomi was a baby, and the previous summer one of my mother's cousins had brought two girlfriends with her, to stay in the country for a vacation. This was when we were living in a five-room flat at 715 East Street, and Mother feared that they would return the following summer, because they had had such a good time!

In fact, Morris and Rosa had been hard pressed to find a way to let the girls know that they had overstayed their welcome. They finally resorted to a plan which was successful. They told the girls that they were going to drive them home, because they were going to Baltimore to see Mother's family. So we piled into our Buick in our usual fashion. In the front were Father and Mother, with baby Naomi sitting on Mother's lap. Since Mother was busy with the baby, I was assigned to read the AAA book for directions. There were no road maps, and no Route numbers at the time, just the American Automobile Association book. The three girls were to sit in back, along with most of their luggage. This would have been possible, had Uncle Meyer not decided that as long as the car was going to Baltimore, he would go along to see the Dunn relatives. This necessitated putting an extra

wooden crate in the back seating compartment, and the girls had to take turns sitting on it.

It was our routine to drive the first day as far as Canarsie, where Mother's Bransky family lived, stay over the night, and then drive the rest of the way the following day. We arrived in Canarsie with no prior notice, ate supper with them, doubled and tripled up with the seven Bransky children, had breakfast the next morning, and lo and behold, Cousin Harry Bransky was packed and ready to join us. He wanted to go as far as Philadelphia to see some of his cousins. Things got a bit testy in the back seat when the search for second crate to accommodate Harry was instituted. None could be found, but the problem was solved. After all, how could he be refused after the cordial welcome Mieme Riesel (Aunt Rachel) had given us! After some discussion, Harry sat in front with me on his lap, Naomi on Mother's lap, and Father driving. Five in front, four in back to Philadelphia with constant complaints from the back seat by Uncle Meyer.

So this next summer was going to be different.



Maishe and Rosa rented one room with kitchen privileges from a woman named Mrs. Mennel, in Sound View, Connecticut. After two seasons with this arrangement, they rented a cottage with Hattie Goldsmith Glazier and her husband Morrie for one season, and then they decided that they could have a place of their own. They went to a real estate agent, who was selling homes at White Sands Beach, which was within walking distance of Sound View. The place was quieter, with more substantially built homes, on larger pieces of land.

They introduced themselves to the agent as Dr. and Mrs. Dunn, and were courteously received. Father was handsome, with light gray eyes and blond hair, Mother was small and petite, and always dressed fashionably but with restraint. By this time in their lives, Father had conquered most of his foreign accent, except for the "ch" sound, which remained



Hattie Glazier, Hattie Goldsmith, Father and I, Mother, and Naomi (as well as several young children) enjoy the beach.

a puzzle to him all of his life. They must have looked like a good prospect to the agent, who took them on a tour of the homes which were being built for sale in the development. They selected one particular home which interested them, and the couple returned to the agent's office to write up the sales agreement.

This was where the agent spoiled the sale. "You know," he said, "that all of this development is restricted, so that there will not be any undesirable neighbors."

"What exactly do you mean by 'undesirable'?" asked Maishe. The answer made it clear that Jews were definitely included amongst the undesirables, so that concluded their interest in the White Sands development.

• • •

Following this episode, they bought a piece of land in Sound View, and built the Hadassah cottage of four rooms. For many years it consisted of two bedrooms, a kitchen, and a dining and living room. We had a radio and a second-hand piano, which I constantly managed not to play. My cousin Libby Meyer's would come in from next door to practice until they found another second-hand instrument of their own. Cook-

Naomi, Mother, and me
at the beach.



ing was done over a kerosene stove, and for many years there was no running hot water. At night, we sat around the table lighted by a kerosene lamp, which served us until electricity was brought into the area.

Later on, my parents built an additional bedroom and kitchen and broke out a wall, which made the living room larger. We also got a new kitchen sink with running hot water, which included a warm shower outside in back of the house. We kept the kerosene lamp handy for those times when the electricity failed, which happened frequently at first. The nearest telephone was in a shop two streets away, until the Fichman family across the street had a line put in.



This photo was taken on the porch of the beach house in 1935. Sidney and I are sitting to the left of my father; Naomi to the right. Mother is sitting on the far right.

For some of the earliest years, Mother hired a local youngster with a playwagon to walk to the railway station and pick up our pasteurized milk, which she had shipped in from New Britain twice a week. Finally, the local milkman began to carry the pasteurized milk, so Mother discontinued the practice.

Ownership at Sound View included many Jewish families, and there was a kosher butcher located on Hartford Avenue, the main shopping street. Hartford Avenue was the meeting place for the Jewish women, who would gather to shop and exchange greetings and news. Mothers and children would stay all summer, and most heads of families would journey from the cities for each weekend.

There was only one pay telephone available in the entire complex, and I remember an evening when we stood in line, mother, Naomi and I, while mother tried to contact Maishe at home in New Britain. She was upset and impatient, until she heard his voice on the phone, and then she began to cry. Her tale to him was not unusual for that time: Mother

had gotten tired of long hair, had taken the two of us, each with long curls, and her own beautiful curly locks, and had gone to the barber. We were finally up-to-date, but it had been an impulsive deed which she had not discussed in advance with her husband. That evening, as we were getting ready for bed, my father came driving up to the cottage, to see us and to reassure his Rosa!

The beach was wide and beautiful, and there was a sandbar which kept the level of the water safer for all. We spent many hours of the day playing on the sand and venturing into the water. Both Naomi and I learned to swim, and so did Mother, but Father only pretended, by keeping one foot firmly on the ground, moving his arms in a swimming motion, and puffing his breath in and out rapidly.