

Chapter 7

Struggle

It was not customary for a man to contemplate college after he was married. A man worked and supported his family. In the Dunn family milieu, anything else was a disgrace. This was the family verdict when the young couple asked for support and encouragement to make their dream come true. Morris wanted to become a doctor. Rosa was willing, and despite the bitterly expressed disapproval of his family, the two of them made their plans. He was to go to school, and work when he could. She would also work and help support the two of them.

Mother had a dear friend, Elizabeth Osenberg Maitlin, who visited with her one afternoon when I was about five years old. While the ladies sipped their tea and chatted, I was presumably playing with my doll, but I remember the conversation vividly.

Elizabeth said, “How did you have the courage to decide for Morris to go to college?”

The reply came, “When we got back to New Britain after our honeymoon, he got up the next morning at half past five. I asked him what was wrong, and he said he was getting dressed to go to work. I had just not realized what was involved in making a living by working in a factory, and I was determined that he was too smart, and too fine, to waste his life that way.”

Mother continued the tale. Morris earned five dollars a week. They managed to live on three dollars, one dollar went into the bank for tuition, and one was put aside for Mrs. Coholan, principal of a local school, who had taught Morris to speak and read English at night school.



I later found a rough draft of a letter in Rosa’s handwriting, which undoubtedly went to Mrs. Coholan. It reads:

Dear Mrs. Coholan,

You no doubt remember your scholar from night school, Morris Dunn. I am in need of advice at the present time, and knowing very well that if you will be able to recollect and remember me, a scholar of one of your night school classes, you will surely help me out, being that you did take some interest in me at that time.

I am very ambitious and have fully decided to take up a certain profession, which I do not know how to go about, and what should be my next step. I know very well that I am taking quite a liberty to ask so much of you, but as I have no one else to turn to, I will never forget it, if you do this favor, and let me know what your advice will be. Thanking you in advance, I will expect to hear from you soon.

Yours Respectfully,
Morris Dunn
102 Hartford Ave.

This appeal to the teacher bore fruit, for their money was allotted for tutoring, with the aim of preparing Morris for the high school equivalency examination.



Rosa had finished eight grades in the ugly, scarred schoolhouse across the street from her home in Baltimore. She studied with Morris, corrected his grammar, helped him eliminate some of his accent, and encouraged and discussed his efforts with him.

There were times when Rosa was very lonely for her parents' home, which had been filled with the hubbub of seven children. She made a few friends in New Britain, but her household duties and the studying took the largest part of her time. Morris was working by day, and attending Zionist meetings at night, and the rest of the time he was busy with his lessons. There were times when both of them were tired

and discouraged, but their goal was set, and they pursued its accomplishment whole-heartedly.



The day finally arrived when they heard that he had passed his high school equivalency test, and they were on their way. He applied to the University of Maryland Dental School, whose campus was then located within the City of Baltimore, and Rosa's mother gave them a room in the family home. Morris bought the horse named Frank, and also a broken-down wagon. The Kallinsky family lived at 428 S. Pulaski St., which is still located on the waterfront in Baltimore. Each morning, Morris would go down to the docks, take on a load of fruits and vegetables, and peddle the produce through the streets. Each trip with Frank, the horse, was a nightmare to him, for he was very much afraid of the animal. He suffered and survived each day, and then brought the left-over foodstuffs back home, and Rosa would sell them during the morning to housewives in the neighborhood.



As an interesting side note, there is extant a Letter of Recommendation which Morris undoubtedly took with him to Baltimore. It is addressed to Dr. H. Friedenwald, who was a community leader in the city. It reads:

Mr. Dunn, bearer of this recommendation, we have the honor to introduce as one of the most popular young men in our city, and one who has greatly assisted in cultivating the true Zionist sentiment in our community.

At present, Mr. Dunn is in Baltimore, where we ardently hope he will continue to work for our great cause with the same zeal and energy he displayed here. As the bearer is at present in Baltimore, and as he intends to enter the employ of a certain industrial concern, being a stranger in that city, he will no doubt

need reference concerning his character. Therefore, we would be greatly thankful to you, if you will kindly use your high influence in his favor. You may do this without a doubt as to his character. We could not find a more popular person, so well connected with us in Baltimore, hence we address this to you.

Begging your pardon for this bold step,
 we remain,
 Most cordially yours, with Zion's greetings,
 The Sons of Zion
 per Samuel Berson, Sec'y

Since we never heard of Morris working in an industrial concern in Baltimore, it seems possible that the job had fallen through with or without Dr. Friedenwald's recommendation, before he turned to the expedient of peddling fruits and vegetables.



Meanwhile, Rosa took over the parlor of her family's home, put up a few shelves, and bought a stock of delicatessen products. Business proved adequate, providing a scant income which helped to defray their expenses.

After his early hours of peddling, Morris would return home, have his breakfast, and go on to his classes. On campus, he became one of the founders of Alpha Omega, a dental fraternity which was open to all Jewish students. He was very proud of his association with the group, and he often described how the students had helped each other in many ways, by lending books, arranging social events, and tutoring each other in their studies.



While Morris was studying in dental school in Baltimore, his mother had a fifth child, a girl, who died at birth or shortly thereafter. I was never told that Bubie died with this delivery; my father told me that she died by choking on a chicken



My grandmothers: Maishe's mother in law, Chasya Bransky Kallinsky (left), and mother, Liebele Edlavitch Dunn (right). This photo was taken in the side yard of my parents' home in New Britain, Connecticut, circa 1910.

bone, and Naomi remembers that he told her that she had had a lingering illness. There is the strong possibility that he did not want to talk about dying during childbirth, either to me or to my sister.

Liebele died on January 13, 1911, and is buried in the New Britain Jewish cemetery. Michael remarried twice. The first woman was also a survivor of Yanevah whom he knew from the old country. They came back to his house in New Britain after a marriage in New York, and the first Friday morning, when she looked out of her window, she saw the line of women standing and holding chickens, while the *shochet*—her husband—was killing them for the Friday evening meals in the community. When she called her husband to explain what was happening in her front yard, he told her that this was part of his livelihood and could not be changed. She refused to live there under these circumstances, and when she could not get Michael to forgo his

arrangement, she left him and returned to New York. After her death, he married a widow who also had a daughter named Libbie. I remember that the Dunn brothers took care of Michael's third wife and made certain that she was cared for after his death.



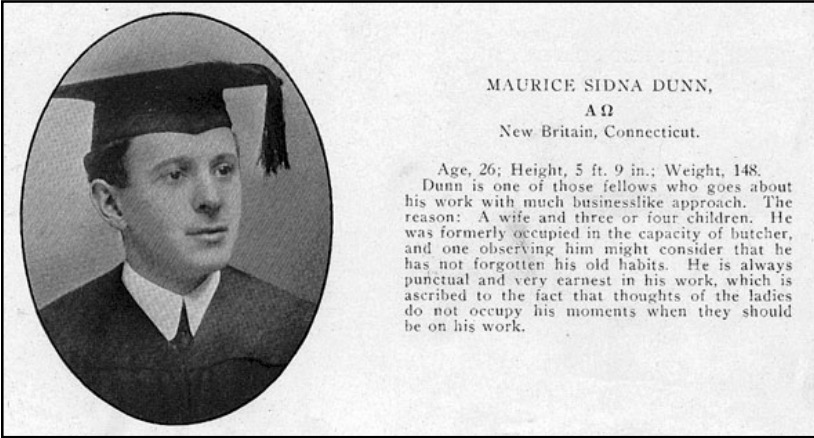
Soon after Liebele's death, my mother realized she was pregnant. The imminent advent of a child came as a shock to Rosa and Morris. The prospect of new expenses, and the new responsibilities were frightening, as they threatened their possibilities of achieving the goal of Morris becoming a professional man.

When Bubie Kallinsky found Rosa nauseated and weeping one morning, she sat down and spoke with her. They would have shelter, they would make room for the baby. That was what families were for. She was not to worry, and Morris was to continue his studies. Bubie understood their dreams, and she was there to help.

Family lore had it that the doctor who was called when I was born was drunk, but no harm seemed to have been done, and the whole family adopted me as their mascot. Thus it happened that Yiddish became my mother tongue. Yiddish was the language used at home, mother's customers were Yiddish, and we lived in the heart of a Yiddish-speaking neighborhood.

I have scanty memories of that early period of my life—I remember a gas jet popping and frightening me, and either I heard the tale so often or I really remember picking up a whole bologna from mother's stock in trade and munching it while sitting in the window seat of the front room, which served as Mother's delicatessen store. There is also an apocryphal story of having my arm come out of its socket when Uncle Isaac attempted to lift me over a wet spot on the sidewalk.





MAURICE SIDNA DUNN,
A Ω
New Britain, Connecticut.

Age, 26; Height, 5 ft. 9 in.; Weight, 148.
Dunn is one of those fellows who goes about his work with much businesslike approach. The reason: A wife and three or four children. He was formerly occupied in the capacity of butcher, and one observing him might consider that he has not forgotten his old habits. He is always punctual and very earnest in his work, which is ascribed to the fact that thoughts of the ladies do not occupy his moments when they should be on his work.

Morris Dunn's yearbook photo (1914).

I do not remember Father's graduation from Dental School, although I have been assured that I was present. Morris had entered the School of Dentistry when he learned that the course was a year shorter than that of Medicine. After graduation, he traveled to Connecticut to take the Dental Board Examination, and he wrote to his Rosa, "I am very tired, but I did all right and am almost sure I passed. Don't worry, Rosaleh, I am sure I passed."

The next day, there was another letter: "Rosaleh, I will come back for you and Liebele as soon as I arrange for my office to be ready. I miss you both so much that my heart hurts. Don't worry, I have many friends here, and I am sure that I will make out fine."

• • •

The office he rented was in the Hanna Block, at 434 Main Street, and at that time it gave a vista of East Main Street, directly in front of it. There were three tiny rooms, one for the waiting room, one for the dental chair, and a third to be used as a laboratory. At the time, there were no dental laboratories, and each dentist did his own laboratory work or trained someone to do it for him.

Morris also rented two dark, dirty rooms which faced the

back of building. There was only one window, which looked out over a wooden porch and was consequently the source of little light. On the porch there were two toilet stalls, used by all of the tenants. Below was Finnegan's Livery Stable, which was reached by Finnegan's Alley, which ran along the side of Hanna's Block. The rooms Morris rented had been used by transient actors and actresses who performed in the vaudeville shows at the Palace Theatre, which was a few feet down the street. The place was cared for by Mrs. Wells, who in turn got rent free for her own two dingy rooms.

One of the rooms my parents used as a kitchen, living room and dining room, and the other was the bedroom. There was a locked door which led from our apartment to the office of Dr. William Dunn—no relation—next door. One night, I was awakened by the light going on in our bedroom, and by my parents whispering to each other. I stood up in my crib, and my father lifted me out and held me, while we heard noises next door, and feet running down the outside hall. It was a bad man, mother told me, who wanted to steal drugs from the doctor's office.

How Rosa ever got through the several months while they lived on Main Street, she never disclosed. Her faith and admiration for her Maishele never deserted her and she made a home for him under most adverse conditions.



It must have been as soon as Dr. Morris Dunn's practice began to build that they rented a home on City Avenue. The house was what was called a "twin bungalow"; our next-door neighbors were Amelia and Elmer Jones, and they had a son named Holcomb. Mr. Jones was janitor in a local school. Holcomb was later killed during World War I. The Joneses had planted a copious vegetable garden, and I remember visiting with Mr. Jones as he worked in the garden.



There were nights when I lay awake and listened to the men's



When Morris and Rosa visited Israel, they invited General Yigal Allon to speak in New Britain. When Allon wrote to my parents to accept, Father feared he wouldn't have room in his house for all those who would want to hear the General. So, in 1957, Yigal Allon spoke in my new home. (Father was right: the place was packed!)

voices as they sang Zionist songs, discussed politics, and talked about Palestine. After each Zionist meeting, the speaker was invited to a local home for tea and cake and conversation, and many times it was our home where the group gathered.

The custom of inviting the Zionist speakers to a home for a discussion was expanded, and several times the speakers were invited to stay overnight in our home, since there was no adequate hotel in New Britain. It was at this time, too, that Morris made friendships which remained a source of great pleasure to him all of his life. He became a member of the National Board of the Zionist Organization of America, and he was proud to know Louis Lipsky, who later served as President of that organization, as well as Maurice Samuel writer and newspaperman, both of them luminaries on the Zionist scene. He also became acquainted with Louis Dembitz Brandeis, who later became a Supreme Court Justice, as well as Golda Myerson, now known as Golda Meir.



Years later, my parents, my husband, Sidney, and I, and Sidney's sister Evelyn attended a meeting at the Beth David

Synagogue in Hartford, where Israeli Cabinet Minister (and future Prime Minister) Golda Meir was the guest speaker. At that time, Abraham Ribicoff was Governor of Connecticut, and Golda was seated next to him. When my father entered the room, Golda left the governor, hurried around the table, and rushed to embrace him.

(Part of the story of this particular evening is that, as we left, each of us shook hands with Governor Ribicoff, who had lived in the same apartment building as the Zuckers had when he was a small boy. He greeted my father and mother, and then, using their first names, he greeted Sidney and Evelyn. He said to Evelyn, "Hello, Evelyn," and she replied, "Hello, Abe." As she proceeded down the steps, Evelyn spoke in a loud, shocked voice, saying to us "My God, I just called the Governor of Connecticut 'Abe'!")



Unlike Morris, Rosa appears to have had difficulty in making her way into the social life of the small Jewish community, until she began to take a place in the activities of two women's organizations which became active at the time, namely the New Britain Chapter of Hadassah, organized in 1918, and the Sisterhood of our synagogue, Temple B'nai Israel. By that time, my sister, Naomi Ada, was a toddler, and Rosa was left home alone with two small children a great many evenings while her husband attended Zionist meetings. As Naomi and I grew older, there were times when she took us along to the meetings, which were often conducted in Yiddish. This enabled me to keep up my speaking knowledge of the language; the ardent and dedicated men who came through our small town speaking their minds about Zionism, the trials of the Jewish people, and the hope of Zion rebuilt were eloquent and expert in the language.



I find it fascinating that the things I heard about in my earliest years, the things which the visiting speakers predicted,

have come true in my own lifetime.

Sidney and I were married in 1937, and it was in the first year of our marriage that Maurice Samuel came to speak in New Britain. He looked very tired and explained to his audience that he was exhausted from a recent trip to South Africa. Father invited him to come home with the three of us, and since my mother was visiting her family in Baltimore, I became the hostess.

It was Prohibition time, but Mr. Samuel asked for a drink. I naturally brought him a glass of water. He looked at it, looked at me, looked at my father, and said, "Now, young lady, take this away, spill it out, and bring me a real drink." My father went to the telephone, called a friend who had confided that he had a few bottles of Scotch he was hoarding from the days before the Prohibition Law, and within minutes, Mr. Samuel had his drink.

(When I served the drink, I said, "Here is your drink, Mr. Samuels," and he replied, "Young lady, I am singular, not plural." This reproach was devastating to me at the time, but remains to keep me aware of the importance which people attach to their names!)

As we sat and talked with him, we could see the man become invigorated, and I shall always remember the brilliance of his words. He described to us the insidious methods by which the Nazis were preaching anti-Semitism in North Africa, and how their words were spreading over many parts of Europe. He predicted the Holocaust that evening, before the word had any meaning for us.