

Notes on a 1993 interview with Ed Caine by his step-niece, Anne Karmatz. Ed was the son of Ida Cohen, sister of Perel Rizher, who was Solomon Maidenberg's wife. Ida Cohen was known to the American Maidenbergs as "Tante Haika." She lived in Philadelphia. David was said to be her favorite nephew. She probably brought David and Rosa to America by financing their passage. David and Rosa listed Ida Cohen as their contact on the ship arrival manifest. Tante Haika likely helped set David up as a peddler. David would visit her on trips to Philadelphia after settling in Indiana. She visited Marion on several occasions.

Anne Kozart Karmatz interview with Ed Caine, Nov. 6, 1993

Anne said (August, 2009) that Ida's husband Isaac came to America first, and sent for Ida and Anna. This is at variance with what Ed says below. Anne said Ida came through Ellis Island. Ida was a money-lender, who was always collecting. Ida and Max Feldman, her second husband, were married in 1908.

Isaac died in 1902, according to Ed.

[Below is an edited transcript of the interview]

Anne: You said Bubbah was born in Bessarabia. It was Ida Feldman, Haika Feldman.

Ed: Her name was Cohen, Caine. She married my father, they had two children, a little girl and a little boy. There was an epidemic and they passed away.

Anne: Before you and Anna were born?

Ed: Yes. He was a scholar. They called him for the army, he didn't want to go. We came from the Cohanim. He ran away. He skipped borders and borders to come to America. He became a rabbi. [This portion is a little confusing. Ed says "grandfather" but seems to be referring to his father.] Anna was born in 1900. Just about two years younger than I am.

Anne: She was born in Bessarabia?

Ed: No, she was born in the United States.

Anne: What year did Bubbah come over?

Ed: Bubbah came over in 1900 and Anna was born shortly thereafter, in the United States. When my father died, I wasn't born yet. I was born two months afterwards. Born in Philadelphia, 1902. Anna was born in 1901, I just remembered. She was a year and half younger than me.

My father passed away. We had it pretty tough. A lot of people from the small towns, they stuck together and helped one another. One of them, Gusman, some sort of relative, he got Mom started in the installment business, see? She did fairly good. She would walk along the street and see a little girl. She would ask, do you have a piano? Where do you live? For 50 cents a week we can put a piano in your house.

As I grew up, I helped with the collecting, and the selling.

We were living on 500 block of Lombard St. or 400 block, 425 Lombard St. Like the house on Reed Street, but it didn't have limestone. The man who owned the place asked Bubbah to move because the two children upset the household. Then we moved to Gaskill St., between 4th and 5th. And we brought over most of the family from Bessarabia.

[David and Rosa's ship arrival manifest appears to show a 320 Gaskill St. address,]

We brought Jack Daniels, Bubbah's nephew. Her sister passed away, and she brought over the husband and seven children. The one who wanted to come over, his name was Yossl. Bubbah got them tickets, and they paid it out. They helped out. Bubbah had three sisters.

[Note: There is no memory of a Jack Daniels in Maidenberg lore. Also, it is interesting that Ed uses the phrase "they paid it out." The ship tickets were essentially loans.]

There was a bath house at 5th and Gaskill. When they came, I took them to there to clean up. For 5 cents they got a shower.

They all became peddlers. They would buy merchandise, piece goods especially, go out in the country, stop at the country houses [farm houses]. In those days the women would sew instead of shop. They all did well. They went out in horse and wagon.

They would go on the train, out to Lancaster. Told to stop in the rooming house, ask where the wholesale market is.

Anne: Uncle Jack was in the ladies garment business, this is how he got started.

Ed: he had brothers: Nochem Motl, who died at 28. Other brother, he was a butcher.

Jack married Natalie. He was a dresser, ambitious.

When they first came they all lived on Gaskill St. They slept on the floor, they slept on the couch. Until Bubbah got them an apartment.

After Gaskill St. we moved to Christian St. Bubbah married Max Feldman, a very fine man, like a father to me.

We didn't have a bathtub on Christian Street. Had to go outside. Later they put in a bathroom.

Max made children's dresses. He was a very good designer. He was in New York. He found his wife with another man. He just picked up and came to Philadelphia. He had a brother here.

Between Pop (Max) in the dress business and Bubbah in the installment business, we did pretty good. All the kids pitched in. Max's mother kept the house while Bubbah went out.

Mom's cousin was a rabbi [who?].

Ed says he was going to be a rabbi, then wanted to be a doctor, couldn't afford it, so then wanted to be a pharmacist.

My father's sister, her husband had a drugstore. His name was Sam.

Ed remembers how he kept kosher. Talked his way into an apprenticeship at a Catholic pharmacist. He taught me.

Memories of Dorothy [Anne's mother], Kenzie and Ben. Dorothy was serious. Anna and Ed were fun-loving, would dance and sing together. Dorothy was more serious, but had a good sense of humor.

Ed worked in a real estate office.

There was a depression when Kenzie and Ben were born.

In 1921, Max lost his business, became a designer at Ship and Shore. He could design anything. He made dresses for Anna until she was married. Everybody worked.

Max had four brothers, brought them all over to Philadelphia. Max wasn't a good businessman, he was too honest.

Saturday night everyone came over to our house. Herring and onions, pumpernickel. I bought beer. We had a swell time.

Mrs. Belluck of Belluck Piano. [sp?]

Max died at 68. He went upstairs to go to bed. He said I feel thirsty. Can you get me a glass of water? When Mom came up with the water he was dead. He died in 1928.

Dorothy went to Philadelphia Normal School. She liked to laugh. I would kid her, pull her hair. She got married in 1933. Moved to Surrey Lane. It was a restricted neighborhood, the Jews were just started moving there. The real estate agents didn't want to sell to them. Your father somehow got around it. Harry Kozart wasn't a kike, he was an American fellow, a good-looking lawyer. Harry wanted to be friends, offered legal services. Everybody loved Dorothy.

Anna died in 1939. Arthur went off the beaten path, young kid, cut school, walked the streets. Harry got hold of him, took him to school, helped explain to the principal. The three children were left with Mom. Anna's husband was a bum, he was running around from the first day he married Anna. He always borrowed money and never paid it back. Bubbah pawned her ring to give him money. He ran away to California with his girlfriend. He left the three children with Mom. He lived at 40th and Parkside, wouldn't let anybody from the family come visit, so Mom would walk up and down the street.

Anna died from cancer. I used to visit her in the hospital, she would cry and cry and ask, what's going to happen to my children? I said nothing is going to happen, you're going to get better. But she knew. Her last week was terrible. She was talking and screaming.

Arthur got straightened out. Became a dentist. Bought then sold his practice, joined the Army, did well, came out a colonel.

Ed and Ben offered Harry money because he was taking care of the kids. Harry didn't want it. He said, they're my children, I adopted them. They're my responsibility, I'll take care of them.

Ben and I were in business together, did well.

Kenzie was a happy-go-lucky kid. Babies were dying when Kenzie was born, there was an epidemic. Doctor said to Pop to take her to Mt. Zion, who didn't want to take her. Hospital said, why did you bring us a baby to die? Let her die at home.

Harry was the shining star of the family. Nothing was done unless he okayed it.

I met Jenny at my bar mitzvah. Jenny was a kosher girl, I liked that. Mom liked her. I had dated another girl, but didn't go further because I didn't think she would get on with Bubbah.

Bubbah fixed up Anna with her husband. Fixed up others.

Jenny was a good mother, but she wasn't a business lady.

Bubbah taught me business. She would go to the corporation, borrow money, buy the furniture, then pay it back. Collect every week. She said, never make an offer until you get the man's lowest price. I live by that until the day I will die. Bubbah was smart, good at business. Her father was a good businessman. He was a wheat converter (miller?) and beside that he had a little tap room, to keep friendly with the goyim.

Bubbah was steady, collected and smart. She always had the right answer. She would always say, it's only money. Pop was in manufacturing, he would get nervous. Bubbah would steady him.

Mom had many friends on Christian St., could borrow from them when she had to, or collect installments from them.

Ed would go collecting on Sunday.

Ed is 91 at the time of this recording.

[Ed had a small department store called Caine's in Darby. Ben had a store there called Ben's Dad and Lad .]