

SYLVAN SIEGLER



Twelve-year old Sylwe Sielger, his younger brother and parents fled Kaisersesch, Germany, for the United States in 1937. Seven years later, having joined the U.S. Army, Sylwe – now Sylvan – lay wounded in a foxhole in Germany thinking, “They got me anyway.”

Sylvan believes in a superior power that watches over us. His Army-issue prayer book and Bible were with him as he made his way to an aid station. Sylvan recovered, was transferred back to his outfit and later interrogated German prisoners of war. At war’s end, assigned to the military government in Germany, he helped identify Nazis, of whom, he comments wryly, “There were none in all of Germany. They all had done nothing but help Jews.”

Prewar Kaisersesch was a predominantly Catholic, rural community of 1,500, including eight Jewish families. On *Shabbat* and holidays, people from neighboring towns walked to Kaisersesch for lay-led services in the little house that served as a synagogue. A Hebrew teacher visited twice monthly.

After completing kindergarten, which was run by nuns, Sylvan went to public school. The year before leaving Kaisersesch, barred from school, he traveled by train to Koblenz for Zionist meetings. The Sieglers brought a Torah with them to the United States. It has since been donated to a synagogue in Omaha.

Sylvan’s father, Bernhard Siegler, was a cattle trader, as were most of the region’s Jews. He was also a decorated World War I veteran and a *shochet*, a kosher ritual slaughterer. The Sieglers kept a small garden and a few cattle and chickens. Bernhard Siegler had a motorcycle for business travel. Sylvan’s mother, Amalie Siegler, ran a small notions business in the house.

The family was shocked in 1934 to see marchers in front of their home urging support for the Nazis’ boycott of Jewish businesses. The Sieglers escaped Germany with the help of Bernhard Siegler’s brother and two sisters in America. They arrived in Pittsburgh at the height of the Depression.

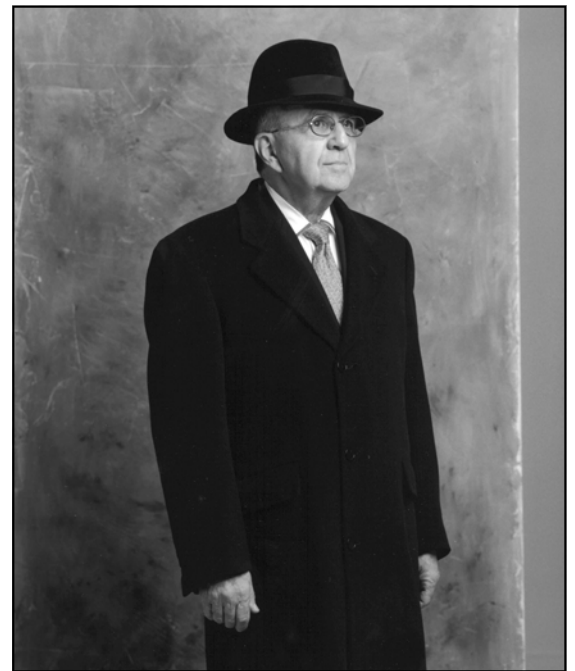
Unable to find work, the family moved to a farm nears Maysville, Missouri, where Sylvan went to a one-room schoolhouse. In 1939 they moved to Omaha. Sylvan entered an Omaha World-Herald essay contest describing what he was thankful for and won first place.

He worked his way through high school selling newspapers, shining shoes and clerking in grocery and liquor stores. Bernhard Siegler worked as a janitor at the Jewish Community Center and Amalie Siegler as a housemaid. Sylvan was 19 years old and in the U.S. Army when his mother gave birth to his sister.

After the service but still in the reserves, Sylvan entered law school. He was admitted to the bar the same day that the Korean War began and served in the army in Japan. Upon returning, he obtained a position with the Internal Revenue Service, which assigned him to Kansas City.

Sylvan met his wife, Merna, through a contact he made trying cases in St. Paul, Minnesota. They have three children – Mitchell, Jeremy, and Susie – and six grandchildren. His favorite holidays are Passover and Thanksgiving because they bring the family together.

Sylvan enjoys cultural events and is active in Jewish communal organizations, including his synagogue, the Jewish Community Center, the Jewish Community Foundation and others.



Portrait by David Sosland

Excerpt from *From the Heart: Life Before and After the Holocaust ~ A Mosaic of Memories*

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