

Martin Leiser

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Abstract

Martin Joseph Leiser was born May 27, 1931 in Vienna, Austria to Sarah Grifel and Benzion Leiser. He has two sisters: Rosa who was 10 years older and Suzy who was 11 years older. The parents were very happy when they finally had a boy. His father was born in Romania and he and his brother were drafted in World War I where his brother met an officer who proved to be helpful in later years. His father was hit with shrapnel close to his spine which gradually got worse so he taught his business to Martin's mother and died in 1937. His business was buying items for others and lending them some of the cost. Martin's sisters took care of the household and watched him. Martin said Kaddish (mourner's prayer) for his father after his uncle taught him. He recalls in March 1938 hearing over the loudspeaker during the Anschluss that Germany took over Austria. In November 1938 windows of the Jews' stores that had been marked with a "J" were shattered and the stores were looted. The SS gave his family 10 days to get out of their apartment, told Martin's mother to scrub the sidewalk and sent Suzy to the German Barracks where they feared she would be raped. The officer who was a friend of the father's brother was contacted and he had the mother and sister excused from these tasks. Also, the officer arranged for his mother's brother to be released from Dachau. The uncle who taught Martin to say Kaddish was taken away by the SS and died so Martin also says Kaddish for him. Martin's mother was concerned for the children and arranged a quick marriage for Suzy and her boyfriend who escaped to Palestine. His mother quickly got affidavits from a relative in America for him and Rosa. They take a train to Rotterdam and a ship from there to Hoboken arriving January 10, 1940. His mother remains behind to care for her sisters. On the ship Martin daily gathers 10 men for a minyan to say a proper Kaddish. Martin and his sister are met at the dock and settle with relatives in Passaic, New Jersey for two years. Rosa works as a maid for a relative and soon marries. Martin learns his mother was sent to Thereisenstadt and probably died there. His mother had given her photo and a letter for Martin's 10th birthday to an escapee from Thereisenstadt and Martin received it on his birthday. Martin lived with his sister and her husband until he was 18. During that time he received a medal for obtaining the most subscribers for a newspaper and, also, worked as a busboy. After he graduated high school, Martin worked at the Robert Hall Company and attended college at night. He was promoted to Assistant Manager at the Company and after a year was drafted for the Korean War. He was sent to Texas to train in assisting doctors at operations and then sent to Korea. He met his wife, Trudy, through friends and learned she was from Austria and her father was part of the minyan on the ship. They named their son Bennett for Benzion, his father, and their daughter Sherrie for Sarah, his mother. After the interview, Martin showed his Austrian passport with the letter, "J" for Jewish, the last photo of his mother, a photo of his father, a photo of himself at age seven, a photo of him and his sister, Rosa, upon arriving in the US and a group photo of: 2nd row starting

on the left – his mother, her niece, Minnie, his mother’s oldest sister, Aunt Yetta and her husband, Max, on the first row- his mother’s younger sister and her husband.