

Buddy's My Father Oscar Sommer

My father, Oscar Sommer, son of Lazar Sommer, was born in Braila, Romania December 5th, 1886 the youngest of five sons and one daughter of a Jewish Wine Taster and Measurer of fine alcoholic beverages. His mother, Fanny Wind was a school teacher.

My grandfather's eldest son Moisha, joined the Romanian army, which was a requirement of the government and was drowned by his companions. Such pranks were often played upon Jewish boys along with forcing them to eat food prohibited by their religion. My grandfather sought means to prevent this from happening again to his other sons and had them apprenticed in various trades outside of the country. Daddy became a tinsmith in Vienna, Austria; Uncle Nathan a tailor in Paris, France. Uncle Henry came to the United States enrolled at the University of Pennsylvania and graduated a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine.

After completing his apprenticeship Daddy secured passage on "Baltic" arriving in New York City March 9, 1906. There he secured employment at a factory where he met his life long friend (another Romanian Jew) Joe Braunstein. Joe's mother accepted him as one of her children.

Two years later Daddy joined the U. S. Army, serving in the 54th Coast Artillery Corps, from July 24th 1908 to July 28th 1911. Two years were spent in Corrigidor Island in the Philippines. He received his discharge at Fort Wadsworth, New York on July 23, 1911.

Upon returning to New York City, Daddy rented a room from a woman who was also a seamstress. This seamstress was my mother's dressmaker. On one of my mother's visits to her dressmaker, my father saw her and was instantly attracted to her. My father made it a point to have his landlady introduce him to my mother.

Joe Braunstein's oldest brother Aaron had moved to Brownsville, Texas, secured employment with Sugarman Supply Company and invited Joe to join him. Joe invited Papa. So that's how we Sommer's got to Brownsville in 1913.

Aaron had prospered, opened a furniture store hiring his brother Joe and my dad as salesmen. Aaron decided to move to Mexico City. He sold his business to his salesmen.

So now Papa was a merchant, and decided it was time to get married. He proposed by mail and was accepted, paid for his brides trousseau and passage. They were married March 28, 1917. They were blessed with seven children in a period of ten and a half years; Ray, Mildred, Sylvia, myself Marcel, David, Sidney and Shirley.

Times were good. Oscar bought Joe's share of the business; the original store became a warehouse, he moved across the street to

a larger store, opened a store in Matamoros, also a mirror factory. he also had a mattress factories in Brownsville, Matamoros and Mercedes.

And then came the depression, 1929. Many people lost their life savings. Banks failed. Jobs were unavialable. Money was hard to come by. People could not pay for what they had bought. Papa was soft hearted, he just could not reposes their furniture. So you know who suffered.

He was also very proud. He did not want to go bankrupt. It was not something to be proud of, so he settled on having a friend loan him the money to pay up his creditors. In the meantime this friend brought him merchandize to sell. To make a long story short--it took him until the Second World War to pay up all his bills. To suppliment his income during these hardship years he accepted a position as a Deputy Sheriff.

In the early years of the Depression we did not have a Temple of our own. We would hold services either at the Masonic Temple or the American Legion Hall, which is not the HEB Store on 9th and 10th East Levee. There were only a few Jewish Families at that time. Never the less, with lots of sacrifice and hard work, these few Jews built their Temple on 8th and West St. Francis in 1931.

A few years late the Pauline Bollack Social Hall was built adjacent to the Temple and then a Sunday School Building was acquired. These building were sold, and the present Temple was built on 24 Coveway Drive.

When my father came to Brownsville he helped his brother Henry financially, enabling him to become a veterenarian. Henry retired from the Army as a Colonel in the cavalry. My Dad sent money as soon as he was financially able to his parents. After his parents died he continued sending money to his sister whose husband had lost a leg during the First World War in Romania. Upon her husband death, my father helped her, her only son Marcel Rabinovici and his wife Rosica immigrate to Israel.

My Dad, Oscar Sommer, loved politics. He was a staunch Democrat and had many friends. His political influence was amazing. He managed many campaigns, among them were Olin Culberson's bid for Railroad Commissioner. He assisted Linden Johnson in his race for the Senate, Ralph Yarborough for Governor, and Art Goolsby for Sheriff for Cameron County to name a few

To repeat: His political influence was amazing.. When my sister Ray and brother-in-law Leonard opened their business in Harlingen after the Second World War in 1946 and people learned that they were Oscar Sommer's daughter and son-in-law. they often remarked that they always voted the way Oscar Sommer suggested. No problem.

He loved helping people! There were many many times people came to him for financial assistance and favors. To tell you the truth, I never once heard him refuse to help--always reaching into his pocket and pulling out a roll of bills; peeling some off and handing them out.

Some came asking that he intercede for them, by requesting that he petition the parents of the girl they were in love with and wanted to marry. Another might come seeking his influence in the release of their son from prison.

At the grave site, Lisandro Martinez, in his eulogy dated August 29, 1971, entitled OSCAR SOMMER, UN HOMBRE EXTRAORDINARIO. He tells of his love and admiration of my father. Lisandro recalls when he and his cousin Marine Martinez came from Reynosa Tamp. in 1925 seeking work, my father hired them both. They were young well mannered fellows. He tells of the good counseling my father gave them and how well it served him in his later life and in the raising of his own family. He also states how well loved my father was in Matamoros and that any time my father went to that city innumera<sup>l</sup> friends gathered around.

Mr. Licandro Martinez tells of the attacks of Pancho Villa's forces in 1915 upon the town of Matamoros. He recalls hearing tales of my father's valiant nature in offering General Navarrette his services of transporting many of the wounded to Brownsville for medical treatment.

Mr. Licandro Martinez further recalls one instance at a "pachanga" where much food was eaten and intoxicants were imbibed --one dear friend now residing in Reynosa became enraged with a companion and possessing a fire arms, a 41 calibre older that methuselah, wanted to shoot him. My father, tried to avoid this confrontation asked him, "Wait, let's go and try this pistol out and make sure that it fires and that it is accurate. you would'nt want to miss him, would you? "

They left the party and rode out toward San Fernando. A target was put up. They continued target practice until all the rounds were expended. Knowing that the ammunition for this calibre was very scares and expensive and knowing that his friend was without funds to purchase any --My father said, "OK, now go kill the...." That's how this possible tragedy was averted.

Besides having to provide for a large family, my father found time to become a 32nd Degree Mason and became Master of Rio Grande Lodge #81 from 1920-21. He was also a Shriner. He worked very hard to gain fraternal recognition with the Grand Lodge of Tamps Mexico. Whenever Oscar Sommer visited a lodge in Mexico he was treated royally.