

## Gutman Smerkovicus's Family



This is the family of my husband Gutman Smerkovicus - Gutman's mother Leya Shmerkovich is sitting to the right, next to her is Gutman's sister Riva, their brother Itshak, Riva's daughter Gitele is standing. The photo was taken in Kaunas in 1936.

My husband was born in 1916. Gutman came from a very poor family. His father, a craftsman, had died a long time ago, and his mother Leya worked in our school as a janitor. Gutman's eldest brother, Iliah Shmerkovich, was exiled from the country for his Communist activity. He lived in Argentina. He was a headmaster of a Jewish school there. Iliah had two daughters - Kunya and Catalina. Before the war Iliah wrote letters and when it became impossible to keep in touch with relatives abroad we stopped corresponding, so I don't know anything about his fate.

Gutman had an elder sister, Chaya. Her husband - I can't recall his name - was an underground Communist. In 1933 he fled with his family to the USSR in order to avoid persecution. He was arrested on the border with the Soviet Union for being a spy and then executed. Chaya and Maria were exiled to Kyrgyzstan in accordance with article 58. [It was provided by this article that any action directed at upheaval, shattering and weakening of the power of the working and peasant class should be punished.] She got married for the second time and took her husband's name - Kantorovich and changed her daughter's name to that as well for her not to have any trouble because of her father. Consequently Maria's father was rehabilitated. Chaya died in the 1980s. Maria Kantorovich lives in Israel. Gutman's younger sister Riva was married and had two daughters - Rosa and Gita, born one after another. Gutman's brother Itshak was also an underground Communist. Gutman and he composed wonderful verses, which were published in Jewish papers.

Gutman proposed to me and on 31st December 1940 we got our marriage registered in the marriage registry office. My parents didn't even insist on a Jewish wedding as they clearly understood that we would be against it, so they let us do as we wished.

In 1946, Gutman found out that his loved ones had perished in occupation. His mother Leya was executed during the first big action in Kaunas ghetto. His sister Riva, not having found her daughters Rozele and Gitele, who were taken away during the action against children, surrendered for an execution. My husband's favorite brother, Itshak Shmerkovich, a talented Jewish poet, lived to see the liberation. He was very exhausted and famished. On the first day when he ate a lot of food, he died from volvulus. Gutman took the death of his kin really hard.