

The Family Of Rita Kazhdan's Father Abram Fridman



This is the family of my father, Abram Fridman. The photo was taken in Minsk in the 1910s. In the front row on the left is my granny, Sarrra Fridman and on the right is my grandpa, Shimon Fridman. In the second row standing from left to right are my father's elder sister Tsilya, with whom I lived in Leningrad when I became an orphan, my father Abram Fridman, his younger sister, Fanya, his

brother Grisha and his oldest sister Sonya. I didn't really know my granny as I was too small when she died in 1933. They lived in Leningrad and we in Minsk. According to the stories she was a kind, affectionate woman devoted to her husband and children. She skillfully ran the house, cooked well. As my parents told me she cooked for the most part traditional Jewish dishes. Granny never punished her children or grandchildren. When we visited Leningrad with my father on his business trips, I met my grandpa and I remember him very well. I recall us arriving in the morning, because the train from Minsk used to arrive in Leningrad in the morning, and I remember him praying. He was always sitting with his face turned to the East, wearing his tallit. I don't know exactly the names for all these gadgets, which one could put on his head and hands - bricks, as I called them - and he prayed. [Editor's note: The interviewee is referring to the tefillin.] There was one more detail: grandpa prayed for a long time, not noticing anyone, and stayed in the corner, but he allowed us to look at him. At that time I sometimes messed about, but all this seemed very interesting to me. Grandpa didn't teach me to pray at that time, I was quite small. Nobody approached him until he stopped praying. The only person acquainted with all the traditions was his younger son Grigory, who lived with grandpa and granny. Grandfather Shimon was the owner of a dye-house in Minsk before the Revolution of 1917. He often traveled on business to Poland and Germany. The family was considered to be one of the most well-to-do families in the city. All grandpa's property was nationalized after the Revolution of 1917, and he escaped with a part of the family to Petrograd. Grandpa died in 1936, when he was, in my opinion, 75-76 years old. Grandpa Fridman's family lived in Petrograd in a big communal apartment. In the spacious hall, if one can say so, or anteroom, there was a huge chest which belonged to my grandpa; at that time forged chests were in fashion. What was inside it, I don't know. I also recall how he washed potatoes, as he was keen on hot jacket potatoes with butter. And we liked them, too. I also recall a big room of approximately 35 square meters, partitioned off, in which uncle Grigory later lived with his family. The walls were covered with wallpaper, and beautiful photo-portraits of grandpa and grandma were hanging on them. Then the youngest daughter Fanya Fridman, my father's sister, took the portraits to Moscow. Aunt Fanya, father's sister, died in 1986, she was 83. After her death her children threw these photo-portraits in the garbage can, though they knew beyond doubt that their ancestors were on them. These grandchildren do not need even those relatives who are alive. Now they live in America, but they have not sent us any letters, or any news. Especially my cousin Lara, she was a very selfish woman and remained such. She is 9 months older than me - she doesn't need anybody or anything. Grandpa Shimon and granny Sarra Fridman had six children. All of them were very decent people, very honest. Only one of them was a university graduate - the oldest Veniamin, because before the Revolution he had left for Kiev and graduated from the Academy of Commercial (at that time it was the same as a university). Uncle Grisha was a builder. He had completed courses for draftsmen and foremen (already in the Soviet period) and worked in the building industry. The women, for the most part, were housewives.