

Lubov Ratmanskaya's Father Isay Ratmansky



My father, Isay Ratmansky. The photo was taken in Kiev in the late 1920s. My father, Isay Ratmansky, was born in the 1870s. He went to cheder for a short time. While he lived with his parents, until he came of age, he studied embroidery - he worked on special embroidering machines. There are no such machines any more; they disappeared during the war. My father's teacher was Russian, and my father often stayed at his house. My father was very talented. He embroidered dresses, fabric. There were many Russian embroiderers in Kiev. I remember Fedorov very well. I remember him because when Petliura came to Kiev, he brought his banner to my father to embroider. My father refused. My mother begged him on her knees. It was very dangerous for him to refuse. Then I, a preschooler, was sent to Fedorov, who embroidered that banner and we

gave it back to Petliura's soldiers. My mother and father got married through embroidery. Traveling to different cities in search of a job, my father found himself in a workshop where my mother was sewing coats, and my father began to work there as an embroiderer. My mother and father got married in Pogar. It was a small town. My father was involved in some revolutionary group, so he was given a false passport under the name of Pasternak and he was illegally sent to Tsaritsyn. My mother went with him. My elder brother Abram was born in Tsaritsyn in 1908. I don't know any details of my father's revolutionary activities. He never talked about it. But my brother was Jewish, so he was circumcised in secret: father found a rabbi in Tsaritsyn and received a special certificate for Abram. Abram is Jewish, but his skin is very dark. Later, the group that helped my father sent him to Vladikavkaz. It was some time around 1909. At the end of 1917 we came to Kiev, to my father's parents. Later, because my father was an embroiderer and his work was in demand, my parents found a flat. My father was religious and raised us the same way. So I knew everything from an early age. In spite of being an atheist later, I still know all about Jewish traditions. And this is due to my father. We had celebrated seder night. We always celebrated all holidays, even when we had to hide in order to celebrate. On Chanukkah I remember that mother lit candles and we knew why she did that. For some time she also lit candles on Sabbath, but then she stopped because she was afraid and also because we didn't have any money. I also remember Purim, when mother made hamantashen, and we threw a lot of herbs for some reason. Most of all I remember Passover. We had a table laid with matzah and other necessary stuff: a piece of meat, maror, etc. We even found the hidden afikoman, and then asked presents for it. We sang along with my father. He was a wonderful singer! All members of our family sang well. The grandson of my father's eldest brother graduated from a music college and won a lot of competitions. Vera is a wonderful musician. Her teacher was Genrich Neigauz. When he heard her he took her to Moscow right away. My brother Abram sang in the synagogue where my father took him. My father also sang in the synagogue. Abram sang well. And when the Opera wanted to have a children's choir, the leader of the choir took him to the Opera and Abram sang there as well. The Opera wasn't far from us and my brother ran home one evening, grabbed me by the hand and pulled me to the Opera. That's how I saw the first opera in my life. I also remember that my brother sang in Carmen. This gift for music came from our father. We sang a lot at home. My father didn't only sing Jewish songs: before I went to the music school I knew all the arias from the operas because my father sang them all. Sometimes he sang revolutionary songs. He would put Nadya, Vera, me or Abram on his lap and sing and embroider on his machine. And thus we remembered all the songs. I can still sing some things, but the songs I learned in the music school and the songs I learned from him are a little mixed up in my memory. But father sang many songs that we were never taught at the music school, for instance, some spiritual songs. Father stayed in Kiev during the war. I still have his letters. He never asked for anything in his life, but this time he suddenly wrote me and asked for money because he had nothing to eat. I sent him the money and, miraculously, he got it! He wrote me that he went to the market and bought meat. And I wrote him to leave Kiev immediately, but he didn't want to. He remembered the behavior of the Germans during World War I, so he stayed. After the war, Vera was told that when everyone was told to gather their belongings and go to the square our father said, 'We will be led to death,' and didn't take anything. He was killed in Babi Yar in 1941.