

Abram Pasternak



This is my maternal grandfather Abram Pasternak. The photograph was taken in Tartu in the 1920s.

Grandfather worked hard and became rich. He owned a ready-made garment store, located in the center of Tartu at Alexandera Street. He also owned several houses. One of them was in the center of Tartu, where the whole family lived, and he also had a house in the resort area Elva, not far from Tartu. Grandmother was a housewife. She raised the children and did a lot about the house.

My grandparents had four children. All of them were born in Tartu. Mother's elder brother was Rolli. The second child was her sister Rebecca. My mother Paulina was born in 1895. Her younger brother David was two or three years younger than she. Grandfather took the education of his children serious. There was the famous Russian Pushkinskaya lyceum in Tartu. All their children finished it and then entered Tartu University.

Grandfather was a very religious man. Jewish traditions were kept. We lived together and had meals together not only on holidays, but on other days as well. We marked Jewish holidays. On Saturdays all men – Grandfather, Uncle David and Rebecca's husband Semyon – always went to the synagogue. On major Jewish holidays all Jews went to the synagogue – men, women, children. We marked all holidays at home.

Grandfather died in 1931, when I was six. I remember his death vividly. I was in the kitchen, when he came home for lunch. The cook put the food on the table for me and went to meet Grandfather. I heard him entering the hall and falling on the floor. He had a stroke. He had died before the doctor arrived.

Grandfather was buried in Jewish cemetery in Tartu. The funeral was in line with the Jewish rite. There were crowds of people. Grandfather was famous in the city. There were Jewish volunteer fire fighters in Tartu. All of them had other jobs, but when there was a fire somewhere, they got together, put on their uniforms and started putting out the fire. When Grandfather was young, he was also a member of that team. When he physically could not participate in putting out a fire any longer, he provided considerable monetary assistance to the team. He was an honorary member of the fire team of the city. All Tartu fire fighters came to his funeral. There was a large monument on my grandfather's grave in the Jewish cemetery in Tartu. Unfortunately, the Tartu Jewish cemetery was destroyed during World War II. There is nothing left of it.