

Iosif Lazarevich Raitsykh In The Film 'Peter The First'



This is my grandfather, Iosif Lazarevich Raitsykh, in a scene in the feature film 'Peter the First.' The film was shot in Leningrad in 1936.

Having arrived in Leningrad at the beginning of the 1930s, Grandfather Iosif, as a man of society, quickly acquired connections among the artistic elite. His inherent artistic features were noticed here, as well as in Baku, and were awarded with an invitation for participation in a film. After 'Peter the First' Grandfather also acted in the motion picture 'The Girl Sets off for a Rendezvous.'

Alongside working as a sanitary doctor, he was also in charge of reception of patients. As he was a therapist, people of different nationalities came to see him. Grandfather spoke Azeri and Armenian. Azeris, as well as Jews, are prohibited to eat pork. Among them were tuberculosis patients and Granddad had to treat them somehow, and there were no medicines then, and it was necessary to give the patients fat food, not only mutton. Grandfather would make pork balls and give these to them, not telling them what they were eating. God forbid them from finding out what kind of medicine that was! So he tried to treat them by and large. But afterwards, when one patient had almost recovered, Grandfather confessed to him, and they say he felt sick and vomited. I don't know, if it's true or not. But anyway, there was such a story.

Grandfather was a very artistic, pliant man, he danced easily, despite of his corpulence, and was an easy-going man in general. He was invited to act in a movie. Films were silent then. He was cast in the role of a groom in a silent movie called 'In the Name of God,' shot in Baku in 1926. Then, after he moved to Leningrad, before the war, he acted in two films: 'Peter the First' and 'The Girl Sets off for a Rendezvous.'

During his whole life Grandfather was a very religious man. The Soviet power was officially established in Baku in 1922. Observation of all customs – celebrating of Pesach and Rosh Hashanah – was permitted, but was supposed to be done privately, in someone’s apartment. It was allowed to visit the synagogue. But it wasn’t encouraged. I remember very well, that Grandfather used to put on a silk hat, a kippah, when he prayed. In everyday life he didn’t wear a kippah, as far as I remember, because it would have given away his Jewishness to other people, and this was in the Soviet times. He was a medical doctor and worked among atheists.