

THE PEOPLE IN THE PICTURE

A note from bookwriter/lyricist Iris Rainer Dart

Sometimes a writer doesn't know what she's writing about until she writes it. Certainly it wasn't until I'd finished writing *The People in the Picture* that I realized it was about the power of laughter.

My parents, Rose and Harry Ratner, were immigrants. My father was from Lithuania and my mother was from Russia. They moved to America in the teens of the 20th century, to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and though they were happy to escape the pogroms of Eastern Europe, they never found streets paved with gold. In fact they always lived hand to mouth. My father was a social worker in a settlement house and worked long hours, barely earning enough to cover the bills. Remarkably, despite our limited financial resources, what I remember best about them both and my years of growing up in their household was how much we laughed. Because of their sense of humor, I never felt deprived, even when I wore mostly hand-me-downs till I was in my twenties. A family vacation meant driving in a beat-up old Plymouth station wagon to visit my dad's childhood friend, who owned a boarding house in Atlantic City. We sang all the way there and all the way back. (Both of my parents had accents, so I thought Irving Berlin's famous love song was called "Always.")

I learned from my parents that there wasn't a time or place or incident about which one couldn't make a joke. And that point of view turned me into a TV comedy writer for years, and then a novelist of books that made people ask, "Do you write comedy or drama?" The answer is I write about the human condition, which is both funny and painful, often in the same moment. Finding the humor in every aspect of life was what started me on the journey of researching the use of humor under tragic circumstances. I realize now that the ability to laugh at everything, including and especially oneself, has a lot to do with survival and I'm grateful that my parents passed that along to me. Enjoy this show. I so enjoyed writing it, and working with the brilliant composers Mike Stoller and Artie Butler. We all hope and believe that when you listen to our musical, as the Warsaw Gang warns, "You're gonna laugh and cry until the final curtain."

— Iris Rainer Dart, August 2011