

## **Auto biography of Madame Slou Saparovna Akimguereeva.**

### **A true life inspiration.**

I was born on the 19<sup>th</sup> of January 1963 in Almaty, the capitol of the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic.

I was born with a trauma to my spine and was a sickly child, but despite my physical and emotional challenges, I overcame and now work in my specialized field as a master of ballet and choreography, and I am very proud of this achievement. I think I was able to do it because I spent my childhood surrounded with unconditional love and support. I truly consider myself lucky. From the very beginning I had to fight for my future and my mother was fundamental to that fight. I was unable to walk until the age of three. From a very early age my doctors and my mother helped me to develop strength in my legs. I was enrolled into swimming, gymnastics and dance classes. My mother also tried to encourage skills which would help me in the future such as sewing, cooking, music and art. My love for the theatre came from spending countless hours with my, former opera singer, care-giver nanny, at the theatre.

Mom molded me into shape in a similar manner to the way Giuseppe created Pinocchio. When I was nine, I was accepted to a professional ballet training school, where I spent 8 years. Good fortune smiled upon me. From the start I had three options: to continue my training in Almaty, Moscow or Leningrad.

My mother decided to keep me in Almaty as she was still worried about my state of health.

A year later a renowned classical dance teacher from Moscow, Lydia Rafailova, who taught Maya Plisetskaya in 1944-1950 came to Almaty. This was the beginning of my professional training. Later I had a wonderful teacher from Leningrad, Tamara Kosova, who herself had been a student of the famous Agrippina Vaganova who founded the Vaganova Ballet Method. She put her heart and soul into training me. Thanks to my teachers, I was able to graduate with honours from the ballet training school and receive a diploma as a professional Ballet Dancer.

The minister of culture of Kazakhstan then personally recommended that I travel to Moscow to audition for GITIS, which was then part of the renowned Bolshoi Theatre. GITIS translated, was known as the State Theatrical Arts Institute and is now an accredited University renamed the Russian Academy of theatre Arts.

I applied and to my delight and amazement was accepted to study there after appearing in front of the panel of judges. I was the only 18 year old student there. GITIS was for retired dancers or those who had sustained injuries and could no longer perform. It offered training for

future teachers, choreographers and producers. My tutors were among the famous Ballet masters:

Raissa Styuchkova taught classical dance to me. She had the title of “the people’s artist of USSR and was the first ever Cinderella in the famous ballet by Prokoviev. Professor Tamara Tkachenko taught morning class and Character Dance. Professor Maria Semenova taught Historical Dance.

By the start of 1982 I had a successful professional career. I had a lead role in a play dedicated to the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Chilean Communist Party, where the producer was Abdu Ndiegen. I got to know this talented man and we married the same year. A year later our first son Charles was born. With all that, I never missed a single class. All my dreams had come true, as ever since the age of fifteen, I had dreamed of falling in love, getting married and becoming independent. I was very shy by nature and although I had been given wonderful opportunities, control was ruining my life. I felt like a bird in a golden cage. I wanted to break free from parental supervision and society’s expectations.

Meeting my husband was like the door of that cage being unlocked. He was my teacher and a graduate of GITIS and worked as an actor at the Mayakovsky Theatre.

I finished my studies in 1986 qualifying as Ballet Master and choreographer. I went back to my first school of ballet in Almaty where I continued to learn from my former teachers by working alongside them.

After Perestroika, my husband, our baby and I were forced to leave the country. We moved to Senegal, my husband’s country of birth. I was the first ever Kazakh woman to live in Senegal. With family, friends and work always a priority to me, Senegal did not seem foreign to me. The country entrusted its children to me, to teach them how to dance, appreciate music, art and to love all things beautiful. I developed a special program for the rehabilitation of disabled children, gave master classes in France and Morocco, and in 1995 received an invitation to work as choreographer from King Mohammed V. Later in 1998, I was invited to teach at Opera de Paris in France

In 2000 we had our second, long awaited baby boy, Marat. With his birth our happiness and our artistic career seemed to be complete. We had achieved our dreams of creating our own artistic school. But in 2002 disaster struck. My husband was diagnosed with terminal cancer. He died 11 months later. My fairy tale had come to an end and I was thrown into a deep horrible depression.

Fortunately friends, relatives and colleagues rallied around me. It was because of them I learned to stand on my own two feet again. I had to begin rebuilding my life from scratch. Then

and there I remember what my teacher and husband had taught me. His words were:” Do not panic, do not fall into despair. Do not succumb to weakness and think that this is the end of the world. The calamities will pass and life will triumph.”

In 2005 I came to South Africa first on invitation from the South African Ballet theatre to train local dancers in the Vaganova Ballet Technique which is considered the best in the world. New acquaintances made me feel so at home and have since become dear friends. They have, and continue to love, protect and sometimes spoil my small family. I praise the Lord each day for giving my life back to me.

Circumstances lead me on different paths and at my own initiative; with the support of non-governmental sponsors I opened The Russian Ballet Academy of South Africa. The goal of the academy is to preserve and develop the traditions of classical dance, to propagate the classic Russian and universal choreographic arts among the youth, identifying young talent and then development of international relations. The academy enjoys participation of children from different nationalities. My task includes familiarizing my students with Russian Culture and the culture of countries of the former USSR as well as the rehabilitation of disabled children, with the methodology I designed during my time in Senegal.

My students perform twice a year, together with such companies as The Crown of Russian Ballet and the Imperial Russian Ballet early in the year and towards the end of the year we host a charity production.

My most recent and highest achievement to date was to be the recipient of a medal awarded to me in October 2014, when Vladimir Putin signed the Executive Order on National Awards of the Russian Federation to Foreign Citizens. It is awarded for achievement in arts and culture, education, humanities and literature and for great contribution to expanding friendship and cooperation with the Russian Federation and to the development of economic, scientific and cultural ties.

Indeed “Life will triumph”.