



First, Let Me Take a Selfie.

Who Snapped That First Shot?

Selfie: (also selfy) (noun) A photograph that one has taken of oneself, typically taken with a smartphone or webcam and shared via social media.

Luther George Simjian is the answer to the question above. He was the Ottoman-born Armenian inventor of the self-posing portrait camera. We consider him “Ottoman-born” because he was born in Gaziantep on January 28, 1905. We don’t have much information about his life in Turkey. All we know is that he got separated from his family during the Armenian crisis at the time of World War I. He emigrated to the U.S.A. to live with his relatives in Connecticut after first passing through Beirut and Marseille.

He worked as a photographer in many places, including Yale School of Medicine. He was very good at his job. In 1934, he took the biggest step in his life by moving to New York City. It was in the Big Apple where he constructed the first self-posing portrait camera.

The machine Simjian invented was not much like our iPhones, iPads, Galaxies and iOther Next-Best-Things. And I’m pretty sure the photos taken with it didn’t look like the ones we’ve been shooting with Retrica. With Simjian’s camera, a person could see and optimize his or her own image in a mirror before the photo was taken. Pretty cool, isn’t it? That kind of detail is amazing considering the camera was invented in 1934. It definitely gave the idea of self-posing to later mechanical engineers. Simjian would likely be very surprised at how his idea has been updated for the 21st century. Or would he? On second thought, maybe it’s better he didn’t live to see the kind of snapshots to be found among the hundreds of thousands of selfies. If he could see the teenagers with duck faces taking selfies, he’d probably ask forgiveness before killing himself!

Similar to the self-posing cam, he invented the Reflectone, a kind of cosmetic chair with movable mirrors. Seated there, a person could see her own body from all perspectives. Simjian obviously had a talent for finding ways to reflect and reproduce images of the human form.

Above all, his most famous invention was the Automated Teller Machine (ATM). Yes, he was the inventor of Bankamatic, the convenient device used globally by millions of people every single day. And let's not forget his clever teleprompter, an invention used by journalists and politicians in studios worldwide. Simjian had interests and ability in so many fields: telecommunications, military, banking, science. . . . His selfie-cam is the one that attracts us the most, but the others are pretty amazing, too.

With his ceaselessly creative brain, Simjian never stopped inventing in his laboratories in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, United States. He was a very smart and capable man. It makes me disappointed that even though his inventions are used daily all over the world, he still remains unknown to many people. We're proud to feature L.G. Simjian as a historical person of interest to students of English Translation and Interpretation Studies.