

Chaja Klara Szwach



This is my mother - Chaja Klara Szwach, nee Kupferman. The photo was taken in Horodenka in 1900. Mama was of medium height. Mama was pretty; she had black hair cut short. For me there was no woman more beautiful. In the winter she would always put a woolen shawl on her head. At home they used to tell us that my mom was supposed to go the States, and she got the affidavit [papers enabling emigration], but then she fell in love with my father and passed up the trip in favor of her sister Sara. They didn't get married by shidduch. Times had moved on by then. Perhaps they met in a club or something. Mama completed elementary school. And during World War I she spent a year in Austria, because Granddad was in the army at the time and Grandma was escaping from the Cossacks with small children. When the Germans came, Mama always said that it was impossible, that the Germans, with their culture, with their history, Goethe, Heine... [commit all the crime they did]. And so we didn't escape. When the Germans attacked the Soviet Union, they reached us, Horodenka, within a few days. And then my parents said that no, we were staying,

but that Rywka, the eldest, she should escape with the Wajcmans. If something were to happen to us, then at least she would survive. Our mom was so gifted at sewing that she could patch up anything. If any of our clothes were handed down from older children to younger ones, they were always neatly patched. I remember one of our mistresses, called Liebster, who taught us religion in 1938. And there was this son of a horse-food merchant, who always came to school ragged, all dirty. And Mrs. Liebster would often shout at him: 'How can you come to school in such a state!? Come here, Tobiasz,' - that's what they called me at the Polish school - 'come here, show us what you look like.' And she would show all the children my carefully patched clothes. And I was very embarrassed, I felt humiliated.