

Genia Weisenberg, Grandmother Fania Gempeld And Aunt Riva



This is my mother Genia Gempeld (standing on the right) with her mother Fania Gempeld (in center) and older sister Riva (standing on the left). This photo was taken in Ozarintsy in 1921.

Mama's parents came from the Jewish town of Ozarintsy near Mogilyov-Podolskiy . I think that my grandfather Yevzel Gempeld and my grandmother Fania were born some time in the late 1860s. My grandfather was a tailor. Before the revolution of 1917 he owned a small shop, which was expropriated after the revolution and my grandfather did sewing at home. His younger son Mikhail assisted him. My grandmother was a housewife, which was quite common for Jewish women. They had many children, but they all left their parents' home before I was born. During the Civil War some of my mother's brothers and sisters moved to the USA. There were no contacts with them, and mama never told us anything about them. Mama was born in 1901. I also knew mama's older brother, whose name I don't remember, her older sister Riva, born in 1898, and her younger brother Mikhail, Moishe in Jewish, born in 1909, the youngest child in the family. He was single and lived with my grandparents in Ozarintsy. Riva married Motl Kagan, a shochet in her town. Riva and her husband lived in their house not far from my grandparents. Riva had three daughters: Hana, Vera and Yekaterina. Mama's older brother learned tailor's vocation from his father. He lived with his family in Luchinets village, was married and had two sons. I don't remember his wife or children's names since we did not communicate.

I remember my mother's parents. My grandfather was a stout man of average height. He wore a black suit. At home he always had a black yarmulke on, and wore a hat to go out. He didn't have payes, but all old men in Ozarintsy had beards and my grandfather had a big black beard with streaks of gray. My grandmother was short and thin. She always wore skirts with gathers and long-sleeved blouses. She always covered her head with a black kerchief. My grandfather and grandmother were religious. They celebrated Sabbath and Jewish holidays. Their children were also religious. Mikhail, whom I knew well, always went to the synagogue with grandfather on Sabbath and Jewish holidays. My grandmother went to the synagogue on Jewish holidays like other Jewish women.

Mama told me that she always wanted to leave Ozarintsy for a big town. Of course, Mogilyov-Podolskiy can hardly be called a big town, but my mother, a common Jewish girl from a small Jewish village, found it attractive. After the revolution she moved to Mogilyov-Podolskiy. I don't know whether my mother had any education at all: she could hardly read words or write her own surname. She was looking for a job and was offered a job of housemaid in a Jewish family. Mama worked for few families doing shopping, cleaning and baby sitting for them. I don't know how she met my father. Mama hardly ever told me about her life. My parents got married in 1922. They were both poor, and a big wedding party was out of the question. There was a chuppah installed in the yard of my mother parents' house, and then my grandmother made a small wedding dinner with my mother and father's relatives. After the wedding my parents returned to Mogilyov-Podolskiy. They rented half of a small house in the center of Mogilyov-Podolskiy, in the Jewish neighborhood.

Mama was a housewife after getting married. Their first daughter was named Zina - this is a Russian name, Zisl in Jewish; she was born in 1924, their second daughter Etia was born in 1926. I was the third daughter in the family. I was born in 1932. I was named Sonia, and my Jewish name is Sosl. My younger sister Nyusia was born in 1939. She was given the Jewish name of Hana. She was called affectionately Hanusia - Nyusia at home, and this name was put down in her birth certificate. It was hard for my father to provide for the family of six of us. My father made plain furniture, doors and window frames. We could hardly make ends meet. Nyusia and I wore our sisters' clothes that they had grown out of.