

Portraits

Highlighting the exceptional contribution
of European Jewish Women

Pauline Einstein

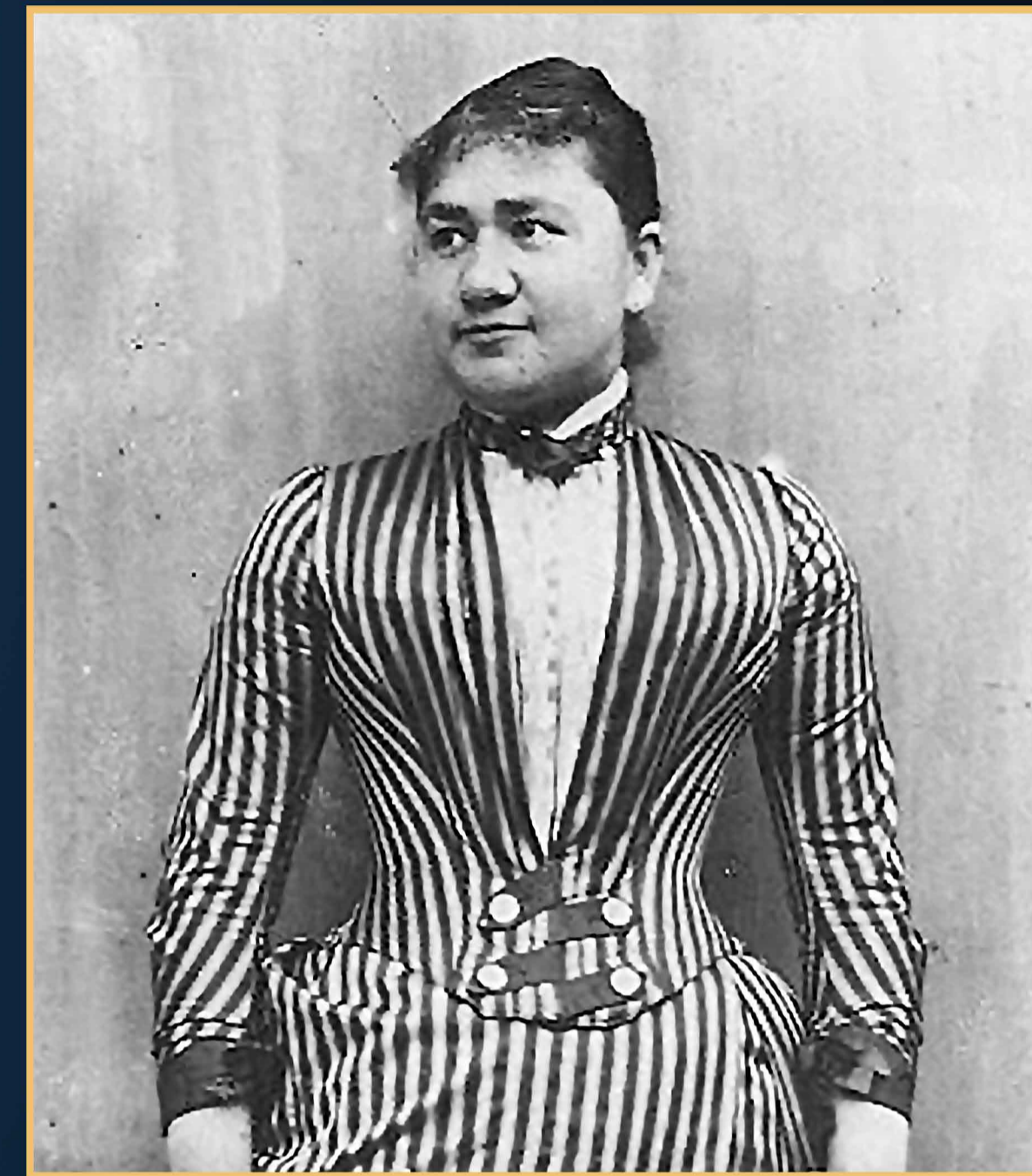
Mother of Albert Einstein

(1858-1920)

Born Pauline Koch in Cannstatt (Wuerttemberg). Wife of Hermann Einstein. Mother of Albert and Maja. Pauline has a sister Fanny and two brothers, Jacob and Caesar, all three her elders. Her parents, Jules Derzbacher (who had taken the surname Koch in 1842) and Jette Bernheimer married in 1847. Pauline's father managed to make a fortune in the corn trade and became "Royal Supplier of Wurtemberg to the Court."

In 1876, at the age of eighteen, Pauline marries Hermann Einstein, who is eleven years her senior. He runs a German company that manufactures items as diverse as dynamos, bow lamps, light bulbs, and telephones, "high technology" for the time. Albert's interest in science comes naturally to him. Hermann went bankrupt despite the finances his in-laws provided. The family moves to Munich after Albert was born in Ulm on 14 March 1879.

As a devoted, determined and assiduous mother, she supervises the education of her children, especially her eldest son, Albert, who is mistakenly taken to be retarded because of his huge head and until the age of seven repeats every sentence he utters. He has speech problems and up to seven years old, repeats every sentence he says.



https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pauline_Koch_edit.jpg

Pauline predicts he'll be a genius. A piano player herself, she gives him violin lessons from the age of six. Paradoxically, she accepts that he leaves his school in Munich, where he was unhappy, to join them in Milan where they moved in 1894, after Herman went bankrupt again. It is she who insists that he studies in university, his father would have liked him to earn his living right away. Albert failed his Polytechnique exam, but his math copy is spotted by a teacher who advises him to take it again the following year. He passed the exam that time round. Hermann dies in 1902, leaving Pauline a widow. Albert never fails to send her his press clippings in order to "feed her considerable pride." When she dies, in 1920, Albert was forty-one years old and already well known. When Albert Einstein was awarded the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1922, he declared, including his mother: "We got it."

Even non-mathematicians know the famous formula of equivalence between mass and energy: $E=mc^2$ that revolutionised science. Without his mother's support, would Albert have become Einstein?