

Henryk Prajs And His Friend Mr. Kawka



This is a photo of me and my friend Mr Kawka in the seniors club of the Social and Cultural Society of Polish Jews (TSKZ) in Warsaw. It was taken two years ago. I've been a member of the TSKZ for 50 years now I think, ever since its creation. I go to the seniors club in Warsaw once or twice a week when the weather is fine. Very rarely in the wintertime. I have my friends there: Kawka, Janowski, Wajnryb, Mrs. Szymanska, Mrs. Kaczmarska, all of them elder people, some are even older than me. We tell each other tall tales, what comes, our life stories, we talk of our youth and the later years. Back before the marriage I changed my name to Henryk at the district administration in Grojec. Why shouldn't I have a Polish first name while I'm a Pole, well yes, of Jewish descent, but still a Pole. I never felt, however, the urge to erase my nationality. It's not a shame, and it's not a distinction either, that's who I was born, that's who I am, that's who I will be. You mustn't forget your nationality, it's no shame. Every human being has a right to live, and it doesn't make any difference if someone is black, or a Gypsy [Roma], or a German. Even against the Germans I don't hold any grudge anymore. A German named Kulc harbored me for three months, could I have any grudge against him, could I refuse to shake hands with him? I would do anything to help that man, because he helped me knowing I was a Jew. There's no place for chauvinism, nationalism, or racism in my mind.