

### **At my place.**

They had come to Mińsk Mazowiecki in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. First newcomers used to trade booze. For years, they had been living next to the Poles, probably never together. The Jews. In 1936, after the pogrom, a lot of them left out of fear, loneliness and uncertainty, when one incident triggered the avalanche of hate. However, before WW2 they still constituted 30% of the population in Mińsk. The year 1941 came. Local Jews and those residing in nearby villages herded in the ghetto. A year later, on August 21<sup>st</sup>, over 1300 Jews were murdered on the square, under church towers. 5000 headed towards Treblinka for their last journey. After WW2, 100 Jewish Survivors had no place to return to. Only Tajblum, the glazier, and Roma remained. What next? Nothing. They're gone. No one asks, no one mentions or recalls them. As a child, I would go with my friends to the Jewish cemetery. We played caps and ate mirabelles falling on the matzevahs. Nobody protested that there was something inappropriate in it. It continued. In 2009 a friend of mine called me. He asked me if we would like to host teenagers from Israel at the school where I used to work at the time and I replied: "Sure". I had the entire period of summer holidays to prepare the program of a one-day visit. It would be a shame to talk about mirabelles. I read all the available materials about the Jews from Mińsk. I remember my first emotions – disbelief, shame for the lack of knowledge of local history and the recurring question, how was it possible? That experience was a one-way ticket. A turning point in my life. My place. My Jews. My responsibility. I became a member of the group of local leaders of Polish-Jewish dialogue. The Forum for Dialogue follows the conviction that learning history is connected with taking the responsibility for it. I learned it.

### **My responsibility.**

I undertook my first timid activities with my pupils. We had one goal from the very beginning – commemoration. Holocaust Remembrance Day, anniversary of liquidation of the ghetto. Year by year, we would leave our classroom or school club more courageously and go to the town. On the anniversary of the outbreak of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, we formed a group of nearly 100 people and stood in a circle, holding our hands at the Old Town Market Square – former location of the ghetto. We stood in silence. Also those who had not joined us.

I used to present my Jews through the lens of the Shoah. However, for 7 years now, I have been telling the Jewish history through individual stories of their lives, events and places, supported by my outstanding friends. We initiated Jewish Culture Days in Mińsk Mazowiecki. The year 2021 is unique for the history of the town as we celebrate 600<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the granting of town rights, including 400 together with the Jews. We would like to mark four locations connected with the presence of our Jewish neighbours in the town. For this purpose, the project "Commemorating the Jews from Mińsk through art" was established.

The unveiling of locations commemorating the presence of Jewish community, planned within the framework of Jewish Culture Days, will be accompanied by theatre etudes. The themes of four of them will be organically connected with the locations: the cemetery, synagogue, yeshiva, ghetto. It will be not only a historical reference to the past, but an attempt to establish the relationship between the past and the present. We aim not only at symbolically emphasizing specific buildings or places, but also at establishing a point for cultural, social and historical reference, entering into direct interaction with a passerby or a visitor. For this reason the etudes will take the form of performances. The combination of music, light and image will form the basis for emotional and intellectual penetration of history and the commemoration of people, places and events from the past which were forgotten. It is important for the venues of commemoration to revive in the eyes of participants not only from the historical perspective. They should become living urban tissue, especially for young citizens of Mińsk. The project is accompanied by educational activities.

### **My memory.**

The Survivors that I met the most frequently asked for memory. We enrich the memory with care and actions. Pupils, teachers, local activists, a Catholic priest, town mayor, descendants, participants of commemoration activities, Jewish Culture Days “The near and the alienated”, our families, me. **OUR MEMORY.** Our life. Our identity.