

Esiah Kleiman With His Wife Fenia Kleiman And Friends



This is a picture of me on the very left and my wife Fenia Kleiman, third from the left, at the celebration of Purim at Hesed. The photo was taken in Chernovtsy in 2002. I was rather skeptical about perestroika, which began in 1986. I thought it was another 'activity' of the Communist Party. After some time I saw that things began to change for the better. Newspapers became more interesting, and books, which had been banned in the past, were published. The first steps of the restoration of the Jewish spirituality and culture were made at that time, and I became actively involved in this movement. I was chairman of the Jewish charity committee that was established during the Soviet regime in 1988. Many problems that had made our life difficult before perestroika were eliminated. Religion, although it wasn't officially acknowledged by the state, wasn't forbidden any more. The attitude towards Jews changed for the better. Jewish writers began to have their books published, which hadn't happened before. A Jewish association of culture and a public cultural fund were established in that period. I participated in both organizations. Jewish life began to revive even before Ukraine declared its independence in 1991. Jewish organizations, theaters and art collectives were established. People visited Jewish exhibitions. A Jewish library and school were opened in Chernovtsy. When Hesed was established in independent Ukraine I became chairman of the Board of Hesed. This organization supports older people and helps them to communicate and satisfy their spiritual needs. I'm the chief editor of Hesed News, the newspaper published by Hesed. I do this work for free. My wife and I receive a pension given to former inmates of ghettos. We can manage with what we receive, and when somebody needs help we are always happy to provide assistance. I go to the synagogue on Jewish holidays and on the death anniversaries [Jahrzeit] of members of my family. My wife and I celebrate Jewish holidays and Sabbath at home. We have lived a difficult, but interesting life. I'm grateful that we've found each other in this big world.