

Rena Michalowska



This is me today. This picture was taken by a professional photographer in Warsaw before my trip to the USA to visit my son in 2005. We wanted to go to Vancouver and I needed that photo for the Canadian visa. My contacts with the Jewish community are very selective. I go to the Singer days and Jewish Book days. This year a wonderful panel was organized, called 'Assimilated Jewish Families.' Since 1968 or 1969, when Ida Kaminska left with the core of the theater group, I have not gone to a single performance at the Jewish theater, though I used to go before. I don't like ersatz. I understand practically everything in Yiddish. But when I want to answer, my English pushes out my Yiddish. I must have put so much intellectual effort into absorbing English, that it has become dominant. I feel very bad for having stopped speaking Yiddish. I think that if I found myself in a community speaking that language, I would get it back without a problem. Now I'm painstakingly making up for those years when I had no time to read fiction, as the day was only 24 hours long. I used to joke that I'm educated on 'Ekspres Wieczorny' [a popular evening daily, published in Warsaw in 1946-1990]; only the titles, for the smaller print puts me to sleep. When I recently read 'W ogrodzie pamieci' [a book by Joanna Olczak-Roniker, 2001, Znak Publishing House,

a saga of four generations of a Jewish family], I was somewhat envious. Those better educated families have had some papers left, some documents, something. And with me, what there was is all gone now. I used to come back to all that in my thoughts very often, but I pushed it away from me. When I read 'My z Jedwabnego' [by Anna Bikont, 2004, Prószyński i S-ka Publishing House: the reconstruction of the Jedwabne pogrom from 1941], I thought, 'My God, why does all of that have to disappear? And I didn't even try to commemorate anything, to recollect it?? That's why I wanted to write up these, somewhat hazy, family memories.'