

Michal Warzager



This is what I look like now as I'm telling you my story. This picture was taken in my apartment in Legnica in 2000s. I'm wearing my army suit.

I garnered a few medals over the years. Some are combat medals from the war, and some are for my work with the unions. For example the Union of War Invalids - I was one of their financial aid and loan officers. I'd give out loans - my word went. If I didn't like someone, I could say: 'We won't give him a loan this time - we'll give him one next time.' But I didn't do that. We still have an organization for Poles who served in the Soviet Army, and I'm the head of the chapter here. There used to be nine of us; there are three left now. Yes, they were old, and they've died. Not long ago we had a meeting, because the government wanted to take away our privileges, but thanks to the efforts of our authorities, we've hung onto a few, for the time being, anyway - at least those heart medications. And those medals didn't come so easy. They're for a lot of community service. I didn't have heart disease then, just the leg, and we used to go around to visit the old sick people. We'd visit them and take notes about how much their benefits amounted to, so that they could get financial aid. Sometimes we'd have to go way out of town, or hunt them out on housing estates. And so the authorities thought it over and came up with a medal as a reward. So I got a medal: one's a Victory & Freedom medal, one's a Cavalier's Cross; I got an Officer's Cross as well. The most important one is the one from the war: the Order of the Great Patriotic War [13], first class. There used to be an allowance for people with that medal and two crosses, but that's been done away with now.

And so here we are - my wife is 85 years old now, and I'm 84. It's not too cheery anymore - we have a pretty monotonous life. It's even risky to go out. We used to go visit some friends who lived on the other side of the park. Once he came over at midnight saying his wife had baked a fish pie. He got us out of bed and we went to his house in the middle of the night. I had a big dog then, so I took my dog along. But there wasn't a soul on the street! And now I look out the window and see drunks walking around looking for someone to hassle. Nowadays I don't go out at night at all. I'm getting old - it used to be that hardly anyone lived to be 84. I can't walk very much, because my leg hurts. I can't put pressure on it. I put a thick layer of cotton wool in my shoe - otherwise I wouldn't be able to walk at all. And I sit at home. I don't have anything to do, since I'm not supposed to do any work or carry anything. I just look out the window, and sometimes I think about the old days.