

Perets And Leon Kalaora



This is a picture of my brother Perets Kalaora and me. He lived in Paris from 1941 until 1943. The photo was taken in 1978 when he came to Sofia after we hadn't seen each other for a long time. My brother Perets Kalaora was an honest democrat. He was the man who persuaded me to join the fight against fascism. He managed to escape Gestapo in a very shrewd way. He died in 1997. Then I wrote his obituary published in 'Evreiski Vesti': 'He managed to escape Gestapo, but did not manage to escape the insidious illness.' The fate of my brother Perets Kalaora during World War II was very interesting. At first he studied industrial chemistry in Brno. But after the German invasion, he had to save himself. He went to study industrial chemistry in Paris. But the Germans showed up there, too. He went to finish his education in Bordeaux; Marshal Petain governed this part of France, who was known to be a servant of Hitler's. The French government did not shoot down Perets only because he was too young. At the same time in Bulgaria King Boris III issued a special

decree and ordered his foreign minister to tell the German government that all Jewish Bulgarian citizens in the territories occupied by Germany and in the allied countries must be treated in the same way as the local Jews. That is, they could be arrested, harassed and, all in all, included in that group of six million killed Jews. At that time my brother was in Bordeaux. One day, as usual, he studied for some exam with a fellow student in his rented apartment. It was a late, rainy and cold autumn day. The evening was drawing near. Perets went outside to see his friend off. They started talking at the front door when two Gestapo officials approached them and asked, 'Sirs, do you know if Mr. Pierre Kalaora lives here? They meant Perets. And my brother obligingly informed them, 'Yes, he lives here. Go to the third floor...' and he showed them his door. The moment the men entered the building, he and his friend ran away. He ran into one direction, and his friend in the opposite one. Naturally, my brother never passed through that street or that neighborhood again. I was told this story by fellow students of my brother, but I do not remember their names. He did not like to talk about it, even in front of his relatives. A few months after that incident, he went to the city hall in Bordeaux to change some documents. The clerk there told him to come back after two or three hours and everything would be ready. But Perets started wondering whether the clerk wanted him to come back later so that he would have time to call the Gestapo, or he was just paranoid. So he stopped 100 meters from the building and looked around for any Gestapo officials or suspicious civilian people. Then he went to the clerk, who, to his great surprise, gave him not one but two sets of documents. One of the sets contained the real documents, and the other - fake ones. And the clerk said, 'Sir, I feel for you and I want to help you...' It turned out he was a man from the Resistance. After 9th September 1944 Perets returned to Bulgaria for a short period to try to find and thank this man, but he could not find him.