

The Alhalel Family And The Chomonevi Family



This is a picture of my family and the Chomonevi family, who helped our relatives a lot during the Holocaust. The photo was taken in 1938 in Vidin. From left to right you can see: Vasil and Dimitar Chomonevi (brothers), Nedialka (Uncle Vasil's daughter), next to her is her brother Sasho. Sitting from right to left are I, Lili (Dimitar's daughter), Ivan (Vasil's son) and I don't remember who the last woman was. During the Holocaust the Bulgarians always helped us, although our closest neighbor was a fascist. His name was Dimitar Chomorev. He had a son and a daughter. His wife had died. Dimitar Chomorev believed in Hitler's ideas. His son was an admirer of English culture. His daughter was a Legionnaire. But we respected each other as neighbors. We always helped each other, and we never discussed our different ideologies. During the Law for Protection of the Nation in 1942 the radio sets owned by Jews were confiscated and the others in the town sealed. We would invite Dimitar and the other neighbors to play tablanet [a card game] at home, while a Jewish boy, interned from Sofia to Vidin, and I went to Dimitar's home to listen to the news on the radio. His radio hadn't been confiscated or sealed because he worked in the police force. If we wanted his daughter out of the house, we asked a Jewish boy to invite her on a date. His son was away most of the time, because he was an incorrigible gambler. So Jozko, who lived in our house, and I, listened to Radio Free Europe, Radio London, Voice of America and Radio Hristo Botev. He knew English, because he had studied in the American College in Sofia and he interpreted to me in detail the flash news on Radio Free Europe and The Voice of America. Then we would return home, where the men were still playing cards. As if on command, one of them would immediately say that he was tired, another would say that he had some work at home and they would cut short the game. The aim was to get Dimitar out of his house so that we could get some information from his radio and share it. I can't say for sure if he knew about our little tricks. I only know that he had always been a great neighbor. One night, when the whole family was in the house and I had just returned from one of my labor camps, I don't remember which one, and we had just fallen asleep, suddenly there was a knock on the door. I was 18 or 20 at that time and went to see who that was which was very foolish of me. When I went outside the house, I saw a German soldier holding a knife. He was drunk. He asked me in German: 'Jude? Jude?' That is, if Jews lived here. I started

shouting at him and he raised the knife to stab me. But I was strong then and very fit from my work in the printing house before the Holocaust. So, I caught him and took away his knife. I remember that I was wearing a gold ring on my right hand, a present from my mother. I had squeezed the drunk German so hard that the ring stuck deeply into the flesh of my finger. The German ran away, but I immediately went to Dimitar. He was an influential man and lived next to us. I woke him and his children up at 2am. He immediately sent his son to the police station. The police came and took away the German who was still wandering in Kaleto. The story had a happy ending, but it could have been much worse.