Letter from Stanislav Muravsky to Volodymyr Maniak, .

Regarding events in Litynka, Lityn raion, Vinnytsia oblast

Pain of the Human Soul

In 1933 I was not quite 15 years of age yet, but I was already in the Komsomol and a student in the 5th grade. What a terrifying life it was. What a living hell it was for people, when we could barely cross our legs. Boys and girls would walk home from the school situated in the regional center 5 kilometers away, and it was horrible to watch when in the ditch there lay a still live person, a child, not talking, but just motioning its lips and begging. And what can you possibly give the child when you yourself were as hungry as a wolf.

It’s true that in our village of Litynski Khutory [Litynka] a brigade was formed in 1932-33; the people called it “The Light Cavalry” in those days. This brigade – under the leadership of the activist Pavlo Panasiuk of the Selyshche Village Council, which administered our village – would burst into every house and confiscate everything to the last kernel of grain.

I remember when my mother grabbed a bag of beans and threw it between the 6 of us who were on the stove. We thought they wouldn’t find it, but Panasiuk began to yell: “Look at this – the “somol” [slang for Komsomol member] has gone the way of the kurkul. Tomorrow, there won’t be a trace of you in that “somol!” Nevertheless, I remained in the Komsomol, but did not finish the 5th grade because I could no longer study. I dropped out of school and went to work as a mail carrier. Each work day would be officially recorded as a labour day.

It’s true that a Twenty-Five Thousander, the communist Zakusylov arrived in our village with his wife. But I do not understand for what reason a lunch was organized in the kolhosp [for them]. On a daily basis, those who worked received a kilogram of ??? grain, but there was nothing in which to grind or mash it, because the “The Light Cavalry” smashed up and destroyed everything. So mother mixed it with water in a *makitra* [big clay bowl with a rough surface], ground it and cooked a soup out of it. We did not eat the soup by spoon, but rather we drank it. However, this did not help anyway. In our family, 2 of my little brothers and a little sister died, while three of us – two other little sisters and I – survived. And so the rest of the family went to work in the kolhosp. My work was officially recorded as a labour day, while my 2 little sisters did not receive such a designation because they were too small.

Our aunt died along with three children. Our uncle lived on. The ears of the wheat stem had milky grain, so our uncle picked a few ears. He ground the ears of the wheat stem, dried them on the stove, cooked up a porridge, ate the porridge and ended up dying.

We pressed on in whatever way we could. I, as the oldest, remained with the family and foraged for food among the wild fowl. We lived in a very muddy location and every spring thousands of wild geese and ducks would fly into this area. Thus, I would take off my shirt and climb up the hillocks, seek out the eggs, bring them home and our mother would hand out an equal share to everyone. Because I was a good tree climber, I would go get additional eggs from crows, magpies and red-footed falcons. The meadow served as an additional source of food where – together with my little sisters – we would go grazing. In other words, we would pick the sorrel, eat it in clumps and then get an unbearable headache. We would yell and cry from the pain, and then go grazing again the next day.

Many died of hunger, entire families. It was a long time ago and apparently forgotten. Only now are people beginning to recall that horrible, famished spring – it’s terrible to even think about it. You’re climbing a tree 25-30 meters in height, you reach a bird’s nest, but it’s already empty. I would go into the water neck-deep and there would be nothing. With my arms and legs all scratched up, I would go out of the freezing water dripping wet and head for home with nothing, hungry like a wolf.

There were skeptics who would quietly sing:

Dad is in the SOZ, [Association for Joint Cultivation of Land] mom is in the SOZ,

While their children died on the road.

There is no bread, no lard –

Because Panasiuchyna [Panasiuk rule] took it away…

Those who sang were taken away in the years 1937-38. These included Stepan and Karol Andrikevych, who never returned to the village. They became known as enemies of the state in the village, forever. Of course they were rehabilitated, but their little children remained and they were harassed and called “Trotskyites.”

Furthermore, in order to save our lives, I would go in the meadow, where there were many crows and I would sneak up quietly to the nests and catch crows, magpies and red-footed falcons. Then I would bring them home, our mother would prepare them, accordingly, for consumption and we would quietly eat the meat, simultaneously making sure not to stir up the attention of strangers. It was disgusting and sickening to eat this stuff. Tears would flow out of our eyes as we put this hideous stuff in our mouths. But famine is no one’s dear mother, and it takes everything away, while a human being wants to live, and we survived.

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Our village was not that small. There were about 200 households, but there was hardly anyone to collect the grain. As a result, a brigade from Vinnytsia numbering 100 individuals was asked to provide assistance. They worked for 2 months.

S.M.