Letter from V.S. Samoiluk to Volodymyr Maniak, 5 February 1989 (?).

Regarding events in Stadnytsia, Vinnytsia raion, Vinnytsia oblast

Dear Friends,

Recently I learned that the writers’ union is planning to write a book about the famished year of ‘33. They are requesting the assistance of survivors-eyewitnesses. Although I was too young at that time, that tragedy nevertheless has embedded itself in my life. We, children, did not have any idea at that time that a tragedy was approaching. The famine of ’33 sneaked up like a criminal, as if it were a predatory animal. My impression is that the year 1932 did not foresee such a tragedy, because the harvest that year was not a complete failure. Our parents had six children, each two years apart. Volodya, the youngest, was going on four years of age. The older children were eagerly anticipating to go to school.

I remember the year 1932 very well. I had just marked my 8th birthday, and was going on my 9th year. My parents had six tithes [1.09 hectares] of land and tilled it themselves. That year they reaped a pretty good harvest, and stocked up on sowing material. They stored it on the shelves in the small granary.

In the winter of 1932-33, the government official Kotula (?) arrived in our village, at the head of a convoy of horse-drawn drays under the escort of two NKVD agents for the purpose of confiscating grain from single-family farmsteads. The official made his way from yard to yard, in the process wiping his hands in satisfaction.

Soon, the time came for a visit to our farmstead as well. Kotula barged into our home like a rabid animal and shouted at my father: “Go ahead, open up and show us what you have!” The small granary was closed by lock and key. So the government official grabbed a crow bar from the dray, tore off the lock and burst into the granary. The grain that lay there was all taken away as if the granary was swept completely clean. The people on the drays were not locals. They loaded up the grain and drove it away.

Our parents pleaded with and appealed to the officials to leave something at least for the children, but in response all they heard were threats: “Do you wish to wind up in the Solovky [Solovets Islands prison camp]?” Our mother broke out in tears, fell to her knees and implored the officials, but this had no effect on them. They continued their black deeds.

In the spring of ’33, the shortage of food started to become noticeable. It was a good thing that the potato crop had been successful, and that we had a cow. Perhaps this is what saved our family. Our parents were worried − how much longer could we go on like this, especially since the next harvest was still a long way off.

Then my father made his way to the neighboring raion [district] and arrived at the Bohdanivsky radhosp [state-run agricultural enterprise, but larger than a kolhosp] which manufactured beets. The director of one of the departments of this radhosp in the village of Rokyta was a man by the name of Petro Opanasovych Podolianchuk. He suggested to my father the following: “Send your children to our department and we will organize three meals per day for them and we will guarantee work for them..” The distance to the department was not very far – only 1 km [kilometer].

The following day, under my father’s supervision, my older brother and I commenced working. Everything turned out to be just like the director had promised. The children were fed hot meals three times per day, including 400 grams of bread and 100 grams of sheep’s milk cheese mixed with vegetables.

The kids from the surrounding villages yelled and shouted about in the department’s courtyard and fulfilled relatively easy and manageable labor, namely they plucked out the weeds in the wheat fields. Furthermore, when the sugar beets had been planted on the plantations and the bo weevil had appeared, the bo weevil would be picked out.

The more agile and active boys would carry water for the women, who were responsible for overseeing the development of vegetation. This type of routine lasted almost right up to the harvest. During the collection of grain, the ears would be collected as well as the sheafs, which were subsequently carried over to a designated area and the older workers would pile them up into haystacks.

During this period, the children gained strength and became more agile. The bread was rationed in such a way so as to bring some of it home in the evening for the smaller children.

When I recall this tradition, I am overwhelmed by bittersweet joy, and I owe the most to the thoughtful and considerate individual Petro Opanasovych Podolianchuk, who was oppressed in 1937 and whose further fate is unknown. Our mother took care of the smaller children, while her legs and arms swelled up from the famine. The family was saved. However, there were such cases in the village where entire families perished. In the yards of these farmsteads, the sad howling of stray dogs could be heard as well as the hooting of brown owls.