Letter from Halyna Sopilniak to Volodymyr Maniak, 4 February (?) 1989.

Regarding events in Shura-Mitlynetska, Haisyn raion, Vinnytsia oblast

To the editorial board of the great book-memorial on the ‘33 famine.

The year 1933 is now in the distant past, but it is never to be forgotten. The current generation does not comprehend what famine is. There probably isn’t a more horrific sense of being, especially when famine becomes a mass phenomenon.

I follow the material which is regularly published in the newspaper *Silski visti* (The Village News) and *Literaturna Ukraina* (Literary Ukraine) about the famine in Ukraine in 1932-33. I can’t really add any new information to this horror, which the villagers (peasants) experienced during those years. All of the information is quite typical of what occurred in my village.

I was born in one of the villages of the Podillia region of Ukraine. This village has the romantic name of Shura-Mitlynetska in the Haisyn district of Vinnytsia oblast. The picturesque village was abundant with gardens and groves on all sides, [surrounded] as if [by] a wreath of flowers, hugged by a forest grove and decorated by ponds. In 1933 a terrible misfortune befell my fellow villagers. A famine began and was followed by a terrible death by hunger.

People were dying in silence, without agonizing moans and without tears. People were dying in houses, outside, on the streets, under fences, wherever death would come upon them. No one wept after anyone else, no one lamented, no one grieved. People wandered about like apparitions − gray and sorrowful. They ate whatever they could get their hands on: weeds, leaves, slivers of grass, moles, mice, cats, dogs and dead horses. Eventually, the circumstances led to cannibalism.

At the edge of the village there lived a widow named Frosyna Bronykha (this was her street name). She had 5 small children. She ate all of them. Solomiia Patlatiuk ate her neighbor Fedora, who lived alone in a house and was starving. Fedora was swollen like a log and immobile – Solomiia “disposed” of her easily. Afterwards, Solomiia dismembered her own younger daughter Marichka. Her 16-year old son Ivan helped her commit this criminal act. He perished in 1939 during the war with Finland.

These womn, Solomiia and Frosyna, were eventually deported to the Solovets Islands [Solovky] and managed to return to their native village only after the war.

There were instances when cemetery pits were filled not only with the deceased, but also with those who were still breathing and stirring. The official transporters would drive up to the houses to collect the “harvest” of cadavers and pile them up into one pit. Burials took place without coffins and without memorial services.

What led to this horrible desolation? As far as I remember (I was 10 years old at that time), I heard the following words from the adults: “the confiscation of bread,” “the red broom.” The authorities searched, shook, rummaged and poked around in every corner, in pots, in jars, in sacks, in and behind the ovens, and just about anywhere. And when they would find something, they would take not only the grain, but other products as well.

I remember when our mother had saved a sack of lentils and placed it on the stove, and then set me and my brother on this sack – the brigade of confiscators was already in the yard. They entered the house, looked around everywhere and saw us sitting on the sack which was covered by rags. They dragged us down with a fire-iron and took the lentils.

The rye and the cherries began to ripen. Those people who managed to stay alive, lunged at the grain-filled ears and ate them with intense greed. Dysentery soon followed and a new wave of dying began.

I am submitting my thoughts and recollections to the editorial board. I want the book-memorial “Famine-33” to be published. Let our generation know of such a sad history.

They say that villages have become obsolete. The same thing could be said for my native village. Even up to the present day (to be perfectly honest) the village has not been able to heal its wounds. The ponds have dried up, the gardens, groves and meadows have been uprooted. The houses have been abandoned and today they are known as “masterless”, while the yards are lifeless. The gardens near the households are overgrown with thistle. A tiny spark of life barely flickers in this village. On top of this, the German fascist invaders burned virtually the entire village during the Great Patriotic War.

If possible, please include the information about my village of the Podillia region in your publication.

My address: Vinnytsia oblast

Haisyn district

Shura-Mitlynetska village

Lenin Street, 56

Sopilniak, Halyna Oleksandrivna