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Cherkasy Oblast

City of Uman

8 Oleh Koshovyi Street

Skrypnyk F. S.

Dear Yevhen Pylypovych!

It is hard to imagine the interest and attention with which I read (not just once) your article “Holod” [Famine] and the polemic reflections of the teacher Vasyl Pakharenko in *Literaturna Ukraina*, no.45 dated November 10, 1988.

How truthfully everything is written. But not enough. But only so much can be included in the pages of a newspaper.

You rightly raised the question of creating a book of people’s memory, a memorial book, a book-monument, a book of recognition. Besides this, you wanted it to be a collective book. Particularly the kind of book that is composed of living testaments or of those who lived through this frightening people-killer.

Here I am, among those from the generation who survived the famine of 1932–1933, the war of 1941–1945, and the after-war ruin and rebuilding period. My birthday—February 1918.

And in support of your hope that “readers of *Literaturna Ukraina* will actively participate in creating this future collective book” I have decided to bring in my own piece to this book, as I consider that the more genuine and truthful testimonies of survivors of this artificial famine there will be, the more collective the book will be, written by the people themselves.

The newspaper features truthful short narratives about the 1933 famine, including those by many survivors, though almost all are from the Cherkasy region. I want to recount the 1933 famine in our village in the Kirovohrad region.

Our village Tabanova was then part of the Pidvysotske raion of the Kyiv oblast. Before the war, as the Kirovohrad oblast was created, our raion was separated from the Kyiv oblast and transferred to the Kirovohrad oblast. After the Great Patriotic War, our raion was reorganized and divided between two raions of the Kirovohrad oblast—Novoarkhanhelsk and Holovanivsk. The village of Tabanova went to the Holovanivsk raion of the Kirovohrad oblast.

So in Tabanova, as I said, I was born in the month of February 1918. By the time of the famine I was 15 years old. So I would have a good memory of everything for the rest of my life. I remember how people walked around with swollen faces and swollen legs; how they ate dead cows and horses; caught and ate cats and dogs. But this did not save people. Dozens died every day. Many of them were buried a few days after death at the place where they died (at their farmsteads), dragged into shallow graves with a bit of earth sprinkled on top. Some were not buried at all and this created an unbearable stench. They were not buried because there was nobody to do it.

Those who were still alive were barely alive.

On our corner (of the street) the houses were densely packed, and in each house there lived 6–8 people and only 2–3 people remained alive.

At a nearby neighbour’s house (two houses away), Osyp Sak’s family (‘Satchok’ was his nickname in the village) had 12 people, but only one survived the famine — Darka. There were some houses which became completely abandoned. This village which I am describing fared better compared to other villages, since 7 km to the North of our village in Perehonivka there was a sugar refinery, and 7 km to the South-West in Mezhyrichka there was a spirits factory. The production waste from the sugar refinery was pulp used as feed for animals, and the waste liquid from the spirits factory was used for feeding pigs. So on one day we would go to Perehonivka for pulp and on the second day to Mezhyrichka. All of this was mixed and baked into pancakes. Nature was also helpful for our village. How? Our village is located on a peninsula. It is surrounded by the river Yatran from three sides. In the spring of 1933 there was a really high tide and in certain places the water had brought lots of seashells (we called them *skoiky*), and underwater islands formed from them. People dived into the cold water and gathered them. At home they ripped apart the shells and pulled out the living mollusks, frying and eating them. In some cases we even gathered entire buckets. But these islands did not last long since the whole village was eating from them.

There were cases of cannibalism in our village too. I remember Smutchykhawho lived in the outskirts of the village near Osykove farmstead cut up her son, her own kin, and cooked aspic out of him. Ivan Lobodiuk from the Shevchenko farmstead, who I studied with in school in the village Lebedyntsi, was returning home from school one day and was chopped up and eaten. There were other cases of cannibalism, but I do not remember the surnames exactly, not to be mistaken.The famine was made artificially. In 1932 and in 1933 there were good harvests of all crops, especially wheat and rye. But the whole harvest was taken, everything down to the last grain was taken from yards and houses. Nobody had the right to keep grain for themselves. And no matter where it was hidden, activists would still find and take it. I remember how our mom hid grain in a large glazed pot which she had once used for fermenting beets for borscht, and poured red borscht on top. But an activist from Lebedyntsi whose surname I remember well, Drobot, found this pot, carried it out into the yard and shattered it, spreading the grain around with his feet because it was wet.

He would come with other activists very early when it was still dark. I remember the words he said when he entered the house “the devils are still fist-fighting, but we are already working”

Our neighbour Khoma Oshovskyi hid a sack of grain directly in the river Yatran, tying the sack with rope to reeds on the shore. Nonetheless activists such as Vasyl Babenko (known colloquially as Pup [Navel]), and Iakiv Kondratiuk (known colloquially as Barabolia [Potato]), found it anyways. This was how they were called, proactive activists. I remember how one time villagers were standing over lying corpses, **making fun of** these activists with a poem: “Such is their fate, but Vasyl Pup and Iakiv Barabolia are still alive.” But they did not live happily for long. The famine touched them too. And to rescue themselves from death they stole a cow from their neighbour Petro Makarynskyi and cut it up; they buried the meat in Iakiv’s rye field. The owner of the cow found the meat but it was already rotting since it was in May. Soon the activist Iakiv died from starvation and Vasyl once again became an activist during the Nazi occupation. He became an active police officer in Perehonivka where he tortured our Red Army prisoners of war and other citizens. For this he undoubtedly got what he deserved.

While the famine killed people, these same activists killed*kurkuls*. I remember how slogans hung on the walls of reading-rooms and other public places: “We will destroy kurkuls as a class.” Who did these activists consider to be kurkuls? Those who had a house with a metal roof. But there were only 5 such houses in the whole village (Ishchenko, Markiy Mykolaiovych, Ishchenko, Volodymyr Mykolaiovych, Fedir Plakhotniuk, Martyn Zaiets, and Vasyl Vovk each had one). So they even took into account those homesteads with straw roofs but well-built, or maybe those that had a porch and detached structures—an animal pen, a barn, or a cellar.That is why they were dekurkulized. The master of the house, or the master with his wife, or the whole family was exiled to the Solovetsky Islands and their houses were broken down, crushed, and burned.

I cannot omit the story of one so-called kurkul, Lautar. I recounted this resentfully, along with everything else that happened during this sinister time, even though I was very young at the time. Later when I was a student of the rural technical college (1934–1938), also during a sinister time of repressions, I would recount this with even greater resentment—before the Great Patriotic War and after it. I spoke openly and not once did I experience disgrace and humiliation of human dignity and honour. And now in the time of glasnost I can freely tell and am obliged to talk about the white spots of our history.

There lived in the village the poor peasant Lautar. He had neither father nor mother. He worked as a farm hand but mostly worked for childless families. He married as an adult to the daughter of Kyrylo Ostroverkhyi (our neighbour). He received a division of land as all villagers did. He toiled on the land along with his wife since their kids were still little. He built a house, a cozy barn, animal pen, cart storage, and cellar. All the structures were under straw roofs but were well-made. So the activists decided to call him a kurkul. They labelled and dekurkulized him. They expelled his family from their home and farmstead. Eventually the family died from hunger but he alone survived. He settled in another abandoned house where the entire family had also perished. One time we (schoolboys) went to look for firewood to warm up the classroom for our polytechnic studies s. And all classrooms for the polytechnic studies (carpentry, blacksmithing, tailoring and others) were located on Lautar farmstead, as the buildings were close to the school. We looked into the windows of the house where he had moved in. He was lying on the ground in the house, dead with both fists clenched. But these fists were already powerless. (Read on the backside of this letter).

I ask your forgiveness for being so frantic. I have written it as I knew it. My goal was to write concrete facts that occurred in 1933 without any hyperbole.

There is not a single untruthful word here.

I tried to write the actual surnames.

All the best,

With respect, Skrypnyk, Fedir Serhiiovych

* invalid of World War II and veteran of labor

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