

## SURVIVOR TESTIMONIES, MEMOIRS, DIARIES, AND LETTERS

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## SURVIVOR TESTIMONIES, MEMOIRS, DIARIES, AND LETTERS

### Introduction

The fourth section of the *Reader* consists of testimonies, memoirs, and letters by famine victims. Most are by ordinary folk and are usually of a personal nature. At the same time, they provide a plethora of oftentimes painful and gut-wrenching details about the fate of family members and particular villages. Interestingly, several testimonies emphasize the limitation of the famine to Ukraine, noting that conditions just across the border in Russia were significantly better. A letter from German settlers in southern Ukraine to their relatives in North Dakota illustrates the fate of the German minority in Ukraine during the famine.

Some testimonies were given before U.S. government-sponsored investigative bodies. Some, such as those published in *The Black Deeds of the Kremlin*, were collected and published by Ukrainian émigrés and Holodomor survivors at the height of the Cold War. This made it easy for those holding pro-Soviet views to dismiss them as anticommunist propaganda. A noteworthy personal account is that of Maria Zuk, who emigrated from southern Ukraine to western Canada to join her husband in the late summer of 1933, when she gave her interview to journalists working for a Ukrainian-language newspaper in Winnipeg. Another is Miron Dolot's *Execution by Hunger*, published by a major American press in 1985.

This section also contains materials from non-peasants: Fedir Pigido-Pravoberezhny, who worked as an engineer in Ukraine; Yuriy Lawrynenko and Mykola Prychodko, both literary scholars; and Vladimir Keis, an urban worker at the time of the famine who retained strong ties with the Ukrainian village. Lawrynenko states that repressive measures against the Ukrainian intelligentsia, carried out while the famine raged in the villages, constituted “a double blow delivered against Ukraine.” Pigido-Pravoberezhny describes the degenerate behavior of those sent by the Kremlin to extort grain from the Ukrainian peasants. Prychodko describes “the miserable hulks of humanity dragg[ing] themselves along on swollen feet, begging for crusts of bread or searching for scraps in garbage heaps, frozen and filthy,” in Ukraine's cities. Finally, Keis notes that “The horror of death by starvation hung like a dark shadow all over Ukraine. The moaning and sobbing spread throughout our land. Some villages died out completely. All those people died a martyr's death at the hands of the vicious executioner in Moscow. Whoever witnessed it knows that I am telling the truth.”

**Letter from Y. Shvets, a collective farmer from the Lenin's Testament collective farm, village of Horozhene, Bashtan district, to the head of the All-Ukrainian CEC, Hryhorii Petrovsky, about the unjust grain-procurement plan for the collective farm and the starvation of collective farmers. In *Holod-henotsyd 1932–1933 rokiv v Ukraïni* (2005). Excerpts, pp. 115–16. Translated by Maksym Motorenko and Bohdan Klid.**

13 September 1932

Comrade Petrovsky,

In 1931 our cooperative had 2,400 hectares of land and was completely sown, but

as we have a good deal of land close to the river, and it is useless, the district [authorities] directed our cooperative to use this land for particular agricultural needs—growing vegetables, raising cattle and pigs....

Our cooperative has 1,052 people to be fed, and here, in 1931, most of our cooperative members—poor peasants—were starving, beginning in December. In this year of 1932, the cooperative sowed 600 hectares of grain crops....

When the District Executive Committee apportioned the grain-procurement plan, our cooperative was obliged to fulfill a grain-procurement plan of 2,400 poods of grain. But, Comrade Petrovsky, if we stretch it considerably, perhaps there will be enough [grain] to fulfill the established plan, but there will be absolutely nothing left for food....

So please explain to me: has full agreement been reached with our district authorities to leave our village and cooperative hungry for the whole year, or have former landowners perhaps joined the ranks of the authorities and begun to take vengeance for their [lost] estates? Or, perhaps, it is the state of affairs to be hungry under Soviet rule?.... When the grain-procurement plan was being discussed at cooperative and executive meetings, and someone says that the plan is very great and that there would be nothing left to eat, our village board immediately threatens us with the police and the GPU....

Yu. R. Shvets....

**“Zhinka z Ukraïny opovidaie pro holod i liudoïdstvo” (A Woman from Ukraine Tells of Famine and Cannibalism), *Ukraïns'kyi holos* (Ukrainian Voice, Winnipeg), 13 September 1933. Excerpts, pp. 1, 5. Translated by Alexander J. Motyl.**

The wife of Ivan Zhuk, a farmer in Consort, Alberta, came to him from the Pervomaisk district near Odesa, Ukraine. On the way, she made a stop in Winnipeg for a few days and was brought to the editorial offices of *The Ukrainian Voice* by some good people. We have to admit that it was interesting to see this woman; she seemed like someone from another world. Her poor clothing showed that she had not come from prosperous conditions. It will be best to convey our conversation in the form of questions and answers.

Q: When did you leave home?

A: On August 5.

Q: How were people living in Ukraine at that time?

A: There was a terrible famine. People were dying of hunger like flies.

Q: Did many die of hunger?

A: As far as I could learn, 25 versts [ca. 17 miles] in either direction about one-quarter of the population survived. Three-quarters died.

Q: Are people suffering the famine quietly, or are they rebelling?

A: How are they to rebel, and what will they achieve by rebelling? They suffer because they have lost all hope. They walk like the blind, and they fall wherever death strikes them. No one pays attention to the corpses lying on the streets. People either step over or

sidestep them and keep on walking. From time to time they are collected and buried in common pits. Seventy and more people are buried together.

Q: Have you heard anything about instances of cannibalism?

A: Why not? It happens all the time. There have been cases of a mother starving with her children and then killing and eating them when she sees that they are about to die. Or you are walking along the street and you see a corpse. You look around to see whether anyone is watching, and you cut off a piece of flesh and then bake or cook it.

Q: What is the reason for the famine? Has there been a drought or a bad harvest, or are you not sowing anything?

A: There has been a harvest, we sow and we plant, but as soon as anything grows, they take it all away and pack it off to Moscow. We had a good harvest this summer, but so what? They sent in the machines, cut everything, threshed it, and left not a kernel behind. They took everything. People were weeping. They asked, "What will we eat?" But the Chekists [members of the secret police] laughed and answered: "You'll find something." What will people not do in order to hide some grain for themselves! They hide it in their hair, they hide it in their mouth, beneath their tongue, but they [the Chekists] search it out and take it too.

Q: Do people on the collective farms live better?

A: At first they had it better, but now they take everything from them as well. I myself was on a collective farm, and if I have not died so far and could leave, it is only because my husband in Canada sent me money, and I could buy things in the Torgsin shops [state-run hard-currency stores].

Q: Do people not expect something better in the future?

A: They used to, but now things get worse and worse with every year. And now they have reached the limit. No one expects anything any more; everyone just expects death. Even the officials do not know what the future holds and only shrug their shoulders. Some tell the people, "Rebel, and we will join you." And the people respond: "You rebel first."

Q: How did you come to Canada? Through Romania?

A: No, that is impossible. You have to go through Moscow.

Q: And how do people live in Moscow? In the Moscow region? Is there also a famine there?

A: No, there is no famine there. There is enough of everything. When I arrived in Moscow, I could buy everything I wanted at the bazaar—bread and meat and vegetables.

Q: And how much did your passport to Canada cost?

A: 283 dollars.

Q: Rubles or dollars?

A: No, dollars, American dollars. My husband had to send them from Canada. If someone wanted to earn them, it could never be done. See these slippers on my feet? They cost me 90 rubles last year. I had to work three months in order to buy them.

Q: They take your wheat and grain, and you have no bread, but may you keep your animals? Cows, horses, chickens, pigs?

A: The famished people ate everything. If anyone still has a horse or cow, they guard it like the greatest treasure. People caught field mice and ate them like the greatest delicacies. The cats and dogs have been eaten long ago. Some collective farms still have pigs, but the Chekists guard them and seize and take them away as soon as they grow fat. People have already forgotten how pork tastes....

**Petro Shovkovytsia, “Zhakhlyva diisnist” (Terrible Reality), *Chas* (Time, Chernivtsi), 18 March 1933, p. 3; 19 March 1933, pp. 2–3. Excerpts. Translated by Bohdan Klid.**

Petro Shovkovytsia, a journalist for the Chernivtsi paper *Chas*, wrote this article on the basis of a conversation with the head of the Kryzhanivsky family, who had recently escaped with his family from Soviet Ukraine, crossing the Dnister River to what is now Chernivtsi oblast (then part of Romania).

...It was here that I saw with my own eyes the lucky ones from the Soviet heaven: two men, two women, and five children. The older man [surname Kryzhanivsky] was over 60, the younger past 30. The women were approximately the same age. These were not people, but rather shadows of people. Cut them with the dullest of knives, and you will not get blood to flow from them: beaten, tortured, exhausted.... The younger man is talking, answering questions, and narrating, while the older one falls silent ever more, replying only rarely, on occasion, with utter hopelessness etched into his eyes and face.

For some unknown reason, it was just the older man with whom I wanted to talk, so I began to address him personally from a distance. A bit later, I sat down closer to him, conversing with him about their extremely miserable outer appearance.

“Eh, young man, we’ve recovered a bit, thank God,” he replied. “We have been on this side for more than twenty days—let the merciful Lord thank for us the good people who are feeding us. We are all eating—knock on wood—not badly at all. Whatever we are given by the good folk is all eaten to the last morsel. At first we were careful, so as not to fall ill. You should have seen, young man, what we looked like when we crossed over to this side—what we were like then.

So how could we resemble people, when [we had no] lard—God be witness to this—from [the Feast of] Cosmas and Damian [14 November] we had only sugar beets to eat? I myself would have been the first to disbelieve this if someone were to have told it to me twenty years ago, but now I believe it, having lived through this reality, and I implore the whole Christian world to believe it.

We ourselves are more or less fine, but what about these unfortunate children? There, you see, are two of mine, and three of my daughter’s. They were the ones in real trouble. We at least knew that disaster had come, but the dear ones did not understand that, and when they began their ‘Mom, I want to eat; Mom, I want to eat; Mom, I want to eat,’ it seemed that a sharp knife through the heart would have been less painful than that ‘Mom, I want to eat.’ Believe me, when we crossed the Dnister—for in the village we have distant relatives who, having learned of this, were the first to bring us a package of bread and lard—not one of the children knew what lard was. All of them said that it was

soap. And, in the way children converse with one another, they expressed amazement that there was such tasty soap here. And that smallest boy—he is three years old—when we were taken from the riverbank by soldiers to their base, and one of the soldiers gave him a piece of bread before the others, the poor soul ate half that piece and gave his mother the other half, telling her to put it away for the next day, for what, he said, am I going to eat tomorrow?

The merciful Lord has turned his face away from us, and such a hard misfortune the blessed earth has never seen before. Here is my daughter, and those are her three children (pointing to three of the children). Shortly before Christmas, some three or four days previously, in the evening, when it had already gotten quite dark, she comes to me, sits down, we talk about this and that. And later she admitted to the old woman [his wife] that she had fired up the oven, put the children to sleep, closed the damper [to the chimney], and come to me to stay until she was certain that the [closed] damper had suffocated the children [that they had died of carbon monoxide poisoning]. She could no longer listen to that ‘Mom, I want to eat.’ The old woman, screaming, relayed this to me. For fear of God, child, I told her, what are you doing? If we are to die, then let it start with us, the older ones. We ran immediately and saved the poor souls.”

Hearing this, both the old woman and the young one began to cry.

After a moment of silence, I again asked the old man: How could it happen that in autumn, that is, right after threshing, you were already hungry? I gather that you sowed at least a small amount of something? And if your brother, knock on wood, is such a good farmer, then I gather that you are not some kind of oaf who does not know how or does not want to think about himself and his family, so that they do not go hungry.

“Yes, dear sir, we sowed,” replied the old man. “We both had sown a *dessiatine* [2.7 acres] of rye and a *dessiatine* of spring wheat. But, you see, we were individual farmers (not collectivized), so, you see, we were given the worst type of land, pure gravel. All the individual farmers got this. The better lands were taken for the collective farms. So we managed to thresh 14 poods of wheat per *dessiatine* and up to 8 poods of rye [per *dessiatine*], but according to the *rozverstka* [procurement plan], we were supposed to supply 70 poods of wheat and 55 of rye each. My son-in-law was able to grind one pood each of wheat and rye, but I was not. They came and took [all the grain] from both of us to the last kernel.”

“Couldn’t you hide at least a third of this grain?” I asked. “What are you talking about, dear sir? They will find it underground. And then a special court will be sent to sentence you. They will sentence you in your own home. They will sentence you to a *dopr* [forced-labor colony], to exile in Siberia, and sometimes you are taken away, and God knows where you will end up. By themselves, they would not always be able to find [hidden grain], but the collective farmers report to them. It is hard to hide from your neighbor, especially there, among the Bolsheviks, where half the population, for sure, are secret informers.” “Well, the collective farmers are also subject to the procurement plan, are they not? Or, if they are assessed, then perhaps less [than individual farmers]? Or why are they such faithful dogs?”

“They are assessed, dear sir, as well—a bit less, it is true. But they are also dying of hunger. And that is precisely why the [practice of] secret informing is increasing, as well as informing by others. If I am to die, say I, then let him die as well. That is the kind of life all the unfortunate folk live there.”



“And now, having left your home, did you leave anything alive in the yard—a lamb, a cow, a horse, or something else? Or did you sell everything that was there?”

“There was nothing to sell and no one to buy. I left a rooster in the home, and my son-in-law left a one-and-a-half-year-old colt on the veranda. I left it a sheaf of straw that I tore from the roof. Nobody has anything. We were ordered to kill even the dogs, skin them, and give them the hides. My son-in-law and I already did this in the spring [of 1932].”

“Tell me, please, how you crossed the border with such small children. Did this have to be done quickly and quietly?” “It was impossible to do it quickly under any circumstances, but we managed to do it quietly. When there was still daylight we told the children that we were going to Romania, and that uncle would give them bread there, but that if any one of them started to cry or cough, that one would be thrown into the water. Of course, the children believed this, and when we were climbing down [to reach the riverbank] and walking atop [the ice] on the Dnister, not one of them even peeped. Believe me, that smallest one—the poor thing was running and only breathing heavily. But by this riverbank a Bolshevik dog saw us and fired two or three times, but we were no longer afraid of those shots.”

“Could you please tell me one more thing: Does the population expect someone to rescue them?” “Yes, they are waiting, but they themselves do not know who it will be. There appeared some Yakhromiv who wanted to liberate the people. They awaited him. What has become of him, God knows... People say that someone else was shot by firing squad in his place, and that he was freed by some band.

If only [Symon] Petliura were to show up now! Everyone would pick up not a rifle but even a skeleton [anything that could be used as a weapon] and would run to assist him. People on this side say that even he is no longer on earth, but God knows whether this is true or not.”....

**From the diary of the teacher Oleksandra Radchenko. In *Rozsekrechena pam'iat'* (2007). Excerpts, pp. 542–43, 545–48. Translated by Bohdan Klid.**

Thursday, 26 February 1931

We Ukrainians are living through an exceptional moment in history. When you read Leo Tolstoy, you always understand his outrage over the vile acts committed by the government in that disgusting time. But now those horrors appear miserly in comparison with what is going on at the present time. There is no justice. Sticks and whips. Besides sticks and whips, there is much more. They say that during interrogations at the militia station, the accused are beaten. They are forced to place their fingers between the door and the frame, and they are squeezed until the person suffering, enduring inhuman torture, either confesses or reveals his accomplices.

Why are hundreds of thousands of completely innocent people suffering? Children are suffering because their parents were capable, energetic workers.

This is how “dekulakization” is taking place. About three years ago a peasant had two cows, a horse, a sower, and a thresher. This was the “first kulak.” Everything is taken from him, and he is driven out within a three-day period. Most recently, he is thrown out of the house in winter within 24 hours. Most often the parents are taken to prison.

Most recently the following methods of “dekulakization” are also being

employed. Meat procurement takes place. The “kulak” (and the “kulak” has only one horse and one cow) is obliged to deliver 20 poods of meat and 400 rubles in cash to the state. This has to be fulfilled in 24 hours. Obviously, the peasant cannot meet this levy. The result is known.

The peasant is driven out of his home, and everything is taken from him. There are 600 households in the village of Khotimlia, 80 of which have been designated for “dekulakization.” There are 600 households in the village of Velyka Babka. The village has been assessed a meat-procurement levy of 400 head of cattle.

One peasant said: “If the Soviet government cared about the future, it would not enter anyone’s head to impose such meat-procurement levies.” Taking so many cattle means removing half of all that is in the village. The situation is so tense that one can hardly imagine it. Terrible dissatisfaction and rancor are spreading throughout almost all strata of society. Anyone who says that life is good now (and that is only one in a thousand) is laughed at straight to his face. The stores are empty. We do not receive rations. Sugar is again not freely available. They say that only in Kharkiv can one buy sugar at 6 rubles a kilogram. Ilinka has stomach flu. She often falls ill. There is no white bread, of course. There is nothing at all to be had. We eat potatoes most of all. We have milk for the time being.

We can receive nothing from abroad. My sister tried several times to send a parcel. But parcels either were not admitted or were returned. “We do not have any hungry people” was written on one of the parcels. What impudence! Headscarves and shoes were stolen from a parcel in Moscow, and the parcel was returned....

Tuesday, 12 January 1932

Our life is becoming ever more difficult in economic terms. The flour has run out. Where to get it? How to obtain it? These thoughts give one no rest. The peasants continue to be swept clean. All are astonished and indignant, talking of an inevitable famine to come, but no one will tell this to “the powers that be.” The most idiotic show trials continue to be held of people who did not have enough grain; they are subject to extortion and deprived of freedom for 2–3–5–6 years.

Wednesday, 10 February 1932

Today I was told by peasants that they saw...two children freezing along the road to Chuhuiv. The children were still alive. Why did the passersby not pick up those children? How cruel people have become. My God, what is going on? They were obviously children of plundered peasants, brought to ruin by the authorities. Yesterday a frozen adult male was brought to the hospital at Khotimlia. Today they went for the body of a murdered carpenter from Khotimlia whose name I do not recall; he was killed on a farm near Burluk. In Khotimlia M. Bozhko could not take it any longer and threw himself on the grain-procurement brigadier with an axe; the brigadier ran off.

Horrific thievery has developed. I fear famine so much; I fear it for the children. God protect us and have mercy on us.

It would not be so offensive if there were a poor crop, but the grain has been taken away and an artificial famine created...

Tuesday, 5 April 1932

Famine, artificially created famine is taking on a nightmarish character. No one can understand why they are pumping out grain to the last kernel, and now, having seen the results of such pumping out, they nevertheless continue to demand grain for sowing and sowing material in general. And when the indignant peasant exclaims that all his grain was taken for the grain procurement, he receives a question in reply: “Why did you give everything; you should have realized that you would have to sow with something,” and the endless negotiations begin. And the children go hungry, worn out, emaciated, tormented by tapeworms, as they eat only sugar beets—and those will run out soon—and the harvest is still four months away. What will become of us?

A beggarly way of life is gradually turning people into rude, cruel, unbridled creatures ready to turn to crime....

Wednesday, 6 April 1932

...The famine is beginning to rage everywhere, bringing all the miseries that one could possibly imagine. Criminality is developing especially rapidly. Anger at the authorities has grown to such an extent that it seems if a match is lit, a fire will erupt, uncontrollable, terrible, as in a summer drought with windy weather. I am tormented by the thought of peasant children swollen with hunger, and my anger grows. The poor things, and it is for them that socialism is being prepared. Funny—some kind of comedy.

Thursday, 2 June 1932

How difficult it is to live, desperately difficult. In general the times are exceptional, unknown in history. All are suffering from malnutrition or famine, and generally from a half-indigent way of life. There is a terrible and oppressive indifference to everything....

Monday, 24 October [1932]

...I received 3 dollars from Nina. With this V[asia] bought 6 kg of wheat flour, 2 kg of sugar, 3 or 4 of rice and 1 kg of wheat groats at the Torgsin. What a great help to us....

Monday, 9 January 1933

...The horrors of famine are developing in Kharkiv. Children are being stolen and sausage made of human flesh is being sold. Adults (the better-fed ones) are lured by tricks under the pretext of selling them footwear. Even the papers wrote about this, calming people that measures are being taken, but...children are still disappearing.

Thursday evening, 23 March 1933

...I saw awfully much human misery this day. I returned home with heavy impressions. Along the road to Zarozhne, in a field by the roadside, we saw a deceased old man, in tatters, thin, without boots. Obviously, he became enfeebled and froze or died right away, and someone took his boots. Returning, we again saw the old man, who was unneeded by anyone. When I told the Babchanka village council that the body should be taken away, the chairman asked, smiling: “And how was he lying, with his feet in our direction or toward Zarozhne? If toward Zarozhne, then let the Zarozhne village council take him away.”

Upon entering Babka, we came up to a 7-year-old boy. My co-passenger yelled out, but the boy staggered on as if he had not heard; the horse overtook him; I shouted; the boy unwillingly turned from the road; I was drawn to look him in the face. And it was unbearably horrible. The expression on that face left an everlastingly indelible impression. Obviously, that expression in the eyes can be found in people when they know that they will soon die but do not want to die. But this was a child. My nerves could not take it. “For what? For what, children?”

I cried quietly, so that my co-passenger would not see. The thought that I could do nothing; that millions of children were perishing from starvation; that this was elemental, reduced me to total despair....

April 1933

Facts of the famine

It is already three o'clock in the morning, meaning that today is 27 April. I am not sleeping. The last days have been filled with a terrible apathy. The whole horror of the situation that has been created has affected my health. Although we are not starving, we are not eating as we should.

People are dying by handfuls each day in every village, and this throughout Ukraine. Yesterday a member of the collective, Leontii Petrovych Tkachev, came. His leg is hurting. He is swollen from hunger. He implored me to give him something to eat. We gave him whatever we could. I complained to him that I am feeding a hunting dog, once expensive, but no one needs it now, as there is nothing with which to feed it. He asked me for it, saying that they would eat it. The roofer Korzhev regularly maintains his family with dog meat....

**From the diary of Dmytro Zavoloka. In *Rozsekrechena pam'iat'* (2007). Excerpts, pp. 553–58, 560–61, 566–67. Translated by Bohdan Klid.**

...14.III.1932

At twelve o'clock midnight I am to drive to Barash.... These collective farmers are completely without bread, even without potatoes. And that is why, in a number of collective farms of the district (Barash, Novyi Yablonets, Usoluiasia, Bobrytsia, Kyianne, and others), collective farmers steal even food meant for pigs (mixed fodder), bake flat cakes from this, and eat it. In some of the collective farms seed grain is [being] eaten.... And the general impression is as if the country were suffering through a difficult famine, or on the eve of mass starvation....

The methods of grain procurement were overly leftist. For the most part, naked administrative methods were used: mass searches, arrests, and, in general, completely unjustified arbitrariness was allowed.... The population, beginning with the well-to-do kulak stratum and ending with the poor collective-farm peasant, was intimidated and terrorized. In the resolutions of the District Party Committees there were various preemptive resolutions of the authorities against “leftist” excesses and lawlessness, but in fact no struggle was undertaken against such manifestations. Moreover, even the DPC went down the road of naked administrative methods, forming an operative troika under the direction of the DPC secretary, before which the full complement of the delegated village council and the administration of the collective farm were summoned for a

chastening, accompanied by arrests, intimidation, and so on. As a result of all this work, the district, for all that, fulfilled only 66–69 percent of the grain-procurement plan.

At present the state of preparation of seed stocks is especially dangerous. Across the whole district 40 percent have been prepared. There is almost no hope of significantly increasing this amount. Hence the danger that almost 50 percent of the fields for sowing will remain unplowed in the spring.... [E]ven if the whole seed stock were available, there is still the danger that many of the collective farmers will not go to work, as they have no food.... That is today, and what will happen when the harvest is to be gathered? Then there will be even fewer food resources than there are now. And again there will be the danger that the sown fields will not be harvested in time, or that a portion will perish completely. To what end was such a tense situation created in the village? And especially in the collective-farm sector? Could this undesirable confrontation have been avoided? Clearly, it could have. There should have been greater attention to the needs of the populace, above all to their need for food....

### 19.III.1932

Mother was already here yesterday. But only today did we have a frank conversation. The situation at home is especially difficult. For several months there has been no bread in the house. They live on potatoes and potato pancakes. The children are developing acute anemia (Misha, Kolia, Vitia), and they often complain of dizziness. Bread appears in the house only when Mother returns from Kyiv and brings “presents.” Earlier, when Mother would begin to talk about her affairs and bring up hunger and malnutrition, I did not believe it. I did not listen attentively to these conversations and said: “Mama, why are you falling for enemy agitation and blabbering about all sorts of kulak ‘frights’?” And I would turn the conversation to jokes and assure her that nothing terrible could take place; that the state and the Party would not allow it. But today, when she again began to talk to me about this, and her voice quivered near weeping, while her face showed tearful spasms and her eyes glistened with tears, I could not but feel that heavy, hopeless state in which our household is living....

I did not know how to respond to her words. I was helpless to cheer her up in any way and only managed to say that this situation would not last long. It could not be that the Party was taking no notice of the way people all around were living, and if there were instances of hunger, this would soon be corrected. I do not know whether she believed me or not.... She is constantly perturbed whether in fact it will come to placing one’s hopes only on those seed funds that the people have and on the food available for spring work.... According to Mother’s words, the collective farmers do not have anything at all....

### 22.IV.1932

We conversed almost the entire evening. Mother and I. She had come to buy bread for “the holidays”....

We talked a great deal, but I heard nothing of any good thought or event. And this was not really a conversation but, in essence, Mother’s narrative about current village life and her own, of course.... According to her words, “The peasants have never before lived as they do now. Never have the people suffered as they do now. The peasants are oppressed to the uttermost, and that is why they are living as they do; may our enemies

never live this way, and it is also bad for the workers”....

To the question of how the sowing campaign was proceeding, there was also a reply that paints an unhappy picture. “The people are working but moving as if barely alive. They gather at nine in the morning, but then, by the time tasks are assigned, before they begin to work, give them something to eat. And for food they give three quarters of the type of bread that you cannot force down your gullet. Well, and with bread they boil hot broth once. As for those who stay home—the little ones, the elderly, the sick—do not even mention them: they are left on their own, even to die.”.....

Yes, it is extremely difficult to hear and learn about the condition of the peasantry. And we, the Party, have consciously brought this about with our line, our behavior, our leadership....

### 12.VI.1932

Only 2,417,367 hectares of the spring fields have been sown, or 57.1 percent of the plan. This is as of 10.VI.... The possible time for sowing has passed. Sowing after 10 June is more hopeless for germination, and even more so for yield. This means that in Kyiv oblast alone almost two million hectares of unsown fields remain.... As of 10.VI, only 314,170 hectares of potatoes have been planted, which constitutes 56.7 percent fulfillment [of the plan]. The results of spring sowing are more than catastrophic. In the aftermath of the newspaper observations, a comrade commented: “I HEARD THAT WHEN MOLOTOV WAS IN OUR OBLAST, HE SAID: ‘Through our mistakes this year we have set back the agricultural economy of Ukraine a number of years.’ What he said was absolutely true if one believes that it was he who said this, but he was also present precisely when the grain procurements were in full swing and our mistakes were at their worst.” I was unable to object to this but only thought how profoundly true were the words spoken by Molotov or someone else to the effect of “setting back our agricultural economy a number of years.” And that pertains not only to the unsatisfactory state of sowing this year but to all the ruination that has occurred in agriculture.

Almost 40–50 percent of the horse herd has died. The number of horned cattle has decreased more than twice. Pigs are decreasing in number. Smaller livestock is almost wiped out. The peasants from the villages have dispersed and scattered to the four corners—if not all, then a considerable portion.

Political confidence in the Soviet government has been catastrophically shaken, and it is strange that in all these matters the fault remains that of “DISTORTIONS AT THE LOCAL LEVEL,” which “THE CC OF THE PARTY INDICATED” in timely fashion. And certainly there will be no quick re-release of the outstanding historical explanations of the Party “chief,” Comrade Stalin, concerning the reasons for the distortions and the next steps for dealing with them. Just as it was with regard to the question of collectivization in 1930, when the guilty were whoever you please, but not the CC.

For the latter “indicated more than once” the danger of “dizziness with success.” How despicable to engage in self-criticism and not admit to one’s own mistakes!

What is the use of a leadership that cannot see the destruction resulting from its own deeds, is unable to prevent catastrophe in timely fashion, and then does not have the courage and decency to admit its own mistakes?

**Letter from Adam and Rosina Ketterling to Johann and Dorothea Ketterling. In *We'll Meet Again in Heaven* (2001). Excerpts, pp. 194–95.**

May 18, 1933

*Wishek Nachrichten*

Kassel, South Russia [Komarivka, Ukraine]

April 23, 1933

A nice greeting and kiss to you, my beloved friends, in the wide distant world, brother Johann Ketterling and Dorothea and all of your children....

... We are, thank God, healthy and still among the living. But for how long, we don't know, for it looks so sad and sorrowful in our lives. Many people are dying of hunger. They swell up and then die. It is such a terrible time that I can hardly write about it.... I must let you know that our brother died on March 8. He had to leave his house, and then he lived with his daughter, and there was nothing to eat. It is awfully hard. He starved and then died....

Meat I haven't seen for a long time, much less eaten. Anything fried, or fat or oil, it has been three months since we had anything like that....

A pud [pood] of corn costs 200 rubles, but there is no money. A pud of potatoes and also of beans costs 70 rubles. We eat anything we can. Potato peels, grape seeds, and roots. We put it all together and cook it in water, and that keeps us alive, if there is enough of it. If there is grass, we cook grass.... This is the third letter I've written you, and also probably the last. If it continues as it is now, then we will soon find our end.

You might want to know what work I do. I work in the vineyards by cutting and pruning, and each night I must stand watch at a house in which are stored fruit, potatoes and corn. Many people in Kassel get help from their relatives in America. That is good for our people, otherwise many more of them would starve. Starvation is a terrible death. People swell up so much....

My dear brother Johann and Dorothea, and all friends and acquaintances, I would like to ask all of you, if it is in your good will, to please help us out some. If you can't help much, I'll be satisfied with a little. If I don't get help, then everything is lost. Then we must go to the ground, to our deaths. I must close and give you another heartfelt greeting. We hope for a very quick answer from you.

Adam and Rosina Ketterling

**Unsigned letter. In *We'll Meet Again in Heaven* (2001). Excerpts, pp. 196–97.**

June 8, 1933

*Wishek Nachrichten*

[Probably] Kassel [Komarivka, Ukraine]

Dear Friends,

We want to let you know that we got your gift, which saved us from certain death. We send you a loving heartfelt thank you for that. But worst of all is how our people are afflicted, always with death before their eyes. The higher authorities have sent 150 men here to our village, whose job it is to plague us half to death. At our community gatherings at least several leaders, the commandants, have told us, “Now that we have grown in power over you, you will see that wherever you destructive insects have settled in our land, that we have you in our hands, and no God will drop manna from heaven to help you, and nowhere will anyone hear your miserable complaints. Hangings, shootings, starvation, and freezing—all of those will be done to you if you don’t work to exactly meet the requirements of the predetermined Plan.”

But who can work? People are so weak that they fall over. So it has been for a while. When they can hardly move anymore, they are sent to the forest to work. Even old people must work. They have ordered everyone from 13 to 100 years in age to work in the forests, there in the deepest snow, in the grimmest of cold. They must cut trees and get wood.

Men and women must arise early, at 6 a.m., and before, go to the collective kitchen to eat a piece of bread and a little soup, and after that try to work—if they can. And if you don’t work, you don’t get paid. Whoever has no money to pay is tossed out and must lie there without food until it is 10 o’clock at night. So many of the people fall over dead, up to six people each day, with hardly anyone left to bury them in the snow. The husband lies in his final resting place, while the wife must still work. He falls dead on the way, but the others must let him lie there and go on to their work. If someone lies dead at home, the others must still work. Still others, who try to get help and find food, fall along the way and just lie there. Until now our God has not been pacified with all this death.

I just don’t know what will happen in the future. Every day I think: only God knows if my husband will come home alive. Almost everyone who has worked with him is already dead. With your gift we bought the cheapest food: gruel, flour, and a little fat. It has been over half a year since we’ve seen anything cooked with fat. You can just imagine how we thank our loving God whenever we do have food. Now, live well with the Lord. We’ll meet again in heaven.

[Unsigned]

**Letter from the collective farmer Mykola Reva to Joseph Stalin about the Famine of 1933 in Ukraine. In *Rozsekrechena pam’iat’* (2007). Excerpts, pp. 573–75, 576. Translated by Bohdan Klid.**

1 May 1940....

Dear Joseph Vissarionovich,

You are, it would seem, our friend, teacher, and father, so the bold idea occurred to me of writing to you with the whole truth....

The dark reaction of the hungry year of 1933, when people ate tree bark, grass, and even their own children, when hundreds of thousands of people died of starvation,



and all this before the eyes of the communists, who drove their cars across our bodies and impudently praised life....

...[T]he people were dying of hunger not because there was a poor harvest but because the state took their grain, and that grain lay in the Zahotzerno [Grain Procurement] warehouses in elevators and was being distilled into alcohol for intoxication, while people were dying of hunger.... [I]n 1933, when hungry people gathered grains of corn by the Zahotzerno warehouse at the Khorol station, they were shot like dogs; a detachment of mounted police was dispatched from the town of Khorol, and like lions, with sabers drawn, they pursued us hungry ones, and there was grain in the warehouses, there was flour, but people were dying of hunger, which means that all this was carried out deliberately by the state, and the state knew about this....

The village council does not issue death certificates for 1933 because mortality in that year was so great that in more than fifty years so many people did not die as in that year. Whoever was left alive, having endured such difficulties—that person is already ruined because, as I know from my own experience, we collective farmers were swollen from hunger, we fell on our feet, we lost our ability to think, we lost a certain percentage of our eyesight, there is no health, no strength, a general weakness of the bodily organism, and a great incidence of hospital visits and many sick people in those areas where the year 1933 made itself felt. All this took place before the eyes of the communists—how can they not be sorrowful and ashamed that they could not besiege the higher authorities and sound the alarm about this misfortune, so that it would not exist... [T]he communists cared more for their own skins, for if anyone endeavored to stand up for the people with a mere word, his fate would be settled along with ours. That is how we are valued, Joseph Vissarionovich....

N. Reva

**V. Maly, *Selo Druha Korul'ka* (The Village of Druha Korulka) (Munich: Suchasna Ukraïna, 1952). Excerpts, pp. 19, 21–22. Translated by Alexander J. Motyl.**

After the famine of 1932–33, Russians from Russian territories were brought into the village—twenty-five families—and settled there. A little while later, another seven Russian families arrived. In this manner Moscow filled the gaps that emerged in the Ukrainian village as a result of “dekulakization” and the planned famine. All these Russian families occupied the farms of those who had been dekulakized or had died of hunger.

They did not need to build their own houses! After a while the Russians occupied all the key “leadership” positions on the village collective farm.... The Russians also began to compose the cadre of the Korulka village soviet....

About 1938–39 I got to know one A. Kulish in Sloviansk. He used to live in the Poltava region. In 1930 Kulish had been “dekulakized”; he and his family then settled on Russian territory, where he lived in the village of Kastorna, about a hundred kilometers from Voronezh....

At the beginning of 1933, in the winter, the NKVD issued an order in Kastorna, where many dekulakized Ukrainian refugees lived, instructing all Ukrainian “kulaks” to present themselves within twenty-four hours at the train station nearest their place of

residence. Several NKVD agents were sent to Kastorna, where they collected all the Ukrainian inhabitants and led them to the Krasnaia Dolina station. These NKVD agents said openly that the Ukrainian “kulaks” hiding on Russian territory would be sent to the Urals, that is, in fact, to Siberia....

While waiting for space on some train to Siberia, many Ukrainians died of hunger and cold at the station. The NKVD gave the arrested people nothing to eat. It was cold at the station, and people sat and lay helplessly on the bare cement floor. The wailing of children and women could be heard incessantly. The NKVD simply threw these Ukrainian prisoners—children, sick women, and old people—into the fully packed freight cars of some train. Once a car was packed tight with people, they would slide the door shut and lock it. The eyewitness A. Kulish said that some unfortunates would tear their clothes and hair and go mad.

**Mykola Prychodko, “The Year 1933 in Soviet Ukraine.” In *The Black Deeds of the Kremlin* (1953–55). Excerpts, vol. 1, pp. 234–38.**

Mykola Prychodko (Prykhodko, 1904–80) was a Ukrainian literary scholar and writer. He was imprisoned in a Soviet concentration camp in 1938–41. After World War II he settled in Canada. He was the author, in English, of the novels *Stormy Road to Freedom* (1968) and *Good-Bye Siberia* (1976); the concentration-camp memoir *One of the Fifteen Million* (1952); *Moscow’s Drive for World Domination* (1961), and *Ukraine and Russia* (1953).

Through the streets of Kiev, Kharkiw, Dnipropetrowske, Odessa and other cities, the miserable hulks of humanity dragged themselves along on swollen feet, begging for crusts of bread or searching for scraps in garbage heaps, frozen and filthy. Each morning wagons rolled along the streets, picking up the emaciated remains of the dead. Often even the undershirt had been stripped from the corpse, to be exchanged for a slice of bread.

Those who were lucky enough to reach Moscow had a better chance for survival. Here were more scraps of bread, made of Ukrainian wheat, on the dumps; here one could also buy a little food on the black market.

The difficulty was to get there. On the trains and in the stations the GPU, in their red and blue caps, halted every traveller, demanding his official travelling permit. Those who could not produce them were arrested.

At this time my friend S. was working as an assistant in the October Revolution Hospital. Having completed his medical studies in 1931, he now worked in the surgical division. One evening he invited me to visit him in the hospital, promising me an unusual spectacle. When I arrived he took me to a large garage in the yard. A guard unlocked the door and we entered. S. switched on the light and I beheld an unforgettable picture of horror.

Piled like cord-wood against the walls, layer upon layer, were the frozen corpses of the victims picked off the streets that morning. Some of the bodies, I later learned, were used for dissection and experiments in the laboratories. The rest were simply buried in pits, at midnight, in nearby ravines out of sight of the people.

“This, my friend,” S. whispered softly, “is the fate of our villages.”

I was too unnerved to utter a word. With unbelieving eyes I could only stare at the hundreds of outstretched frozen hands which still seemed to be begging for bread, begging for life.

S. turned out the lights and we departed without a word. The guard slammed the door and locked it behind us. Slowly we walked home, speechless and shaken, but with mutual understanding between us....

There is another unforgettable incident which I witnessed in that year of 1933. It happened in the spring, as I was riding on the train from Kiev to Uman. At the Monasteryshche station 12 farm laborers came aboard, their faces bloated with starvation, tattered and dirty, all on their way to work on a state farm. With them was a young lad, about 14, his hands tightly pressed against his chest, inside the shirt.

Like a pack of wolves, the men gathered around the boy, their hungry eyes glued to the hand at his bosom. The lad tightened his grip upon his possession—a slice of black bread—and stared back with frightened eyes at the fierce, unshaven, swollen caricatures of human faces around him. To a man, they were urging and pleading with him to share the bread with them. Tomorrow, they promised, there would be boiled potatoes at the farm, maybe even bread!

The hungry boy stoutly refused. His mother, he explained, had somehow procured that one slice for him and had admonished him to save it for tomorrow.

The tragic scene ended when the twelve men, as though electrified by a command, fell upon the lad and tore away the bread which crumbled and scattered over the floor. The starving, snarling human beasts tore the crumbs out of each other's fingers, scratched them out of crevices, as though in a paroxysm of insanity. The hungry youngster sobbed bitterly, but for the men he had already ceased to exist.

**J. Chmyr, “Speak Russian or Starve.” In *The Black Deeds of the Kremlin* (1953–55). Excerpts, vol. 1, pp. 272–74.**

I had an opportunity to observe the life of the “muzhiks” [peasants] in the Russian villages. It was different from life in the Ukrainian villages. Each farmer had, on the average, 4 horses, 6 cows, sheep and pigs, while in Ukraine the people had been deprived of all their possessions and were starving. The Russians had bread, meat, and potatoes were rotting in the farm yards. No one dreamed of any famine here!

I worked here for a year. Towards the end I lived in a Moscow suburb, and saw Ukrainians come to buy bread, which they tried to take back to their dying families in Ukraine.

I left Moscow on April 20, 1933, after having provided myself with 79 pounds of bread. When about to leave I met two women from my native village who had come to Moscow to buy bread. Our journey was uneventful until we reached Bakhmach on the Russian-Ukrainian border. Here, all the passengers were ordered by the NKVD to go to the customs office, where the officials took away my bread, leaving me only 9 pounds. This was in consideration of the fact that I had been working in Moscow, but my countrywomen were not only robbed of their bread but were themselves detained for “taking” bread away from Russia.

These two unfortunate women left hungry children at home. Their husbands died from hunger, and the children were alone. They never came back.

After my arrival in my native village I was ordered by the village soviet chairman, a Moscow henchman, Klym Komiychenko, to oversee a brigade of women, swollen from hunger, whose task it was to sow and weed sugar beets. Practically all the people in the village were suffering and swollen, many were already dead from hunger. The work these hungry women were doing was too hard for them, and they would fall down and die. It was terrible to look at them, the skin cracked and water oozed out. The peak of mortality was reached just before the harvest.

Then another man and I were ordered to roam over the village and gather up the corpses. Cannibalism raised its ugly head, mothers ate their children and wives their husbands. Nastya Kyzyma ate her husband, Andriyan, and one child, and then she and her remaining five children died. Osadchy's wife ate him when he died, and then told the neighbours that she had buried his bones behind the cottage. The hot weather hastened the decomposition of the bodies, and the stench in the village was unendurable. About twenty people died every day, and there was no one to bury them. Four men were steadily employed at the cemetery, digging graves. We brought in the dead on the wagon like logs. No one lamented their deaths because their families or relatives lay sick or were already dead. The NKVD agent, a Russian, was telling us what to do. People were buried worse than cattle. If I should, by some miracle, return to my native village I would be able to find all those holes where more than half the people in the village were buried.

I worked at this collection of the dead for two months, and then myself swelled with hunger. All I had to eat during that time was 3 ½ ounces of bread and a small potato a day, and lack of other foods, especially meat and fats, began to affect my body. I ate nettles, lambs quarters, locust flowers and drank water. My body swelled so badly that I could walk no longer, I could only crawl along.

But luckily for me, the ears of rye began to fill with a milky substance. I greedily sucked the ears and the swelling abated. In Moscow I had weighed over 200 pounds, but now I was only 106. Slowly my strength returned. I could walk, and in four weeks was out of danger, thanks to the ears of rye.

**Fedir Pigido-Pravoberezhny, *The Stalin Famine: Ukraine in the Year 1933* (London: Ukrainian Youth Association in Great Britain, 1953). Excerpts, pp. 44–45, 50–51.**

Fedir Pigido (pseud. Pravoberezhny, 1888–1962) was a Ukrainian economist, publicist, and civic activist. Born to a peasant family, he completed medical training in Kyiv and served in the main medical administration of the Ukrainian People's Republic (1917–20). After obtaining a degree in economics (1935), he worked as a construction engineer. He spent World War II in German-occupied Ukraine. In 1949 he joined the émigré Ukrainian Revolutionary Democratic Party and became one of its leading figures. His major work is *Velyka Vitchyzniana viina* (The Great Patriotic War, 1954, repr. 2007).

Hunger increased ever more until it assumed huge proportions. The divisional, district and national leaders acted as if they saw nothing. But that was not all: anyone who lived at that time in Ukraine will surely remember the dissolute orgies which were being arranged during the dreadful spring of 1933 by the Party bosses. I shall mention only one of them, the “Paradise Evening” arranged in May, 1933, in the city of Zaporozhe [Zaporizhia], to take place—if I am not mistaken—in the “Intourist” hotel. In arranging

that Party the following persons were particularly active: the secretaries of the Divisional Party Committee, Budny and Leibeson; Rohachesky, director of the Zaporozhe Steel Works; Kuryluk, secretary of the Steel Works Party Committee; Porokhnia, secretary of the Construction Works Party Committee, and others. Through the open window of the hotel there flowed out into the streets and to the ears of those sleeping in a hungry stupor the drunken songs and wild laughter of the leaders of the city as well as of the famous Party nymphs who, naked as on the day they were born into this world, were dancing gracefully on the tables among the bottles of champagne. It was possible for the ruler of the Dniepropetrovsk region, the notorious M. N. Chatayevich [Mendel Khataevich], secretary of the Party District Committee, to be ignorant of this “Paradise Evening Party,” but as he was whirling at that same time in drunken fox-trots somewhere else, he did not want just then to hear anything about the “Paradise Party.” Not until 1937, during the so-called [Nikolai] Yezhov period, when it was necessary for reasons unknown to the public to “settle” with the above named Party secretaries, were the details of the “Paradise Party” dragged out into the glare of publicity.

It is interesting to note that one evening, when the Zaporozhe leaders were amusing themselves in a “cultural” way, as described above, dozens of peasants in the village of Mala Lepetykha in the neighbourhood of Zaporozhe were shot down like so many mad dogs. This is how it happened: in March 1933 a horse died in the local kolhosp [collective farm]. As was learned later, the cause of the horse’s death was glanders. The horse was buried, but the hungry peasants, unaware at that time of the cause of death, dug out the corpse, and a whole section of the village tasted the horsemeat. After a short time several cases of glanders appeared among them. The Zaporozhe authorities investigated the matter and found out that the sick people had eaten horsemeat. It was decided to liquidate all those who had consumed the dead horse. It is not known how or in what minutes’ book of a meeting that decision was written down, but the results, at least, are known. One evening that section of the village was surrounded by a detachment of N.K.V.D.; a few N.K.V.D. men went then from house to house and all people—young and old—were shot to death. That job was entrusted to first class specialists, amongst whom was Alexander Rezenov, the inspector of “Workers’ and Peasants’ Militia,” well-known for his foaming rages. In that fearful spring of 1933, when masses of people were dying of hunger each day, when on the streets and in houses thousands of corpses were lying for days and days without being carried out for burial by anyone, at such a time no-one paid any attention to the “little” affair in the village of Mala Lepetykha....

To the accompaniment of the drunken, savage shouting of the leaders, the last act of the tragedy of the starving Ukrainian villages was taking its course. People walked through the streets as if half-asleep, supporting themselves on sticks or leaning upon walls of stables or upon fences—wherever any of these were still standing. Most of them had swollen legs that looked like heavy logs of wood, as well as swollen hands and faces. Very often the swelling would burst, and then a white fluid would flow out. Legs and hands were covered with numerous tumours; they were strange tumours, and people called them “hunger tumours.” Those who had died lay on the very spot where death had overtaken them; they would lie there, side by side with those yet living, for days and days, sometimes for over a week.

Once a week, and sometimes more than once, men and women were driven to a burial ground to dig common graves. Waggons passed through the streets of the village

picking up the corpses and carrying them to the common graves. From twenty to a hundred corpses were thrown, like so many pieces of wood, into each grave, which was then covered with earth. There was no Christian burial for them—these victims—they were tossed away like animals, not human beings. In any Ukrainian village you will be shown dozens of such common graves, stacked up with corpses and then covered with earth in the year 1933.

Members of the kolhosps were buried separately from the “indus” (individual farmers). In Hermaniwka [Hermanivka], a large village about 60 km (about 40 miles) north of Kiev, not far from my village, the corpses were being carried one day to the burial ground and piled up by the grave. When about sixty corpses had been thus piled up, they were thrown into the grave. At dinner-time comrade Nikiforow [Nikiforov], the head of the local village council, happened to come to the burial ground, and, seeing the corpse of an “indus” in the grave of a peasant who during his lifetime had refused stubbornly to join the kolhosp, he ordered the corpse to be thrown out as not being worthy to lie in the same grave as members of the kolhosp. By Nikiforow’s order a man was lowered into the pit to bind a rope to the foot of the poor “indus,” who then was pulled out of the kolhosp grave and thrown aside; there he lay for a week or so before that notorious village satrap would allow anyone to throw him into an indus grave.

**“Testimony of Yuriy Lawrynenko, Through the Interpreter, Roman Olesnicki.” In *Eighth Interim Report of Hearings before the Select Committee on Communist Aggression, House of Representatives, Eighty-Third Congress (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1954). Excerpts, pp. 114–15, 116, 117–18.***

Yuriy Lawrynenko (Lavrinenko, 1905–87), a Ukrainian literary scholar, critic, and publicist, was born in Khyzhyntsi near Cherkasy. He was imprisoned in the Norilsk concentration camp (1935–39) and then exiled. He settled in the United States in 1950. He was the editor of the anthology *The Executed Renaissance* (1959) and the author, in Ukrainian, of *Socialism and the Ukrainian Revolution* (1949), *At the Test of the Great Revolution* (1949), *The Stump and Its Offshoots* (1971), *Vasyl Karazyn* (1975), and the memoir *The Black Blizzard* (1985). He also compiled *Ukrainian Communism and Soviet-Russian Policy toward the Ukraine: An Annotated Bibliography, 1917–1953* (1953).

**Mr. McTigue:** All right; Mr. Lawrynenko, you were testifying as to what happened in your village.

**Mr. Lawrynenko:** My native village originally consisted of about 2,000 inhabitants, and I know personally that at least 700 of them died of starvation. I also know that this year was a normal one as far as harvests were concerned. . . . All the grain and other food products produced by this village were confiscated by force. At first the food was stored in the local church, and later it was transferred to the nearest railroad station. Searching parties went around the village looking for food and looking even into the pots in the kitchens. On the one hand, the confiscated grain was transported to Moscow and—

**Mr. Feighan:** When you referred to searching parties, you meant the Russian Communists?

**Mr. Lawrynenko:** Special brigadiers were at that time dispatched from Leningrad and other Russian cities and the total of these brigadiers was in excess of 20,000 people, and their task was to search and confiscate the grain in the Ukrainian villages. And they could call upon the Red Army to help them.

On the one hand the confiscated grain was transported to Russia where it was stored in railroad stations and sometimes out in the open. The other part of that grain was being transported to Odessa and other parts of the Black Sea, and from there it was transported to foreign lands.

My wife's family escaped from Poltava to the city of Voroniez, which is in Russia, and there they were able to save themselves from starvation because at the railroad stations of Russia grain was plentiful. Kharkov is the main railroad center of the Ukraine, and in that city I myself saw whole trainloads of grain being dispatched to Russia day by day during the famine and the ravaging of the Ukraine. This was a mass phenomenon. Many of my friends and colleagues undertook trips as far as Moscow and Leningrad in order to buy bread there which they brought along in suitcases back to their families, and in this manner they were able to save their families from starvation.

**Mr. McTigue:** Did you personally feel the effects of this terrible famine?

**Mr. Lawrynenko:** I lived in the capital, and personally I felt it to a lesser extent than people in smaller cities felt it. There were many times when I went hungry.

**Mr. McTigue:** Why do you think, Mr. Lawrynenko, that the Russians staged this terrible famine of grain in a year when crops were plentiful?....

**Mr. Lawrynenko:** The famine was organized in order to break the opposition which the Ukrainians were displaying to the policy of colonial exploitation of the Ukraine by the Russians from Moscow.

There was a double blow delivered against Ukraine, one against the basic population element of the Ukraine which is the agricultural element of the peasants. The other was against the educated people of the Ukraine, that is, the intelligentsia.

According to my personal observations I have come to the conclusion that during the period of the famine at least 6 million people died in the Ukraine as a result of it, and about 80 percent of the Ukrainian intelligentsia, that is, the classes of the Ukrainian leadership, also perished during this period....

I myself was arrested and declared a bourgeois nationalist, an enemy of the people, merely because of the fact that as a student in the course of intellectual discussions I defended the position that the Ukrainians formed a part of the Western European culture and that therefore Ukraine is alien to Russian culture which the Moscow rulers were attempting to impose upon Ukraine....

**Mr. Feighan:** Are the Ukrainians called bourgeois nationalists because they are patriotic and they love their country and their culture, and because they have a national spirit? Also, because they want to have a country with their own sovereignty and independence and also because they oppose Russian imperialism?

**Mr. Lawrynenko:** Yes; absolutely. For example, in the year 1933 such was the method of terror applied against the Ukrainians that merely the persistent use of the Ukrainian language was sufficient reason to be classified as a bourgeois nationalist.

**Mr. Feighan:** Bourgeois nationalism then is a very common crime, a most common crime in Ukraine?

**Mr. Lawrynenko:** Every day and every hour the term “bourgeois nationalist” is on every page of every newspaper, and at every meeting that term is employed to castigate those with whom the ruling class is dissatisfied. But this term “bourgeois nationalist” is applied only to Ukrainians, Byelorussians, Caucasians, and other non-Russian nationalities. During the whole time that I was in the Soviet Union I never heard the term “bourgeois nationalist” applied to Russians, ethnic Russians. There are all shades of bourgeois nationalists, Ukrainians, Byelorussians, Caucasians, but there does not exist a Russian bourgeois nationalism....

**Mr. Feighan:** Mr. Lawrynenko, were you in Kharkov during the time of the manmade famine, when Edouard Herriot, the French diplomat, came to make an investigation?

**Mr. Lawrynenko:** In the summer of 1933 Edouard Herriot arrived at the Kharkiv Airport.

**Mr. McTigue:** In an airplane?

**Mr. Lawrynenko:** Yes. The route which M. Edouard Herriot was supposed to take from the airport to downtown Kharkov was especially prepared for that occasion. Buildings and fences were painted, the many corpses that had been lying in the streets, the people who had died from starvation, were removed, and the whole place was especially staged for the trip which he was to take through the city.

Edouard Herriot in an interview declared that the Ukraine was a most prosperous and flowering country, and this was one of the most horrible personal blows that I had ever experienced because I knew that this was far from the truth.

**Mr. Feighan:** Was this the same year in which over 6 million Ukrainians died because of the forced famine?

**Mr. Lawrynenko:** The same year. This was the same year when 6 million people died of starvation. That is why it was so difficult for me to reconcile the statement made by Herriot with the real conditions then prevailing.

**Vira P-ko, “It Happened in 1933.” In *The Black Deeds of the Kremlin* (1953–55). Excerpts, vol. 2, pp. 641–44.**

Then began the most difficult time of our student days. It is with great sorrow that I recall this harrowing period of famine in the Ukraine.

On the farm to which we were sent there had been quite a number of workers, but only a third of them were still alive. The following was a daily occurrence: In the



morning, bullock-carts full of yet-living people were transported to work. Some were so dried up, only the eyes glittered as a sign of life; their arms were skinny and long, their legs likewise, their noses protruded, their clothing was tattered, they were unkempt, unwashed, the men unshaven, their eyes avid with hunger. Others were distended, their arms and legs like logs, their bellies huge; their legs were particularly horrible. When they moved them the skin cracked, a fluid seeped out, the sunlight caused festering sores to form, on which flies alighted and soon larvae developed.

So they proceeded, transporting both the lean and the swollen to work, and in the evening the bullock-carts would collect two-thirds of them from the fields and take them to the previously prepared “fraternal” graves; sometimes even those still living were picked up and buried. It was rare for members of the family to come to claim their dead; they, too, were deep in the clutches of starvation.

Like hungry wolves lying in wait for their prey, the workers of the State Farm lay in wait for the assorted kitchen refuse which was thrown or poured out beside the students’ mess, and indeed, there was not much to be thrown out, except potatoes or beet peelings or some smelly bone. They precipitated themselves in a heap at these leavings, retrieving them from the pit, in which everything was in a state of decay and larvae flourished. The poor hungry people, having lost all feelings of disgust, ate all that they could lay their hands on and died of stomach ailments in the bushes close by.

Once I happened to be a witness to such a ghastly, unheard-of occurrence. Not far from the students’ quarters lay the latrine. After lectures, during our dinner-hour, my friends and I often used to see someone who always, in the greatest heat of the summer day, used to wander in that filth, seeking something and putting it in his mouth. What could he possibly find there, we often wondered? A feeling of dread and horror assailed us. How could we prevent this abomination? Even though we ourselves had nothing to spare, receiving, on the completion of our quotas, 200–300 grams of incompletely baked bread, we resolved to save this individual.

We approached in a group and observed the following: Out of the human offal the man was picking cherry stones, apple and pear seeds, and other such things which became visible after the sun dried out the vile stuff in which they were embedded. We were seized by an unheard-of horror. How should we approach this person, who was perhaps mentally deranged? He might attack us. A burning pain enveloped us, our hands and feet trembled, ants crawled up and down our spines. Then one of the boldest, Larissa M—h, approached to a certain distance and shouted, “Come to us. We have bread!” The figure straightened out and began to flee but our group blocked the way. The man halted. It is difficult to describe that frenzied expression in his eyes, which gazed with complete sanity out of the skeleton-features.

Without questioning him at all, we put down the pieces of dry bread which we had earlier prepared for him, and shouted to him to come again to this place at the same time the next day. We did not expect to see him the following day, for we doubted whether he had understood us, but he did come; we again gave him some bread and some clothing, having made a collection among the students. On leaving him we told him to wash and put on the clean clothing. We were curious to know whether the man had understood us and whether he would obey. On the third day we were all there again. A shocking scene ensued. This time we approached closer with the bread. Before us stood a clean young person, who, even in that old clothing, looked almost normal. Gently

swaying with exhaustion, he approached us, stretching out his hand toward the bread when suddenly he swayed backwards, his large protruding eyes assumed a frightfully death-like appearance, he fell backwards and died in a convulsive fit.

Later we discovered that this was Vasil [Vasyl] Kuchma from the village of Babanka, whose starving wife had killed and eaten their five-year-old daughter. He had been working at the State Farm, saving every last crumb and bringing it home to save his beloved daughter from a hungry death. Heavy labor and hunger compelled him to seek additional means of subsistence. He went out into the harvested fields to glean ears of grain and was arrested the next day, but, strangely enough, was not sentenced. They kept him in prison for a week, beat him, then set him free. It was obvious that his end was near.

After returning from prison he noticed that his little Marika was not at home. He asked his wife where she was. The wife replied that she had taken her to her mother's at Talne, in the hope that she might escape starvation there. He believed her and was glad that his daughter would be safe. He sustained himself by cooking chaff, burdocks, and other weeds. However, uncertain thoughts tormented him. Was Marika really at his wife's mother's? Or was she elsewhere? Sometimes, on returning home with some sort of food for himself and wife, he smelled the odor of meat. He searched but found nothing. However, once when he came home he discovered a horrifying sight. In the middle of the floor lay his deranged wife, dead, tightly clasping the severed head of her child. He crossed the threshold and collapsed. He was found, still alive, by some people. In a confused state he left his home, whereupon the fate already known to the reader overtook him.

It might also be in order to mention here certain facts concerning the students. Twenty-five of them died at this time, unable to bear the hunger and excessively hard labor.

### **I. Hannych, "The Living Grave." In *The Black Deeds of the Kremlin (1953–55)*. Excerpts, vol. 2, pp. 585–87.**

This event occurred during the peak of the famine in 1933, in the village of Mykailivka [Mykhailivka], Neforoshchanske district, Poltava region. A farmer named Marko Klymenko lived in this village. He was not very poor, but neither was he rich. He had a horse, a cow, a few simple farm implements and a nice orchard and vegetable garden beside the house. But his most valuable possession was a beautiful tract of land, twelve acres of highly fertile black loam.

With the beginning of collectivization the whole countryside was infested with Russian Communist workers and "25-thousanders," armed with pistols and unlimited power to crucify Ukrainian farmers. No sooner was the threshing completed than the Komsomol [Communist Youth League] shock brigade, under the leadership of a "25-thousander," appeared in the village under the grain-collecting plan, diligently searching out and seizing every kernel of grain. The grain poured in a steady stream into the railroad stations and thence on to Moscow.

Those who had refrained from joining the collective farms were branded as kurkuls [well-to-do peasants]. And this is what happened to Marko Klymenko. Several times he had been summoned by Urbanov, who beat him with his pistol and demanded

his signature on the application form, but Marko withstood the brutality and refused to sign. Then Urbanov ordered the grain-collecting commission to seize all the grain Marko had and even the buckwheat, millet and potatoes. Again they pressed him to join the collective farm, threatening him with deportation if he refused, and again he remained resolute.

Then he was declared a *kurkul* and dispossessed of all his property. The livestock and machinery were appropriated by the collective farm and everything else by the government. He was arrested and sentenced to Siberia with about ten others. As he was taken away he resisted strongly, and the GPU beat him so badly that he could not stand on his feet. Every inch of his body was bruised and covered with blood. In this condition he was taken to the district prison, while his wife and three children were left without even a crust of bread in the cold, empty house.

The deliberate appropriation of grain by the Soviet government soon brought the inevitable results. In the first months of 1933 people ate mice, oil-cake, bark and almost everything imaginable. By spring hundreds were swollen from starvation. Dead bodies littered the streets and market places, ignored by everyone. Soon, though, an order was issued that all the dead must be promptly buried because the decay was causing disease which threatened the GPU, “25-thousanders” and other Communist officials. Because none of the farmers were fit to dig graves, Urbanov called a GPU detachment from the district headquarters for this task. They dug a huge pit where once every three days dead bodies were dumped, after being collected by the village active [*aktiv*, Party activists] and Komsomol group, and covered with a thin layer of earth.

Urbanov himself took an active part in the burial. He distinguished himself by throwing into the pit people who, though they were motionless, were still living, and burying them. This happened when one day he came to the home of Marko Klymenko and found his wife and three children lying on the floor, swollen and unable to move from starvation. Urbanov ordered them to be taken to the pit and buried. When some of his commission members protested that it did not seem right to bury people who were still alive, Urbanov answered that it made no difference, that today or tomorrow they would die and have to be buried anyway.

When the woman and the children were brought to the edge of the pit, she seemed to realize what was about to happen. Summoning all her remaining strength and raising her head, she spoke in a pleading voice: “Please do not bury us. We are still alive and, God willing, we may yet get well again.”

In answer Urbanov kicked her on the chin with his heavy boot and with the words, “You did not want to join the collective farm, so now you die,” he threw her and the children into the almost full grave and buried them.

That is why this grave was called the “living grave” by the people.

**Miron Dolot, *Execution by Hunger: The Hidden Holocaust* (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1985). Excerpts, pp. 203–8.**

Miron Dolot (pen name of Simon Starow, 1916–98) was born in a village of Cherkasy oblast. After World War II he settled in the United States and worked as a language teacher in California. He was the author of *Who Killed Them and Why?* (1984) and of articles and brochures about the famine published in Switzerland and Germany. He wrote this memoir in the 1950s.

I cannot find the words to describe what my eyes saw in the spring of 1933, but since those awesome memories still haunt me, I shall endeavor to convey my recollections of the sufferings and deaths of my fellow Ukrainians.

World War II was a reality, and I was a part of it. I saw the multitude of dead and mutilated bodies; I heard the cries of despair, and the moans of agony all around me. Day after day, I felt cold and hunger. I was constantly in fear of death. But all of that is now seen through the mist of time. In the haziness of those memories, I see a dim spark of light. This spark is the recognition that those sufferings were caused by war, that I and others at that time had a chance to fight for our lives, to defend ourselves no matter how slim those chances might be. Above all, I realized that while fighting in the war, I had not been completely abandoned. The military was always there with daily food rations, no matter how deficient in quantity and quality. We were also clothed (after a fashion), and barracks as such for sleep when possible were provided. The sufferings of war pale in comparison with the events in our village, all of which remain in my memory as absolute in horror.

Those of us who were still alive harbored a secret and final hope that the coming of the spring of 1933 would bring us some relief. We thought that the new vegetation would help us live through the long months of waiting for the new bread. Nourished by this hope, we were able to carry on until we saw the first signs of green. Sadly, however, many of the villagers were no longer alive by the time the long-awaited spring finally arrived. And many of those who lived long enough to see the passing of winter found their death in the very vegetables and grasses they were so hopefully and patiently awaiting.

That spring of 1933 in Ukraine was unusually cold. In our region, the spring weather usually set in around the beginning of April. The snow would melt quickly, and the green blanket of vegetation would immediately appear in its place. But in 1933, snow was still visible everywhere in mid-April. An icy-cold wind blew continually. It would often bring heavy clouds of rain or snow, or both, and the village would sink deep into mud and slush again. Then a freeze would turn all that into knobs of dirty ice.

Starvation in our village now reached a point at which death was a desirable relief. Many houses around us had already been standing for a long time with no signs of life. As the snow slowly melted away, human corpses were exposed to view everywhere: in backyards, on roads, in fields. Those dead bodies constituted a pathetic problem for the living. As the weather warmed, they started to thaw and decay. The stench which resulted plagued us, and we could do nothing about it. The villagers who survived were unable to bury the dead, and no one from the outside seemed in a hurry to do it, so the bodies were just left wherever they happened to die. Those in the fields or in the forest fell prey to wild animals; those in their homes became the prey of countless rats.

For the third time, the village was stricken with panic. Those who were fortunate enough to remain alive were in the depths of despair. The resources they possessed had been used up long ago. They all finally had to face the shocking truth that there was nothing to eat, and no hope of getting any help: that death from starvation was their imminent fate.

Most of these desperate villagers reconciled themselves to this fact. They stayed at home, and their conditions were indescribable. They were unkempt and haggard, and

so weak that they could hardly drag one foot after the other. They just sat, or lay down silently, too feeble even to talk.

The bodies of some were reduced to skeletons, with their skin hanging grayish-yellow and loose over their bones. Their faces looked like rubber masks with large, bulging, immobile eyes. Their necks seemed to have shrunk into their shoulders. The look in their eyes was glassy, heralding their approaching death.

The bodies of others were swollen, a final stage of starvation. Their faces, arms, legs and stomachs resembled the surfaces of plastic balloons. The tissues would soon crack and burst, resulting in the fast deterioration of their bodies.

The thaw brought with it a new wave of beggars. Those who still had strength enough to move left their dwellings and took off in search of food. Old and young, mostly women and children, slowly moved from house to house dragging their rag-covered feet. They pleaded for food: a potato, or a piece of bread, or at least a kernel—a single kernel!—of corn. At the onset of the famine, I remember how the emaciated would come to the doorstep, often sobbing, and would ask for some spare food. If refused, they would excuse themselves politely and go away, apologizing for bothering us.

But this spring's beggars presented an entirely different picture. These desperate people, numbed by cruelty and injustice as well as hunger, were no longer the modest, honorable small farmers they had been before. Their fear of starvation was so great that they lost all semblance of self-control, becoming more like wild, hungry beasts in their search for food. They no longer distinguished friends from enemies and were ready to commit even murder for a mere scrap. Their clothes had long ago turned to rags, and they themselves were worn out and exhausted to the point of collapse.

With protruding frightened eyes and outstretched hands, they would approach someone, but this time they did not plead: they were voiceless; they just cried. Often their heavy tears were mixed with fluid slowly oozing out of the cracks in their swollen faces. They whispered and begged for a crumb of bread.

Another sign of almost imminent death from starvation was the body lice, those small, flat, wingless, parasitic insects who were the constant companions of the wretched and impoverished. The starving villagers were no longer able to take care of their sanitary needs, nor had they the strength to fetch water, let alone heat it in order to bathe themselves, or wash their clothes and their bedding. Those who still had strength could do some washing, but not properly because they had no soap. For a few years now, not a single bar of soap had been seen in the village. But, even if soap had been available, we could not buy it. First, we had no money; second, we were prohibited from buying any merchandise in the stores as our grain quotas had not been met. As a result, all of us were dirty and infected with lice.

As the limbs of a starving person turn cold with the approach of death, the lice begin to migrate to the warmer facial areas such as the eye sockets, ears, mouth corners, and nostrils. When this happened, it was an unmistakable sign that the starving person's sufferings would soon come to an end.

The plight of the children was one of the most heartbreaking experiences for me during that time, and their pathetic faces, parched or swollen, and streaked with tears, will remain in my memory forever.

They could not understand why they couldn't get a piece of bread or something else to eat. They were not able to comprehend what was going on in their own small world. Thinking of them still makes me tremble with horror. God is my witness that as I write these words, the paper is wet with my tears.

Not many children in our neighborhood had survived the terrible winter, but those who had were reduced to mere skeletons, too weak to cry. The heads on their small thin necks looked like inflated balloons. Their small bony arms and legs were like sticks protruding from their little bodies. Their stomachs were bloated to unusual proportions, and water flowed uninterruptedly from their genitals. Those childish faces looked prematurely aged and twisted. They resembled old folks: wrinkled, listless, and very, very sad. At their stage of starvation, they were in a constant stupor which is peculiar to those who suffer from extreme hunger. It seemed as if nature itself had conspired with the Communist regime to add a final touch of pathos and horror to the sufferings the children had to endure. Hair had started to grow on the faces of some, mainly on their foreheads and temples. I saw a few such children and they looked so strange to me—like creatures from another planet, and they left me with a feeling of helplessness and doom.

Often starvation would sweep away an entire family. The adult members would die first, leaving the children alone in a cold house, half-naked and hungry, to fend for themselves. One can imagine what happened to such hopeless children: these orphans, scantily clad and feet wrapped in rags, joined the rest of the beggars. Struggling in the snow, they would first go to their nearest neighbors only to find that they too were dead. Then they would go to another house and yet another farther away. Compassionate villagers who were still alive would let a child or two stay with them only to watch them slowly die.

Yet miraculously, some children managed to survive. These were mostly boys and girls between ten and fifteen years of age. With the coming of spring, they saw their chances of survival in terms of leaving home, and going to the city. A few, but *very* few, children managed to do just that and were fortunate in finding help and understanding from some of the urban dwellers. Others, less fortunate, were picked up by the militia and locked up in the Children's Detention Home. These children had a better chance of surviving the famine, although we heard that many of them also died. And then, there were those whose fate it was to join the ranks of the city's juvenile criminals. God alone knows what happened to them. Finally, there were those who neither reached the city nor were picked up by the militia. They lay dead wherever they had fallen for days or even weeks, until someone would drag them out of sight into some ditch like a dead animal.

I saw many tragic events in which children were the innocent victims, but one episode in particular emerges from my memories of that spring as a symbol of humanity gone completely mad. It was sometime at the onset of April. One early morning while we still lay in our beds, we heard a child's cry and a weak knocking on the door. I was the first to jump out of bed. As I opened the door, I saw a small girl of about four. She stood trembling from the cold and exhaustion with streams of tears flowing down her famished little cheeks. We knew her! It was Maria, the daughter of our neighbor Hana, who also had a seven-year-old son and lived about half a mile from us. Hana's husband, a young and industrious farmer, had been arrested like many others, for no apparent reason, and exiled somewhere to a concentration camp about two years before. Hana was left alone

with her two children to struggle for food, like all the rest of us. However, as winter came and starvation struck us, we lost track of her.

I let the child into the house.

“My mommy won’t wake up!” the child announced, wiping away the tears with the sleeve of her dirty coat.

Mother and I glanced at each other. A short while later, my brother Mykola and I were on our way to Hana’s home. When we entered the house, our fears were confirmed. Hana was dead, lying on her back on the sleeping bench. Her bulging glassy eyes seemed to be looking at us. Her widely opened mouth still seemed to be gasping for air. We could see that she had met her death not too long before Maria had knocked on our front door. On Hana’s cheek we could still see the traces of her tears; we could also see the lice moving back and forth like ants, in search of a warm spot. Next to her, wrapped in some cloth, lay her dead son. The one-room house was empty and dirty. There was no furniture except for two benches, and no trace of food. The mud floor had been dug up all over, and there were holes in the walls. The chimneys of the cooking and heating stoves were totally ruined. We recognized immediately the work of the Bread Procurement Commission. There was no doubt that they had been there recently, searching for “hidden” foodstuffs.

Mykola and I stood there aghast. I felt the impulse either to run away screaming, or to sit down next to their dead bodies and hold their cold hand in mine in sorrow and sympathy, but I did neither. I just stood there petrified, and looking at the dead mother and her young son, I asked the question:

“Why? Why did they have to die?”

We left the bodies in the house hoping that soon the kolhosp [collective farm] burial brigade would pick them up on their daily search for bodies. This brigade was set up about two months before for the purpose of collecting and burying the corpses of the starved villagers.

Little Maria survived the famine. She stayed with us for a while until her relatives, who lived in one of the cities, took her into their family.

**Anastasiia Lysyvets, *Spomyny* (Memoirs) (Kyiv: K.I.S., 2008). Excerpts, pp. 28–30. Translated by Alexander J. Motyl.**

Anastasiia Ivanivna Lysyvets (b. 1922) was born into a peasant family in the village of Berezan, Kyiv oblast. She lost her parents, sister, and brother in the Holodomor. During World War II she was taken to Germany for forced labor. After returning to Ukraine, she received a degree in philology from Kyiv State University and then worked as a schoolteacher in the village of Kuianivka, Sumy oblast. She lives in Kyiv. This memoir was written in the 1970s.

Father died at night, before daybreak. Mother’s screaming and weeping woke up Halka and us and drove us off the oven. We jumped up and looked at our dead father. Mother ordered us to kiss Father’s head and hands. We kissed them, trembling with fear and grief... The neighbors brought what they could, as we had nothing of our own; out of respect for Father, our relatives and neighbors wanted to bury him according to custom....

Everyone saw that famine was approaching; that this spring would be terrible. Grandfather Nykypor sold a cow in order to pay the tax and buy grain. Uncle Lavrentii placed his hopes on the hospital, where he was often called to do various things, and for which he accepted payment only in food. He also had a cow. At Uncle Mykhailo's they were waiting for a cow to give birth to a calf before Easter. Uncle Petro had no expectations, for things were no better with him than with us. Besides, his wife took absolutely no pity on him. Uncle Petro knew that when death by starvation came to his family, he would have to die first, then his mother-in-law, and then his elder daughter, since his wife looked after his younger daughter and herself. Everyone saw this but remained quiet, as they could do nothing about it. There was nothing to eat. Yudykha, the Hopkal family, Lazar Lysyvets, and many other people, both non-collective farmers and collective farmers, also had nothing to eat. Everyone prayed and concealed a hope known only to him in the depths of his soul....

The second day after Father's funeral, everyone started to go away. Everyone told mother to take care of herself above all, not to kill herself with grief, for that was the only way she could somehow save her children from death by starvation. Some suggested she go to the head of the collective farm, Semen Kozatsky, and ask to be admitted to the collective farm.

Grandfather Nykypor and Aunt Motria were stubbornly quiet and waited until everyone had gone home. But even then a terrible silence hung over the house. Finally, Mother asked Grandfather Nykypor and my aunt:

"Papa, Motria, can you help me somehow?"

"Just how? How can we help you? We have no bread, no cow; we'll give you three or four small buckets of potatoes. We don't know ourselves whether we'll survive the spring. We've placed our hope in God and Dunka and Palazhka. Let them go and find a job for some bread. If they don't, we'll die... We still won't go into the collective farm, but you, daughter, do as you wish... Go to Mykhailo for help..."

"What, Papa—to Mykhailo? Everyone's going to him for help, but he can't save everybody. And then there are Maria's relatives; they're all starving, all looking to be saved... I thought that maybe you would take in at least one of my children and save him. And if Mykhailo also took one, I'd somehow manage with two..."

Grandfather was silent, as was my aunt. And Mother spoke again: "Why are you silent? I'm asking you. Will you take one of my children? At least one... Whichever one you like..."

"No, we won't. If they die with you, Oksana, no one will say anything... Even God will not say anything... But if they die with us, then all the people will talk, as will God... We can't take a child, daughter... If we get a slice of bread or some potatoes, we'll share, and if we don't, then all of us will die, if God wills it."

Grandfather Nykypor crossed himself and again began to read the psalms. We prayed for the repose of the soul of God's servant Ivan, for the heavenly kingdom. Soon an oppressive gloom and a horrible silence descended on the house, which smelled of incense, wax, oil, smoke, and hunger...

When I recall my relatives today and analyze their actions, their characters, and their words, I cannot say who of them was better and who worse. They all sympathized with us and shared our grief. Everyone wanted to live, and no one wanted to go to the grave in place of another. Who wants to go to the grave for anyone, even the person



closest to you? Only a mother could do that for a child, and not always even then. Everyone looked after himself; everyone wanted to survive the hard times. There began a terrible struggle for existence and salvation from death by starvation. It was like this all over Ukraine, in the villages and towns, within families, between unrelated and related families, between friends and acquaintances, between old and young. It was a terrible year of struggling against death and for a chance to breathe the air, walk the earth, see the sun and sky, speak to people, and see people—and yourself among them.

**Pavlo Makohon, *Witness: Memoirs of the Famine of 1933 in Ukraine* (Toronto: Anabasis Magazine, 1983). Excerpts, pp. 20–21. Translated by Alexander J. Motyl. Online at <http://www.faminegenocide.com/resources/witness/lifebegan.html#j>.**

...Our village was becoming increasingly emptier because some of the peasants had been “dekulakized” and transported to Siberia, while others had abandoned everything and fled at night so as to avoid Siberia. The remaining peasants were forced to join the collective farm. The activists had taken the bread from all the houses. Horrible times were approaching, as there was nothing to eat. Famine had begun. Winter was approaching. Our house became sad because all of us were hungry. Father tried everything possible to find something to eat, but his attempts produced almost nothing. I, too, ran about wherever I could, looking for food. People began to swell up. In a short time the famished people had eaten all the village’s dogs, cats, hedgehogs, and birds. I, too, would bring hedgehogs home—I even caught somebody’s dog—and we cooked and ate them.

Afterwards, the horses also began to die of hunger in the collective farmyards. Everybody, including me, fell upon the dead horses, but the authorities did not want the people to eat them and dug pits. They poured carbolic acid on the dead meat and threw it into the pits so as not to give it to the people. But the people did not care; they dug up the pits, and everyone cut off a piece of meat. They were not afraid of the carbolic acid, for starving people have no fear.

Freezing winter came, and total famine set in. People began to die of hunger. All of us were already swollen. The first to die in our house was my mother’s mother, while the others were barely able to move. A rumor spread throughout the village that some woman in the fifth brigade had eaten her two children, but that rumor was quickly hushed up. Then the district militia arrived and closed the case, so that I do not know exactly what happened. But famine encompassed the whole village, and people began to die en masse. The authorities sent the stronger men to the cemetery, where they dug mass pits, while special wagons went from house to house, collecting dead people and taking them to the cemetery. All of them were thrown into one pit without coffins, and when it was full, they dug another one.

Many people tried to leave the village to find something to eat, but they died along the way, as they had no strength to go farther. The village became sad.

I was still able to move a bit and was therefore able to walk and see everything that happened. When evening or night approached, there was no one to be seen in the village any more. A hungry deathliness reigned, and it was terrible to walk through one’s own village, for there was no longer any voice—either that of a dog, or a cat, or a human. I saw it all and mulled over all those horrors. I concluded that my days were also

numbered. But our family was saved from death for some time by the fact that our father had managed to hide some bread from those who were searching it out, and we could therefore live a little longer than the others.

But a sad and tragic time also came for our family and our house. I saw my brothers die of famine—a famine artificially created by Moscow in order to break the Ukrainian people and use death by hunger to drive it into collective farms.

**“Testimony of Mr. Ivan Kasiianenko of Los Angeles, California.” In *Second Interim Report* (1988). Excerpts, pp. 10–12.**

In 1932 the harvest was a normal one. It was brought in before anyone suspected what was to happen. It was winter when they came in to take the grain that had already been ground into flour and was sorted in bags. They came and seized all of this grain, not only from us but from all the villagers. And ours was a large village—6,000 people lived there.

The sound of crying was everywhere. Those who seized the grain carried out their orders without mercy. I remember as if it were yesterday how a man ran away, leaving behind a wife and three children. They took absolutely everything: cows, pigs, everything. There was nothing left for the wife to do. She sent her children away to fend for themselves, set fire to the house, and hanged herself.

Things were a little different in my family. My father was always on the run during the day and would only come at night. We had nothing; they had taken everything from us. They came with their pikes, poked around, asked questions, and grabbed my mother by the hair. They tore off my mother’s earrings and her cross. We children cried, but nothing helped. No one paid any attention to our tears.

They locked our mother in the basement. So there we were, five of us children with me the oldest, and our father nowhere to be found. They came back to see if they had missed anything and found one egg that had not been taken. They took it away.

Father would sometimes be able to bring us a little flour, sometimes a little grain, anything that had not been seized. But protecting the food was impossible because our house was under constant surveillance, and he could not get to us every night. They took everything, even our clothes. We did not even have a blanket. We were poor as church mice. We huddled together at night to keep warm.

After two weeks they let mother out of the basement. But what could she do when there was nothing to eat? In March or April, 1933, they took our cow. The first to die was my youngest sister, then another sister. Then my brother and a third sister died at the same time. Father died and was buried on Holy Thursday. Mother died two days later, and they threw her in a hole on Easter Sunday. I remember how a neighbor came and comforted me, saying that although my parents had gone, they had died on holy days, Holy Thursday and Easter. It was a terrible time for me. I was starving myself to such an extent that I could not walk. Before he died, my father had asked one of the teachers to take me under his wing. I was only in the first grade at the time, and it was only thanks to this teacher that I survived. He took me to a hospital. I don’t remember who the doctor was or anything about the place. I only remember that my skin was shiny and transparent like glass. The doctor cut me open in several places and let the liquid under my skin run out. It smelled like dead flesh. When I left the hospital, I had no strength to walk and sat

in the sun. The teacher picked me up and saved my life. But many who had owned everything they needed now died like flies.

It was hard. While still swollen, I would go to the point to catch fish and frogs. I tore them up and ate them raw.

After my family died, I lived alone in the empty house until the same teacher came and took me to live with him. Usually, people took no interest in small children. Typhus was very widespread then. But whether they were sick or starving, they would be put on open trucks like sheaves of wheat and taken away. The people who took the children said that they were being driven to a hospital, but none of these children were ever seen or heard from again.

A horrifying silence settled over the village. I can still remember going to my neighbors' houses to see if anyone was alive. I remember going into one house and seeing the blind son sitting in one corner. His skin was grey. He had been dead perhaps a week or two. And he wasn't the only one. Starving people on the verge of death, sometimes even mothers, sometimes lost their sanity and turned into animals who smothered their own children and ate them. It happened, for example, to one of my acquaintances. His name was Ivan Ostapenko. His mother put a noose around his neck and tried to strangle him, but he was stronger than she was and managed to break her hold. But he kept the marks the rope left on his throat for a long time.

I went to another neighbor's house. They were young people. I looked in the window and saw the mother and father lying dead on the floor. Their infant son was lying in the middle, still alive, and sucking its mother's dry breast. I took him to a retention place for such children, and he was saved. As long as I stayed in the village, he was like a brother to me, and I watched over him. When they took us to the orphanage, we went together. Children whose parents had died of starvation were not treated well. They were not allowed to light the stove to keep warm or to wear warm clothing. We were told that we were parasites, capitalists, vestiges of the *kulaks* [well-to-do peasants] and exploiting classes.

These weren't orphanages; they were houses of torture. The children had nothing to eat. It was impossible to keep clean. We were literally eaten by lice. But nobody cared. We were the progeny of the defeated class enemy.

**“Testimony of Mr. Mykola Kostyrko of Sacramento, California.” In *Second Interim Report* (1988). Excerpts, pp. 6–8.**

The famine started—that is, when they took away all the meager reserves from the Ukrainian peasants. Those who had some clothing or other articles came to the city, to the market, to sell it and buy bread. But bread was sold by ration cards. A black market emerged, and the high prices did nothing to resolve the hunger problem. Starving, ragged peasants staggered through the city. On the streets, especially on the outskirts of town, lay the bodies of those who died of starvation.

The government did all it could to make sure no one saw this, because many foreign vessels came to Odessa's ports to take the “surplus” Ukrainian grain and other merchandise abroad. They exported everything in order to get foreign capital for the “needs of the state”—to buy tractors and for propaganda abroad, among other things. The city “cleaned up” the corpses every morning. A special club was created for foreign

sailors to prevent them from going into the city and seeing what they could not have missed. At the club they were entertained and distracted, even with girls.

I also had the opportunity to witness the “show of prosperity” staged to pull the wool over the eyes of the French minister [Edouard] Herriot, who was invited to the Ukraine to convince him that there was no famine. (He was undoubtedly convinced when he received a number of rare paintings from museums.) As proof that life was absolutely normal, they escorted him along streets that had been especially prepared for him. Police were stationed around these streets and did not admit people who were poorly dressed or had shabby-looking vehicles. I walked along the main street and was amazed to see that the storefront windows were full of all sorts of merchandise. In those days all the stores were empty, and one could buy only poor quality cheesecakes and tooth powder. I went into one store where I knew the sales clerk and asked if I could buy something. He told me that nothing was for sale. For what, then? Maybe they were filming a movie...

At that time, there were only a few personal cars in the city. They belonged to the government and were used by big party bosses. These automobiles were cruising back and forth to create the impression that our streets were as busy as any abroad. A few weeks later I learned that this had been a sham, a stage play of “the good life,” especially arranged for a few hours for Mr. Herriot’s visit. This spectacle had a historical precedent—the “Potemkin village” of Catherine the Great’s time.

If the villages were condemned to die of starvation, then the city was half starved. The retail stores were empty. Rationed bread was doled out in meager doses. Only heavy laborers got one kilogram per day. Civil servants got 400 grams, and dependents received from one to two hundred grams. That bread, black as earth, moldy with all sorts of additives, was the staple food.

Many in the city died of starvation. They were old, single pensioners. They received a very small pension—thirty rubles per month—on which one could live maybe one or two days. The state started selling the so-called “commercial bread” at forty rubles for two-and-one-half pounds.

The “dekulakization” [expropriation of kulak property] of the urban population progressed hand-in-hand with that of the village. The only difference (between the city and the village) was that the city dwellers were allowed to hang on to their lives, while the peasants were put to death by this criminally organized starvation...

I witnessed yet another tragic phenomenon. Starving mothers brought their children into the city and left them on the streets, hoping that they would be saved if someone picked them up. There was a pediatric clinic not far from the place where I lived. On my way to work I passed by this clinic. During the famine I saw small children at the gate of this clinic. When the famine first started, there were five or six children there each day, but with each day more children appeared. They looked horrible. They sat on the ground, emaciated, with strained, suffering faces. Many of them were bleeding from their intestines. Heartsick women from the local area knocked at the gate, shouting at the clinic to take these children. But the medical personnel were in no hurry to do this. But, when I returned home from work, these children would be gone. They took them in after all. On subsequent days, the scene was the same, and the number of abandoned children increased.

A sort of defensive protection was organized around the children. No one gave them bread or anything to eat, because, in the state these poor children were in, it was

understood that this could kill them. And the bread at the time was of such poor quality that it was harmful, even for adults.

In those days I had to go for a short time to Kharkiv, then the capital of the Ukraine. A conference of all the high-ranking employees of the industrial cooperatives was being held. As I noted, all craftsmen were forced into collectives also, just like the peasants. The “commercial bread” was already on the market at that time, at very high prices. There were enormous lines for it. The starving peasants tried to stand in the lines, but they were not allowed. I heard from the locals that the police took the living, the half-dead and the dead together out of the city in freight trucks and threw them into the snow.

**F. P. Burtiansky, “The Famine: A Pogrom of the Ukrainian Peasantry.” In *The Great Famine in Ukraine, 1932–33* (1988), pp. 96–101. Excerpts. Online at *Memoirs of the Famine*, <http://faminegenocide.com/resources/memoirs/pogrom1.html>.**

My family lived in Selevyna, a village in the Odessa province. It consisted of about two hundred households and was considered prosperous. During the struggle for national liberation, during the rule of the Ukrainian People’s Republic, my father was chosen the (assistant) vice county chief of Lovshyn. When Ukraine lost the war with the Russian communists, and the latter came to power, my father was arrested by the Cheka and summarily shot....

By 1932, virtually all peasants had been inducted into collective farms, and so the grain consignment plans were applied to the latter. In applying the plan to the collective farms, the government dictated that the state quotas were to be satisfied first, and then the needs of the individual collective and its workers dealt with. However, the grain consignment plan was so unrealistic that even entire collective farms were unable to meet them, let alone provide enough for the needs of its members. The cruelty of the Communist Party in its dealings with communized farmers offered no hope for compromise between the two parties. The defenceless collective farm workers were thrown to the mercy of fate, and were thus destined for famine. Nobody stood up for them, and there were no laws that protected the collective farms from such robbery. The Party and the government were like bandits stealing not only grain, but also all food. As a result of this, people managed to find food during the summer, but by fall and early winter, the famine began in earnest. My God. What a terrifying word that is, and how much more of a terrifying sight.

My wife and I had already fled to [the] Donbas to escape the famine. Here I found a job and received my food ration as a worker. These rations saved the three of us from a death by starvation. But not everyone survived: our infant son could not endure, and left us for a better world.

In the spring of 1933, my wife and I both worked in a mine, and we both received food rations. I filed for leave from work because I had decided to visit the village of my brothers and sisters, and to provide my in-laws with some assistance. While still on the train, I wondered at the fact that all of the windows were covered. Later, I found out that these were coverings put in place to prevent anyone from seeing what was going on outside. When I arrived at Zinovievsk (now Kirovohrad) I found a real hell. The station was empty, and all around swollen, starving people begged everyone who had arrived for but one crust of bread. The dead lay in the street—they were only taken away at night.

Those who were still moving and those who were already dead were all village people, I could tell by their clothing.

As I passed through the city, I noticed the building of the local government administration. There was a Torgsin (Soviet Foreign Trade) shop on the first floor. I steeled my courage and dared to look inside. Everything you could desire was in that store, but only for gold or silver. This was ostensibly free trade, and yet all communists, higher officials and OGPU operatives benefited from outfitters not open to the public called “zakritie raspredy” (closed outlets).

I went to a bazaar that was located near an alcohol distillery and saw a terrible sight. On one side of the plant, waste and still mash were pouring into the Inhul River. People were falling into this waste, drinking it, and dying slowly. No one made any effort to prevent them from doing this; no one tried saving their lives. On the plant grounds, cisterns full of clean mash stood under armed police guard—intended for feeding pigs and other livestock.

In the bazaar, it was possible to buy bread, but a half kilo piece cost forty to fifty karbovantsi [rubles].

I hurried on my way to the village, and arrived in the evening. Here I had spent my childhood and my tempestuous youth, but I could not recognize the place. It was all in gloom; everything was dead; no dogs barked, no birds chirped, no children shouted. I shuffled through the weed-covered streets until I reached my sister Onila’s house. The yard was overgrown with briars, and I was afraid to go into the house: was anyone alive in there? Both my sister and her husband were in fact alive, but they were both emaciated by hunger. They told me what was happening in the village and listed off the people who had already died of hunger. Only those who managed to come to work in the collective farm were surviving, because they could eat in the mess hall, as they did.

I stayed with my sister overnight and then moved on to Reimentarivka, where my in-laws lived. On the way, I passed through the Rozpashka farm. It stood empty. The once luxurious orchards were reduced to stumps overgrown with nettles and brambles, and collapsed houses seemed to stare up at the sky with their crumbling chimneys. People from Redchyna and Zashchyta told me that some of the villagers had been dekulakized and deported somewhere, and those who remained had died of starvation. The last residents of the farm, the father and his two sons, had been imprisoned, apparently for cannibalism.

When I reached Reimentarivka, I went to the village council building to register my arrival. The head of council was a relative of my wife’s, Ivan Hudzenko. He related the events of the recent past in the village to me and said that seven hundred people had perished of hunger.

On my way back to [the] Donbas, I stopped in on my sister once again. She told me that in Selevyna over three hundred people had died of hunger. It was only June at the time, two months of waiting until the next harvest.

**Vasyl Zaiika [Zaiika], “The Secrets of the Famine (Where the NKVD-OGPU Buried Thousands of Bodies).” In *The Great Famine in Ukraine, 1932–33* (1988), pp. 86–87. Excerpts. Online at *Memoirs of the Famine*, <http://faminegenocide.com/resources/memoirs/secrets1.html>.**

During the tragic years of the famine orchestrated by Moscow, I worked in the Donbas region in Mine 4–6 Maksymivka, as a coal quality inspector. My responsibility was to take samples of coal as it was loaded onto freight cars, and send these samples to the laboratory for testing. I then took the results of these tests to the chief inspection bureau.

In terms of work-time, my job was not regulated by norms, because the railyards supplied freight cars both day and night, and I had to appear at the time they arrived, whatever the time of day. The main street in Kadiivka, a town that I walked through each day, was Torhova Street. Virtually all of the administrative and commercial buildings were located on this street. There were various shops, a factory kitchen, a cafeteria for the workers of the “Illich” mine, a restaurant, and, at one end of the street, a bazaar that everyone called the “tolkuchka.” During the spring of 1933, famine was raging in the countryside. Peasants were trying to save themselves by escaping to the cities and towns in droves, because there at least some food was being issued by ration card. However, most of the peasants got neither jobs nor food and died in the street.

The chief inspection bureau was located behind a school park across from Torhova Street. Thus, every day I walked along it and saw hundreds of people, emaciated by hunger, as they lolled all swollen on the sidewalks, and saw the dead and dying among them.

One night in May 1933, I was walking to the bureau on business and witnessed how drunken policemen or NKVD (OGPU) [secret police] operatives, aided by some criminal elements (who always seemed to hang around the police), loaded the dead and half-dead onto trucks. The criminals, who were also drunk, paired up, took the bodies by the legs and arms and then threw them onto the trucks as if they were firewood. They always did this at night, in order that local residents not know where the bodies were taken or what was done with them. I too wondered about these secret burials many a time.

Once, also in May 1933, a messenger from the mine came to me at around one or two o'clock in the morning. He was a boy of about sixteen or seventeen, and he told me that the coal was being loaded at the mine. I dressed quickly, and we set out toward it. In order to get there more quickly, we did not pass through the town but cut across a field behind, following a path that led from the Parkom mine, past the no. 31 mine to the Maksymivski mines. There were a number of auxiliary mineshaft exits along the way that were used for ventilation and as emergency outlets in case of collapse of one of the tunnels. These exits, or “shufry” as they were called, were excavated about two hundred to three hundred metres away from the main shaft, and when the coal in the mine was exhausted they were fenced off and then covered over.

The path we followed wound about eight to twelve metres past one of these “shufry” that had fallen into disuse. As we drew nearer to it, we saw a truck pull up. Some NKVD (OGPU) men got out, turned off the light in the truck, rolled back the fences around the exits, and then the criminals began to throw the corpses and the dying into the shafts. We could hear the groans and cries of the unfortunate victims of this wantonness.

We could see the cargo of this “shipment” with complete clarity because the moon came out from behind a bank of clouds and lit up the sight of this unspeakable crime. It was obvious that the NKVD (OGPU) had given the order to use this place as a

burial ground: the police would not have dared. When we got to about thirty or forty metres away from the “shufr” a voice from the truck stopped us: “Halt! Who goes there?”

We stopped and a drunken NKVD (OGPU) man came up to us. We could now see his uniform. He drew his gun and said: “Who are you and what are you doing walking around here so late?” I had my certificate of place of work, so I showed it to him, explaining that I was on my way there, and that the boy was a messenger who was sent to me. I also said that we had taken a short cut to the mine to get there more quickly.

“What did you see or hear?” he asked sternly. I played stupid and replied: “We met nobody on the way, and we saw nothing and we heard nothing.” All the while, two more NKVD (OGPU) men got off the truck and one of them said: “Maybe you want to go down there too?” and pointed to the “shufr.” “I’ve already been in there,” I replied. “I worked in the mine for a couple of years, and now I’ve got another job.”

The NKVD (OGPU) men said nothing in return and turned back to the truck, speaking in Russian, and left two of the criminals standing beside us like guards. I recognized one of them—he was a pickpocket everyone called “Lafa.” The NKVD (OGPU) men came back up to us and told us to get on our way to work. Then one of them, apparently the chief, said: “If you breathe a word of this anywhere, one word, about this night, then we’ll see that you come back here.”

We left, and the two of us promised each other not to tell anyone, any time, not a word. However, rumours were already circulating among the people, because many had seen bodies of those who had died in the famine buried in these “shufry.” Mainly the no. 5 Semenivka shaft and the no. 8 Maksymivka shaft were used for this. Later all shafts so used were filled in and razed to the ground. Then they were divided into lots and sold to workers as gardens....

**“Survivor Transcript: Victor Tkacz,” *The Famine in Ukraine, 1932–1933*. Online at [http://www.theage.com.au/multimedia/ukrainefamine/transcripts/transcript\\_viktor.pdf](http://www.theage.com.au/multimedia/ukrainefamine/transcripts/transcript_viktor.pdf).**

Mine are a child’s experiences, but they are so vivid—the (mental) pictures I have are so vivid they have been with me all the time.

I remember fear. Fear of losing my parents, because I had seen what was happening. There was famine, and there was another disaster—collectivisation, Stalin’s idea.

Both my grandfathers were arrested and taken away to Siberia. My father, he was going to be next, he was told. So he ran away to [the] Caucasus. It was freer up there, because the communists had not as much control as they did in our area of Ukraine.

We didn’t know where he was. He just ran away, and he couldn’t write letters. He used to come home and bring food. We had been put in this category, kulaks [well-to-do peasants], therefore we had to pay what they called contribution, heavy taxes. They come in and they take all the food away.

And this was also where my fear was—there was nothing to eat! Mum had hidden somewhere bags of dried bread. It was dangerous to hide food. She used to bring it into the house little by little.

So it is winter time, and we’re still alive. And so they come in and say, “How come (you are still alive)?” And so they search the place again. Father knew we would perish if he didn’t help us. He had come in two or three nights before, and there was half



a loaf of bread.... They knew it wasn't locally baked, he had brought it from another city, and they immediately recognised it. They said, "Ha! Look what they eat. They are well fed!" And they took the half-loaf, it was the only thing they could find.

Later on, as they were going through the house, someone picked up a cooking pot and in it there were some dry beans hidden away. And they said, "Ah, here it is! Give us the bag. Bring out the bag." And I've got this vivid picture of them throwing the dry beans and they go on the floor as well. To me, that is the food that we cherish, and that was gone.

We were tossed out in the street. It was deep snow. Mum had run away because we got a message they were coming. She had gone to a neighbor's, because they were going to arrest her. She was watching from there.

My grandmother was the only one in the house with us at the time, so we run away and are standing on the other side of the street, watching what is going on in our yard. They are taking everything of ours on their carts—clothes and bedding. And they took grandmother out and shook her out of her coat and into the snow. To me that was a horrible picture.

After this, mum took us to the train. At night, because she knew they were waiting at the station to catch her. She got us on the train, not from the platform side, but from the other side somehow.

I don't know how she did this. She dragged us through the snow, two small boys—my brother was completely in the snow! It was like a cat taking her kittens. Anyway, we had to crawl under a stationary train, then she threw us on to another train that was already moving, and she got on.

The grain stores were all locked up and full of grain, and yet the people were starving. In this same place! The grain was guarded by police or military, with weapons. As a small child, I could roam and see these mountains of grain. People who pinched some, they were sent to Siberia. It was very strict.

You know the cobs, when they take the corn off? Then they use the cobs for fuel for the fires. But we were rubbing them one against the other to get anything at all that was left on these cobs, these husks. Mum used to boil that and give it to us as gruel.

We had to be very careful not to say where we were from. Father spoke very good Russian—undetectable, in fact—but us others, we lived in constant fear of being discovered.

I remember a big panic to run away again, because my father thought he had been recognised by someone who knew him back in Ukraine.

This is the fear in which we lived.

**Vladimir Keis, "Moi zhiznennyi put' i zhiznennye perezhivaniia moei molodosti na rodnoi ukrainskoi zemle do 1929 goda i Vtoraia Mirovaia Voina" (My Life and Youthful Experiences in My Native Ukrainian Land up to 1929 and the Second World War). Unpublished memoir. Excerpts, pp. 6-8. Translated by Alexander J. Motyl.**

In 1933 I left the city of Sochi.... I bought a ticket for the express train to Mykytivka. I figured that I would be a welcome guest in my native land and would relate where I had been and what I had seen. I would relate how I had spent my youthful years on my own.

I arrived in Mykytivka, got off the train, and entered the station. There was a large number of people in the building, more than in Sochi. But they looked the same: hungry, cold, and unfortunate. Women were looking for men, while men were looking for women. At that time many people had fled to the Donbas.

One man told me how to get to the No. 19–20 Mine. That evening I found Barracks No. 2, where the miners and their families lived. My family lived on the second floor. I knocked on the door. They said to come in. I walked into the room: there stood my mother. She threw herself at me with the cry: “Where have you been, my son?” Everyone wept for joy. My five-year-old sister, Nadia, and my three-year-old brother were in the room. Mama said that my father would soon arrive from work in the mine. She also said they were very fortunate to have avoided the famine.

Father received one kilogram of bread a day, while Mama and the children received 300 grams. I asked Mama where our Niura, who was then twelve years old, was. Mama said that, when they were separated, Niura stayed with her godmother, my father’s sister. Her last name was Zvonar. Mama also said that she had heard that Niura was living with people like them in Krasnyi Lyman. They were living near a bread factory in the barn of a repressed peasant. My father soon came from work and was very happy to see his prodigal son at home.

We all sat down to the table to eat supper. We did not eat as much as we talked. We ate some kind of black herb soup and bread. Mama said we should eat less bread and more soup because there was little bread and much soup. Father spoke of his fate: how the activists had plundered and thrown him out of his home. I spoke of my adventures: of where I had been and what I had seen. I stayed a few days with my parents. We agreed that I would go to find my sister Niura. This was in January 1933. A very cold winter had set in. My mother and father saw me off. I spent the whole night waiting in line for a ticket at the Mykytivka station. I managed to leave for the city of Sloviansk only in the morning. I had frozen and was very hungry.

Mama had given me nothing for the road because they themselves did not have enough food. I arrived in the city of Sloviansk. I very much wanted to eat. I had a little money, but there was nothing to buy. I bought a ticket for the train that took workers to the city of Krasnyi Lyman. I arrived in Krasnyi Lyman late in the evening. I was very cold and decided to spend the night in the station. When I awoke in the morning, I saw that I had fallen ill. Exiting the station, I asked people how to get to the bread factory. They told me which way to go. But I just stood and could not move: I felt ill and was shaking. I thought that I had found death, and not my sister.

Suddenly I saw a young girl approaching me. She came up to me and asked: “Is that you, Volodia?” That is how my sister Niura and I met. Tears flowed from my eyes. When I asked her what she was doing there, Niura said that she was going from house to house of the workers of state security and begging for food. I said that Mother and Father had sent me to find her. She said we should go together and gave me a piece of bread. I did not want to eat, as I had become quite ill. And so it happened that I did not find my sister, but she found me. She took me to the place where she lived. Next to the bread factory stood a house formerly inhabited by a rich peasant. Next to it stood a barn where they kept the sheep.

The dreadful smell of manure was pervasive. We entered the barn. Two old people were sitting inside—a man and a woman. Inside the barn was a small oven with

coal burning, as well as three wooden beds on which they slept. After greeting me, the old man with a large beard came up to me and asked me why I had come. I said that my sister had brought me to them. Niura then broke into tears and said that I really was her brother. At that point the old woman, Oksana, joined the conversation. They allowed me to stay with them. The old woman, Oksana, gave me soup to eat. I ate a bit and fell asleep. I recovered in a month. They said I had had typhus, and that a doctor had even come to see me. All that time those elderly people took care of me as one of their own. As it turned out, they too had been subjected to repressions. In very difficult times those people had saved me and my sister from death by starvation.

After the mass persecutions of peasants in 1929–31, a terrible famine took place in Ukraine. The communist authorities took everything they could find in homes, even from inadequately supplied peasants. They went from house to house and searched for hidden grain. They even took the beans that were being dried in the garrets for planting. The famine began in the winter, and in the spring of 1932 terrible things began to happen. People began to die in large numbers. The mass flight of peasants to cities began. But there was not enough to eat in the cities either. At that time they confiscated all poultry from the peasants. At the beginning of 1933 a full-scale famine set in. Millions of Ukrainians died of starvation. All the horrors of famine began to appear: cannibalism and the eating of corpses. I lack the words to convey the horror of the famine caused by the despots in Moscow. Mountains of corpses turned black on the roads. People were dying at train stops, in train stations, and in the fields where collective-farm grain was growing. Wherever you went, you would see the dead. When walking past the dead, people crossed themselves and said: “May the heavenly kingdom be yours.” The dead were buried in pits that were not even covered with earth. Thousands of crows circled above those pits. The problem was that during the very cold winter there was no one to dig graves and bury the dead.

The horror of death by starvation hung like a dark shadow all over Ukraine. The moaning and sobbing spread throughout our land. Some villages died out completely. All those people died a martyr’s death at the hands of the vicious executioner in Moscow. Whoever witnessed it knows that I am telling the truth.

**Tetiana Nykytiuk, “A Candle Lit in Memory and Hope,” *The Day Weekly Digest*, no. 10, 2003. Edited excerpts. Online at <http://www.day.kiev.ua/260363/>. Original Ukrainian text: “Svichka pam’iati ta nadii,” *Den’* (Kyiv), 20 March 2003.**

Why does my heart ache so whenever I recall that old story? I heard it from my mother when I was a little girl. Perhaps I was in a bad mood and did not want to clean my plate. In such cases parents, back in the 1950s, would say, “You must eat everything on your plate, for your dad and mom...” I do not remember, but I clearly remember what my mother told me. It happened in her youth, and the story would have a lasting impact on my mentality...

My mother, Antonina Tkachuk, was fortunate to be born in Kyiv. Although the famine after the Russian Revolution did not discriminate among its victims, it was not as ruthless in the big city. However, my mother’s famished childhood, when a boiled beet and no bread was considered a festive treat in winter, would take its toll in the form of countless ills as she grew older.

After school she enrolled in an agricultural technical school in Kyiv. Together with other happily young and enthusiastic Komsomol [Communist Youth League] girls, she would be sent to neighboring villages for her academic practice. It was in 1933, and food was a problem in Kyiv, so the girls expected to be better off on the collective farms. Somehow, my mother, then 16, went to the village assigned her alone. She had to walk 60 kilometers. She had long eaten the small slice of bread she had taken from home. Her young system vigorously protested an empty stomach, and she strained her eyes, trying to spot a village by the road. If and when she found one, she thought she would be sure to have something to eat; there were no people anywhere in the world as friendly and hospitable as those in the Ukrainian countryside.

Finally, she saw a village. It looked strange. No dogs barking, no chickens cackling, no children playing and shouting. There was no one in sight. As she reached the place, she found it deserted and frighteningly quiet, every home standing like an old blind beggar, all the windows hastily boarded up, the boards blackened with rain and snow. And then she noticed a cabin with its door ajar. Tentatively she stepped inside. "Anyone here?" Something moved in the rags on top of a big stove. She heard a faint woman's voice, "What do you want, little girl?" My mother looked closer and recoiled, horrified. A living skeleton was looking at her, eyes glinting in a face all skin and bones. Stammering, she explained that she was on her way to such-and-such a village and that she had hoped to find a place to rest and have something to eat; that this place looked so weird, so dead. "You're right, the place is dead. Some died of hunger, others left for the city to stay alive," the woman whispered and then told my mother something she refused to believe. No one of sound mind, with healthy instincts, above all that of self-preservation, demanding food and drink, would believe it. "See that small chunk of bread on the table? Take it. You're young, you need it. I don't. It won't help me anyway. I am dying." The woman did not ask her to give her bread but to take it and eat it!...

My mother took it and ate it (it was hard as stone, made from goosefoot, weeds, and acorns) as she went on her way. She ate and wept for that woman with such a big heart and because there was nothing she could do to help, for she could not understand what was happening. No one heard her... Like so many others, she knew nothing about the man-made famine, the Holodomor. She knew that one of her friends had been told by a well-wishing chairman of a collective farm to go home because she looked too healthy for her own good. One morning in Kyiv she had seen several dead emaciated bodies in country clothes by a bakery. A woman nearby had whispered that they had eaten fresh bread on an empty stomach....

**Tamara Orlova, "My Beloved Unhappy Mother a Murderer?" *The Day Weekly Digest*, no. 10, 2010. Edited excerpts. Online at <http://www.day.kiev.ua/292315#>. Original Russian text: "Moia dorogaia neschastnaia mama... ubiitsa?" *Den'* (Kyiv), 12 February 2010.**

"Tomochka, do you remember anything from your past, I mean that horrible famine seven years ago?" my mother asked me back in 1940.

"I do, Mom, I remember everything," I replied. My mother looked at me and remained silent for a couple of minutes; then she said quietly, as though unsure of what she was about to tell me: "Please listen to me carefully and do as I say. There is one thing that you must promise me. Do you remember the man who bit your leg during the

Holodomor? You started shrieking with pain. I heard you, dashed out of the cabin, and grabbed him by the throat to protect you. I couldn't stop strangling him with my hands until the man died. Please keep this secret as long as you live. Please swear to me this will remain between the two of us!" Mom started crying, and I told her no one would ever learn of this secret, cross my heart and hope to die.

Arriving at my twilight years, I am tortured by my oath of secrecy; I cannot tell the horrifying story about what we—and other Ukrainians—went through during the Holodomor period, and how we survived. I am still amazed that my mother and I did, with families dying of hunger around us. Few people survived the Holodomor in our village, although I remember that the year was marked by good harvest yields....

In 1932, our family was subject to dekulakization [expropriation of kulak property]. They [the NKVD] came and robbed us mercilessly. I believe it happened in October 1932. Seven men came, and two wearing militiamen's uniforms, with four horse-driven carts, and told us that they were acting on orders from "upstairs"; that they had to divest us of all our property, evict us from our home, and send us into exile because we were "hostile elements." That included elders and children. They spent three days robbing our household; they even confiscated our winter clothes, as well as our two horses, two cows, pigs, poultry, grain, and kitchenware. My father was thrown behind bars in Berezna; my grandfather made himself scarce. My elder brother was placed in the care of my old maternal grandmother in the village of Shabalyniv; my paternal grandmother succeeded in staying with her daughter, whose husband was a Party member. This left my mother and me in our plundered home, with no clothes or food. We were downright beggars. Mom told me later that she had spotted two men wearing our clothes—members of the dekulakization team that had invaded our home. In fact, our home was turned into the office of the local collective farm. Mom and I were shown the door and told to go wherever we wanted. We had nowhere to go and kept sitting in our courtyard, knowing that no one in the village would have anything to do with a dekulakization victim, for such were the Soviet authorities' instructions. Eventually, one of the local kolkhoz functionaries walked over and told us that we could live in a cabin, but we alone. He added, "If I find anyone else living with you, I will throw all of you out; you'll have to live in the street." The cabin in which we were allowed to live was actually my grandmother's windowless pantry, where she had kept all kinds of trash. However, this cabin was a godsend for us. Mom brought an armful of dry straw—there was a sheaf at the back of the barn-cum-stables—and made our abode somewhat warmer, for there was no heating. We survived. How? I went out to answer a call of nature one evening (in early November). It was dark outside, and as I stepped out someone grabbed me by the leg. I fell and felt a terrible pain. I started yelling and saw Mom dash out of the cabin. She looked like a zombie—I could not even recognize her. She ran over and pounced on what turned out to be a man on top of me. She grabbed him by the throat and did not let go. She started yelling that she could not get her hands off his throat. We were both screaming. Then she managed to get her hands off the man's throat. She stood up, grabbed the man by his clothes, and dragged him behind the barn. She returned to the cabin, washed the blood off her hands, then washed my knee wound, applying a clay bandage (she used the clay that grandma had used to polish the floor). My wound did not heal until the summer. I still have a scar left from where the man bit me. As it was, Mom and I left our cabin the next morning to meet Maria Shablykha, a woman who lived next

door. She asked about the yells she had heard the previous night. We went over to the barn and saw a boy dressed in rags, with blood spots on his chest. Shablykha said he was between 12 and 13 years old. His mouth was open, with just one front tooth left. Mom and I were crying. Shablykha was saying this was the werewolf who had bitten a three-year-old boy the previous night in Azarovychky. He had sucked his blood, and the boy died shortly after. This was God's punishment. My mother changed afterwards: she was like a living skeleton, with shaking limbs. I remember thinking she was not the Mom I remembered. Famine had changed her beyond recognition, and I became afraid of her. Even decades later, I still cannot figure out how we survived; we had no food, just water. Mom kept saying that the situation would change for the better; that there would be grass in the spring, along with leaves, bark, and roots.

We heard a knock on our cabin door early in the morning. It was early March, and the frost was murderous. Mom opened the door and let in a man who looked horrible, dirty, unshaven, and dressed in rags. His feet were wrapped in rags for want of shoes. Mom was scared, but the man said, "Have no fear, Dunia; I'm your father-in-law; please let me spend at least an hour in your home, for I can't survive in the woods. I'm on the militia's wanted lists; they want to exile me to the north of Russia." He was an intelligent man, proud of his Cossack heritage—a well-to-do and hard-working individual reduced to enemy-of-the-people status. What had he done to deserve such a lot? He and his family had worked hard from dawn to dusk. None of his family had wronged any fellow villagers. Mom was afraid he had been spotted by a kolkhoz activist or militiaman; that we would be thrown out of our cabin and left to die in the street. As it was, my grandfather spent a day with us. In the evening he told Mom he was leaving. Mom kept walking around the room, wringing her hands, racking her mind for a way to save her father-in-law. In the end, her fear for her baby got the upper hand. If and when discovered, both of us would be thrown into the street, and no one would dare to take care of us, for there was a decree from "upstairs" that no one was to accommodate a dekulakized character on pain of harsh punishment. And so my grandfather left. His frozen naked body was discovered the next morning by the dam. That same day a militia officer visited Mom and asked if she had accommodated the "old Bannyk" the previous night. Without waiting for her answer, he faced me: "Hey, little one, did your granddad visit you last night?" I replied in the negative (I understood the situation even then). The man told Mom: "I'll have you evicted if I find your testimony to be false. You're allowed to live here because you have a child. We found his frozen body by the dam; we'd been hunting him down for half a year, only to find him right under our nose."

Mom told me later the weather would get better; God willing, we would survive this horrible period and settle in Russia, following in the footsteps of many, for in Russia we would not have to experience the horrors we did in Ukraine. Vain hopes of a horror-stricken people. We lived through every painful day, hoping for warmer weather, so as to walk all the way to Russia to find salvation. In the depths of poverty we lived on hope alone, as did all those around us. But there was one living skeleton, our former villager, who told my mother—and all the other starving villagers who were dreaming of salvation in Russia—that their dreams would never come true. He said he had been on the Russian border and was nearly killed there, for there were too many people trying to cross it, and soldiers and armed civilians kept them from doing so. Some Ukrainians tried to cross the

border anyway: they were hit with rifle butts, and some were shot on the spot. He had seen bodies being carted away, so he returned to Ukraine's living hell.