

Memories of the year 1933

Lysenko street 7/3
Lviv.

In the newspaper the “Village News”, in the article “The famine of – 33”, the survivors are invited to share their experiences of that time. I was born in the third month of 1924, in the village of Soboliwka, Teplyckyj region, Wynnytcia province in the family of a blacksmith. Our family consisted of parents and four children. In the year 1930 our family was “rozkurkulena”, meaning all our possessions were confiscated and taken into the collective. They took away the thrashing machine, the engine, the other implements, the smithy the barn, all the produce and all the cattle. On top of that we were supposed to pay a big tax. Our father left us and we did not know where he was, but mother was summoned every night to pay the tax. We were destitute and already experiencing hunger. We did not plant a garden because we had no seeds and there was nobody to help us. The year 1931 was already terrible. Mother planted tobacco, which we later mashed, stalks and leaves together, sold this and bought corn out of which we made and ate a thin gruel.

In 1932 it became even worse. We were tortured by the taxes. Mother was summoned every night by the village council and we cried, afraid that she will not return. My sister Vera was the youngest, I was eight, my sister Nadia four, my brother Tolik was five. This torture continued to the point that mother did not know or comprehend what was going on, she was called insane. This is how it happened. When they came in the night to pick her up, she put on her coat and went with them. When they arrived at the village council and again started demanding that she pay the tax, she took off her coat and said: “Take it”. All present froze and hung their heads. Before them stood a naked woman. From that time they did not demand the tax, but still came around several times and dug up the yard, made holes in the walls, cleaned out whatever there was in the pots and for a long time after that were making raids at night. We were constantly hungry and happy to get even the thin gruel.

Then came the most horrible year 1933. In the spring, we already depleted to the end, were eating whatever we could find and it was hard to find anything: a dog, a cat or a frog. We were hungry all the time and there was nobody we could beg for food, because all the neighbours like us had no food to give. All around weeds grew, nobody had strength to plant a garden and there was nothing to plant. The famine conquered all. People turned into beasts. Terrible hatred ruled the land. Nobody saw or heard anybody else, people moved like shadows. Our mother was just skin and bones. I, on the other hand was all swollen. Brother Tolik was taken into the hospital, Nadia was taken into the collective’s kindergarden, Vera was still in a crib. Nobody knew where anybody was, nobody looked for others. I ate whatever I could find: weeds, leaves, bark of young branches.

Although I was swollen, I could still move around and found brother Tolik in the hospital. I sat outside his window, waiting for him to die, because in his little fist I saw a small piece of bread. I sat like that all day and all night and heard him crying as he lay dying. He died in the night and they took him away and never gave me that little piece of bread. I cried a lot, because I had to get home but had no strength to do it. I don’t remember when I looked into the crib, but Vera was no longer there. When she died, I don’t know. Father was brought home in a cart, he was emaciated

and sick (suffering from bloody diarrhoea). He was lying down and could not get up. I was swollen, but could still walk for a little while and then also stopped walking. I remember once crawling out to the gate and begging the passers by for something, although I knew that I would get nothing. Along our street wagons were passing on the way to the market, it was Sunday, I was lying at the gate. Our neighbour Sydorenko came out and called out to me offering a piece of bread. I answered "Auntie if you want to give me a piece of bread, you have to walk over to me, because I can't walk to you."

Their house was situated higher than ours, I clearly remember what happened next and tears run down my face. A crowd gathered at our gate, both neighbours and strangers and we saw Sydorenko being led out of the house by a policeman with something in pails carried after them. It came out that our neighbour had eaten her son Kostia. My mother scolded me for leaving the house fearing that the same fate almost met me. As for Kostia, he was fourteen years old and a drayman for the collective. He drove around the village picking up dead bodies and transporting them to the common grave. When the bodies had not been picked up for three days, the manager of the collective went to inquire about Kostia and his mother told him that she had eaten him. She showed him the crocks full of meat, that stood on the windowsill. Sydorenko was arrested and taken to the village council, while the members of commission searched her whole property, where inside tree stumps they found many children's hands, feet and heads.

Today we have the opportunity to remember and write about this, but even earlier I used to tell people about my childhood. I told them how my mother and I used to go at night into the collective field to gather ears of wheat into a little bag. We could not do this in the day time, because if caught, not only was the wheat taken away, but we were also beaten with a whip. We did not take the ears home, but hidden in the woods, got the seeds out and so carried a handful of them home in our bosoms where we made a porridge. We did not plant a garden, as there were no seeds, but sowed poppy-seed. In our village there is a sugar factory, we picked up the sugar beets which fell off the wagons, being transported to the factory and saved them for the winter. Baked sugar beets with poppy-seeds are very tasty. Thus we survived.

Finally, I would like to add my previous address:

Wynnycka province,

Teplyckyj region,

v. Soboliwka,

Lisna st. (after war}

Cherwona Halyna Ivan.

Father Chervonyj Ivan Oleksiewych, died 1969

Mother Chervona Pelagia Afan., died 1979

I live in the city of Lviv since 1945. I am married with two children: a son and a daughter. My married name is Woznenko H. I.

Honourable! I have a personal request, please, if you have any information about Savchenko Heorhij Makarowych, born 1921, please send any information you have to my address: Lviv, Lysenko St. 7/3, Woznenko H. I. 290008.

With Regards