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Into the memorial book “The Famine of 1933”

Korupii, Ivan Vasylovych, born 1925, city of Koziatyn, 4 Sklyarova Street, apt. 19

The events of 1932-1933 left terrible recollections in my memory.

I was only 7-8 years old at that time. My father, Vasyl Tymofiievych, was among the first to enter into the “Spartak” collective farm in the village Vilshka, Brusylivskii district, Zhytomyr oblast. He gave over to the collective farm two grown and one young horse, while one cow remained at the house. It was not easy for collective farm workers then since they calculated for the year that each be given 250-300 grams [of bread] per labor day. There was so little money that one could not pay the agricultural tax, and for a labor day one was given several kopeks.

And then 1932 drew closer. Starting in the fall, all the grain gathered in the collective farm was taken away for grain procurement, and then they began to gather grain from the farmers as well, especially those who had not joined the collective farm and still had their own land.

The winter was very cold. There was too little wood, and most people fueled the furnaces and ovens with straw. Hunger and malnutrition became obvious in the spring. Across the village a massive famine began. People died from hunger.

We had an uncle, Ilko Oliinyk, who worked in the militia in Kyiv (Lenin district) and who helped my relatives and my sisters Haia and Olena give their children to the orphanage so that they would not die of hunger. So Nina, Hania, and Mykola Puzenko went to live at the Kaharlyk children’s shelter. And Oleksandr and Dmytro Zakharchenko were also sent away, but we did not know where they were sent. My two twin brothers, born in 1930, were still living at home.

In order to survive somehow, father began to grind up the remnants from corncobs, and mama would make pancakes from this. The little ones could not eat it, and father started bleeding. Mother brought her [wedding] rings and gold earrings to the *Torgsin* [government hard currency store], which she exchanged for several kilograms of various cereals, which lasted for a few days. Some time near the end of April, our cow gave birth, and our salvation from starvation began on account of a glass of fresh milk.

In May I herded the cow into the field and pastured it, together with my cousins Mykola, Vasyl, and Leontii. There we were able to boil oilcakes in a cauldron every day and we ate them like a delicacy at that time. And when the rye began to ripen in the field, I secretly would tear off shoots, burn them in the fire, wipe them and bring them home to share equally with all in glasses, and my mother poured milk on it, and we had rye porridge.

Mother tried to make pancakes from “horse sorrel” [sometimes called Asiatic Dock], but I couldn’t eat these. The adults managed to eat them because they had to, and still I had to go to work on the collective farm. At this time, the draining of swamped fields was going on. For this difficult work they issued half a loaf of bread, which men carried home to their children and wives.

One time, an acquaintance of mama’s named Masha gave her meat, saying that it was from a rabbit her brother-in-law had killed. But we did not rush to eat this meat; mama knew that Masha Havryliukova was starving terribly and that they didn’t have any rabbits. Then, our neighbour Semklita Puzenko suggested that we figure out whether this was rabbit or dog meat. If it was rabbit, then her dog Nerka would pounce on it; if it was dog meat, then the dog would ignore it.

They placed the meat on paper in the road and unleashed Nerka, who ran right past the piece of meat without glancing at it. That’s how it was revealed that this was dog meat.

They sent me to return the meat to Masha. I ran quickly to the hut at the end of the village. The door was shut, the hut was dark. I became scared because I knew that her brother was a bandit and really bad man. I put down the piece of dog meat near the door and ran back. There was a commotion going on at home as they were worried that these starving people could kill me and eat me. My father and mother were already running to meet me.

It was still a long time before the new harvest, and the inhabitants of the village would gather on the potato fields and pits where potatoes were stored (clamps), where they went searching for frozen potatoes left from the previous year, which by now were just pieces of starch, and from this starch they made edible pancakes and a starchy soup.

At this time the collective farm organized a meal in the cafeteria once a day. Basically they cooked a borscht made from clover, for which we brought a large wagon swaying with a green mass of clover each day. There they washed, crushed, and cooked it in large boilers, adding some frozen potatoes or vetch seeds. And at lunch, the hungry collective farmers ate whatever the collective farm’s cooks had prepared, and so they did not completely collapse on the collective farm field.

In the winter we also had meals at the school. This cafeteria food was the same, hard on the stomach. During the famine, Hania died in the children’s shelter, and we still do not know where Dmytro and Oleksandr ended up. Nina now lives in Kyiv, but Mykola is already dead. Opanas Puzenko also died, and Mykhtod Zakharchenko had a family of eight; he was de-kulakized, though not exiled.

With the onset of the harvest, we had sown our own rye and wheat in our garden, which saved us from the continuing famine.

In addition, our grandmother, Efrosyna Korupii, who lived with her daughter Natalka, field leader on the collective farm, consistently supported us with day-old food.

From that time, my favorite dish has always been yesterday’s borsht, in which there are overcooked potatoes and beans, which give it a taste that has no equal.

And these holidays were not often, because they cooked only for themselves and not often was there this tasty borsht left over.

A terrible evil at that time was the murder of a grandfather and grandmother in the village (they were called the Horilys on the street), which their neighbor Bas committed, after these old people hosted him in their home. After killing them, Bas took all the things from their chest to his place and set fire to the old man’s house. So, they both burned in the house. Later, the murderer was tried in the village, but I do not remember his sentence.

So that our cow wouldn’t be stolen, the entrance to our barn was through a room in the house. And with such measures, thieves repeatedly attempted to break in through the wall of the barn to steal the cow, but they feared father, who, though an invalid of the second class from the imperialist war, was rather clever and strong in resisting them.

It is quite rightly emphasized that it is necessary to establish all who perished from the famine in 1933 as a reminder to all future generations of the difficult pages of our history, which our “leaders” created in the Kremlin after the death of Lenin in the struggle for a high position in the Kremlin.

Korupii, Ivan Vasylovych, participant of the Great Patriotic War [WWII], participant in the Victory Parade in Moscow, head of the union of veterans of war and labour of Koziatyn raion.

Signed

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