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### **Famine of 1933–1934**

I was born on January 15, 1924 in the village of Soldatske, Velyka Pysarivka raion, Kharkiv oblast (today Sumy oblast). In 1933 I was nine years old. I remember well how the suffering of the rural population began. [The authorities] began to drive people into the collective farm, but none of the peasants wanted to join the collective farm. Then they began to confiscate livestock: horses, cows, sheep, pigs. But the villagers rebelled, beat up the activists, and took their cattle home. A woman who rang the bell to sound the alarm was removed from the bell tower and sent somewhere, never to return. Then they began to carry out grain procurement. This is how they conducted it: They walked from house to house and told each farmer

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how many quintals of grain he had to deliver. The farmers turned over the grain. Then they came again and asked for more grain, but a smaller amount this time. The farmers delivered a second time. Then people began to hide any sacks of barley or rye that they had left. Then the grain procurement brigades began to make their rounds daily. They made themselves iron stakes and used them to find pits that had been dug in the houses, entryways and yards, and gardens. If they found any grain, they confiscated it. When they had taken all the grain, they began to take potatoes, beets, sauerkraut. If somebody kept bean or cucumber seeds for planting in the spring or something edible

they took it. Nobody cared whether any food products would be left for large families of 8 to 12 people.

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There was nothing left to plant in the garden in the spring. Those who came by 10 potatoes, peeled them so thinly that there would be something to eat and then they planted the peels in the ground.

People ate beet pulp and ground straw and tree leaves in mortar bowls, but the brigade continued to walk around and break the mortars. People began to die. Horses began to die at the collective farm. One after another, people asked when a [dead] horse was going to be carted out, and when it was being driven to the mass animal burial site, they walked behind the wagon as if behind a deceased human being. Before the horse could even be thrown off the wagon, the people tore the carcass to pieces. Those who did not get any meat, took the intestines, head, or legs.

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Families around us died out. The streets became deserted. The whole family of my father's older brother, Fedir Danylovyh Panov, died out. My mother's sister had five small children. She and the children died. My uncle travelled around looking for food. He arrived at the Kyrykivka railroad station swollen from hunger and unable to walk. The people collecting corpses wanted to send him to the next world while they were at it. But he cried and persuaded them to leave him, and at night he crawled home. He lived there until the war, and then he was sent to the front, where he shouted: "For the Fatherland, for Stalin!" He returned from the war, lived for a while, and then died.

I remember something being sown in the spring, but I don't know where they got the seeds. Across the river from our farmstead, they sowed hemp and I tried to sneak in

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to steal a handful of hemp seeds and throw them into my mouth. But the sowers would not let me come anywhere near, because they themselves ate the seeds all the way [home], while I just swallowed saliva.

My father had seven children—five sons and two daughters. He saved us from starvation. He buried a bag of millet under the trunk of an apple tree and the brigade did not find it. In the dead of night, my father would dig it up and fill a bowl with millet. They would covertly grind it together with the husks in a mortar, and by morning mother would cook a gruel, and we ate it before the neighbors found out. My mother sold a silver cross for 1 kg of millet and so we survived in 1933.

Then came 1934, which was even harder for those who remained alive. There was nothing to plant in the gardens,

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everything had been taken away and there was nothing to expect. Mother scolded my father, telling him to join the collective farm, otherwise the family would die. They told my father that if he did not join the collective farm, they would take him outside the raion, as they had taken our neighbour, Ivan Perfylovych Bocharov. So my father joined the collective farm and began to mow the meadow which now belonged to the collective farm. There he received one kg of fodder bran for one hectare of mowed field. Father mowed with his eldest son Nikolai [Mykola], who was around 20 years old at the time. They would take a bucket with them and cook lunch there: as much water as possible with just enough flour to cloud the water. They took me with them. I crawled around the meadow, plucked the heads of the clover, and ate them.

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But even though they cooked lunch in the meadow, my father and brother were already so exhausted that they had no strength to mow. One day after lunch they started mowing and suddenly my brother threw his scythe down and left, no one knows where to this day. My father cried and I remember him saying, how am I to finish this mowing? My father received no more rations. So I went with my neighbor (a boy) to Kharkiv in

search of bread [rolls]. But in Kharkiv the police soon caught us and sent us back home by train. At home I searched the garden for pumpkin rind, but it was impossible to chew. So then I went looking for a state farm and 35 km away I found the Parkhomivka State Farm, where they took me in and I gathered

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spikelets in the field with other children like myself. We were led by a young Pioneer leader (*pionervozhataia*). And this is how I survived until the harvest. From the new harvest, my father was issued 20 kg of flour. My mother baked bread and divided it up in small amounts among us.

In 1935, I attended school—I don't remember what grade, third or fourth. I know that older classmates, one from the 7th grade, one from the 6th, and one from the 5th (he was an orphan, had no parents)—these three students wrote a letter to [Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars Viacheslav] Molotov asking why such a famine had been created. [Officers from the] VChK<sup>1</sup> arrived and summoned them to the office of the director, Vasyl Vasyliovych Khilaenko, two or three times. After that, they were taken away and their fate is unknown. Some other men were also taken away under suspicion, but of what?

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To the question whether anyone helped the starving people, [the answer is]: No, they confiscated everything until people died of hunger. And those who were left alive, were driven into the collective farm. To the question of how many people died of hunger in the village, I think that no one knew their number, because ours was a large village, and large families and whole streets died out. And it was very dangerous to conduct a count at that time. To the question whether the city helped the villagers in the spring of

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<sup>1</sup> All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for fighting Counter-revolution and Sabotage, commonly known as the Cheka. [Translator's note].

1933, [the answer is]—no one helped. In the villages, the peasants themselves sowed the fields with what they had. The horses were so exhausted that they fell in the furrow, and the drivers raised them to their feet and continued to drive them. As for people, I have no more to say, because I've already described what went on.

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In my opinion, the hunger was created deliberately in order to destroy the unsubmitive peasant population, as well as to destroy the leadership of Ukraine. Not all of them were enemies of the people. But Molotov and [Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party Lazar] Kaganovich were not the only ones who were guilty, the peasants themselves were also guilty. For example, in our village Nikita [Mykyta] Denysovych Poimanov and his wife went from house to house and took away even cucumber seeds from the farmers, thereby killing hundreds of people. When the Germans arrived, their policemen hanged the old man and his wife from a post in the center of the village. But for the hundreds of people who died in our village, for the millions of people who died in Ukraine, it was not enough to hang an old man and woman. Many were guilty.