

№. 197

Aleksei Andriyanovich Khurdei
No. 95 Oktyabryskaya Street
City of Gukovo, Village of Zverevo
Rostov Oblast [Russia]
346360

Dear Editorial Board of the Great Memorial Book '33: *Famine.*'

I am 62 years old, on a pension, and a former resident of the village of Petrivka, Poltava raion in Poltava oblast. My name is Alexei Andriyanovich Khurdei, currently living at No. 95 Oktyabrskaya Street, village of Zverevo, city of Gukovo, in Rostov oblast.

I have read in the newspaper *Silski visti* [Rural News] about a memorial book being prepared under your direction, '33: *Famine.*

I decided to write about the terrible famine there was in our village.

I was 7 years old, and I remember everything as if it were not long ago, in the village of Petrivka, where I was born and grew up. There was a terrible famine in 1933; there were 520 households, and half of the village died from hunger. There were incidents of cannibalism. Parents died from hunger, and two brothers and a five-year-old sister remained; they stabbed her to death and ate her. A mother and daughter ate her six-year-old brother and son, they were taken to the police and their fate is unknown.

I am writing and I cannot help but cry for my fellow villagers who died from the terrible famine.

In 1932, the harvest was not bad. My mother did not want to join the collective farm. We had 1.5 hectares [3.7 acres] and a horse, and that year Mama planted wheat. It yielded a good crop, we harvested it, tied it in bundles and wanted to bring it home. But at that time, every village had wheat-requisitioning brigades from the raion [district] center, and a commissar [*upovnovazhenyi*] who headed up these brigades. The commissar rode around the fields in a buggy, and when he got to our house, I, Mama and my brother and sister were loading the bales into a cart. He said, "Where are you taking the bales?" Mama said, "We'll wrap it up with a chain and take it home, we'll turn over the winnowings to the state, and what remains will be for sowing and for

ourselves.” He said, “Take it to the threshers”; there was a horse-driven thresher at the collective farm. “The guys will thresh it for you, you give them something for their efforts, and take it home.” Mama did this and gave them 3 liters of vodka and had it threshed, but then they didn’t give her a single grain to take home. My poor Mama cried so hard and asked the commissar to give her even just a sack out of the 90 pouds [1.6 tons], but he didn’t want to hear it and got into his buggy and went away to keep fooling the next people.

They confiscated everything from our home down to the grain, even the beet fodder, and the potatoes, peas and beans; they even took the pumpkins. There was a shed, a trunk, and a chest of drawers; they took everything but didn’t kick us out of the house. No one cared about the house as it was in ruins... nobody would have bought it.

There was no food at all at home, but Mama had two gold earrings, an engagement ring, a cross from a chain, and two five ruble gold coins.

In Poltava, there were *Torgsin* [state-run hard-currency] stores, where all kinds of food could be had in exchange for gold things. We somehow survived the winter. Mama took all the gold things to the *Torgsin*, and we survived somehow until May; it was very hard to survive until May, June.

My brother Vanya, who was two years older than me, and I began to forage for food. We ate baby magpies, crows, sparrows, mussels; we collected mussels in the river, snails, and I could climb any tree to catch magpies and crows; we ate all kinds of grasses, burdock, milkweed, clover. Mama fried cakes made out of linden leaves, and we ate oak bark.

I nearly died; we went around bloated. I wore a shirt and pants of hand-made fabric that Mama dyed with a handful of black elderberries, which by some miracle remained.

At every step, there were gangs armed with knives and axes; no one caught them, the police looked the other way.

At the collective farm, lunch was made for those who buried the dead. There were so many corpses that they couldn’t even bury them. They hauled several dozen at a time on carts, and there were cases when they brought them to the graveyard still alive and threw them all in pits and buried them. Many people died when the spikelets appeared in the fields; people ate the empty still unripe spikelets, and died there on the field. People’s horses, cows, pigs, fowl, their equipment were forcibly taken to the

collective farm, and in the winter, there was nothing to feed them and they all died, not a single dog or cat was left in the village. The streets were overgrown with weeds taller than a man; to sum up, a flourishing village turned into a jungle, and not a single person could be seen. Everyone who was still alive was afraid to appear on the street. When they went to bed, everyone took an axe or a pitchfork with them; not rarely but often, gangs would come to anyone who had any food, and a bloody battle would take place, and there would be a lot of victims. In the neighboring village, 17 people were murdered over night during a battle, and no one from the rural soviet [council] took an interest, let alone the police; that was the kind of lawlessness that was going on. And here, 55 years have passed since that time, and I am very hurt and ashamed that our government permitted such lawlessness.

Whoever had two cows and two horses was considered a *kulak*, and during the January frosts, activists drove little children and nursing infants out of their homes into the severe frost, and they froze to death and no one cared. And if I had not seen that with my own eyes, I would not have believed that activists from the Communists and Komsomol members [Communist Youth League] did this. Or how on Easter, they went into the church, and as the priest was blessing the *paskha* [Easter bread], they pulled down their pants and relieved themselves.

I am sure that if those times returned, it would all be exactly the same; it is even the same now, the blood of our children and grandchildren is being shed in Afghanistan for 10 years now, and no one is to blame for it. Whoever started the war is gone; he died, and how can you go after dead people.

When the Cultural Revolution was happening in the People's Republic of China, our newspapers wrote that the Chinese were doing it wrong, but they are silent about what was done in our country in the '30s, '40s, '50s, and you have to ask who they borrowed our experience from, but Mao Zedong did not do what Joseph Dzhigashvili [Stalin] did, he didn't starve them and didn't have such outrages in the prisons and labor camps like our "great leader of the peoples" did.

Dear editorial board of the great memorial book '33: *Famine*:

I beg you, I am not a very literate person, and I would like to get your advice on how to write so that you could print at least my last name and one line how I survived the '33 famine by a miracle. I very much beg you to advise me how to write.

My letter may have many grammatical mistakes, but I am sorry, I had very little schooling, only five grades. Everything I have written is the pure truth and nothing but the truth.

Respectfully,

I await your advice.

To the following

[Signature]

January 18, 1989