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Village of Dnistrovka

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I was born in the village of Pariivka, Illinstskyi raion, Vinnytsa oblast. I have decided to write my memories of the fiercely terrible 1933 famine.

I was then eleven years old. I remember (there were nine of us) how hard it was for us to live; we ate wild leek, nettles, linden leaves, mussels, and frogs caught in the river Sob. Mama was working in people's gardens and would look for frostbitten potatoes from which we made potato cakes to eat. My papa died from dysentery. And we seven children and mother survived. In the village of Soroka there is a government mill where people could bring all kinds of things and in exchange receive the food waste from the mill like pulp or chaff, so we survived.

In the village, people were walking around swollen from hunger, sad, and everyone only wanted to eat. And my mother's sister Maria and uncle Kalenyk and three children, Dunka, Aliosha, and Roman, the whole family died. I still remember how Dunka said I do not want to die of hunger. And her second sister, Motria, took her children away to Kyiv and left them there so they would be taken to an orphanage. [Motria's] older son came back on foot to us and is still alive, but the younger brother, Ivan -- to this day, we do not know what happened to him. Our aunt herself also died from starvation.

And how I remember the many corpses found everywhere because it was spring: in the forest and in the fields, on the streets, people had just collapsed from hunger, and they died. A cart went around and gathered the corpses and buried them in one pit without any coffins. I remember once I was grazing the cow, and in a field by the forest, a boy, Sirozha [Serhiy] died. We shepherds dug a pit in the meadow, gathered grass and tall grasses, laid the body in the pit, and covered it with grass and buried it. There wasn't even anyone to bury the corpses.

When on the collective farm, the wheat spikelets were getting ripe, we children gathered, peeled and ate them; that was already good.

I remember how they made a commune in our village; they collectivized the cows and people were to receive some milk rations, per person. Our father did not give up the cow, because he said let the children still drink milk, as well as one other person Strichenko [did not give up his cow?] and then after about two weeks, the cows were given back but you had to pay 50 rubles; this was done without much thought put into it. That is everything I remember.

I cannot forget how badly I wanted to eat.

I would like for this excerpt to be included in the memorial book, "The 1933 Famine."

Pensioner Bilash, Z. S.

Chernivtsi oblast, Kelments raion, Dnistrovka village