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After reading an article entitled “Famine:‘33” in the December 9, 1988, issue of *Silski visti* (Village News) I felt as if during those minutes I once again lived through that unforgettable “famine of 1933.” I did not live through the famine alone. I can refer to “we,” because we were students and we all starved equally. This was in Poltava.

In 1932 we approached the beginning of the famine, but we did not quite feel it yet, because we were not fully mature and did not completely understand what was happening.

But 1933 made us understand what happened. We students received 0.4 g (*sic*)¹ of bread daily, and after the January school holidays we left to do our practical training until March 1933. In the raion, we received 0.2 g of millet bread each. Upon returning from practical training, the dormitory was cold, we were hungry and being eaten alive by bedbugs. We received 0.4 g of bread each. In the dining hall where 7,000 students ate their meals, when you stepped through the door, you almost fell over [from the smell], because they were cooking dinner with horse

¹ The author probably means 0. 4 kg.

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bones that came from the horses that we saw being led in herds through the city of Poltava to the meat-processing plant. For the main course they served grated radishes with absolutely no fat on them. Next to our table sat some relatively mature students from the agricultural construction institute. They said: “never mind, one day Stalin will be just as miserable as we are now.” We were members of the Komsomol,² and we were frightened by what they were saying, so we quickly snuck out of there to get away from this kind of talk. Fortunately, a student ticket to the bathhouse cost 0.5 kopecks, so we would go for a steam and then quickly jump into bed, curl up and warm up with our own breath. We would throw our coats over the student blankets, but we did not have warm coats, ours were light, between-season coats. And that’s how we kept warm. We were young, seventeen-eighteen years old. When you get 0.4 g of bread, by the time you reach your room on the third floor, resting on the landings, you’ve eaten all the bread.

One female student from our room would quietly disappear in the early mornings. My girlfriend and I saw her at the market absolutely by chance. She was selling her bread ration (0.4 g). Naturally, we confronted her, why hadn’t she told us?

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She explained that she, too, had accidentally seen some boys from the dormitory selling bread at the market. So, next day, my girlfriend and I also went to sell one ration of 0.4 g for 5 karbovantsi, leaving the second ration for ourselves. This left us with 0.2 g of bread daily. We were rich: we each had 0.2 g of bread and 5

² The Young Communists’ League, a Soviet organization modelled on the Communist Party open to young people between the ages of 14 and 25. Although described as a voluntary organization, membership was compulsory for most young people.

karbovantsi. What did we buy for those 5 karbovantsi? In the evenings, old women sold four lumps of sugar (granulated) for 1 karbovanets on the streets of the city. Rumors spread among the students that 6 (six) glasses of boiling water equalled 0.1 g of bread. We had no tea. We would go to a café with any kind of container, and they would fill it with boiling water for 0.10 kopecks.

My girlfriend brought a primus stove and a saucepan from home. We bought a glass of corn semolina at the market, as well as the kerosene.

Our stipend was 35-40 karbovantsi [per month]. The boys somehow forged bread ration cards to get an extra piece of bread. Students roamed the stores, finding cornmeal in one (brought in from Moldova), horse sausage in another, *bohdatki* (*sic*) with some awns in a third. That is how we kept ourselves from starving. We knew how to share and save money.

The director of our technical school (*tekhnikum*) was a real Bolshevik, sensitive, as they say, a “man’s man,” a partisan. He walked on crutches or with cane. When money from the stipend ran out, he never refused to help with 10 karbovantsi.

They imprisoned him in 1937-38 and he died there. I know that two of our students were also imprisoned, and later released.

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Now about the famine in general.

Our technical school was next to the Gogol Theater. Walking to class, or when we came out during recess, usually into the street, we could always see in the square a peasant, dead, a sack lying next to him, empty, not having found anything for his family. Parents abandoned their children at railway stations so that they would be taken to orphanages, thus saving their children from a hungry death. Because the parents were also stacked like firewood at railway stations, in the villages, in the suburban trains. The road from the southern railway station in

Poltava ran not far from our technical school, and every day we saw long lines of children being led in pairs. One pair of children I can still see before me. An older brother leading his little sister by the hand. I was young, seventeen years old at the time. I cried, and they (these children) are before my eyes even now—I weep as I write. The children were led to the bathhouse and then settled somewhere and saved from starving to death. Then came time for weeding on the collective farms. There were 90 of us third-year students, and we were sent to one of the collective farms not far from Poltava, where we did not see any people. The houses were completely empty, their doors open.

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They were bringing us 0.4 g of bread, and then they stopped bringing it, and we waited for the grain to ripen more quickly so that we could at least cook it, and that finally happened. We simply ate boiled grain and were thankful for that. The cooks were our students. Later they sent soldiers from the *VPS³*. We worked like this until we had harvested everything on the collective farm. It's impossible to describe everything. I know that they sold homemade sausage at the market and it contained children's fingernails. In general, this could be compared to the Leningrad blockade. That's how it was in Ukraine in 1933.

My grandmother starved to death, my brother was swollen from hunger. Our family consisted of eight people. My father was an office worker (*sluzhbovets*). My friend had a husband in the NKVD (secret police), so they received a ration, and when she had pieces of bread left over she would give me bread and soap. I took those home [to my family]. Naturally, terrible things happened—all these things were rumors, and perhaps true—we believed, and now it's impossible to confirm because we were young.

³ Likely *Vyschaia Pogranichniiaia Shkola OGPU* (Rus.) - Military Academy of the Border Patrol Service of the Joint State Political Directorate, the secret police of the Soviet Union from 1923 to 1934. (Later OGPU was renamed NKVD - People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs.

Maybe what I have written is not that important for this memorial book. But

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I did live through it all, and people at the time did what they could to survive and save their families. Some succeeded, and others did not!

I apologize for any technical or other mistakes. It's difficult for me to keep track of these things.

Respectfully yours,

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