

I often read in the newspaper, in the village news, about the famine of 1933. I was nine years old at the time, and I remember everything that happened, because I saw it with my own eyes. My parents had four children. My father made clay pots, and he and my mother travelled around to nearby villages, trying to barter them for a handful of grain. But when they brought it home, our village activists would arrive and confiscate everything, even to the point of emptying the pots and bowls. If they came when our mother and father were away, they would prod everywhere with iron sticks, and ask where our father buried the bread. "If you tell us," they said, "we'll give you a loaf of bread and then you'll have something to eat." When they took our cow, which was all we had left, our father and mother could no longer go to the villages to barter. We all swelled up and started dying from hunger. First the children died, asking our mother for something to eat. In the morning, our youngest brother died. I remember our mother saying that if there had been something to eat, he would have lived. Later that morning, my second, elder brother died. He was born in 1920. They were both dead and our mother cried. My mother, father, one sister and I were still alive. The same day, in the evening, my sister died. All three of them were swollen from hunger. My mother told a neighbor that she had already lost three children, and had only one daughter remaining, meaning me. The neighbor related this to the village council and two men with red bands on their sleeves and a wagon arrived and took away the bodies. Two days later my father died. I remember that it was a Saturday, and I had slept beside his body. On Sunday, my mother asked me to get her clean clothes out of the trunk, which I did. She put them on and lay down beside my father and also died. Thus they lay until Monday, in the month of May 1933. On Monday, a relative of ours, an uncle, came over, reported their deaths, and they were taken away. The dead were thrown into a common grave by the dozen like cattle. By some miracle I remained alive and experienced so much suffering.

At that time, my father's brother lived next to us. There were six children in the family who all died in the space of three days. When I visited them, I saw one child lying dead on the floor, another on a bench, and a third on the table. Their mother was wailing, not knowing what to do. When the dead children were picked up, my uncle left, saying that he was going into the woods to do something to himself. So he went and was never heard of again. His wife lost her mind and walked around with her hair loose, like a mermaid. She kept saying that the red broom had taken away her children, her husband, and the bread. All winter she lived on what she could scrape out of the pots, but by spring people were dying like flies, and homes were standing empty.

I grew up in the village orphanage, yearning for a mother's love or even to speak the words—mother, father—and remembering where they were and why they died. They died because of that red broom and Stalin and the village Stalinists. It's very hard for me to remember all this, even though I am a mother now, and a grandmother. My husband and I raised six children who all flew out of our home like birds out of the nest, but I can't forget how people suffered in 1933.

Please forgive me if I have made mistakes, or written something incorrectly—I don't have much education.

I was born in 1924, in the village Shura-Bondurianska, in the Winnicka region, in the Haysinskyj district.

Honcharuk, Marpha Pavlovna

In our village there are still people who are older than I and remember all that happened.