

Hunger 1933.

That is how the land was torn away from us.

My Father's family was small. It consisted of six people. There were 4 kids; Vanya the youngest, he wasn't even a year old and I was the oldest, just 9 years. We had land, a cow, a horse, our own house and a barn. We lived in a "chutir" [a farm] near Mykhaïlyky, which was close to the Taverivs'kyi Beet Collective in Chutivs'kyi raion, Poltavs'ka oblast'. My Father Mykhaïlo Yvanovych diligently taught us how to work the land. When I was 9, I already knew how to harness a horse and work the land. Then tragedy struck out of nowhere. Activists took all our household goods; took everything we had grown. The most brutal of them was Skrypnyk Matrona Makarivna. You could not hide even a crumb of food from her. She came to us with the coachman Myrnyï many times. My Father had some hidden corn cobs but carelessly a few revealed themselves. The hateful Skrypnychka (that is how people called M. M. Skrypnyk in our villages); she had the well dredged and didn't stop until she got every grain out of that well. However, even that was not enough for her.

I remember my mother was making buns from birch leaves and corn cobs. My mother looked out the window and paled because threatening guests were walking into our yard. I was sitting with my sister Katya (Polya and Vanya had already died) on the oven. My Mother Olyta quickly took the buns [Matorzhenyky] out of the oven and tossed them to us on the oven where we hid them under the pillows. When Skrypnychka came into the house she smelled the fresh bread and came right to us at the oven. She took all the bread including the crumbs and yelled at us to stop crying. At that time with no animal feed our cow got sick and was being nursed while tied up with a rope. It didn't take long for her to die. My brother Vanya passed away first, then my sister Katya while Polya died later. There were only three of us left. Both my Mother and Father had swelled up. One day my father left for Chutovo while my Mother cooked up soup from sorrel and nettles. We were eating this soup sitting on the floor when my Father happily walked in singing like he was drunk and tossed us a bag full of camelina press cakes. I happily took a piece but my Mother took them away, put them in a bag and tossed them into the basement. Father had seizures that whole night and in the morning he died. Mother had swollen up and could not walk. She laid on the lezhanka (the lower part of an oven) and could not move. Finally she died. I was left alone.

I decided to go to Chutovo to my Mother's brother. He took me to an orphanage, where he went to the office and left me alone in the yard. There I saw kids just crawling around and eating grass and weeds. I remember that in Novo-Dmytrivka (which was then called Chutovo) that my Father's family was still alive (his Father Ivan Iakovych and brother Anton Ivanovych) so I ran away to find them. There I stayed with my Uncle Anton and Aunt Motria Mykhaïlychenko. In the fall of 1933 I attended school and during summer I worked in the kolhosp. I drove water out to the field and during the harvest I drove horses that pulled the "hrebka" (hay harvester). After the war until 1952 I worked as a miner in Voroshylovhradska oblast'. I never went back home. For the rest of my working life I labored as a driver.

This New Year I visited my uncle Anton in Chutovo. There I saw Skrypnychka. That is when I decided to write this letter to the district newspaper, "Sils'ki visti". After my article was published other people who survived this tragedy did the same. Skrypnychka first went to the newspaper and then the District Committee to get help not to publish the letters threatening to hang herself if they didn't stop, if they continued to publish them. Please publish my testimony in your newspaper.

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