The Famine in Ukraine 1932-1933 the Holdomor

Survivor Transcript Tanya Wolynec by Steve Waldon



VICTOR TKACZ, 81 Doncaster

In 1933, his family felt the dispassionate wrath of the Bolshevik lackeys. They escaped. In 1943 he was shipped to Germany as a forced laborer.

"Mine are a child's experiences, but they are so vivid - the (mental) pictures I have are so vivid they have been with me all the time.

I remember fear. Fear of losing my parents, because I had seen what was happening. There was famine, and there was another disaster - collectivisation, Stalin's idea.

Both my grandfathers were arrested and taken away to Siberia. My father, he was going to be next, he was told. So he ran away to Caucasus. It was freer up there, because the communists had not as much control as they did in our area of Ukraine.

We didn't know where he was. He just ran away, and he couldn't write letters. He used to come home and he bring food. We had been put in this category, kulaks, therefore we had to pay what they called contribution, heavy taxes. They come in and they take all the food away.

And this was also where my fear was - there was nothing to eat! Mum had hidden somewhere bags of dried bread. It was dangerous to hide food. She used to bring it into the house little by little.

So it is winter time, and we're still alive. And so they come in and say `How come (you are still alive)?' And so they search the place again. Father knew we would perish if he didn't help us. He had come in two or three nights before, and there was half a loaf of bread. (Victor says the children did not know when their father would sneak home, because then they could not give away his whereabouts.) They knew it wasn't locally baked, he had brought it from another city, and they immediately

recognised it. They said, 'Ha! Look what they eat. They are well fed!' And they took the half-loaf, it was the only thing they could find.

Later on, as they were going through the house, someone picked up a cooking pot and in it there were some dry beans hidden away. And they said, 'Ah, here it is! Give us the bag. Bring out the bag.' And I've got this vivid picture of them throwing the dry beans and they go on the floor as well. To me, that is the food that we cherish, and that was gone.

We were tossed out in the street. It was deep snow. Mum had run away because we got a message they were coming. She had gone to a neighbor's, because they were going to arrest her. She was watching from there.

My grandmother was the only one in the house with us at the time, so we run away and are standing on the other side of the street, watching what is going on in our yard. They are taking everything of ours on their carts - clothes and bedding. And they took grandmother out and shook her out of her coat and into the snow. To me that was a horrible picture.

After this, mum took us to the train. At night, because she knew they were waiting at the station to catch her. She got us on the train, not from the platform side, but from the other side somehow.

I don't know how she did this. She dragged us through the snow, two small boys my brother (Walter) was completely in the snow! It was like a cat taking her kittens. Anyway, (at the station) we had to crawl under a stationary train, then she threw us on to another train that was already moving, and she got on.

(Victor and Walter, and their father, Petro, and mother, Evdokia, were eventually reunited in Caucasus, where Petro got a job at the grain silos.)

The grain stores were all locked up and full of grain, and yet the people were starving. In this same place! The grain was guarded by police or military, with weapons. As a small child, I could roam and see these mountains of grain.

People who pinched some, they were sent to Siberia. It was very strict.

You know the cobs, when they take the corn off? Then they use the cobs for fuel for the fires. But we were rubbing them one against the other to get anything at all that was left on these cobs, these husks. Mum used to boil that and give it to us as gruel.

We had to be very careful not to say where we were from. Father spoke very good Russian - undetectable, in fact - but us others, we lived in constant fear of being discovered.

I remember a big panic to run away again, because my father thought he had been recognised by someone who knew him back in Ukraine.

This is the fear in which we lived.'"