

Testimony of a Holodomor survivor, Mrs Anastasia Ostapiuk
Delivered at Westminster Central Hall, 22 November 2008, during the
Commemoration of the 75th Anniversary of the Holodomor
(Read by Maria Mikulin in the absence of Mrs Ostapiuk)

I was born into a village family. I was 10 years old when the Holodomor took place in 1933. I remember 1932 well and the years before. My father was a bookkeeper in the collective farm and village council. He counted the work days, when people came with information about what they had done in the fields, how much they had reaped or whatever, then that was translated into a working day or one and a half days, and that determined the amount of bread you received. Then the famine started in the village. They didn't give bread any more. This was the beginning.

People began to fall ill from hunger. They ran away, they didn't know what to do, they ate everything they had in the house. And the brigades came to search the houses, to see if there was anything left in storerooms or somewhere else, if you had a religious picture or a cross on the wall. The brigades did what they wanted with the people and no-one punished them... they searched the houses once a week. If they found something cooking on the fire, some soup or borsch, then they took it and poured it away on the ground. It was as if we had to die, as if we were marked out for death. This was in 1931-32.

Later in 1932 my father died. First he became very thin. None of us had enough to eat, father worried and his lungs became inflamed. The hospitals didn't even take people in so he died at home. He called me and said, "Daughter, you're the oldest, look after the little ones..." I was the oldest in the family. Then there was Ludmila, who became blind and died from hunger. Then there was Sonya. Sonya survived and Yevhen, the youngest, survived.

My mother went around the garden and picked horseradish, because it was spring and green leaves were coming out. She took the horseradish, cleaned and grated it, then she took leaves from a tree – mother knew what could be eaten – dried the leaves, mixed them with the horseradish and baked biscuits or pancakes. She gave them to us to eat and went to work.

Our neighbours were called Khomenko and they had a full house of children. I saw with my own eyes how each morning a waggon would come to collect the dead from houses. So Khomenko, the father, died. The mother ran from the house and said, "Wait, don't take him, because my son will be ready tomorrow. Let them at least lie together." Because they threw all the dead into a single grave. You know, there was such misery that it's impossible to describe...

When it was harvest time, it was a real tragedy. Many ears of wheat lay in the fields. We would go along the paths and hide in the bushes. When we saw there was no-one around, we would collect the wheat in our aprons and run home quickly. Because every field had two guards on horseback with sticks. If they caught anyone, they would beat them...

Mother would stand the four of us in a line each morning, then she would take a small religious picture – where she hid it, I don't know. But she would put it out, and we would repeat "Our Father". Mother told us all, "For the fear of God never tell anyone at school that your mother has taught you this."

I remember when I went with my aunt Olha to another village to see if we could get something or trade something. When the train stopped at the station, there were children

lying all around near the tracks and begging but those in the train had nothing to throw them through the window.

There was a good, big harvest in 1932-33, but when the grain was collected in the storehouse, they said that the government needed help and then they loaded wagon after wagon with sacks of grain, placed a red flag and went to Novohrad to hand everything over to the government. So the harvest didn't help anyone, because nearly everything went somewhere, for someone, while people were suffering from hunger. It was impossible, but see – God is good and we survived.

The communist government was so terrible, they wanted to break the Ukrainian people so that they wouldn't believe in God, but only in Stalin. Such a government – may God never allow the same in any other country... because its horrific... They spoke so nicely at the meetings – that everything would be better, that it would be heaven – but it was very different. Famine scythed down everyone who lived on Ukrainian land – Poles, Germans, Russians. In our village, I think about three-quarters of the people died... this is God's truth...