

Olga Zazula

The winter of 1932 was very difficult. When the snow melted, everyone who could went out into the fields and gardens to search for roots, and rotten potatoes that were left from the fall. They collected it and dried it. Those who worked with the collective farm animals put handfuls of chaffs in their pockets and took it home. My father and neighbor weren't the only ones who did this – everyone did this. When spring came they mixed it with acacia bark. We ripped the bark of the trees and help our mother grind it, and mother mixed this together so there would be more of it. She made [cakes] that looked like hockey pucks – we called them *lyaposhky*, and we shared them. When grass and weeds began to grow, this was a big help. We tore them out. When the trees began to bloom, especially acacia, we gathered the flowers, dried them, and mashed them together. There was not a single grain left. My mother put little bits of the corn she had saved for planting in the soup. It was because of my mother that we stayed alive. My little brother died.

We went to our aunt Oksana's, and this is what we found. Wasyl, who was seven years old, was lying on a bench staring at the ceiling, with a swollen stomach. Also my cousin Nadia, who was my age. We were supposed to go to school together in the fall. My mother brought them some *lyaposhky*, and [Nadia] said, "If I had these *lyaposhky*, I wouldn't want anything else for the rest of my life." Aunt Oksana was already completely swollen. I don't know if she had a disease, but when I saw her I was frightened for a long time. My mother and aunt Oksana's daughter Halya helped [aunt Oksana] get out of bed, and I saw her, and I didn't go back there. The next day, Halya came and told us that her mother, Wasyl and little Bozhenka had all died. She asked my mother to help bury them. Aunt Oksana had asked that when she died, she be buried with her children. When Halia came, my older sister Polinka helped her, because I couldn't go back to that house. My mother honored her sister's last wish. They took them to the cemetery. Our neighbors helped, lending us a cart. They put the children in the cart first, and then aunt Oksana, and took them to the cemetery. They buried them in one grave, wrapped in a cloth.