

## **Memoirs of the Great Famine in Ukraine – The “Holodomor” (death by hunger) 1932- 1933**

**Klara Djachenko (nee Hrynenko) b 15 September  
1922, Semenivka, Donetsk region, Ukraine.**

We lived in the village of Hrunivka, near Kramatorsk, Donetsk oblast. The family consisted of six children and my parents. Our parents were farmers. We had 50 acres of land that we used for grazing animals, and growing fruit and vegetables. I remember my mother having a shop on the property, selling what extra there was so that we had a little more than other families. We were self-sufficient.

The roskurkulenya happened in 1930. All property was seized for the benefit of the state. This included livestock and any food that was held in the house or cellar. They also took all the farm machinery, such as that used to cut grain or grass. Eventually, even Mother and Father were taken because they were against this and voiced their protests many times. As punishment, they were sent to jail. I remember that Mother was released after a short time but Father was sent to Siberia, where he suffered tremendously, and died.

It was the children’s job to forage in the forest for plants. My grandmother knew what could be eaten. We’d gather dandelion leaves and edible grasses to make soup. Rats were also cooked when we could catch them. When things were at their worst, we cooked and ate any dead animals that we found. This was shared by us all, but I remember that often my mother would not eat because there was not enough for everyone. Some people ate their dead relatives: cannibalism was rife. We were warned not to leave the house unless there was an adult with us, as children often went missing and never returned home.

Many of the older people in the village, between the ages of 50-70, died. Very young children were also vulnerable. Eight members of our extended family died. If they were lucky, they would get a funeral, be buried and have prayers said over them. Most did not have this; they just disappeared. We kept warm by living in one room, all seven of us. Imagine a tin of sardines, this is what it was like! We burnt whatever was lying around: palings or bits from abandoned houses. Timber was kept out of sight as people stole whatever they could. Everything was gone.

I once asked my mother, “Why is this happening, why is there no food?” She answered that we were being punished. The adults never talked in front of the children because communist agents often asked the children, “What do Mama and Tato talk about? Who visits you? Where do you go?” You were frightened. Whom could you trust?

Eventually, when the weather improved, what seed provisions had been saved could be planted. This was watched closely, waiting for the time it could be harvested and food would be on the table again.

When I recall what we went through, it seems unbelievable. Many of you have never experienced such hunger....



*Photo taken by Andriy Gavran*