Galina Kuzmenko (1894-1978) is best known to history as the wife of the Ukrainian peasant anarchist Nestor Makhno, but she was an important figure in his movement in her own right. A teacher by profession, she was elected to important positions within the Makhnovist "republic," including chairperson of the teachers' union and was known as a fiery advocate for women's rights. Her long life was full of tragedy, and the article below describes one particularly poignant episode, the death of her father, an old school reactionary who had to pay the price for raising a daughter who became a revolutionary.

At the height of the Russian Civil War in the summer of 1919, the Makhnovists were being pushed westwards under pressure from the resurgent White Volunteer Army. At the same time, the Makhnovists had to contend with remnants of the Red Army, who were fleeing Ukraine from south to north while seizing all the movable goods they could lay their hands on. As Makhno retreated, his forces entered the region of his wife's home village.

Galina Kuzmenko's memoir first appeared in 1937 in ***Probuzhdenie****, a Russian-American anarchist journal published in Detroit. Her grim tale displays all the horrors of civil war, and is worthy of the renowned Soviet writer Isaac Babel, who portrayed the Makhnovists as villains. But Babel worked up his material in a comfortable railway carriage far from the front line, while Galina was often in the thick of the action.*

Galina Kuzmenko

The Death of My Father

My father, Andrey Ivanovich Kuzmenko, was the son of former serfs from the village of Peschany-Brod,[1] Kherson province, Yelisavetgrad region.

After his military service, he married an orphaned peasant girl from Kiev province, Domnikiya Mikhailovna Tkachenko, and started a low-level job in the gendarme corps [security police]. He worked as a clerk in the gendarme offices in the larger stations of the South-West Railroad. After 20 years of loyal service, he received a 1,000 ruble bonus, and quit his job in the spring of 1908. He went back to his native village and recovered from his brothers the allotment of six desyatins[2] he had inherited from his father. He built a house, bought some cows, and began to farm.

The couple had three children: two sons—Nikolai and Stepan—and me, the daughter and youngest in the family. My older brother, Nikolai, had already left the family and volunteered for military service by the time my father quit his job. At the beginning of the Great War, he enrolled in an officers' school, graduated, and was sent to the front. He rose rapidly in the service and by 1916 was already a staff captain. Then he suffered a serious wound and concussion in battle and as a result became 90% disabled.

My second brother, Stepan, graduated from a technical school, got married, and stayed close to our parents, helping them with the farming.

I attended a two-room school and, well-prepared, I passed the exam for admission to the Dobrovelichkovka Teachers' Seminary for Women, where I spent four years until my graduation. For all the years I studied at the seminary I had a government scholarship, and I lived away from home and wasn't materially dependent on my family. Besides my stipend of 15 rubles per month, I was able to earn a little money tutoring classmates and children. Only infrequently, on long holidays

[1] Literally "Sandy-Ford."

[2] About 16 acres.

and during summer vacations, did I visit home.

In 1916, upon graduation from the seminary, I moved to Yekaterinoslav province, where I accepted an appointment to a two-room school in Gulyai-Polye.

In early 1919, without the knowledge or consent of my parents, I married Nestor Makhno.

In the summer of 1919, Nestor Makhno handed over command of his units to the Bolsheviks and, with a small detachment, departed Yekaterinoslav province for Kherson province. The Red Army High Command declared him an outlaw.

At that time, I was also a member of Nestor's detachment.

This was in August, 1919. Our detachment was stationed in the village of Peschany-Brod and in neighbouring villages and khutors [hamlets].

Units of the Red Army, pressured by the White forces of Denikin, were retreating from the south. While retreating, they tried to carry off from Ukraine as much as possible in the way of produce, coal, machinery, etc. In some districts, the retreating Red Army soldiers burned stooks standing in the field and stacks of unmilled grain in retaliation against peasants in revolt. News about all this reached our village. The peasants were worried and restless.

I recall a huge meeting in the village where the Makhnovists urged the peasants to take over the railway station (seven kilometres distant) and stop the trains carrying troops, munitions, equipment—generally everything the Red Army was trying to remove from Ukraine. The peasants could use these resources themselves to resist the White menace pursuing the Reds.

One night soon after this appeal, the whole population of the village set out for the railway line at Pomoshnaya Station, armed with pitchforks and shovels, to disarm the Red soldiers and unload the trains.

My father was poorly informed about ongoing events, was reluctant to change his mind about anything, and did not take part in the exodus to the railway line.

Our staff received news that a major surge of retreating Red troops was approaching from the south. With our meagre forces it made no sense to engage them in battle and we were compelled to retreat further away from the railway line. Our village would soon be overrun by both Red and White forces.

I knew what had happened in Gulyai-Pole, where our enemies had dealt brutally with the families and relatives of Makhnovist insurgents. I felt strongly that my parents would be in great danger after our departure from the village. Also living with my parents at that time was my younger brother Stepan and his wife Claudia. My older brother Nikolai had been arrested by the Bolsheviks in Kiev and was sitting in prison.

Two hours before our departure, I left the centre of the village, where Nestor was based, and went to my parents' place on the outskirts. My brother Stepan and his wife readily agreed to leave with us. I expressed all my misgivings to my father and mother. I advised them to either leave with us, or else go into hiding somewhere. I told them what had happened in Gulyai-Pole where the Germans and haidamaks[3] had dragged Nestor's sick brother Emelyan from his home and shot him only because he was Nestor Makhno's brother. And Emelyan had never taken any part in the movement. Later, White officers seized the wife of Saveliya, another of Nestor's brothers, and after torturing her for a long time, they stabbed her with bayonets, cut off one of her breasts, then dragged her into the garden and shot her. After listening to all this, my father responded firmly:

"I won't leave my own home. Are the Bolsheviks and Whites really not human beings? Do they really not understand that I can't be responsible for the actions of my daughter? She hasn't lived here for seven years now and hasn't paid any attention to her parents for a long time. I'm even less responsible for the actions of her husband, whom she married without asking me. In my opinion, Stepan and Claudia shouldn't be leaving either.

[3] Ukrainian nationalist cavalry.

The weather's good and we need to harvest the wheat and prepare for threshing."

"You shouldn't be worrying about the wheat and the threshing when it's a matter of life and death. . . I understand perfectly well that you aren't guilty of anything. But the times are such that there are brutal people about who don't care who's guilty and who isn't. They're liable to do anything. You do as you wish, but take to heart my advice and my warning," I said.

Mother listened to our conversation quietly, but only sighed heavily and wiped a few tears that rolled down her cheeks with the corner of her apron.

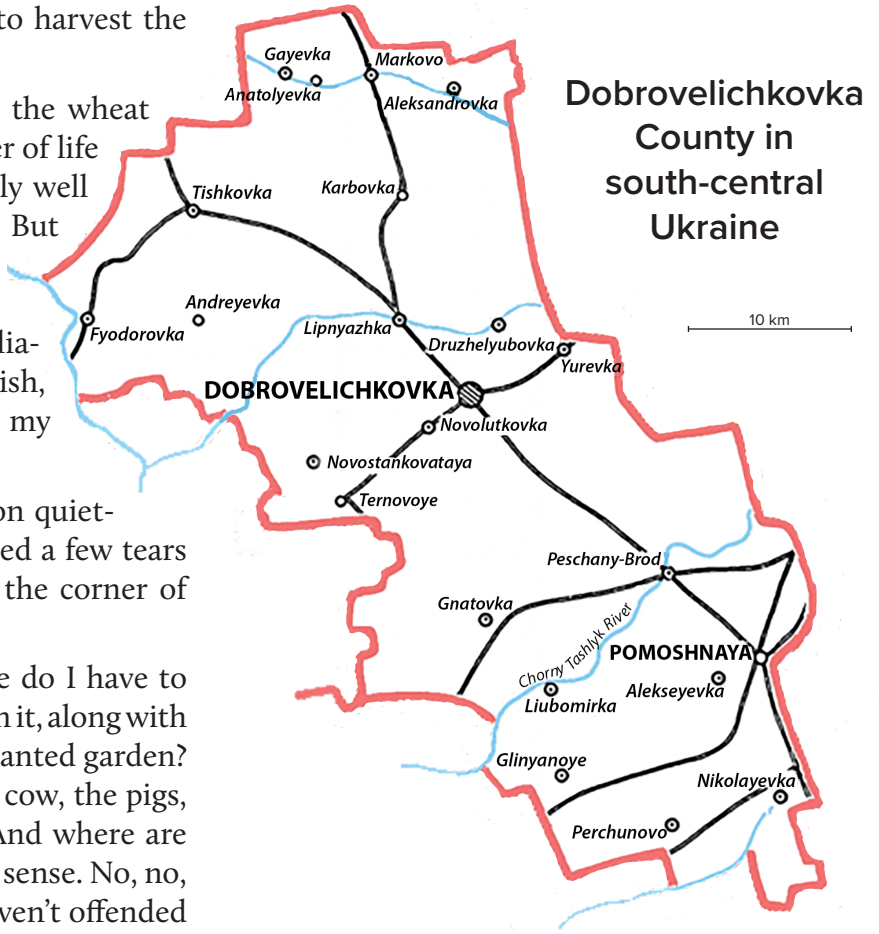
"And why suddenly out of the blue do I have to abandon my house and everything in it, along with the other farm buildings and the planted garden? And what's going to happen to the cow, the pigs, the chickens, and the ducks? . . . And where are we going to go? It doesn't make any sense. No, no, I'm not leaving my own home. I haven't offended anyone and I'm not guilty of anything. I'll take my chances with everyone else, but I'm not leaving my own hearth and home . . . ." ranted my father.

Meanwhile my brother and his wife were getting ready to leave. We said goodbye to the old folks and joined the detachment withdrawing towards the town of Dobrobelichkovka. And on the very same day Red units entered the village of Peschany-Brod.

Several days passed. I heard no news about my parents and was tormented with the question: what's happening with them?

As the Red troops retreated from the Nikolayev–Znamenka military zone, the insurgent forces left by Nestor at the front, led by Kalashnikov and Budanov, found the moment propitious for a coup. They seized the initiative by arresting Red commanders and transferring the Red troops to Nestor's command.

Resisting the onslaught of the White Denikinist forces while falling back, the insurgent units approached the Pomoshnaya–Peschany-Brod–Novoukraina region. Here Red units tried to strike them in rear, but were beaten off and forced to withdraw.



One day Gregory Makhno, Nestor's brother and his chief of staff, came to our quarters and said to me:

"I have some unpleasant news for you, Galina. The staff has received news that your father has been shot by the Reds, and his house looted and burned."

This grievous news about the death of my father lay like a heavy stone on my heart . . . I was sick with agonizing grief to think that, directly or indirectly, I was the cause of his untimely and violent death. He was a completely innocent old person.

"And what about my mother?" I asked in a trembling voice.

"Her fate is unknown," he replied. And noting the anguish on my face, he gently put his hand on my shoulder and said:

"I know how hard this is for you. But be brave,

Galina, keep your spirits up. In our current situation, we revolutionaries are exposed to all sorts of perils and must be prepared for anything."

When he left, I went into the next room where Fenya,[4] my brother Stepan, and his wife Claudia were, and told them what had happened. Claudia dropped the sewing she was working on and burst out sobbing. My brother, paced about the room, then stopped in front of the window and stared into the distance, lost in gloomy thoughts. Fenya, who was sitting on a small bench and had been reading out loud before Gregory's arrival, dropped her book on the floor, and sat motionless, stunned by the news. I sat down on a chair in the corner and bowed my head in my hands . . .

"Why, oh why, did I not force them to come with us?" I was overcome with remorse. "I was well aware that they were in mortal danger."

Feeling guilty of the premature and violent death of my father, not knowing the fate of my mother, and feeling terribly anxious for her—this was an unbearably heavy burden. . .

On the following day, Gregory Makhno came by again and told us that the staff had received more information about the events in Peschany-Brod. Together with my father, five other people were shot: three teachers from the two-room school, the former village starosta [mayor], and one youth—a 16-year-old boy—who, upon seeing his beloved teachers taken to be shot, intervened and tearfully reproached the Red soldiers:

"Why are you taking the teachers?! They haven't done anything wrong. Let them go."

To which they replied:

"So you feel sorry for them? Well, you can join them."

They shot him as well.

As for my mother, the peasants told the following story: upon seeing her home in flames, and learning that Father had been shot, she was overcome with grief and lost her mind. She was spotted running along the bank of the river, apparently deranged. She threw herself in the river and drowned.

Still more painful, still heavier, was the weight on my heart. . .

No more father and mother. . . And together with Father was pitilessly and cynically destroyed the most popular teacher and social activist in the village, Daniil Savvich Marutsenko, along with his wife and fellow-teacher Aleksandra Efimovna, and his brother—also a teacher—Evfim Savvich. I studied under Daniil Savvich for three years. His students loved him. Many were the enlightening conversations I had with him, and many were the good books he gave me to read. He prepared me for the seminary without charging anything, and then helped me with my application. For his warmth, attention, and kindness, and for his help and good advice, I loved him not less than my own father.

And the village starosta, a quiet, well-respected peasant, was someone I knew personally.

I knew young Kavitsky well, and remembered him as a bright kid in the first class when I, being in the senior class, had to substitute for his regular teacher who was sick.

And now all these dear, wonderful, and totally innocent people, together with my parents, were blood-stained corpses. . . And what share of the guilt for their deaths was owing to me? . . .

On the very same day, only slightly later, news arrived at the staff headquarters that Peschany-Brod was already cleared of Reds and re-occupied by the Makhnovists.

At the headquarters was Nestor, just arrived from somewhere, preoccupied and in good spirits about something. He was completely absorbed in the flow of news coming into headquarters: news about events at the front, and about the arrival of more and more new insurgent detachments. He was rushing around so much, I wasn't able to exchange more than a couple of words with him.

Quickly grabbing a bite to eat, he issued an order for an automobile. He intended to go to Pescha-

[4] Fenya Gayenko was Galina's best friend and inseparable companion throughout the civil war. They had studied together at the teachers' seminary.

ny-Brod to greet the newly-arrived units there. When the automobile pulled up, I got in without saying anything to anyone.

A minute later, Nestor came out of the HQ with Lepetchenko and Petya Liuty, armed to the teeth, who accompanied him everywhere.

Upon seeing me sitting in the automobile, Nestor said, rather gruffly:

"What are you doing here? Get out of the car! We're not just going for a drive, this is military business."

This rudeness, this incomprehension of my situation and natural desire to see the remains of my family home with my own eyes and search out all the details of the death of my father and mother, I found very offensive, and painful to experience. I wasn't able to restrain myself any longer. The tears began to flow. Through the tears I sobbed:

"If you won't take me with you, I will go on foot to Peschany-Brod. I must see everything and find out everything that happened there to my parents."

Seeing me weeping and only now grasping my state, Nestor, already speaking softly, said:

"Well, that's fine, let's go. Really, what else can you do?"

He got in the car and sat next to me. Leaning over, he kissed me on the cheek and said:

"Forgive me, Galya. I'm been so swallowed up by events these last few days that I forgot about your grief."

Lepetchenko and Liuty got in next to the driver and we took off.

The distance from Dobrobelichkovka to Peschany-Brod is 15 kilometres.

Along the whole length of the road carts were moving, filled with insurgents, equipment, and refugee families fleeing from Gulyai-Polye.

Nestor frequently stopped to talk with insurgents or with Gulyai-Polye peasants, trying to find out details about the coup engineered by Kalashnikov and Budanov in Novy Bug and everything else that was going on.

Each of these stops was agonizingly long for me. I was entirely wrapped up in my personal worries and all these people and events were of little interest to me for the moment. Before my eyes flashed carts, horses, and oxen with dusty, sunburned people. I heard their cheerful shouts of welcome. Some came up to the car to shake our hands or hurriedly tell us stories about their experiences on the road. I saw all of this in a sort of fog, answering greetings and smiling mechanically, while burning with the desire to reach my village as soon as possible.

On the road we overtook my brother Stepan, who was jolting along on a dilapidated horse without a saddle. Upon learning that the Makhnovists had occupied our village, he also, like myself, was trying to get home as quickly as possible.

Finally our car crossed the last balka [ravine] not far from our village and climbed to a hilltop, from where we could see the whole village sprawling on both sides of the Chorny Tashlyk River for a length of four or five kilometres. Upon seeing the village, my heart beat faster.

Descending the hill, we entered the village and stopped not far from the old church on the edge of the marketplace.

Nestor and the comrades got out and went to one of the huts to see the local commander.

I stayed in the car with the driver. Nestor shouted:

"Wait for me. I'll be back soon and we can go on together."

A crowd of children gradually formed around the car—an automobile was a rarity in our village in those times. And soon grown-up peasants were attracted as well. They greeted me with friendly smiles.

"How are things going here these days?" I asked.

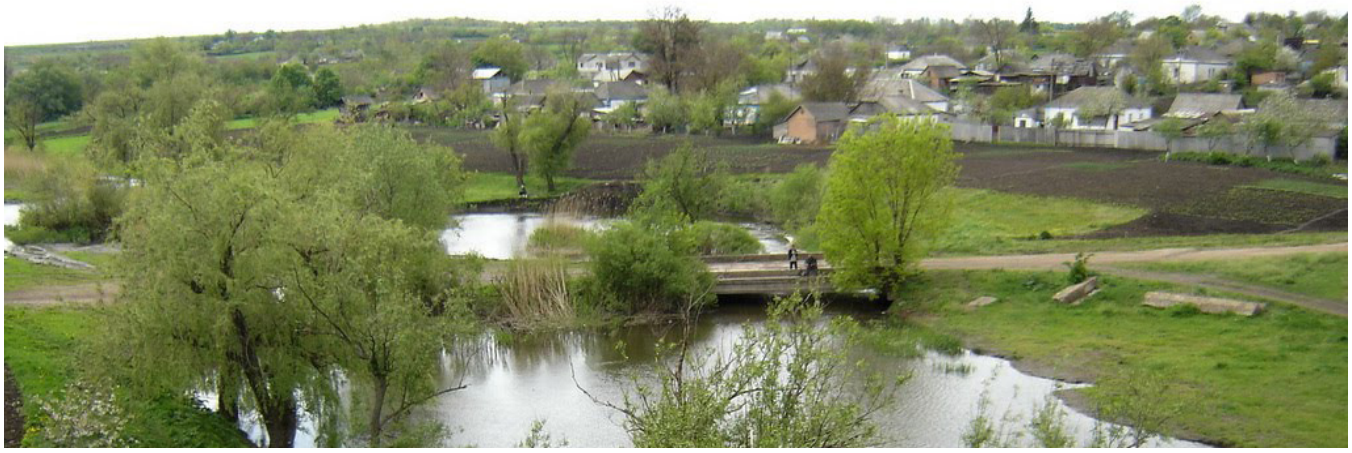
"Oh, what trouble we've had."

"God forbid such happenings!"

"Would to God such devils were never born!"

"The village has never seen such a calamity."

"Only three days after you left the village, a unit



The village of Peschany-Brod, sprawled along the Chorny Tashlyk River, hasn't changed much in the last 100 years.

of the Red Army military police suddenly arrived and set up shop here. They were furious that the villagers had gone to the railway to disarm the Red soldiers. And on the day they arrived, they arrested six people including our batko. And in the evening they used whips to force everybody to come to the town hall for a meeting. The arrested persons were brought there. Some sort of commissar did the talking.[5] He abused us, calling us bandits and counter-revolutionaries. He threatened to kill everyone and burn the village, unless we supported the Reds. And just to show that he meant business, he was going to execute the hostages who had been arrested. And in fact the very same night these unfortunate people were shot."

"Where were they shot?"

"Over there by the two-room school."

"Did they bury them?"

"Early the next day the villagers dug a large pit in the cemetery, placed all the bodies in it, and covered them with dirt."

From the crowd of peasants an old man pushed his way forward, his face swollen and covered with bruises, and said:

"And just look at me. Those devils did this to me all over. They insisted that I hand over weapons. I didn't have any weapons. I swore to them and crossed myself; to no avail. The bastards wouldn't believe me. They began to beat me. They beat me on the head, on the back, they pulled off my trousers and whipped me. They threw me on the ground, beat me with ramrods, and stomped on me. While some of them were beating me, others were going around looking for weapons and robbing the farms. They helped themselves to anything they wanted, these bandits."

"Tell us—where did you hide the rifle and ammunition? We're going to beat you until you tell us," they screamed, and kept beating me.

"Some old women and children were running around me, sobbing and begging them to leave me alone. But my tormentors paid them no heed. Finally they put a shovel in my hands, whipped me on the back, and announced: "We're going to shoot you. Dig a hole for your self, you bastard!"

"They forced me to dig . . . So long as we live, we're going to remember those 'defenders of the workers and peasants.'"

And two big tears rolled slowly from his blackened eyes, down his swollen cheeks, and into his thick, bristly beard.

"They stomped on me, too, the degenerates," said one of the women, and pulled back the embroidered sleeve of her homespun blouse, revealing a bloody welt on her arm.

"I was silent for a long time, gritting my teeth, as

[5] Although Galina doesn't name him, many sources identify the commissar as the prominent Bolshevik Vladimir Zatonsky (1888–1938).

I watched them steal the grain, the piglets, and the chickens. But when they smashed my trunk and began to take my towels, skirts, and my last blouse, I couldn't hold back and began to scold and curse them. One of them jumped up, beat me with a rope and shouted:

"Be quiet, you witch! Or we'll shut you up for good, you damned Makhnovist!"

"Oh, how they threatened and beat our peasants. . . And the grain, along with anything else valuable, they carted away," lamented another old-timer.

"And what happened to my mother?"

"According to what I heard, the poor dear was not shot, but lost her mind. She ran along the river bank and threw herself off a cliff into the water."

"Did they drag her out, bury her?" I asked.

"Probably they've already buried her."

"I don't think so, I think she's still in the morgue at the clinic. You should go there to see for yourself."

At that time an old woman who had been standing quietly a short distance away while stroking her chin and listening, pushed her way towards me. Nodding to me, she said:

"Don't go until you hear what I have to say, daughter."

I jumped out of the automobile and went with her off to the side. Glancing around to make sure that no one was listening, she whispered:

"Your mother is alive. The Bolsheviks searched the whole village looking for her—they wanted to shoot her. So we old folks, to throw them off the scent, deliberately put it about that she had lost her mind and drowned. The Reds believed us and quit looking for her. In fact she is alive and hiding in the gardens on the outskirts of the village." She nodded towards the part of the village where we lived.

The old woman's words made me unspeakably happy.

I hurriedly kissed her and thanked her from the bottom of my heart for the good news. Then I rushed into the hut where Nestor was. Greeting the new commander in a perfunctory manner, I told Nestor that my mother was alive and was hiding in the gardens and that I wanted to go look for her right away. He agreed, and so I was driven to our homestead, located about two kilometres distant.

Upon approaching the homestead, I was surprised to see that our hut was standing untouched, since I was expecting to see only its burned-out ruins. Telling the driver to return to Nestor, I entered the courtyard. There to greet me with an angry bark was our dog Riabko, but when she recognized me, she wagged her tail, howled with joy, and licked my hand. On the doorstep sat our old gray cat, Vaska. When he saw me, he arched his spine, raised his tail, and began to rub against the door post, meowing plaintively.

I opened the unlocked door and went inside. Devastation everywhere. The floor was covered with rags, straw, and books. Cupboards, drawers, and chests had been opened. Everything of any value had been taken by the Red Army soldiers. The rest was broken or ripped up and scattered about.

It was sad and painful to see my parents' hut ransacked and empty. I went outside. Then I saw my mother coming along the street together with my brother. While Nestor and I had paused along the road, my brother had overtaken us by a wide margin and had already succeeded in finding Mother. I ran to meet them and flung myself at Mother to kiss her. She was wearing an old, gray dress, caked with dirt, and a shawl pulled over to one side of her head. From under the shawl dangled disheveled gray hair. Her face was pale and very dirty. She looked at me with a cold, blank stare and pushed me away when I went to kiss her. Then she glanced around and suddenly, strangely, started laughing.

"Play music! Play! I'm getting married," she cried. She stepped away and started to dance in the road.

My brother and I glanced at each other but didn't say anything. We understood that she had endured so much in the last few days, that her nerves had given way.

I took Mother by the arm and began talking to her:

"Take it easy, Mummy, There's no music here. You don't need to dance."

"Why is there no music? Did the musicians not show up yet? You know it's my wedding today, and the guests have already arrived," she announced imperiously. She started singing one of the wedding songs, disengaged herself from my hand, and began dancing with even more energy.

A bunch of kids began to gather around us. We were approaching our courtyard. I grabbed Mother firmly by one arm, while my brother took the other arm. Mother resisted and began to drag her feet on the ground. Realizing, however, that we had her in a strong grasp, she stopped resisting, and quietly, calmly moved along. We brought her into the yard, took her into the garden, and sat down in the midst of the melons and sunflowers. Some neighbours approached. One of them brought a pail of water, soap, and a towel. Another brought pumpkin turnovers with sour cream.

I washed Mother and combed her hair. I fastened the shawl properly on her head.

She looked tired. She never said a word, and allowed herself to be cleaned up.

The neighbours expressed their good wishes to her and began to tell the story of how the Red Army soldiers had taken over our farm.

"They beat your father severely with ropes. He began to argue with them, saying he wasn't guilty of anything, but his words of protest were answered with crude sneers and new beatings. In the end, he was quiet. He wiped away tears with his fist and submitted to everything that they demanded."

"Don't argue! Harness the horses!"

"You're treating me in an illegal fashion. Prove that I'm guilty, judge me in a court, and then shoot me, but you have no right to beat me," said Father.

"Look at that, he wants a court . . . We can flog you to death without a court, you tsarist dog, and we can take all your valuables and burn your hut," he was told.

"That's violence, robbery, lawlessness," protested Father.

He was rewarded with new blows and yelled at:

"Load up the wagon with the goods! And be quick about it, old boy!"

"He harnessed the horses to his wagon, the poor fellow, and helped the Reds load it with stuff from his hut," continued another neighbour.

"The Reds spread out to the cattle sheds and the barns. The took the pigs. They chased the ducks and hens around the courtyard and shot them. One of them set fire to some straw. He placed the burning straw on the front steps of the hut and then began to climb the stairs to the loft with a burning bundle to set fire there as well. So we, neighbours, rushed to him and the grannies began to drag him down from the staircase while asking him not to do this.

"God forbid that you should do this," they said. "It's summer now with a hot wind blowing. If you set fire to one hut, the whole village will go up in flames.

"Go to hell, let it burn, I don't care," replied the Red. But other Reds intervened and said:

"They're right, Vanka, And if the village burns down, we won't have a place to spend the night."

"And Vanka reluctantly threw his burning bundle of straw on the ground. As we stamped out the fire with our feet."

"Then the fully loaded wagon with your father on board was driven out of the courtyard."

"The Red soldiers searched for your mother for a long time. They looked high and low in the gardens, and fired their guns into clumps of tall weeds and marsh grass along the river. They questioned everyone they met if they had seen where the old witch was hiding."

My brother told about his long and futile search that day in the gardens where Mother was hiding. He kept shouting:

"Mama, where are you?! Come out! The Reds aren't here any more. It is I, Stepan. I've come for you."

He covered the whole garden in this manner, but there was no response to his shouting.

He had already made his mind that she wasn't there, and went back to talk to the peasant who had pointed out where to find his mother. My brother told the peasant that he had looked everywhere in this garden, but she just wasn't there. (Our gardens in the Ukrainian black earth region with their corn stalks, sunflowers, and other plants that exhibit luxuriant growth are in no way similar to the gardens in France, which could hardly provide a hiding place for a person.)[6]

"You didn't search well enough. She must be there," answered the peasant and went with my brother into the garden.

For along time they walked together and called Mother, but there was still no answer.

Then they split up and, starting from opposite ends of the garden, began to search it carefully, walking in parallel lines two or three steps apart.

After covering a good third of the garden in this manner, my brother, finally, bumped into Mother. She lay immobile, pressed to the ground among thick, tall sunflowers. She lay face down, with her hands covering her face. At first, my brother thought she was sleeping. But looking more attentively, he realized she was hiding, curled up like a ball, and that she had covered her face with her hands from fear.

The peasant, who was the owner of the garden, approached and the two of them tried to persuade her to get up. But she wouldn't listen, and continued to lay on the ground without moving.

It took a considerable effort to convince her that the danger was past, that she had nothing to fear, and no longer needed to hide. Finally she allowed them to remove her hands from her face, open her eyes, and sit up . . .

While all these stories were being told, Mother was sitting quietly.

Her gaze wandered without resting on any person or thing. It seemed as if nothing was registering; she neither heard or understood anything we said, and was wholly absorbed in her own worries. Only towards the end of my brother's tale, her face became attentive and focused.

And suddenly, her lower lip began to tremble, and tears flowed from her eyes.

She wept, softly at first, and then with loud sobbing. She cried for a long time.

By relieving her burden with tears, she seemed to come to her senses. We suggested that she eat. She ate the warm turnovers with sour cream. My brother went down to the river to his own garden and brought back tomatoes, cucumbers, and a melon. The three of us had a bite to eat—all of us were hungry.

While eating, Mother told how soon after my brother and I had left, several cavalrymen had ridden into the courtyard.

Mother was in the hut at the time, busying herself with the stove. Father was in the courtyard, getting ready for threshing.

At first Mother thought that our insurgents had returned, and looked out the window. The cavalrymen moved towards Father, surrounded him, and asked:

"Does Andrey Kuzmenko live here?"

"He lives here," answered Father.

"Are you Andrey Kuzmenko?"

"I am Andrey Kuzmenko."

"You filthy swine! . . . "

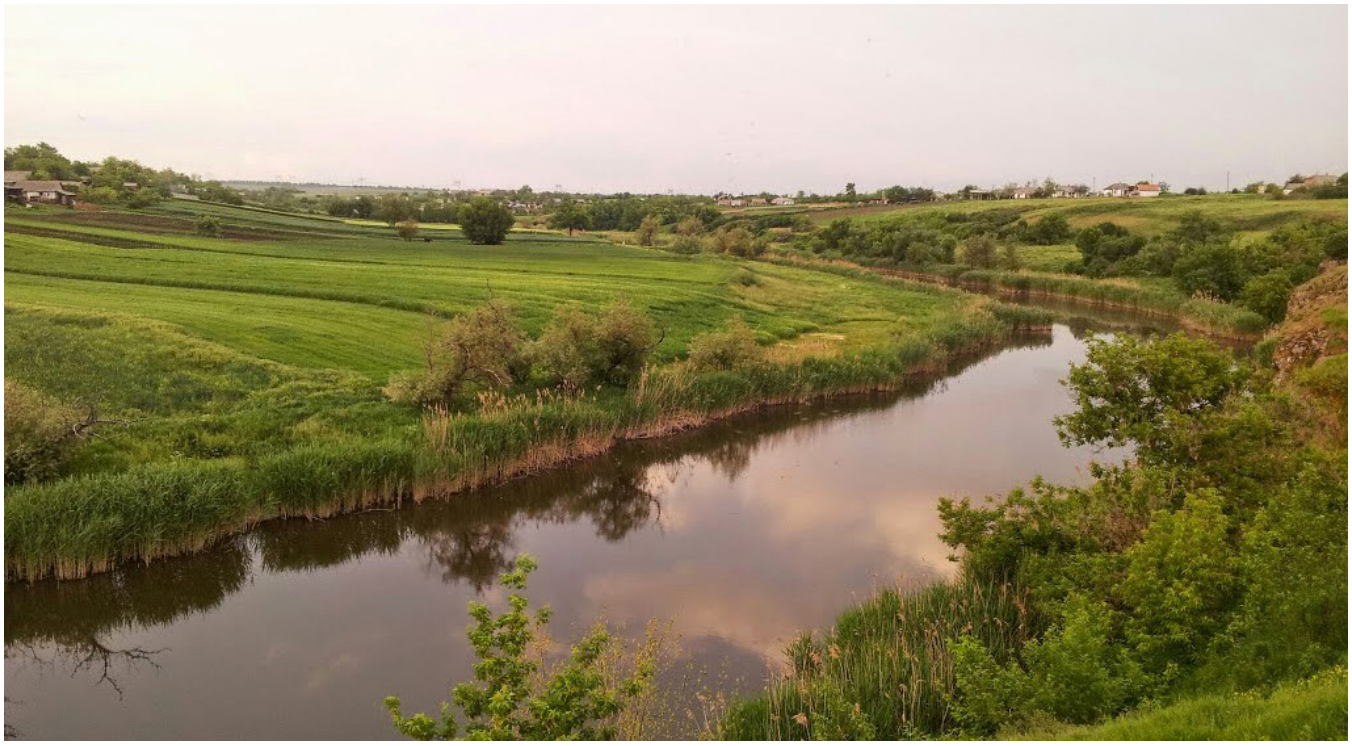
The whip in the hand of one of the troopers whistled through the air and stung Father in the back.

"Why are you doing this, gentlemen!?" began Father, raising his hands to protect his face and head. But a torrent of blows rained down on him.

"So, you filthy cop, you still love 'gentlemen' [gospoda]. Come on, comrades, let's show him some gentlemen!"

Upon seeing and hearing all this, Mother remembered my warning and, without lingering, rushed into the small room in the back of the hut that had a window. Jumping out of the window, she bent over double and ran down a ditch choked with weeds towards the river bank. Concealing

[6] In the 1920s–1930s Galina Kuzmenko lived mostly in France.



Galina's mother hid from the Red soldiers in a stand of rushes along the river.

herself in a thick stand of reeds, she sat in the mud and water and waited.

Soon she heard the clatter of horses' hoofs, the voices of the Red soldiers, and shots fired. Bullets whistled over her head, and two of them hit the water near where she was sitting.

When the shooting stopped, she still remained in the same place, afraid to move. She thought that the Reds had settled in somewhere and were waiting for her to emerge from her hiding place.

It was only in the middle of the night, exhausted and so cold from the night air and the water that her teeth were chattering, that she decided to come out onto the river bank.

She looked around. Not a soul to be seen. She decided not to return home, and made her way along the river through the gardens. On the following day, she encountered a woman in one of the gardens. This woman told Mother that her husband had been shot the night before, and that she was still being searched for by the Reds. The woman advised her not to show herself to people. This good person brought her a coat and some footwear.

All these days and nights she had spent in various gardens, where the peasants brought her food to eat. But she had no appetite.

The neighbours listened to Mother's tale and wiped away tears. And really, her story about her experiences, about her anxiety, fear, grief, tears, and desperation, about all that she felt and endured during the last few days, was impossible to listen to without shuddering and being overcome by feelings of pity for her. . .

Meanwhile, the automobile arrived back at our courtyard. Mother and I said goodbye to our good neighbours, and asked them to look after the hut, the cat, and the dog. Then we got in the car, and after picking up Nestor along the road, returned to Dobrovelichkovka.

My brother stayed behind in Peschany-Brod with the intention of finding out everything he could about the death of Father and viewing the grave where he was buried.

On the following day, my brother returned to Dobrovelichkovka. He had been able to meet and talk with many fellow-villagers. He visited the cemetery and saw the grave were Father and the others were buried.

He was able to tell us some more details by no means lacking in interest.

The peasants told him that after the big wagon was loaded with our family's goods, some of the Reds sat in it, tying their horses to the back. Father was ordered to sit up front and drive the horses to the town hall.

As they drove along our street past the hut of his first cousin Dionisy, Father turned to the Reds sitting in the back and asked for permission to halt for a minute to get a drink of water. Permission was granted.

"I raised a daughter, I taught her, I helped her make her way in the world, and now I must die for her. . ."

He stopped the horses and waved to his cousin sitting on the front porch. The cousin came out to the gate. Father asked him to bring a mug of water to drink. His brother went in the hut, returned with a mug of water, and gave it to Father. Father took it with trembling hands, and drained it through lips swollen from the beating he had received. Handing back the mug, he said:

"See, brother, what kind of world we live in!. . . I raised, a daughter, I taught her, I helped her make her way in the world, and now I must die for her. . ."

And upon saying this, he began to weep. . .

"Hey, you, you've had your drink, now let's get moving! There's nothing to talk about," cried the Reds in the back.

"Thank you, cousin, farewell!" he said to Dionisy, and got the horses moving again.

When they arrived at the town hall, Father was ordered to get down from the wagon. One of the Reds led him into the courtyard where he joined the other prisoners.

The prisoners were present at the meeting that night and heard the death sentence pronounced on them from the mouth of the speaker. None of the peasants were allowed to approach and talk to them. Only among themselves did the prisoners exchanged a few remarks.

Late at night, after the meeting, they were led to the other side of the village to be shot up against the shed of the school watchman.

Among the prisoners was one of the village's priests, wearing only underwear. But, apparently, one of the Red soldiers took pity on him and whispered along the way:

"Scram, Father, I won't notice."

So the priest slipped away in the dark.

Upon arriving at the shed next to the school, the prisoners were halted, and it was announced that they would be placed against the wall one by one and shot. The prisoners began to say goodbye to one another and exchange kisses. Especially poignant were the mutual farewells of the brothers who were teachers and the husband and wife.

My father, being very religious, had spent almost the whole march praying, and lamenting that he was dying without making a sacramental confession.

He was the first to be stood against the wall to be shot. He was ordered to face the wall.

"I'm ready to die and can look death straight in the eye," replied Father. And after crossing himself, he raised his hands and turned his eyes to the sky, praying:

"Lord, I commit my soul to your hands. . ."

The command rang out, then a volley, and, flailing his hands about, he collapsed on the ground.

The second to be stood against the wall was young Kavitsky.

"Butchers! . . . You're shooting the innocent! . . ." he was able to shout before they shot him.

Then it was the turn of Alexandra Efimovna. Another volley and, pierced by several bullets, she fell.

After her came her husband, Daniil Savich, who fell like a heavy sack at the feet of his wife.

Several minutes later the Reds, shouldering their rifles, took off for their quarters to rest, leaving six corpses by the street next to the shed.

At dawn of the following day, by order of the Red commander, several peasants were ordered to take wheel barrows and shovels and collect the bodies for burial.

The peasants decided to bury them in the cemetery and dug a large pit not far from the gate.

Before taking them to the cemetery, they began to undress the corpses and remove their footwear. The undressing of corpses was normal for those times, since clothing and shoes were terribly scarce. When they touched the woman, however, they discovered that her body was warm and that she was breathing weakly.

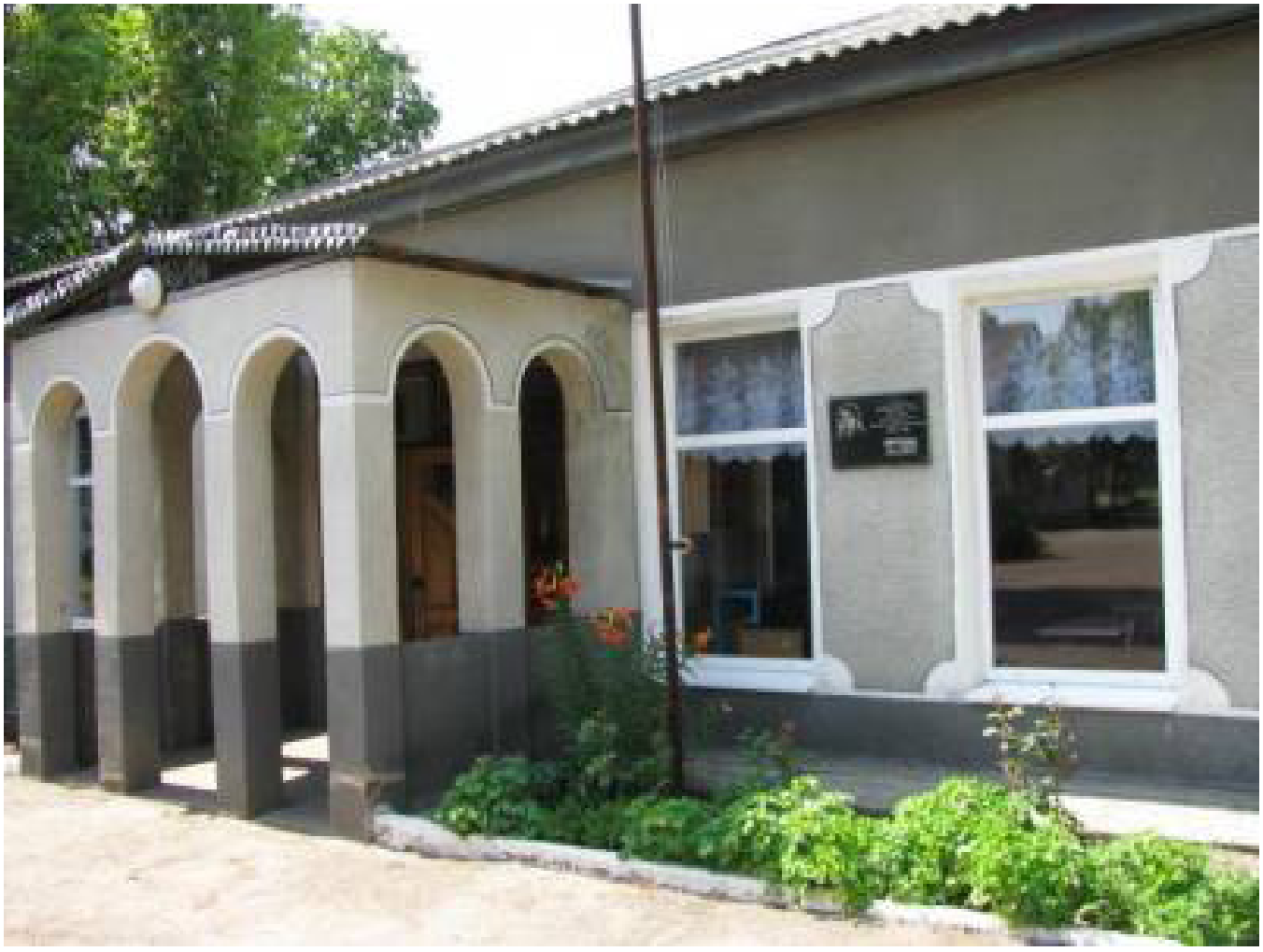
What were they to do with her? They couldn't bury her—she was alive, and possibly she might recover. It was also impossible to tell the Reds that she was alive—they would finish her off. A decision had to be made in a hurry—one of the Reds was liable to approach at any minute.

So what to do?

Hurriedly they decided to carry her to one of the closest huts, that of a poor widow where Red soldiers were not billeted.

The widow gasped when she saw they were carrying in a corpse. But when it was explained to her that this was not a corpse, but a living being, and that she might be able to save her, the widow rushed back in her hut and set up a cot with a clean sheet. The unfortunate victim was carefully laid down and left there under great secrecy. The other victims were undressed, transported to the cemetery, lowered into the pit without coffins, and the pit was filled in.

After sharing out the clothes of the dead people, the peasants agreed to keep quiet about the woman teacher and work out a plan to get her to the hospital.



The building that housed the two-room school attended by Galina Kuzmenko now has a memorial plaque dedicated to her.

A couple of hours later, while the Red soldiers, after a good night's rest and a bite to eat, were occupying themselves with stealing goods, beating peasants, and generally suppressing any sign of rebelliousness, a wagon with the injured woman was traveling along the streets of the village to the hospital. It was necessary to proceed along the main street. Several times the driver was challenged by Red soldiers, who asked:

"Where are you going? What are you carrying?"

To which the driver replied:

"Well, look here, something terrible has happened. This woman fell out of a loft. She's unconscious and I don't know whether or not she can be helped. So I'm taking her to the clinic to see what they say."

At the hospital, the excellent doctor, who was a friend of the teacher's, had already been warned. When they carried in the heavily wounded victim, she was placed in a separate room. Her wounds were bandaged, and she regained consciousness. Bullets had passed through her neck and shoulders in several places, but none of the wounds was mortal. However, because there was nerve damage, one side of her body was paralyzed.

My brother visited her in the hospital and spoke with her. The doctor expressed hope for her full recovery.

She said that when she recovered, she would go back to her own family.

She was really glad to see my brother and willingly told him about my father's last moments .

Published originally in ***Probuzhdenie***, No. 80-81, March-April 1937, pp. 14-24.

TRANSLATOR'S EPILOGUE

Galina's brother Stepan joined Makhno's army briefly, but then had to go into hiding and did not survive the Civil War. Her mother and her other brother Nikolai died in the 1930s, apparently of starvation. Galina and her daughter Yelena were arrested in Berlin at the end of World War II by Soviet authorities and sentenced to terms of imprisonment and exile. Released in 1954, Galina tried to return to her roots in Peschany-Brod, but no one there would receive her and she ended up spending a night in the Pomoshnaya railway station. She was also rejected by Nikolai's son in Kiev, who met her at the train station and asked her to go away. Her final option was to go live with her daughter in distant Kazakhstan. It was only in 1976, two years before her death, that Galina received an invitation from a member of Nestor's family to visit Gulyai-Polye, where she received a warm welcome.

Translation and notes by Malcolm Archibald.