

Sukhomlinsky News



The Ukrainian homeland

Dear reader,

I hope you are keeping well.

The stories in this month's newsletter are nearly all from a section of Sukhomlinsky's *Ethics Anthology* entitled 'Beauty—the joy of life'.

Reading these stories may give us some idea why Ukrainians are fighting so hard to defend their homeland, and what their homeland means to them.

'The oak and the crack willow' extols the virtue standing tall in the face of an onslaught, and not bowing to it.

'Sergeika's flower' shows us that it is not necessary to own something in order to appreciate it.

Many of the other stories explore the notion of 'homeland' and its connection to our childhood memories.

The final story, 'The Old Year and the New Year' is taken from the second section of the anthology, which is entitled 'To be human is to have strength of spirit'. Many of the stories in this section hark back to the experiences of World War II, which were so formative for Sukhomlinsky and for the people of Ukraine.

Best wishes,

Alan Cockerill



Stories from *An Ethics Anthology*

The oak and the crack willow

An oak tree and a crack willow grew side by side. With each passing year, the oak stretched higher and higher towards the sun. But the crack willow did not seem to grow at all, just to bush out. One day the oak asked it, 'Crack willow, why are you so small? Why do you have thin stalks instead of a trunk?'

The crack willow was silent for a while, and then answered, 'Wait till a hurricane comes, and then you will wish you were thin like me. I will bend to the earth and shut my eyes, and the hurricane will spare me. But it will break your mighty branches.'

And indeed, one day a hurricane did come flying from beyond the high mountains and beyond the distant sea. It thundered, and howled, and groaned, and cackled. The crack willow bent to the earth, stretched its thin branches over the grass, closed its eyes and ears, and shook with fear. But the oak stood tall facing the hurricane and straightened its mighty shoulders. The hurricane howled, and roared, and groaned, and tried to break the oak tree's branches, but the oak withstood its onslaught. Only one branch broke off and fell on top of the crack willow. Meanwhile, the hurricane, exhausted, lay down in a valley to rest, hardly breathing.

The crack willow nearly died of fright. It thought that the whole oak tree had fallen.

'How are you, oak tree? Are you still alive?'

'What does it matter?' answered the oak tree. 'It is better to grow tall and straight, and meet the hurricane standing, and fight it, than to bend to the earth and grow stunted and weak.'

Stories from *An Ethics Anthology* (cont.)

Sergeika's flower

It was the second last day before the school holidays. Four grade three boys came to school early in the morning. They sat down under a tall oak tree and began to boast about the presents their parents had given them.

Petro showed the boys his knife. It was a wonderful knife with a copper handle. The handle was engraved with a horse and rider.

'That's a good knife,' said the boys.

'It's my knife,' boasted Petro.

Maksim showed the boys a torch. The boys had never seen a torch like it. On its white casing a wonderful bird was engraved.

'That's a good torch,' said the boys.

'Its my torch,' boasted Maksim.

Grisha showed them a metal nightingale. When he put it to his lips, the nightingale sang.

'That's a good nightingale,' said the boys.

'Its my nightingale,' boasted Grisha.

The boys waited to see what Sergeika had in his pocket. Sergeika invited them to follow him.

'Come with me.'

He took the boys to a thicket and showed them a flower growing under an acacia. It was a beautiful flower. Drops of dew sparkled on its pale blue petals, and in each drop of dew a little sun shone.

'What a beauty!' said the boys.

'But that's not your flower,' said Petro. 'You can't take it home with you.'

'Why would I want to take it home?' asked Sergeika in surprise.

'You can't swap it for something else,' added Maksim.

'Why would I want to swap the flower for something else?' asked Sergeika, not understanding at all.

'I could say that that is my flower,' put in Grisha.

'Would that make it any worse?' asked Sergeika.

A campfire in the field

It is a quiet autumn day. The sun shines but is no longer warm. Silver spider webs fly in the air. Near the pond, in a meadow, cows are grazing. Mum and I are in the field. Mum is working and I am near her. In the evening, we sit near a big heap of potatoes. A small campfire is burning. The potatoes are being baked. How nice it is to sit near a fire, to mix the ashes with a stick and wait for baked potatoes.

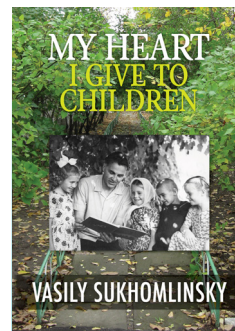
And now the potatoes are baked. As we are enjoying the delicious potatoes, a V-shaped formation of cranes flies across the sky. The sun sets behind the forest, the field darkens, and a wave of cold air spills from the valley.

Whenever I remember this day, my heart becomes so light...

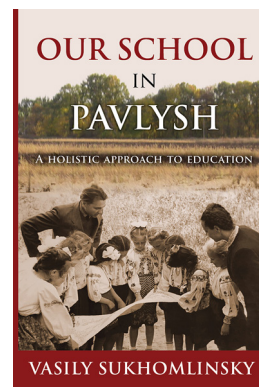
The chrysanthemum and the onion

Not far from a house grew a chrysanthemum. Towards the end of summer, it produced beautiful pink flowers. The chrysanthemum admired its own beauty. Its flowers whispered to each other, 'Look how beautiful we are!'

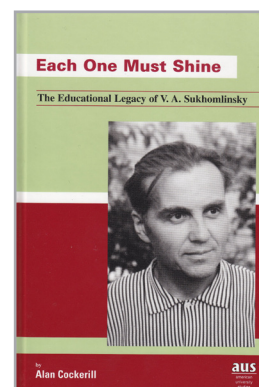
Next to the chrysanthemum grew an onion, an ordinary brown onion. Towards the end of summer, the onion ripened, its green top withered, and it gave off a strong onion smell. The chrysanthemum screwed up its nose and said to the onion, 'What an unpleasant smell you have. I can't imagine why people would grow such a plant. Probably to repel flees.'



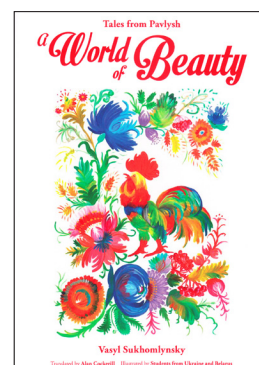
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The onion was silent. It did indeed feel very plain, compared with the chrysanthemum.

Just then a woman came out of the house and headed towards the chrysanthemum. The chrysanthemum held its breath. It was expecting the woman to say how beautiful it was.

The woman walked up to the chrysanthemum and said, 'What beautiful chrysanthemum flowers!'

The chrysanthemum melted with pleasure. Then the woman bent over, pulled up the onion, and examined it carefully. 'What a beautiful onion!' she exclaimed.

The chrysanthemum was surprised. 'Is it really possible for an onion to be beautiful?' it wondered.

The red-breasted waxwings

Where does my idea of my homeland come from? From the things that are most deeply engraved on my memory from childhood.

For some reason the most vivid of my many childhood memories is of some red-breasted waxwings. It was a bright winter morning. The sun's rays were shining through the snowflakes. I looked out the window and saw some red-breasted waxwings. They were looking for something in the snow, or perhaps they were just playing. I gazed with wonder at something I was seeing for the first time. Why did they have red breasts? And where had these wonderful birds flown from?

My mother told me they had flown from beyond the sun.

The waxwings flew away, but I could not forget them. I even dreamed of them that night.

Every time I see red-breasted waxwings I remember my childhood. I remember the fairy-tale about the little bird that flew from beyond the sun.

Everything that we remember from our distant childhood is dear to us. That is where our first notions of our native land come from.

The willow by the pond

One clear, warm, autumn day, an old, hollow willow tree was leaning over a pond. Perhaps at that moment it was thinking, 'Autumn comes, and then winter. After winter, spring will come, and everything will be in flower, but I will never turn green again, because I am old.'

I felt very sorry for that willow tree. In spring I came to see if it had turned green, but it had not. It just stood there all dried out. However, next to it two tender green shoots had appeared. They were two young willow trees that had grown from the roots of the old one. And it seemed to me that the old, dry willow tree was rejoicing, and thinking 'I have not died. I will live forever!'

When I hear the word 'homeland' I remember that old willow tree and the two young shoots. Life never ends, and our homeland is eternal in the same way.

Winter twilight

It was a quiet winter evening. The sky was completely covered with dark clouds and snow was falling. It was beginning to get dark. My mother and I were sitting by the window and looking at the fields. An endless white carpet stretched before us. On that white carpet, somewhere in the distance, a black dot was moving.

'What is that?' I asked my mother.

'I could be a dog, or it could be a cunning fox. It could even be a grey wolf,' answered my mother quietly.

'A grey wolf?' I repeated in surprise. 'Where could a grey wolf have come from?'

'From a fairy-tale,' said my mother. 'That is not just a white field we are looking at, but a fairy-tale field.'

'And the forest?' I asked. 'Over there on the horizon. That's a real forest, isn't it?'

'The forest is also a fairy-tale forest,' whispered my mother. 'A dark, magic forest...'

I will never forget that winter twilight. It is so dear to me! It is a part of my life, and of my native land.

The swallow above my window

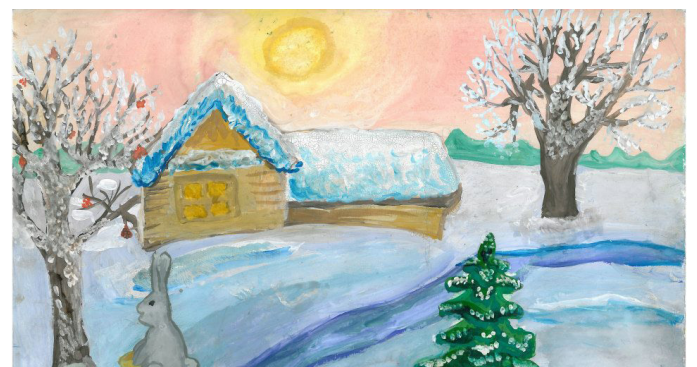
I was lying by my window. The glass was covered with intricate patterns. The frost had drawn wonderful animals, flowers, blue mountains and a tall poplar. I can still remember that poplar, standing tall and proud. The wind tried to bend it over, but it would not bow its head...

Then the sun warmed up, the patterns melted away, and I could see the blue sky. By the window some swallows were chirping. They sat on the windowsill and looked into my room. They flitted off somewhere as quick as could be, brought some earth in their beaks, and moulded a nest.

I sat by the window and watched how the swallows went about building their nest. With each day the sun grew warmer. Leaves rustled on the apple trees, and the swallows became calm and affectionate. Now they had eggs in their nest.

Then the swallows became very sensitive and wary. One day a little chick looked out of the nest.

I have a swallow's nest above my window now. It is like a song from my distant childhood. When I hear the word 'homeland', I remember the icy patterns on my windowpanes, and the first lump of soil in that swallow's beak.





Stories

A formation of cranes in the sky

This is a memory from the time when my grandmother was still alive. I remember we were sitting by the window just before the sun went down. I was looking at the blue sky, and through the rectangle of glass I saw a formation of cranes. My grandmother said, 'Spring has come. The cranes have returned to their native land.'

Grandma told me a fairy-tale about a crane with a broken wing and how in autumn it could not fly with its friends to warmer lands, how it asked its friends not to forget it, and how a little boy saved it.

I listened to the story and watched the formation of cranes. I will remember that evening all my life. I will remember everything: how my grandmother and I were sitting together, how there was a sprig of willow on the windowsill... and the formation of cranes in the blue sky, as if painted on canvas. When I hear the word 'homeland', I remember that formation of cranes. I hear a song about the wide fields and the blue sky.

How dear those cranes are to me...

The old cherry tree

Not far from our house grew a cherry tree, as old as old can be. Half its branches had completely withered, while the other half still bore tasty cherries. One spring only a single branch flowered. Father wanted to cut the cherry tree down—after all it was dying—but mother said, 'Don't cut it down. Your grandfather planted that cherry tree. Let the cherries grow on that branch...'

For one last time, the cherry tree bore fruit. Mother collected the pips and planted them in the earth. Young cherry trees grew from those pips. The old cherry tree withered, but the young ones are already flowering and bearing fruit.

Just as that cherry tree did not die, but continued its line, so a nation never dies. As long as the people live, the homeland lives.

We will always preserve the old and the ancient. We will preserve the things our grandparents and great grandparents treasured. This is the memory of our nation. If a nation loses its memory, it loses its love for its homeland.

The green meadow

When I hear the word 'homeland' I am reminded of a green meadow... that meadow used to seem so big to me, limitless, as if it was the whole world. The sun shone in the blue sky. The carpet of green was dotted with yellow, blue and pink flowers. Bees were buzzing. Butterflies were hovering, big and bright. I used to stand on the bank of that great green ocean, and I wanted to take in with my eyes all the beauty that so excited me.

A day in childhood seems endless, and a meadow limitless. A field stretches as far as the eye can see. Not long ago in springtime I went to that meadow. The same green grass, the same flowers, the same butterflies. And the sun was shining in the deep blue sky, and the bees were buzzing. But for some reason it all seemed small, like a child's toy.

Why is that? Probably because childhood represents the most tender shoots of the tree that we call our homeland. In childhood the tenderest, the most subtle colours of our native land are revealed to us. Remember your childhood, and you will approach the limitless ocean of your native land.

The Old Year and the New Year

On New Year's Eve, two years met: the Old Year, a grey old man, and the New Year, a youth. The Old Year handed his keys over to the New Year and said, 'This big key is to earthly riches. Hand it over to the people straight away. May they mine much coal, ore and oil. May they make many machines. This middle key is to the grain fields. You can give it to the people immediately as well. May they grow much wheat, rice and sugar beet. May they have much milk, meat and butter.

And this is the smallest key. It is to the armoury. Protect this key more than your own eye. As soon as you notice that an enemy is planning to attack our land, give this key to the people and tell them to quickly arm themselves. Do not sleep either day or night.'

Those are the instructions the Old Year gave to the New.

