

Sukhomlinsky News



Prompting thought about values

Dear reader,

I hope you are keeping well.

The stories and descriptions in this month's newsletter are all from Sukhomlinsky's Ethics Anthology.

Scanning through this month's selection of stories, I identified the following values or human qualities that are illustrated in them: hope and tenacity ('Water in the Flask'), generosity ('An ordinary man'), remembrance and respect ('The soldier's spoon'), love and loyalty ('The corncrake and the mole'), politeness ('Borrowing a spade'), self-sacrifice ('The doctor fell ill'), trust ('Oksana left'), responsibility and care ('The precious ear of wheat'), hospitality ('A hut in the forest') and kindness ('The same words'). You may find other values illustrated as well.

Such stories were not told in isolation but were part of an integrated system of education that gave students many opportunities to put values into practice.

I hope you find them meaningful.

Best wishes,

Alan Cockerill



Stories from *An Ethics Anthology*

Water in the flask

A traveller trudges through the dry, waterless steppe. The sun scorches his body and the burning wind stings his eyes. The traveller has been walking for many hours, but the steppe is endless. He has no strength left and is very thirsty. He licks his cracked lips with his dry tongue and, breathing heavily, gazes at the far horizon. In the violet haze something dark glimmers. Perhaps it is a forest?

High in the sky an eagle hovers. He has noticed the Traveller and glides down, circling above the man. He sees that the man is carrying a flask over his shoulder. The bird's sensitive hearing detects the sound of water sloshing in the flask.

'Traveller, I can see that you are exhausted,' says the eagle. 'You will collapse and die of thirst. Why do you not drink some water? You have a full flask over your shoulder.'

'If I drink the water, I will not have any hope left,' answers the traveller. 'My strength was exhausted long ago, and it is only hope that keeps me going.'

The eagle cannot understand what hope is. He circles for a long time above the traveller, his eyes frozen in an expression of bewilderment, like dark beads.

After circling for some time, he flaps his wings and disappears into the burning-hot sky. The Traveller continues on his way.

Stories from *An Ethics Anthology* (cont.)

An ordinary man

In the middle of the hot, dry steppe was a well. By the well was a hut. In the hut lived a grandfather and his grandson.

The well had a bucket on a long rope. When people travelled that way, they would stop at the well, drink some water, and thank the grandfather.

One day the bucket came off the rope and fell to the bottom of the deep well. The grandfather did not have another bucket and had no way of getting water to drink.

The next morning a man rode up to the hut in a cart. He had a bucket under some hay.

The traveller looked at the well, looked at the grandfather and his grandson, cracked his whip at the horse, and travelled on.

'What sort of man was that?' asked the grandson.

'That is not a man,' answered the grandfather.

At midday another traveller came past the grandfather's hut. He took a bucket from under his hay, tied it to the rope, drew some water and had a drink, gave a drink to the grandfather and his grandson, poured some water on the dry sand, put his bucket back under his hay, and travelled on.

'What sort of man was that?' asked the grandson.

'That is still not a man,' answered the grandfather.

In the evening a third traveller stopped by the grandfather's hut. He took a bucket from his cart, tied it to the rope, drew water, had a drink, thanked them and travelled on, leaving the bucket tied to the rope.

'And what sort of man was that?' asked the grandson.

'An ordinary man,' answered the grandfather.

The soldier's spoon

A spoon is on display on our sideboard. It has become sacred to our family.

This is what my mother told me about it: 'I was only little when the fascists attacked our land. It was hard living under occupation, there was nothing to eat, and the schools were closed.

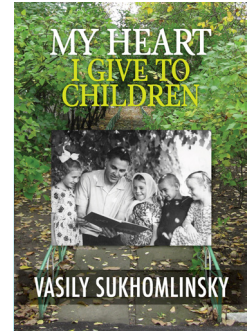
At last, the happy day of liberation of our native land from the invaders arrived. There was a fierce battle for our village. In that battle a young soldier was critically wounded not far from our house. He lived for several hours, and I looked after him. The soldier gave me his spoon and said, "I don't have anything else to leave in memory. Take this spoon—it has been through the whole war with me."

Now we keep the spoon in a place of honour as a treasured relic. It reminds us of the deeds of our heroes. It is a small part of our homeland.

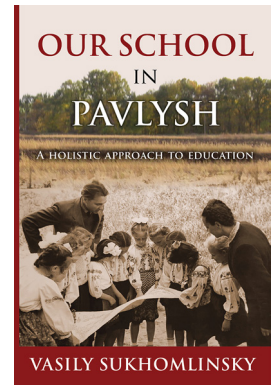
The corncrake and the mole

A little grey bird, a corncrake, is heading north, returning from a faraway warm land far to ours. In summer, the corncrake raises its chicks in our land, and then flies to Africa for the winter.

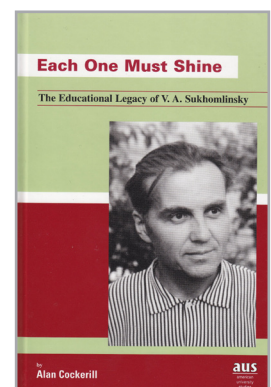
It is difficult for the corncrake to fly, because its wings are small, so sometimes it flies, and sometimes it walks. That is what it is doing now. It has landed and is continuing on foot, walking on and on. As it walks, it softly sings a song about its land in the far north and its nest under



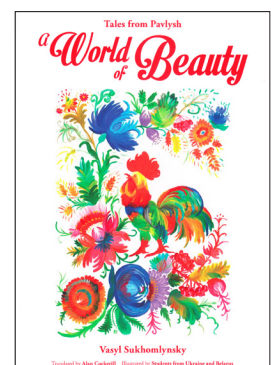
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a crack willow in a green meadow. That is where its dear homeland is.

It walks and walks, and suddenly meets a mole. The mole is sitting in its burrow, and sticks its head out and asks the corncrake, 'Who are you, and where are you going?'

'I am a corncrake, and I am returning to my homeland from a warm land in the south.'

The corncrake told the mole all about its distant homeland in the north, and about the warm lands in Africa.

'But why don't you just settle in that warm land forever?' asks the puzzled mole. 'Why do you travel thousands of kilometres every year? You have worn your legs out so much they are bleeding. You could be attacked at any moment by a kite. What makes you go through such hardship? What calls you to the cold north?'

'My homeland,' answers the corncrake.

Borrowing a spade

A father sent his seven-year-old son to ask a favour of his neighbour, Grandpa Fyodor.

'Misha, go and ask if we can borrow his spade for half a day. Ours has broken.'

The boy came to Grandpa Fyodor and said, 'Give us your spade, Grandpa. My father asked if we can borrow it...'

But old man just kept doing what he was doing, as if he could not see or hear Misha. Misha might as well not have been there.

Misha asked again, 'Give us your spade, Grandpa. My father asked if we can borrow it...'

The old man still did not reply. The boy returned home empty-handed and asked, 'Dad, what's wrong with Grandpa Fyodor?'

'Did you say hello to Grandpa and ask how he is?'

'No,' answered Misha.

'Go back to Grandpa, say hello, and ask if he is well. Then ask him to forgive you your ignorance. If he forgives you, then you can ask for the spade.'

Misha went back to Grandpa Fyodor's house and said everything that his father had asked him to. The old man seemed so stern that Misha nearly cried when he asked for forgiveness.

Grandpa Fyodor smiled, stroked Misha's head and gave him the spade. Then he said, 'Go over to the apple tree by the well and pick yourself an apple. Pick the best one you can find.'

The doctor fell ill

This happened high in the Carpathian Mountains. After a blizzard, the mountains were covered in mist. It had snowed for three days, and snowdrifts covered the roads and pathways. It was impossible to reach the little mountain village on foot, by road or by plane.

In the village was a hospital. Seven patients were being treated there. One little girl was seriously ill.

She needed an operation.

And suddenly a misfortune happened: the doctor fell seriously ill. He could not get up; his whole body burnt as if on fire.

The little girl was groaning in the ward.

Many people came to see the doctor. They stood in silent grief and waited. Perhaps the doctor would get better. Perhaps he would get up and perform the operation the sick girl needed.

The doctor's apartment was next to the ward where the little girl was lying. At sunrise, when the doctor regained consciousness, he heard quiet groans. It was the little girl groaning.

Gathering all his strength, the doctor got up. He put on his white surgical gown. Nurses helped him to stand, and he performed the operation.

When the operation was completed, the doctor again lost consciousness. He lay in his bed, and there was no-one to help him, as he was the only doctor in the village. The mist covering the village was so thick that no-one could reach the village by road, on foot, or by plane.

During the night, the doctor died.

But the little girl got better.

Oksana left

A young woman named Marina was sitting at the table and sewing. Needles and thread lay on the table in front of her. In the middle of the table lay some money—about twenty roubles.

Marina was visited by her neighbour Oksana, who was also a young woman. Their houses were next to each other, and their children studied at the same school. Oksana asked if she could borrow a knife for cutting up cabbage. The knife was in the cellar. Marina put down her sewing and said, 'I'll go down into the cellar now and find the knife.' She took the money from the table, clenched it in her hand, and went to look for the knife.

She came back a minute later. In her left hand was a big knife, used in villages in autumn to cut up cabbage for storage in a barrel.

Oksana was nowhere to be seen. Marina stood there, with downcast eyes. With slow, heavy steps she walked over to the table and sat down, leaning on her elbows. From her clenched right hand, her money fell on to the table.





Stories

A precious ear of wheat

It was during the dark days of the fascist invasion. The enemy were killing and torturing people, driving them into slave labour. They took their crops and their homes.

Before the war, our agricultural scientists had developed a new variety of wheat that yielded four tonnes per hectare. But the fascists came and took the wheat. Grandpa Andrei was an old collective farmer, and his heart ached. He went to the field where the wheat had grown and found a single ear of wheat. He picked it up from the earth, wrapped it in his handkerchief and took it home. He put it in a chest so he could keep it until they were liberated from fascist slavery.

For two years our people suffered under fascist bondage. And then liberation came: the Red Army crushed the fascists. Grandpa Andrei got out his ear of the wonderful wheat, picked out the grains and sowed them. In the autumn he harvested three handfuls of wheat. He sowed it again and harvested half a sack of wheat. He sowed it again and gave the collective farm ten sackfuls.

That is how Grandpa Andrei saved the wonderful wheat.

A hut in the forest

A grandfather and his ten-year-old grandson were walking through a vast forest. A barely discernible path wound between tall trees.

It was evening and the travellers were tired. The grandfather was already preparing to set up camp under the open sky, when suddenly the boy caught sight of a little hut in a thicket by the side of the forest path.

'Grandpa, look, there's a hut!' shouted the grandson joyfully. 'Maybe we can spend the night there.'

'Yes, it's a hut for travellers like us,' explained the grandfather.

They entered the hut. It was clean inside, with a fir branch hanging on the wooden wall. According to folk tradition, this signified hospitality: please make yourselves at home, respected guests.

The grandfather and his grandson stepped over

to a table and saw a fresh loaf of bread and a little jug of honey.

On the windowsill was a bucket full of water.

The grandfather and his grandson washed and sat down to supper.

'Who put food on the table like this?' asked the grandson.

'A kind person,' explained his grandfather.

'How can that be?' asked the grandson in amazement. 'A kind person left food for us, and we don't even know who they are. Why did they make such an effort?'

'So that you would become a better person,' answered the grandfather.

The same words

In summer, grade five student Andrei went to work on the animal breeding farm. He was assigned to Grandma Marina, the cook. Andrei helped Grandma Marina—carting water, peeling potatoes, chopping wood, and slicing bread.

It is a free and easy, enjoyable life working in the steppe in summer. The sun warms you, the wind blows, the birds sing, and you can swim in the pond if Grandma Marina lets you.

Each morning, Grandma Marina said to Andrei, 'Go and bring some water.'

And grandma Marina had such a quiet, kind, tender voice, that Andrei quickly took the bucket and ran to the well. The well was some distance away, on the edge of the forest. Andrei would draw a bucket of water and return ten minutes later.

But then they sent another worker to the farm—Grandpa Karp. He began to work there as the watchman.

No-one liked Grandpa Karp. Grandma Marina did not like him, and neither did Andrei. Grandpa Karp was silent and frowned all the time. One day Andrei asked him, 'Grandpa, can you tell me a story?'

'You only want a story because you've got nothing better to do... Go and bring some water.'

The words were so cold and heartless that Andrei was very reluctant to get the water. He drew a full bucket and then sat by the well for a long time. He did not want to go back to Grandpa Karp.

Andrei eventually returned with the water and then ran straight to Grandma Marina.

In the morning the boy was up before the sun. He peeled some potatoes and waited impatiently for Grandma Marina to send him for water. At last, he heard the quiet, tender words: 'Go and bring some water.'

Andrei ran to the well, quickly drew the water and brought it to the kitchen.