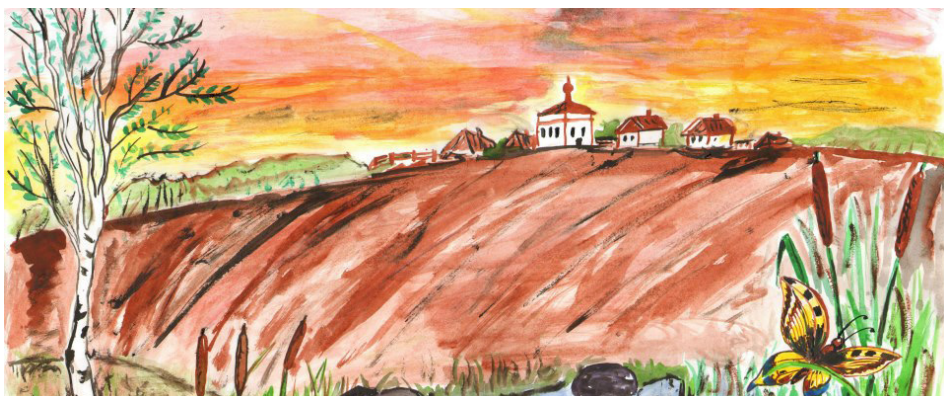


Sukhomlinsky News



Stories from *An Ethics Anthology*

Kolya felt some relief

On the way to school, on the bridge over the pond, Kolya, who was in grade six, met Grandma Marina. He knew her well because she lived next door to his parents' house.

The old lady was carrying a bundle, tied up in white cloth. On the bridge the bundle came loose, and onions spilled out onto the road. The big, yellow onions rolled some distance, and one fell off the bridge into the pond. The old lady was flustered and did not know what to do.

Kolya thought it was funny. He laughed loudly and ran away. When she heard him laughing, Grandma Marina raised her eyes, looked at the boy, and shook her head. When he looked around, Kolya saw her eyes, full of pain and reproach.

At school, Kolya could not forget the incident. He no longer thought it was funny. It seemed to him that the old lady's eyes were looking into his soul, and again he felt her pain and her reproach. He felt a pressure on his heart, and he wanted to go straight away to see her and ask her forgiveness. 'I'll go and see her this evening,' he thought.

But the evening came and went, and so did the next day and the day after, and he could not make up his mind to go and ask Grandma Marina for forgiveness. A few days later, his mother came home from work and told him, 'Grandma Marina has died...'

This news stunned the boy. He felt as if something burning turned over in his chest, and his heart beat rapidly... The boy burst into tears.

'What's the matter?' asked his mother.

Kolya told her all about what had happened. His mother sighed and said, 'When they bury Grandma Marina, walk behind her coffin. When they lower the coffin into the grave, throw a handful of earth onto it, and say, "Forgive me, Grandma..."'

'Do you really think she will hear what I say?' whispered Kolya.

'She won't hear it, but for you the sun will shine more brightly!'

When they lowered Grandma Maria's coffin into her grave, Kolya threw a handful of earth onto it and said, 'Forgive me, Grandma...!' And at that moment the sun shone more brightly, and the sky became clearer. Kolya felt some relief.

Respect for elders

Dear reader,

I hope you are keeping well.

Once again, I am offering translations of stories from Sukhomlinsky's *Ethics Anthology*.

Many of this month's stories come from a section of the anthology entitled 'Respecting and honouring elders.'

The stories examine various aspects of this topic, including showing respect for frailty, respecting the wisdom and experience of older people, being grateful for the love and security that parents have provided, and honouring the memory of those who have passed away. There are also some moments of humour when Sukhomlinsky shows that children can sometimes interpret what adults tell them in unexpected ways, and a reminder to parents of the impact that their examples have on children.

I hope you find the stories meaningful.

Best wishes,

Alan Cockerill



Stories from *An Ethics Anthology* (cont.)

A broken branch

A boy was running along the avenue in a park. It was a sunny spring day, birds were singing in the trees, and beautiful butterflies were fluttering among the flowers. The boy felt very happy, and he waved his arms as he ran.

Along the avenue some young linden trees were growing. They had just been planted. Sweet-smelling green leaves were growing on their thin branches. The boy tore off leaves and scattered them along the avenue for fun. He bent down to one little linden tree and tore off not just some leaves, but a whole branch. The little branch fell to the ground. The boy stopped for a minute and looked at the quivering leaves. He looked at the little linden tree. On one side, instead of a branch, a wound gaped... The boy felt sorry for the little linden tree, but not for long. It was such a joyful, sunny day... The boy stepped over the branch and kept running.

Many years passed. The boy grew up and had children. His children grew up, and the former boy became a grandfather.

One warm spring day he came to the same park where he had once run around as a mischievous little boy. All along the level roadway grew tall, shapely linden trees. But one linden tree appeared to be wounded. It was as if it was missing one of its arms. Instead of a branch, there was a deep scar.

The old man stopped. He recognised this tree. Many years ago, he had broken a little branch off it. And now this tall, shapely tree was missing one of its limbs. There were fewer green leaves on it, fewer linden flowers and fewer buzzing bees, because he had broken that branch. There was less joy in the world.

The old man sighed. He stood and looked up the avenue. Along the roadway a little boy was running.

Petrik and Pavlik

A mother and father were sitting at the table. The mother was sewing; the father was reading the newspaper. Five-year-old Petrik was playing on the sofa, saddling his horse, preparing for a long journey, dreaming of a voyage beyond the deep blue sea.

Petrik's mother looked out the window and said to his father, 'The devil's bringing Grandma Martha ...'

Petrik quickly dismounted from his horse and ran to the window to see this wonder of wonders, but he was too late. Grandma Martha was already knocking at the door.

His mother said, 'Please come in.'

When Grandma Martha came into the room, Petrik's mother spoke to her affectionately and asked her to sit down. The old lady sat down, sighed deeply, and murmured, 'I barely managed to walk here. My legs are so sore, so sore...'

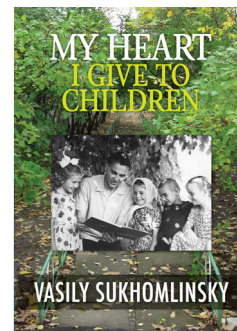
Petrik looked with amazement at Grandma Martha. He asked, 'Grandma Martha, did you really walk here all by yourself?'

'Yes, my dear, I walked. I did not drive,' answered Grandma Martha, and she smiled and gave Petrik a sweet shortcake to eat.

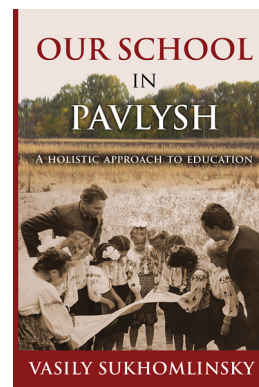
'Mum, you said the devil brought Grandma Martha,' said Petrik reproachfully.

His mother's face flushed and then turned pale. She looked down at her sewing. His father hid behind his newspaper. Grandma Martha got up and quietly left. An oppressive silence came over the house.

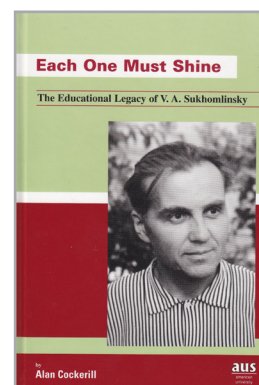
Many years passed. Petrik grew into an adult. He had a wife and a five-year-old son named Pavlik. His father died, and his mother lived by herself in their old home.



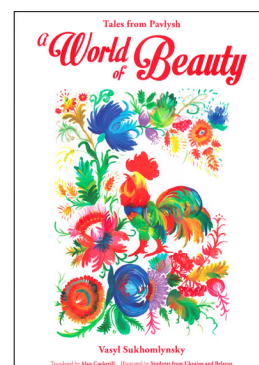
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One day the elderly mother visited her son. She spent the afternoon there, and evening was approaching. The old mother said, as if thinking aloud, 'Should I walk home, or spend the night here? It is getting dark, and it's a long way.'

'You should go home, mum,' said her son.

Meanwhile, five-year-old Pavlik was playing on the sofa, saddling his horse, preparing for a long journey, dreaming of a voyage beyond the deep blue sea.

When he heard his father saying good-bye to his grandmother, Pavlik said, 'You can have my horse, Grandma. You can sit on it and ride home...'

His grandmother put on her coat, and tears fell from her eyes.

At Uncle Matvei's house

On Saturday little Demko's mother told him, 'Tomorrow we're going to Krutoyarivka to visit Uncle Matvei. He has lots of apples. There will be a bowl of apples on the table. Your uncle will probably invite us to eat an apple. Make sure you behave properly, Demko. Only take the smallest apple, and make sure you say "thank you". And then, no matter how many times Uncle Matvei offers you an apple, say "no, thank you".'

Demko carefully remembered what his mother had taught him.

The next day they visited Uncle Matvei. He sat at the table, while Demko and his mother sat on the sofa. On the table was a bowl of apples. Demko wanted to take a big red apple, but he knew he must not... He was planning on taking another apple that was not very big, but not the smallest either.

Uncle Matvei talked with his mother for a long time. They talked about the harvest and the weather, but Uncle Matvei did not mention the apples.

Demko asked his mother in a whisper, 'If Uncle Matvei does not offer us any apples, should I say "thank you" or "no, thank you"?' His whisper was so loud that as well as Uncle Matvei hearing it, Auntie Motrya heard it as she washed the dishes in the next room.

The room became very quiet. The mother's face turned red with shame, but Uncle Matvei's face was not red at all.

Mum comes home

It is a winter's evening. Outside, a blizzard is howling and screaming. Little Zoya is listening, waiting for her mother to come home from work. It seems to Zoya as if a huge and terrible beast is crashing around outside. Now he has crept right up to the window. Now he is knocking on the glass. Zoya screws her eyes up tight.

Suddenly her mother comes silently into the room, goes up to her daughter and gives her a hug

and a kiss.

'You weren't frightened by yourself?' asks her mother.

'No, I wasn't frightened,' says Zoya happily.

Outside the blizzard has fallen silent. The wind is now just a sound in the distance.

Zoya goes up to the window. Snowflakes are swirling merrily above the earth.

Grandpa's spoon

Every day before dinner, Natasha used to take the spoons from the buffet and put them on the table—mum's, dad's, grandpa's and her own.

In winter, Natasha's grandpa died. The girl wept and grieved. She loved her grandpa very much.

From then on, at dinner time, grandpa's spoon stayed in the buffet. Each time Natasha laid the table, she reached for it, took it in her hand and then put it back on the shelf.

The years passed. Natasha grew up, became a young woman, and completed high school. On the day that Natasha graduated from school, she put grandpa's spoon on the table.

Grandpa's spoon sat next to Natasha's plate. Her mother and father were silent. Natasha was silent too. The silence was solemn and beautiful.

Why was mum crying?

Olesya in grade one had an older brother named Nikolai. He was a tractor driver.

The time came for Nikolai to serve in the Soviet Army.

Seeing her son off, the mother burst into tears. Olesya understood why her mother was crying. Her brother would serve for two years. For two years her mother would not see him. That is why she was crying. Olesya started crying too...

Two years passed. The joyful news arrived—Nikolai was returning from the army.

Olesya and her mother went to the station to meet her brother.

Nikolai stepped out of the carriage and smiled. His mother ran to him, hugged him and burst into tears.

Olesya was puzzled. Why was her mother crying now?





Stories

Why did grandma leave?

Mariika's mother was helping her get ready for school. Mariika was in grade three.

Mariika's mother ironed her dress and helped her to put it on. Then she tied Mariika's scarf. The girl had only recently become a Pioneer. Then she helped Mariika put on some red shoes.

Mariika did not like the red shoes. She said, 'I want the green shoes.'

Mum brought the green shoes and helped the girl to put them on.

But the girl did not like the green shoes either. She took them off and said to her mother, 'I want the black shoes...'

The girl's grandmother was sitting near the window. She was watching Mariika and shaking her head. When Mariika said she did not like the black shoes, the grandmother gave a deep sigh and walked out of the house.

Why did she leave?

Grandma's hands

Grandma knits stockings. Her old, overworked hands move rapidly. Now the right and left hands come together, one helping the other. Now they have stopped and seem to be consulting each other. They consult each other, and then get back to work. They begin to knit even more quickly. But in the evening the fingers of one hand squeeze the fingers of the other hand. They are thanking each other for their cheerful work.

But then grandma falls ill. The illness has laid her low, and she is lying in bed. Mum says, 'It is the years that have laid her low.'

Her hands are motionless. They lie on her chest next to each other. Her fingers move slightly, as if her hands want to be with each other. But the years do not allow it. The right hand creeps over to the left, and her fingers grip each other, and are still. Her hand is complaining of the pain.

Gradually grandma gets better. Her hands come to life. She still does not get out of her bed, but her hands cannot live without each other, and they knit some stockings. But why do they keep consulting each other? Can they really have forgotten how to knit?

I won't do it again

During the spring, some grade five students were helping the collective farm workers sow watermelons and rockmelons. Two old men were in charge of the work—Grandpa Dmitrii and Grandpa Dementii. They were both grey haired and both had faces covered in wrinkles. To the children they seemed about the same age. None of the children knew that Grandpa Dementii was Grandpa Dmitrii's father. One was ninety years old and the other over seventy.

And then Grandpa Dementii began complaining that his son had not properly prepared the watermelon seeds for planting. The children were amazed to hear Grandpa Dementii scolding Grandpa Dmitrii.

'How could you be so careless, son, so thoughtless... I've been trying all your life to teach you some sense, but there is no end to it. You need to keep watermelon seeds warm, and what have you done? They're frozen. They will sit in the ground for a week without sprouting...'

Grandpa Dmitrii stood in front of Grandpa Dementii like a seven-year-old boy, quietly shifting from leg to leg, his head bowed, and respectfully whispered, 'Dad, it won't happen again. I'm sorry dad...'

The children became thoughtful. Each of them was thinking of their own father.

The light in the window

A winter night sets in. The lights go out in all the homes. The village is sleeping. The only light still on is at the school. Our teacher is still awake.

I sit by the window. I want to stay up until the light goes out at the school, but sleep overpowers me. I get into bed. As I go to sleep, I plan to get up very early, before the light at school turns on.

I wake up early. Everyone in the house is sleeping. I look out the window. The village is still asleep. The only light on is at the school.

'Has it been on all night?' I wonder.

Milk is white...

The teacher said, 'Children, I would like you to draw a cow...'

The grade one students bent over their albums. Little Mariika drew a tiny, tiny cow in the corner of her page.

The teacher walked over to Mariika and asked, 'Why have you drawn such a small cow? Look at all the white paper left over.'

'That's not white paper,' answered Mariika. 'That's milk. And milk is white...'

