



Grandmother's memories

Vlasov S. A.

Preface



Beginning in early 2024, I recorded my grandmother, A. S. Boytsova, on a voice recorder in her room. Sometimes she would begin telling a story herself; sometimes I would ask a question and she would answer—jumping from the vegetable garden to the war, from bonds to sparrows, from a recipe for sauerkraut to the story of how the house burned down in 1943.

I tried not to switch off the recording. Because I understood that if I didn't record it now, nothing would remain. Not her intonation. Not the way she said, "Oh, Lord," or suddenly fell silent in the middle of a sentence: "I've forgotten what I was talking about."

She was over ninety when these recordings began. She had been born before the war, grown up without a mother, gone to work at fourteen, lived through the postwar devastation, a government loan, a barracks room shared by four people, carbon-monoxide poisoning, the birth of her

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children, and her husband's death. She had grown a garden. She had fed and cared for her family. And until her final days, she remembered where each apple tree had grown in her father's garden and how the first steamboat passed along the canal in 1937.

I transcribed the recordings and tidied them up a little: I removed repetitions, added punctuation, and divided the text into paragraphs. I had to conceal many names: the book may travel beyond the family, while she named everyone—both the living and the dead—by name. But if she says "mazdrosikha," then "mazdrosikha" it remains. If she jumps from a cherry tree to Khrushchev, then that is how she thinks. Living speech does not have to be convenient.

There is no continuous plot here. There are fragments: childhood by the canal; the hungry postwar years; her first wage and the first white bread she was afraid to squeeze; taking over a piece of land for a vegetable garden behind the Society for the Blind; a rat killed with a ski pole; and a relative who sowed rye at midnight so that the jackdaws would not see him. From these fragments, a life takes shape—not an official life, not a ceremonial one, but a real one.

I am making this book for those who never knew her. For children who may never learn what goutweed smells like beneath a scythe, or what a samovar sounds like when potatoes are boiling in it and sausage is being warmed. And for myself—so that I will not forget.

Grandmother, this is yours. Thank you for speaking.

Your grandson, Sergey
September 2026

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July 24, 2023 – January 31, 2024

Health



Saplings

Oh, Lord! While you're gathering the fruit from these bushes, try to grow some new ones as well. As I told you: cut off all the curly shoots, every curly branch, and look at the cut. If the little hole is black, it's diseased—burn it. As for the new shoots meant for planting, bury them until spring. Check them too: if there's a hole, don't keep them. A good cut is clean, without holes—that one can be kept.

Tie them together and bury them, leaving only the tips above the ground. And don't stand them upright—lay them down: dig a small trench, place them in it, and cover them with soil, where the roots are. In spring, you'll take them out and cut as many as you need. I didn't plant them any longer than that, otherwise they'll just trail along.

There should be a bud at the top of the cutting, and one at the bottom too: roots will grow here, and shoots with little buds will grow there. Later, you'll dig them up and plant them not straight, but at an angle: the roots facing south and the tip facing north. Not lying flat, but half-lying.

Leave space between them. Whether you grow ten bushes, or more or fewer, is up to you. Water them all summer so that the soil stays wet. Then, in autumn, take a look: if the little bushes are healthy, transplant them to their permanent place.

Dig them up and fertilize the soil—I used manure. Dig the hole so that the soil is loose. Don't place the roots straight down; spread them out, then cover them with soil. In spring, you'll see: if they've all taken root and are growing well, water them. And by autumn, there will already be some berries.

You have to grow them yourself. How many branches are there in one bundle? Well, if there are two cuttings per bundle...

24 July 2023, 11:48

Taxi and Stifling Heat

It didn't come. So I went to the doctor, I suppose, and said that I couldn't travel right now. My legs are bad too. I can't walk on the ground, let alone through the snow. Anyway, not until spring.

But how am I supposed to get around? By taxi: you get in here, ride there, and get out. I don't even know how to call a taxi. And what does it mean to lock the phone? Where do you press? How do I lock this phone

–akvali...? I don't even know what it's called. Well, all right. And then how do you unlock it? You have to press something somewhere, right? You have to know everything.

Yesterday I went to bed and fell asleep at about half past eight. Then I sat up in bed and looked under the door—the light was on. Either in that room or in yours. It must have been half past eleven already. I said, "Who's still awake? Did you lock the front door with the key? No? Then we've been locked in. Did you lock it?" "No?" Why did I say I would come and feed you? We could have quietly warmed up the food, and you could have sat down and eaten. I had buckwheat porridge. I put some in a bowl, poured milk over it, heated it up, and ate it.

Did you close the transom or something? It's so stuffy. At least open the door. You don't close the door at night—how can you breathe in here?

31 January 2024, 17:33

Weather and Skis

There were frosts, and you went skiing. But now the temperature is above freezing, the children aren't going outside, and you're ill too.
17:39

Blood pressure

Do you wake up? Your blood pressure is high. I take pills for diabetes, my heart, and my blood pressure. After I take them, it goes down—but blood pressure that's too low is bad too. Around eleven o'clock and around seven in the evening, I start to feel better. During the day, I'm more or less myself; my blood pressure is closer to normal: 140 to 150. It never goes below 136, and in the evening it rises again.

On Saturday at one o'clock in the afternoon, I listened to a program. The host, the journalist O. K., has held that position for fifteen years. She asks professors, neurologists, and general practitioners questions. This time, they were discussing the intestines.

I can't listen on Saturday—I have to eat lunch at one because of my diabetes. But on Sunday evening at eight, I watch the repeat. There was a program. Good Lord, was it about a stroke? What was it called? I listened to it, but I just can't remember the name.

17:44

Forgetfulness

It seems I didn't lock the door. I used to come from the elevator and check it. Now I think, "Did I turn off the gas?" I go over, sit down, and then go back to check again—no, I did turn it off.

In general, you forget everything in the world; the word you need simply flies out of your head.

17:48

Doctor

He's from Hospital No. N—who knows where he has worked, probably in every country. Now he hosts a television program and answers viewers' questions about health. He was explaining how much honey one may consume: a tablespoon in the morning and another in the evening, as a preventive measure.

17:54

Telephone

He was here last time and left it on the sideboard. He went away, and I looked—the phone was lying there. I picked it up; it was heavy, probably half a kilogram.

17:57

Cat

Oh, forget you—go by yourself. I'm not going, and don't wait for me. He's waiting for his dinner—go to him.

17:58

March 7-8, 2024

Family



Daughter

It was winter. We made wooden runners, and I took her to kindergarten in a little sled. From the factory itself, past the bridge, along S. Street. No one had walked there yet; the snow was knee-deep. I would wrap her up, sit her down, and pull her to kindergarten for seven in the morning, then run to work myself by eight.

There were no cars or buses back then. When we moved here, there were only three cars in the entire building. Their owners took turns keeping watch at night so the cars wouldn't be stolen—people stole things in those days. But now it's gone quiet. The courtyard is packed with cars. I look out the window, and especially shameless people from the neighboring entrances drive around looking for somewhere to squeeze in. They park right by the front steps and hurry home. Our people now simply park beside the sidewalk.

7 March 2024, 12:42

Son

He worked in R. and attended a technical school. I sewed all his trousers myself—there was absolutely nothing to buy, we didn't have enough money, and you couldn't find the shops anyway. Later, he went and bought himself a pair of trousers. My husband was working, and I sewed all his shirts myself too; there was nowhere to buy them. Then cheaper clothes appeared, while the rich people snapped up the expensive ones—we couldn't afford those. There are probably still some of those shirts lying in the shed.

19:45

Father

Inspectors and accountants would come to our house from the city. There was no office or board of directors in those days, so they gathered at our place. My little sister and I would sit and peek at them. To this day, I can still see the end of a dry-cured smoked sausage.

My stepmother and father would set up the samovar and feed the guests. They put the sausage and washed potatoes right into the samovar to warm and cook them. If our mother had been there, she would certainly have cut off a piece for each of us. But our stepmother

didn't give us any. The guests ate while we sat behind the big stove and watched.

19:47

Nicknames

They called Aunt K. "Mazdrosikha"—people went to her for work clothes. I could name every villager. I remember when my cousin was buried; my brother and I were there. Later, people came from the city. The village of V., O... They probably studied together and met there.

Don't write that down; I'm just telling you.

19:50

Brother

He was a hunter. I remember sitting on a little child's chair and stirring something in the stove. In the settlement of M., the stoves were arranged like this: you entered a small hallway, then a room, and between them was a wall with the firebox; beyond that was the kitchen. When the gas was turned off, they heated the house with the stove.

His wife called to him from the room, "Where are you in there?" They had just finished drinking tea and eating pies. She opened the door, and he fell off the little chair—a cerebral hemorrhage; a blood clot had ruptured. It happened just when I had been brought back from the city after surgery.

8 March 2024, 16:31

10 March 2024

War and Childhood



Armchair

Move it closer so I can get some sunlight. That's why I sat on the table: once it's past two o'clock, there's nowhere for me to go in this room, and I can't lie down anymore—the springs make my sides ache. We'll have to put a blanket underneath tomorrow.

Turn the armchair so the sun won't shine in my eyes. That's it. Still, move it a little closer.

Well, what can I tell you? I was listening at lunchtime: Ukrainian prisoners of war don't want to be exchanged. They want to remain in captivity, or fight on our side, or build and repair things. Everyone is fed up with everything.

But back then, we had no time for any of that. The war. Here, they're gathered in little groups somehow, but back then there weren't any groups. I was lying there thinking...

Did you turn it on?

10 March 2024, 16:20

Childhood and Work

There were no baby carriages. Babies were wrapped in some old piece of clothing. The war began, and there was neither a father nor a mother. My mother died young; she wasn't even thirty. It was a serious illness. My little sister and I were left on our own.

The canal was dug not with excavators or machines, but with wheelbarrows. They brought in all the prisoners. I think they started from Moscow: the first section, then the second, and then the fourth came closer to us—there was a hospital there. The fifth section was where the peat was dug; Mordovian women lived there and worked cutting peat. The sixth section was closer to us, and the seventh was toward Dubna.

In 1937, they filled the canal with water, and the steamships began to sail. Everyone sat on the bank and watched. Then tugboats went along the canal, pulling rafts—long ones, tied together. They built a hut on each raft, where the escort sat, and lit a fire on top of the logs. We used to run there to watch.

And we were hungry. Before the canal was filled, we gathered hollow-stemmed plants behind the sheds—they flowered like dill. We looked for the thicker sorrel behind the sheds. We would collect an armful, sit down, clean it, and eat. We lived on grass.

Then little black prickly plants began appearing in the fields—those things you know, the ones that grow in the fields when you travel to the dacha. We ate those too.

We studied during the winter. Until the fourth grade, the school was nearby, in the village. But to finish seven grades, you had to walk to another village—five whole kilometers. We had nothing to wear on our feet. There were valenki—quilted felt boots, like padded jackets. We had no galoshes, so we cut pieces out of car inner tubes and glued them together. We walked in those galoshes over our felt boots because the road ran through a low-lying area, across marshland, with water underneath the snow.

Our father was at the front. Hungry, cold, and wading through the snow near Leningrad, they drove the Germans back. There was nothing to eat. If they came across a frozen dead horse, they would cut strips from it and eat the horsemeat.

In 1943, the house burned down, and we had nowhere to go. Our stepmother took my sister and brother—the children who had been born after us—to the village, while we remained among the ruins. The women in the village persuaded my mother's sister, our aunt, to take us in. We lived with her and went to school, and in the summer we worked on the collective farm: watering the crops and weeding with the old women. In autumn, we gathered fallen ears of grain and earned money for ourselves.

They would bring potatoes in from the fields. There were five of us girls, and they assigned us to the oxen. They weren't huge oxen—just young ones. But how were we supposed to harness them? You would lie awake at night thinking, "Tomorrow I have to harness Borya again, and he has to be handled like a horse."

We harrowed the fields. When a horsefly bit one of the oxen, they would bolt, the harrows would turn over and go flying into the water. And we would sit on the bank and cry. What kind of farm workers were we? But there was no one else to work—only old women and teenagers.

There was a herdsman in our village. When he saw us crying, he would take a pole and drive the oxen out of the water. We would cry and cry, then go back to the field.

The war ended. There was devastation, nothing to be had, and everyone was hungry—but people still had to be fed. Around the village

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were collective-farm fields: potatoes, rye, wheat, and buckwheat. We worked, and they recorded labor-days for us. There was no money at all. For each labor-day, they weighed out grain to every worker: however much you had earned, that much was yours.

From 1947 onward, I already had a work record. But I needed to study, so I had to enrol somewhere. I took my metrika—the document used at that time instead of a birth certificate—and went to the city. I desperately wanted to study medicine. I dreamed about it day and night.

I submitted my documents, but I had nowhere to live, nowhere to eat, and no money. I asked them to give my documents back, but they absolutely refused. So I was left without my documents—without anything. I cried and cried, then went to my grandmother.

My grandmother said, "Dear, go back. They're taking milk to the dairy plant. Walk quietly behind the cart. Mother will give you and your sister a piece of bread each for lunch. Wrap them in a little bundle, and you'll have something for the journey."

I walked behind the cart for half the way. Then the driver stopped, jumped down, and asked, "Where are you from? Why, you're the chairman's daughter!" I told him everything. He said, "Climb onto the cart." He took me to the city and explained how to find the knitting factory.

I walked along, reading the sign: "Knitting Factory." I peeped through a little window and said, "I'm looking for the person in charge of recruitment." A woman asked me, "What are you peeping in for, dear?" It turned out that she was the person I was looking for. I told her about my grandmother, and she said, "Sit down and have some tea."

Later, she finished work, and the driver finished too—he worked at the factory. They took me in, and I lived with them for about a week.

She arranged for me to attend a factory-training school. The director accepted me without any trouble. I studied there, and in 1947 they gave me my work record book. They fed us in the canteen. They would put oatmeal porridge on your plate, but there was nothing in it except pressed husks. You put it in your mouth, sucked out whatever nourishment there was, and spat out the rest. They gave us some kind of soup, and that was good enough.

At first, we lived in a rented room with a collective-farm woman on K. Street—she's still alive, even now. Then they gave us a place in a dormitory: just a bed. Later, beyond the large pond, there was E. Street.

There were four or five barracks standing there. They gave us a little room for three or four people—just enough space to put in the beds. There was no firewood, nothing.

Once, we were overcome by fumes. I was very badly poisoned by carbon monoxide. He lived nearby. They gave him sick leave so that he could look after us.

We came to our senses a little and quietly walked across the pond to the hospital. Everyone there was whispering: the whole town already knew that we had been poisoned. They gave us sick leave, and we stayed in the room for several days. But we had to eat, so we quietly went to the canteen. Back at the workshop, everyone was talking about it; nobody worked that day. Later, when they saw that we were alive, the second shift came in. The director then gave us...

16:23

Bread

Little by little, things began to improve. Along the river, they were preparing land for vegetable gardens and digging drainage ditches. All the adults worked, and we helped them. We planted the birch grove near the knitting factory. Everything had to be rebuilt.

Everyone who worked received a salary. They would call you in to see the director and set your pay. There were bonds—the government loan. We paid them off for an entire year: they gave us our wages and immediately deducted the loan payment. We received very little.

But gradually, we began to live like proper people again. When I saw white bread for the first time, it was impossible to put into words. It was frightening even to look at. You would pick it up and squeeze it, and it was so soft and airy. You would think, "What a beauty."

16:39

Devastation

This is the house where I first began living. My childhood—with my little daughter. The house looked fairly broad, with three windows, but it stood directly on the ground, without a foundation.

My uncle's father was a Group One invalid; he limped along on one leg. They lived behind a screen. He was always repairing galoshes, and the whole place smelled of glue.

My daughter was born in 1951. My eyes began to hurt, and I was barely functioning at all. There was hardly any maternity leave pay in those days—just pennies, and even those were deducted. The state had no money; everything had been destroyed after the war, and everything around us had burned. They gave us bonds—the government borrowed money from us. There would be a whole page in the newspaper where you could check whether your bond had won anything. Many people eventually lost theirs.

Once, Grandfather brought home a jar of rendered cod and put it on the table. Father was sitting there and said, "You would have been better off buying a bucket of potatoes." And Grandfather said, "I felt like having some cod."

But we were hungry! Father started shouting. We packed up and went to stay in a rented room with our aunt. Her daughter had died, leaving two children. One of them would come home from school and say, "I'm hungry." If I had a piece of bread, I would give it to him; sometimes he would even arrive carrying a little piece himself.

We lived in a room as wide as a bed. A table stood there, nailed into the corner on three legs. The stove was heated in the other room, and in ours the wall was only slightly warm—it was bitterly cold. There was nothing to eat and no electric light, only a kerosene lamp.

In autumn, we bought a sack of potatoes and some onions and put them in the cellar. That meant we were considered rich.

In the spring, my eyes became very sore, and I had to leave the factory. But I had to work. A friend said, "Come to the hospital with me. I work there; it's nothing difficult." So I went and got a job as an orderly in the children's ward. Later, I was transferred to the infectious-disease ward as a pantry maid, handing out food to the patients.

My husband was called up for three months of military training. Our house was being rented out, and the work brigade was given a room on T. Street. They voted to let my husband have it because he was in a difficult situation.

It was a three-room apartment. Four people with children lived in the twenty-square-meter room; we lived in the nine-square-meter room. There was a tiny kitchen, but no running water, no bathroom, and no toilet. There was a water pump beneath the window.

In the rented room, we had paid for our meals, but here we only cooked lunch. The men would come home from work and ask, "Who cooked today?" That meant everyone was to eat together. My daughter first went to a nursery, and then to kindergarten. The kindergarten was far away.

First, we would feed the children fresh meat, and then we would all eat whatever was left. There were three tables in the kitchen. There was no gas at all.

Then we began digging up and planting potatoes. By then, my son had been born. I would put the baby down and run to my husband. He had been admitted to another hospital with jaundice. I would run back; I had planted radishes, and they needed watering. Then I would return to the hospital for breakfast: feed the patients, clean up, and go home.

A neighbor from the twenty-square-meter room looked after my son. He had a heart condition. Sometimes, late at night—around midnight—he would knock and say, "I need to warm up an ampoule." I used to give him injections at night.

17:22

Housing

When we were living with my mother-in-law, my daughter fell ill, so I called a doctor. Two women from the maternity hospital came. Our house didn't have a proper floor: Grandfather had laid joists and boards, but in spring, when you rocked the baby's crib, water would splash up through the floor.

When the doctors saw it, they gave me a referral to improve our housing conditions. We lived on T. Street, probably from 1952 to 1964, in a nine-square-meter room. There were four of us.

Then I was called in and given an apartment on I. Street, a corner apartment near a military unit. We helped the builders as part of our work assignment: two days at the hospital, two days on the construction site.

Three doctors came to distribute the housing. Somehow, one of them managed to register her mother with them—even though the woman never actually lived there—and took a two-room apartment for herself. I was given a one-room apartment.

The narcologist was indignant: "How can this be? You need a two-room apartment, and it was given to her." But what could I do? She was a doctor, and who was I?

We moved to I. Street anyway, but they didn't remove me from the housing waiting list. We lived there until 1976, when we moved here.

People envied us then. Other families were given apartments and three families were moved into each one, but we were given a separate apartment for our family. At that time, K. Street was being built up. If it hadn't been for Khrushchev and his factory for producing prefabricated concrete panels, there still wouldn't be enough housing today.

While we were living on I. Street, I often went to the forest. I would take your mother with me to the settlement to pick bilberries and lingonberries. We would come back with baskets full of berries.

Once, I went with two old women, and at two o'clock we couldn't catch the bus. I shouted, "Hurry up!" but I couldn't just leave them behind. The bus drove away. We waited for the four o'clock bus, but it broke down. We had to sit by the road until evening, until the next one finally came at around seven or eight.

I went home, barely managing to carry the heavy basket on my shoulders. I climbed the stairs, and your mother and uncle were standing by the open door, pressed close together. They said, "Mum, did you think about us at all?" I remembered those words for the rest of my life.

I told them everything, and they cooked something for me to eat. After that, I decided I would never do anything like that again.

I also used to go mushroom-picking. In our basement there were little storage sheds divided into compartments, each about the size of a shovel. My husband dug a pit there for potatoes and put up shelves. Along the sides, I placed three barrels that held four buckets each.

In one of them, I salted honey mushrooms: I would bring them home, wash and boil them, pour them into the barrel, cover it with gauze, and add dill. We had mushrooms all winter. In the other barrels, I fermented cabbage and cucumbers.

For the lingonberries, I had one twenty-liter jar and two or three ten-liter jars with wide mouths. I soaked the lingonberries in them. Later, I stopped pickling cucumbers in barrels and switched to those large jars. I eventually brought them here, but they were stolen from the shed.

That's how we lived. And when we began moving here, it was the World Festival of Youth and Students, and Chinese people were visiting. I even have a photograph in Moscow.

I've forgotten what I was talking about.

17:33

10 March 2024

Moving and the Garden



Moving

My daughter and son were sitting there, saying, "Mum, what if we don't move there? The festival will end, the government will run out of money, and they'll stop building houses in the city. We'll be stuck in a one-room apartment."

I cried and cried. And in fact, if we hadn't agreed to move, we would have received an apartment in the city. But we went there. We moved in 1976.

17:43

Unauthorized Garden Plots

As for the garden, this was how we cultivated the land: you sat on a hummock, cut into it with a hoe, and piled the soil up. The earth there was good.

Later, everything was officially registered, because technically we had occupied the land without permission. The factory workers noticed that gardens could be laid out there, and they took the land away from everyone.

A tractor driver came up to me and asked, "Where are you going with that shovel and bucket?"

I said, "I'm going to dig up some bushes."

He told me, "We left yours."

They left that little patch for me alone, while everyone else's was taken away. We were allowed to have only garden beds: we couldn't plant trees or build sheds.

But the red apple tree I later dug up had grown enormous, covered in red apples. I was always watching from the window. As soon as I saw children running toward the gardens, I would go out and stand guard.

Do you know how hard we worked for all this? So take care of the thing I gave you—your grandmother's gift.

17:44

Collective

The plot was on the site of former borrow pits, where they used to dump rubbish from the city. All sorts of things turned up there until the men had taken away everything useful. Only the farthest little patch was left.

Why did they leave that particular piece for me? Later, people from the factory came and said, "We'll take you into our collective. Write an application and pay five hundred rubles." That was a lot of money at the time, but I went, paid it, and they accepted me.

Whenever the issue came up at a meeting, arguments would begin. The plots were divided into two-sotka lots. The owner of the plot in the very center, where the meetings are held now, listened for a while, then stood up and said, "You don't know how she got this land or how hard she worked to cultivate it. Thanks to her, another plot appeared—the factory gave it to someone—and look what a beautiful garden it is now. The plot next to it appeared thanks to her too."

She defended me so they wouldn't have to make awkward zigzags when dividing up the land. After that, they left me alone. And you should have seen how jealous people were!

17:46

Stepmother

My sister used to take my son everywhere with her. She kept asking me to give him to her: "Life is so difficult for you. Let me take him; he can live in the village."

She had a daughter who was born with disabilities. They stayed in a hospital in Moscow with her, but the child died anyway. Of course, I refused—no mother would ever give away her child.

But my sister would take him anyway. Blizzard or no blizzard, she would wrap him in a large shawl and carry him off to the village. That was how he grew up. She took him with her every weekend, and in summer she would take him away for a week at a time.

Then our neighbor, Aunt K., said to me, "Don't leave your son there for too long. Do you know how they swear at him?"

Later, there was a cow there, too, and my sister would take him with her to the settlement. But then he found out that my sister wasn't my real sister, and that her parents weren't his real grandmother and grandfather.

We were the children of the mother who had died, while their father had the other children with his second wife. After that, my son stopped going there. Well, he still visited, but he no longer stayed overnight.

17:50

School Principal

The school principal came up to me and said, "Come with me to the village after lessons. We'll buy you a pair of felt boots."

I replied, "Oh, I don't have any money. I'll manage in my padded boots."

But she said, "Come on. The school will pay."

They bought me the felt boots. My father found a coat somewhere, and my aunt gave me a knitted shawl. I have a photograph of myself wearing that outfit.

Once, I was walking through the cemetery and saw her husband kneeling there, looking sad as he tended a grave.

At the hospital, I knew all the doctors. My son's teeth hurt terribly, and he was growing very tall. The dentist taught surgery at the nursing school. At that time, it was in a long, low building right where the shop is now, in front of the maternity hospital.

I would run in to him and say, "Are you leaving? My son's tooth is hurting again!"

And he would say, "I'm about to teach a class. Whisper it to me. I'll give the students an assignment and examine him quickly."

I also used to take my son or daughter to the ENT doctor. The head nurse was always prescribing vitamin C in ampoules. The doctor would take a syringe with a bent cannula and inject it directly into the tonsils.

17:53

Head Nurse

A new head nurse was transferred to our hospital. One day she came in and asked, "What's that you have there?"

"How should I know?" I replied.

"It's a lipoma. Don't let anyone operate on it. We'll inject it with penicillin, and it will go away."

No one else was willing to treat it that way, but she gave me only three injections, and before I even noticed, the lipoma had disappeared. There are different ways to treat things!

We had a doctor who was very thin. At the slightest problem, he would immediately say, "Remove it!" Cutting was the only thing he knew.

You should tell your mother about her knee: she should wait before having surgery and try treatment first. Is it any better now?

17:58

20 March 2024

Household



A Dove

A dove flew in. It looked as if it had been badly beaten—perhaps by children, perhaps by other pigeons. I tapped on the window, but it didn't pay any attention. It came right up to the glass and sat in the corner. Recently, while I had gone to get some water, it was already gone. It had flown away.

20 March 2024, 17:00

Figaro

Old age is taking its toll, and my strength is leaving me. When I get up in the morning, I feel that there is even less of it. I get up holding on to the bed, then move the armchair and the chair closer—anything, as long as there's something to hold on to.

When I take the tablets for dizziness, I just stand there without knowing what to grab, even though everything is right beside me. I never thought it would be like this. I used to be running everywhere all the time—to work, to the village, and here. Your parents nicknamed me Figaro: here and there, here and there. Now you have to keep running around too.

My strength is fading, so don't let your mother do too much work bent over.

I was listening to a program, and a television presenter was speaking. They had sent her to a technical school, but she went to an agricultural college instead. She worked as an agronomist, while studying by correspondence and completing the technical school in two years instead of five. Then she went on to university and graduate school.

Now she is already a grandmother, with great-granddaughters. She says, "For me, the dacha is a form of relaxation." She grows tomatoes weighing half a kilogram in her greenhouses. She takes a watering can, her great-granddaughters take their little watering cans, and they follow her like goslings.

17:01

Fifteen Apple Trees

In the village, everything was close at hand: the cellar, a bench, and water from the pump. You would wet a sheet of plastic, rinse the cabbage, and immediately chop it with carrots.

Relatives would come and take vegetables, especially one of my uncles. I planted extra potatoes, even though we had enough here too, but I always gave them away to someone.

And there were so many apples! Your great-grandfather had fifteen apple trees. I can still remember where each one grew. Beneath the window were Anis and Bely Naliv apples. The trees were enormous, like mighty heroes.

There was one apple tree that bore fruit for only two weeks. At first, the apples were slightly bitter, but then they became so delicious you couldn't get enough of them. But after two weeks, they turned pithy and lost all their juice. They eventually uprooted that tree.

17:06

Vladimirka

Your great-grandfather planted all sorts of things: apple trees, pear trees, and red Chinese crabapples. There was one kind of hybrid apple tree—not Bely Naliv and not Antonovka, but very tasty.

There were also cherry trees. We had more cherries than anyone else on the edge of the village, so all the sparrows and thrushes would flock to us. We had to keep chasing them away. You could hear us shouting, "Oh no, the cherries are ripe again!"

And the Vladimirka cherries were very sweet.

17:08

Bees

When I walked to the village, I would count the houses. Five houses before reaching ours, the road turned. I would look up and see Mukhtar already standing there. If I called out, he would whine softly. They had removed two fence pickets so he could come out onto the street.

When you opened the gate, there was a birch tree, and beneath it grew birch boletes. Tall linden trees, birches, and a small oak grew there too.

The moment you stepped outside the gate, there were bees everywhere. There had been beehives, but my stepmother hardly gave me any honey. Grandfather sent some occasionally, but only a little.

Later, our neighbor—may he rest in peace—started an apiary. The bees didn't have far to fly; they hummed right by the gate. It was

Grandmother's memories especially loud when the linden trees were in bloom—the buzzing made an incredible noise.

17:10

Zemklunika

We used to have strawberries, but they were all ruined, so I planted zemklunika—a hybrid of garden strawberries and wild strawberries. The bed was small, stretching from the wall to the window, but it was wide. The plants grew large and produced no runners.

I should tell my grandson to get the basket out of the garage; it's probably still there. Once, I came over and picked a whole basketful—about three liters.

When I reached the bus stop, a woman was sitting there and said, "I can't get enough of the smell." We got into a boat, and a man there said, "The chairman's daughter! He was quite a man."

He had worked as a chairman all his life: first, when he was young, he was a shop assistant, and after the war he became chairman. Later, the collective farms of O. and P. were merged into a state farm.

They sowed buckwheat, oats, wheat, rye, peas, and vetch. They sowed oats together with peas so that the peas could climb up the oats instead of lying on the ground.

Sometimes you would quietly sneak in, gather some peas, and boil them. As soon as you crossed the river by boat, the air seemed completely different. You changed into rubber boots, put on sweatpants, and went out into the fields, where the corn grew incredibly tall.

17:14

The Neighbor

When this garden plot was first created, there were no garden beds where the quince tree stands now—just a strip of bare earth. From here all the way to the refrigerator, there was a bed of strawberries.

Once, I hadn't gone there for about three days. When I came back, it was a sea of red! There were still unripe berries and blossoms too. It was unbelievably beautiful.

I called to the neighbor who lived where the metal shed stands now: "Come here and look at this beauty!" He came over and stood there, unable to take his eyes off it. He said, "It's a shame to pick them."

That time, I filled half of my seven-liter plastic bucket.

And what wonderful potatoes grew here—Sineglazka! They were perfectly clean; you pulled up the plant, and the potatoes simply came popping out.

But now you need fertilizer—manure. In the past, my son would arrange it with a friend of his, a livestock keeper at the state farm. The man kept records of how much manure each person took away and issued an order for a truck.

Your father happened to work for a transport company, so he had access to a dump truck. He brought us as much manure as we wanted. Everything grew beautifully, and the soil remained fertile for a long time—but eventually it became depleted.

17:18

The Toilet

Our outdoor toilet was open on one side so that it could be emptied. There was always a pile of peat and a broken shovel beside it. After using the toilet, everyone would throw a shovelful of peat over it. It made excellent fertilizer.

Later, there were no more cows in the village, so my father came up with a way to fertilize the apple trees. He would measure two meters from the trunk and dig a circular trench about thirty centimeters wide.

Then he would take a large bucket—or a jar with a wooden handle—scoop out the contents of the toilet, pour them into the trench, rinse them down with water, and cover everything with soil.

17:23

15 August 2024

The Harvest



Planting

Seedlings should be planted at an angle, with the roots pointing south. In winter, tie the cuttings into a bundle and bury them shallowly, making sure the roots are in the soil.

In spring, take them out and plant them at an angle facing south. Then water them generously, keeping the soil moist at all times. If they grow strong by autumn, they can be transplanted to their permanent location. But I think it is better to leave them for another year, so that the bushes become bushier and develop a good root system.

Those were exactly the kinds of seedlings I later gave to your father. To transplant them, dig a deep, wide hole, add fertilizer, and loosen the soil. Plant them so that there are buds above the ground and at the top.

At that time, I grew thirteen blackcurrant seedlings. I gave two away to be planted at your home, and planted the other eleven bushes along the path. By now, they have probably grown so much that they form one solid wall.

Of course, they could be renewed, but I wanted them to grow in the sunshine.

15 August 2024, 11:09

Cherry and Currants

Did you ever cut down the old, large cherry tree? If you did, you must remove the stump and plant a new tree in its place.

And what about the little cherry tree I was growing near the greenhouse? Did it grow? I asked you to water it. It should be sweet and healthy. Where did you put it? There was both a felt cherry and an ordinary cherry tree there. Is the ordinary one still small? How can it still be small? It should already be big! I started growing it from a tiny shoot. I cut away everything around it but left that one opposite the currants.

By the way, the curly currants—there are four bushes—should all be cut back. If no new shoots have grown upward from the stump, leave a few fresh ones and cut the rest right down to the roots.

Be sure to look at the cut surface: if there is a black hole in the middle, the bush is diseased. It must be uprooted and burned.

11:12

Fertilizer and Ash

I bought apple and pear seedlings from vendors from the T. Academy, who stood near the seed shop. You shouldn't buy them in summer; I planted them in September. For seedlings, you need to dig a large, deep hole and fertilize it well.

I made compost by putting rotted grass on one side of the pile and fresh grass on the other. I covered it, and it began to decompose and heat up. I collected not only weeds but also mown grass. Sometimes a neighbor would say, "I mowed some grass for you over there. Bring your wheelbarrow and come get it."

For the potatoes, I collected leaves. Where the forest has grown outside town now, there used to be no forest, but there were plenty of leaves. In autumn, I filled sacks, hauled them over the fence, and spread them over the potato plot.

In spring, I didn't dig the soil over. I simply raked up the leaves, made a furrow, and planted the potatoes. The soil in the beds was always well fertilized.

Nowadays, you don't make dividing strips between the beds, but I had everything arranged in beds and strips. I put grass and leaves in the strips. Every year, I switched the beds and the strips around so that the soil could rest and be fertilized continuously.

I burned so much wood ash! Do you remember the wide aluminum tub? I would fill the whole tub with ash, store it under the table, and cover it. In spring, I used the ash to feed all the bushes, especially the currants and the Bogatyr apple tree.

For the garlic, I made four furrows with a special small red trowel. It wasn't a hoe—it was meant specifically for digging out weed roots. I made the furrows, sprinkled them with ash, laid out the garlic cloves, and covered them with soil. You don't need to push them into the ground; just lay them down.

I planted onions the same way, making sure the bottoms weren't pressed down.

11:16

Pitchforks and a Pump

Your uncle bought a special digging fork with four tines. Once, he decided to straighten one of the tines, but it broke off. He had to buy new forks, shovels, and handles, but he never repaired anything after all.

In the little shed between the house and the toilet, there is still a heavy military pump that he brought home. It was a good pump, but it was broken—it was missing some kind of ring, and your uncle never got around to buying one. It should have been taken to the scrap-metal collection point; it's still operating just across from the garden plots.

11:23

On Legs

A frame with legs is hanging from a nail; it's a part from a cabinet. Don't break it up or burn it. It might be useful to someone who wants to put the cabinet on legs—it's currently sitting on top of the wardrobe without its bottom section.

The clothes hanging where the garbage is collected should probably be thrown away to clear some space. There are many things hanging there, including a good gray coat that your mother wore when she worked in cold weather or simply threw on over her clothes.

11:25

I Took Everything Outside and Glued It

I used to take everything outside and wash it. I had a clothesline stretched from the summer apple tree to the plum tree opposite the door of the little house. I hung laundry and sofa cushions there to dry.

I would take the sofa out in sections, clean everything, and glue it so it would stay tidy. And I carried so many boards! When they were building the road, I dragged thick boards from there, one at a time. There was a whole pile of them.

I kept them so I could replace the floor in the little house, because the floor had collapsed near the wardrobe where the sofa stood. My grandson and I put bricks underneath it, but he never got around to installing a new floor. Then I noticed that my boards were already lying in the greenhouse, but I kept quiet.

11:26

I Nailed Them Up and Rested

Under the shelter, there were metal strips with nails hammered into them. People used to make things like that, but they don't anymore. I nailed them over all the corners.

That was where I usually rested after hanging up and drying all the sofa cushions. The cushions themselves have probably rotted away by now.

11:28

Where Are the Three Cherry Trees?

What happened to the three cherry trees? Along the neighbor's fence, I planted young gooseberry and currant bushes, all the way up to the large redcurrant bush. Surely they haven't thrown it away yet?

It was a huge bush and always produced lots of berries. I planted two bushes then: one there, and the other large one behind the house, between the toilet and the neighbor's garden. But that area has probably become overgrown with plum trees by now.

11:33

Barberry

There used to be a huge, thorny barberry bush, but I eventually dug it up. Long, sour berries hung from the branches in clusters—it was such a beautiful sight! The bush reached all the way to the summer apple tree, and daffodils bloomed beneath it. Now there's nothing there.

11:34

Plum Trees

There used to be seven plum trees, and they produced an enormous number of plums. They formed a boundary all the way to the summer apple tree.

Eventually, only one shoot remained, and the new neighbors cut it down when they were putting up fence posts. Sometimes there were so many plums that I would say, "Pick the ones hanging over on your side." They would eat them, and I wasn't stingy.

11:35

Compote

Once, I made about five three-liter jars of compote. It was delicious and went down so easily! But then I was struck by terrible diarrhea. I couldn't get off the bucket—I had been poisoned.

Your mother asked, "What should we do with the compote now?"

I replied, "Open the jars and pour it into the toilet."

We had to throw away the entire supply. It turns out you mustn't make compote from felt cherries. You can eat ordinary cherries without any problem, but it's still better to remove the pits.

11:38

Berries Falling Off

The berries often fell off, and many small shoots—suckers—grew beneath the bushes. I dug up these shoots and planted them in a bed. Once they had grown, I transplanted them again. Later, the old bushes were cut down.

11:39

Strawberries from 1995

In 1995, I had a strawberry bed stretching from here all the way to the refrigerator. The soil was clean, without any rubbish. Once, I was away for about three days. When I came back, the whole bed was covered with berries!

The plants were tall and produced no runners. Some of the berries were white, while others were red and ripe. I almost felt sorry about picking them. I called the neighbor over and said, "Look how large and sweet they are!"

I filled a seven-liter red bucket to the brim. My son was already married by then. I told my daughter-in-law, "Pick some." She filled half a bucket and then complained to the other women, "She must have picked berries from the whole plot for there to be so many."

But it was all from just one bed!

Later, the strawberries began to die out, so I planted zemklunika—a hybrid of garden strawberries and wild strawberries. When they banned people from keeping garden plots, I dug up the plants and transplanted them to the village. That was around 1994 or 1995.

11:40

Until I Was Full

I ate my fill of those berries back then. Then I went to the crossing and got into my uncle's boat. One woman said, "Oh, she's the chairman's daughter, the one from the garden!"

I offered them some berries: "Please, take some."

But they refused. "No, we'd feel bad eating your berries. Take them home."

There's nothing left on that plot now. As soon as my aunt sold the house, I stopped going there.

Here, my son and I planted a row of plum trees—either seven or nine of them. Now they have become very old.

11:44

The Apple Trees Fell

Your great-grandfather had fifteen apple trees. I remember every one of them: one Streyfling, another Streyfling, Papirovka, Cinnamon, three Antonovkas, one hybrid, a striped variety, Grushovka, Kitayka, Bely Naliv, and Anis.

The Anis apples were small, and when you bit into one, the flesh felt almost soapy.

Our house stood at the edge of the village, so all the wind blew straight toward it. Then the storms began. The neighbor would call and say, "Another one of your apple trees has fallen!"

They fell one after another, as if someone were dropping them from above.

I didn't like the Bely Naliv apples. As soon as they ripened, you had to eat them immediately; otherwise, they became soft and pithy. But my father's Antonovka apples were excellent. My parents even took them to the settlement to sell.

11:45

The State

In the past, there were compulsory state deliveries. We had to give the state, free of charge, either 220 liters of milk—I'm not sure of the exact amount—and also several dozen eggs.

If you kept a pig, after slaughtering and singeing the carcass, you were required to hand over the hide. They collected a lot of wool from sheep. The state took everything.

11:48

Pruning the Raspberries

You said there aren't many raspberries because they were pruned incorrectly last year. Gnarled shoots and branches with swollen knots should be cut right down to the roots, without leaving stumps, because pests breed in them.

Leave the fresh shoots so there will be more berries next year. Cut out the old branches that produced fruit this year. Cut off the tips only of crooked shoots that won't bear berries. Any small growth around the bush should also be removed.

11:51

The Sprayer

They've probably thrown away the sprayer by now. If you don't use it for a long time, the piston dries out. I used to keep it at home under the wardrobe.

When using it, you lower one end of the hose into a bucket and hold it in place with your hand. To stop it from popping out, I tied a small weight to it. If the hose came out and sucked in air, you would pump and pump for nothing, and afterward it wouldn't draw up any water.

Then you had to go to the barrel, lower the hose into it, pump up the water, and continue spraying.

11:53

Larvae

Did you paint over the cuts on the pear tree? Check whether the paint has cracked. If there are cracks, paint over them again; otherwise, pests will get inside.

Once, I went up to the blackthorn and saw a few dry, curled leaves left on it. I took one off and unfolded it—and there was a whole mass of larvae inside!

I went to the neighbor and said, "Look, even though there have been frosts and snow, so many pests are wintering in those curled leaves."

I removed three or four leaves, and there were clusters of larvae in every one. You should check the currants in the same way.

11:55

Mowing and Rats

Are the scythes still standing in the toilet? Where did you put them? There was one small scythe that a neighbor gave me, while the village ones were long.

Sometimes I would get up early, while the dew was still on the grass, and mow goutweed between the currant bushes and apple trees. Once everything was mowed, it looked so clean! Then I would stand on the porch, admire it, have some tea, and lie down on the sofa.

In the evening, I rested on a small sofa on the terrace. A working refrigerator stood at my feet. I kept it empty and brought food only for one meal.

But then a rat got inside. It probably came over from the neighbor's place—he kept chickens, so there was food everywhere and plenty of rats.

One time I opened the refrigerator, and it was sitting there looking at me. The doors to the house and outside were open, and it ran behind the refrigerator and behind the ottoman. There were ski poles standing in the corner, so I used one of them to pin it down.

7 October 2024, 16:03

7 October 2024 – 11 September 2025.

The Last One



A Herd of Cows

One day, I went outside the garden, and there was an incredible noise—a herd of cows was running past, their hooves clattering! There was always a lead cow in the herd, the one that set the direction. Wherever she ran, all the others followed.

I grabbed a bucket and began banging on it loudly to drive them away from the potato plots. Then the herdsman came running. The women shouted at him, "What were you thinking, letting all the cows loose?"

He replied, "I'm driving them away just like you are! Look, the lead cow has turned toward the forest, and the whole herd is following her."

It turned out that the herdsmen had been drinking, fallen asleep, and let the herd get away.

16:06

Mushrooms

Sometimes you would step outside the gate and cross the road. There used to be a pond there, but later the water disappeared, leaving a hollow overgrown with short grass.

You would walk along the bank, gather some russulas and birch boletes, peel a couple of potatoes—and the soup would be ready.

16:10

Sowing

After sowing, they rolled the soil with enormous rollers so it wouldn't remain loose; otherwise, the jackdaws would peck up all the seeds. They did the same with corn.

Once, they sowed a huge field of cabbage across the road. I looked out the window and saw rows of cabbage heads, but they didn't even harvest them for the livestock. Everything was left there until it disappeared under the snow.

16:11

In the Marshes

The town stands on marshland. There used to be boggy places and overgrown hollows everywhere.

Sometimes my grandmother—may she rest in peace—would say, "Girls, why don't you go and gather some mushrooms?"

We would climb down into one of those hollows and look along the slopes—and there they were: red-capped boletes. Their caps were bright red and beautiful, and their stems were rough.

We would fill an entire basket, and then Grandmother would make soup.

16:17

A Relative

Half of the house is divided into rooms by partitions. I told you: if anything happens, call him.

He turned his half of the house into a garage. You drive the car in, open the door, and there's a section for jars. On either side are wooden panels that slide aside, with potatoes stored behind them.

To fertilize the soil, he sows rye every year. He prepares all the land, but only goes out to sow at night—at midnight. He does it in the dark so the jackdaws won't see and eat the seeds, because birds sleep at night.

16:19

The Driver

There were three drivers working in the settlement. After work, they often drank. He was a short man.

Sometimes a car would be driving along the road, but you couldn't see the driver. His son was driving while his father slept behind the wheel.

When it was time to prepare for exams, he would hide on the flat roof of the outbuildings in the yard. He would spread something out, lie there, and study.

His uncle would walk around looking for him, but he never knew where his nephew was hiding.

16:22

Quince

"Quince? Its flowers were large—simply beautiful! I was planning to transplant it to a new place, but after my son passed away, I had to tend the garden alone, and I didn't have enough strength.

I didn't wait until autumn to dig over the beds. I harvested the garlic and immediately cleared the soil, made a furrow, put leaves, plant

tops, and weeds into it, widened the path between the beds, and dug it over again. As soon as I finished, the ground would become overgrown again, and this took the whole summer.

But the plot from the pear tree to the raspberries was always loose and well cultivated. I planted leeks there. I sowed them sparsely so the seedlings would grow thick.

All of that is gone now... And what is left?"

10 October 2024, 14:58

She Lives Alone

"She lives alone in a three-room apartment. By the time she takes her pills and cooks herself some porridge...

She sleeps on her side. Today, she'll have dinner at six in the evening because she gets up at six in the morning to take her pills.

I seem to get up at seven, but in fact I just lie in bed from six. I look over and think, "Ah, she's up, and then I stay in bed until seven."

12 October 2024, 18:22

Government Bonds

It is hard to remember—not only for me, but for everyone of my generation. These memories already take my breath away.

One by one, we were called from the workshop to the director's office. Next to each person's name on the list was the amount of their monthly salary. They forced us to "subscribe" to bonds worth a whole month's pay, and then deducted the money from our wages over the course of several months.

The country had been devastated. We had to rebuild the economy, restore the factories and the machinery. And we did our part. In return, they gave us government bonds. They promised that we would win prizes.

What prizes? Some people angrily tore up the papers; others threw them away. They lay scattered in the streets. The clever ones collected them. Later, newspapers published the results of the drawings. A few people won large sums of money, but most were left with nothing.

That is how we came by all of it. And now only the memories remain.

8 April 2025, 16:01

Sparrows

Sparrows live in flocks. There are hardly any left in Moscow—larger birds hunt them, and municipal workers mow down all the grass. Sparrows feed on seeds. If the grass were left unmown, it would flower and produce seeds, but now they have to peck at hogweed instead.

So, in the city, they have little to eat and nowhere to hide. They have moved to the outskirts and to the villages.

And how can you tell a female sparrow? Her head is brownish, and she is smaller overall.

7 August 2025, 11:47

Arranging the Plot

I had already planted some currant bushes. One day, I was walking along with a bucket and a small shovel when the tractor driver told me, "The men from our building have already divided up your plot and quietly started cultivating it."

It turned out that your grandfather had let the secret slip at work after drinking—he had told them about the unused land. Seven men quickly claimed the area where cows used to rest and boys used to play in the trenches.

When we arrived, the whole place had already been dug over. No one had touched our section because it had trees, a trench, piles of broken dishes from the dairy plant, and pieces of bitumen.

I said to my husband, "Look what your loose talk has led to! We'll have to take this trench, and leave the trees as the boundary."

When my son returned from the army, we cut down the trees, filled in the trench, and slowly began cultivating the land. We planted potatoes at the back because, at first, that was all we had the strength for.

Later, the tractor driver told us that the factory director had seen how difficult our plot was, felt sorry for us, and let us keep it.

Then, when everyone was given three hundred square meters, some people approached me and offered me a place in the excavator factory's gardening cooperative. But I had to pay a large membership fee—five hundred rubles. I went home to get the money, paid it, and they accepted me.

At a meeting, someone began complaining that I had too much land, but they defended me:

"We accepted her into our cooperative. Besides, we took the neighboring cultivated plot away from a teacher and gave it to someone from the boiler house, so our cooperative only benefited."

After that, they left me alone.

Oh, how many times I had to go to different offices to register that land! I got up at four in the morning to stand in line at the administration office. But in the end, I completed all the paperwork, and we began planting.

11 September 2025, 09:25

The Society for the Blind

We planted currant bushes in the plots behind the Society for the Blind. I bought an enormous redcurrant bush, with branches as long as a fishing rod. I cut it into four pieces and grew new plants from them. The berries were large and delicious, hanging in long clusters.

"And where is your redcurrant now?"

"I planted a new one. They used to bring me bundles of cuttings tied together. I rooted those cuttings and grew them into bushes. I planted eleven currant bushes along the path, and eleven bushes grew there."

11 September 2025, 09:34