

Sukhomlinsky News

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Afterword to the German edition of *My heart I give to children*

This month I am presenting work by another translator, Jacqueline Schneider, who I commissioned to translate the afterword to the German edition of *My Heart I Give to children*. In it Sukhomlinsky reveals the personal tragedy behind his extraordinary productivity.

This book, which is about children who completed their first years of schooling just after the end of the war, does not only relate the joyful and light sides of childhood. The reader will also encounter stories here that tell of children's suffering, a suffering caused by the war. This war, ignited by the German fascists, brought unspeakable suffering to many peoples, above all to the peoples of the Soviet Union. This suffering had to be brought to an end. The often oppressive difficulty of the job of ending the suffering, and the sorrow and pain that came with it, were eventually outshone by the triumph of seeing happiness and joy entering the hearts of the children once again.

I have dedicated my life to the job of educating people so that they can live happy lives. I consider it the ultimate good fortune to be able to spend time with children. For me, the one true luxury is – to paraphrase the words of Saint-Exupéry – the luxury of interacting with others.

I would also like my book to cause German teachers and educators to stop and reconsider the enormous responsibility they bear towards future generations. I dearly hope that every teacher can grasp that it is, to a large degree, up to him or her what kind of people their students become, and which moral values guide their actions. So that German readers can understand why I say that, I will explain the source of both my love of children and my hatred of fascism.

[continued on the next page]



Responding to evil with love

*In 2016 I published my translation of Sukhomlinsky's *My heart I give to children*, a work that was published in German translation even before it was published in Russian, the language in which it was written. I am currently working on an article about how that came about.*

As part of my research, I requested a German translator, Jacqueline Schneider, to translate the afterword to that first German edition. We are indebted to her for the content of this month's newsletter.

As you will see, when you read the translation, Sukhomlinsky's extraordinary output of work is the result of a heroic response to great tragedy. Faced with the mind-numbing inhumanity of a Gestapo interrogator, who killed his first wife and child, he responded by trying to educate young people who would be incapable of such atrocities. He responded to extraordinary evil with extraordinary love for the children in his care.

Best wishes,

Alan Cockerill

From Pavlysh Secondary School [cont.]

I began my career in education in 1935. In 1941 my wife, Vera Petrovna, completed her studies at the Kremenchuk Pedagogical Institute. We wanted to work together at the school in Onufriivka where I was already working. We were young and full of hope for the future.

The war destroyed all our hopes. In the first days of the war I was sent to the front. No-one could have foreseen then that the fascists would reach the banks of the Dnieper River in the space of five weeks. I imagined that before long I would be returning home victorious. As my wife and I took our leave of each other we dreamed of one day having a son or daughter.

But the war's conflagration extended well beyond what we had foreseen. I didn't receive one single letter from home. The fascists had occupied the village where my wife lived with her parents. My wife and two of her female friends distributed leaflets that had been dropped from our planes. She hid Soviet soldiers who had fled imprisonment and she concealed weapons and passed them on to soldiers who were planning to cross the Dnieper and reach the Soviet troops. She was arrested by the Gestapo and tortured for a number of days in an effort to force her to reveal the names of the leaders of the anti-fascist organisation. But Vera and her girlfriends remained silent.

Vera gave birth to our son there in that underground torture chamber. Dupliciously, the fascists promised to spare her life. But they committed a terrible crime. For twenty-five years my heart has burned and bled when I imagine what took place in that fascist underground torture chamber: Our small son,

just days old, was tied to the leg of the table by a fascist officer. The torturers bound Vera to an iron bedframe and called her names and derided her. Then the fascist officer untied our son and brought him to my wife and said, 'If you don't tell us the names of the leaders of the organisation, we will kill your child.' They killed the boy. They cut Vera's eyes out. For another two days those Hitler fascists tortured and derided their half-dead victim. Then they strung her up and hanged her in the prison courtyard.

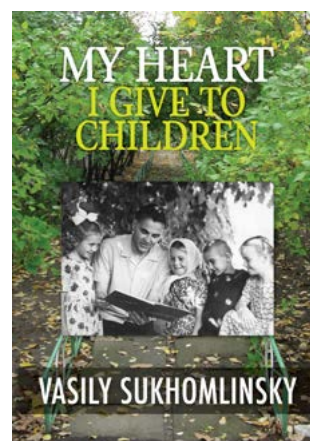
All this happened while I was badly wounded at the front near Rzhev. I had been shot through the chest and was wounded by fragments of metal, a few of which to this day still remain embedded in one lung.

When the Onufriivka district had been liberated from the fascists and I returned home, I learned of the appalling tragedy. I listened to the testimony of a traitor during his trial – he had worked for the fascist police and was present at, and participated in, the torture. Following the court's verdict, he was later hanged before my eyes. However, the fascist officer evaded justice. His name is burned forever into my memory. I keep a small white envelope containing a photo of him in my pocket and this reminds me at all times that there is fascism in this world. The image of the horrific crime that that Gestapo monster committed will never fade from my mind.

Following my return to my home village I wanted to go back to the front immediately. I wanted to confront the Gestapo beast face to face. I wanted to try and understand how it is possible that mothers can give birth to such monsters. But I was prevented from re-joining the

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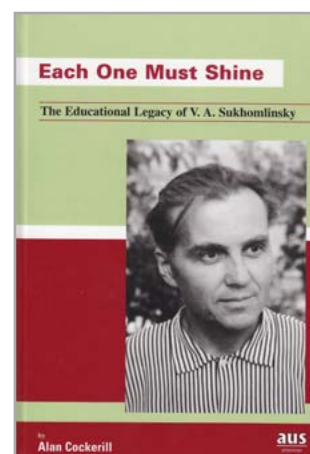
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army. No medical panel would even grant me the status of 'partially fit for duty'.

And so I returned to school. It was work, work and more work. At least there I found some solace for the pain I felt. I spent each day in the company of children. At night time I would wake up at two or three a.m. and, unable to sleep, I worked. I waited impatiently for morning to come, when I could once again hear the children's bright little voices. Every morning to this day I still wait for the children.

I continued to learn German. I believed, and still believe to this day, that one day I will be granted the opportunity of finding the monster who tortured and murdered my son and my wife, and that I will be able to say to him in German what I have carried with me in my thoughts for 25 years, that which can never be either forgotten or forgiven. I learned German and later I also learned Polish, Czech, Bulgarian, English, French, Spanish and Japanese. Despite that I still had plenty of time, because from 2am until the morning is a long time.

Sometimes people ask, 'How were you able to write so much?' It is a lot indeed – 310 academic publications including 32 books. Two emotions gave me the strength I needed: love and hate. Love for children and hatred for fascism; hatred for inhumanity.

I visited East Germany many times. I freely admit that coming to your country for the first time was horrific for me. I knew from books, from literature, and from the reports of comrades who had visited East Germany that the government of the first German workers' and peasants' state had, from its first day of existence, declared fascism to be illegal. Prior to the war I had developed an appreciation of German poetry. I could recite Heine's *A Winter's Tale* by heart and had read Hölderlin's

Hyperion and Goethe's *Faust* in the original German. But fascism had injured my heart so severely that I simply feared on my own behalf something along these lines: 'Perhaps you will be suddenly incapable of objectivity, perhaps your personal experiences will overshadow your view of things and stop you from being able to see this new world in a balanced way.'

I won't deny that I found it extremely difficult. However, after spending a few weeks in East Germany and seeing the lives of simple working people and after having met and got to know some German children and learned what was in their hearts and minds, I began to breathe easier. East Germany is a new world, a world of socialism, a world that sees fascism in all its manifestations as the irreconcilable enemy. I am pleased to have many friends in East Germany – teachers, academics and children.

I am still aware though, that the poison of fascism is able to find a way of penetrating through the smallest of gaps, almost undetected. You, the teachers of the first German workers' and peasants' state, bear a special responsibility for the development of the young children who start school, small and without knowledge, and finish their schooling as mature people ready to venture out into life. It is the task of the socialist school to teach our children to become true people, communists, and humanists in the truest meaning of the word. True humanism consists in fighting to build up communism in all areas of life. It is impossible to be a humanist without hating fascism, whose seeds can be seen sprouting in West Germany and other countries once more.

Dear German friends and fellow teachers, if we teach our children

humanism, if we awaken in them and encourage an empathy for others and respect for human dignity, we should not forget for one minute that those fascist murderers, those monsters who claimed at the time to be superior beings were once children themselves, who enjoyed the sunshine and later wrote tender loving letters to their mothers and lovers. Even the sadistic murderer who smashed a child's tiny head against a wall would have tenderly stroked the hair of his own son and daughter. The photograph I always carry with me shows a man with his wife and two small children.

I very much hope that you, my dear German friends and colleagues, think about the content of my book – a book that I have dedicated to teaching my students noble and humanitarian sentiments. I say these words with my most heartfelt sincerity, as a friend who wishes the best for you, your children and your grandchildren, and as a friend, who if necessary will stand by your side to defend the socialist achievements of the German working class as though it were his own home. Because we live for a common cause – for socialism, for communism, for proletarian internationalism.

N K Krupskaya wrote in her memoirs that Lenin regarded someone who loved people as a true human being. What does it mean to love people in our complicated and difficult times? We teachers and educators must create enthusiasm in each and every one of our young charges for a higher moral ideal: A true human being is one who fights for people's happiness, who spares neither strength, nor when necessary, life, to banish exploitation of others, social injustice and despotism from our planet forever.

[Translated by Jacqueline Schneider]

Stories for Children

The indomitable human spirit

A man was dying from thirst in the desert. All alone, like a grain of sand, overcome with unbearable pain, he closed his eyes and lay on the burning sand. He knew he was dying.

Hard on his heels came Death—a bony old woman with a scythe. The man opened his eyes and saw her next to him.

Death smiled, opened her terrifying dark mouth, and said, 'Before death, you can satisfy your final wish, Man, to drink a mouthful of cold spring water. But if you have the courage and fortitude, instead of a mouthful of water you can wish for anything else you like. Whatever you wish for in place of a mouthful of water, that wish will be granted.'

And Death brought to his lips some chilled water.

The man said, 'I want to know how to find water in the desert. Reveal that secret to me, if you know it, and then take my life.'

Death was amazed at this human wish.

'All right,' she answered, 'I will reveal that secret to you. But what good will it do you? As soon as you find out how to obtain water, you will die.'

'That is my business,' said the man, and the light of hope burnt in his eyes.

Death saw that his eyes shone with such mighty strength of spirit, such faith in life, and such hope for the future, that she retreated in horror from the man. She crept away and disappeared in the darkness of the desert.

At that moment the man heard the bubbling of a spring under the layer of sand upon which he lay. Digging up the sand and satisfying his thirst, he went in search of other people, so as to tell them, as soon as possible, where that source of life was hidden.

The final judgement

In one human society there was a custom.

When a person had lived their life, and it was time for them to die, they appeared before the Final Judge, and the Judge decided what would remain in the world of the person who was departing: the love and respect of their fellow citizens, honour and eternal glory, or merely some minor remembrance.

One day it was time for a Hard-working Man to die. He came to the Final Judge, and the Final Judge asked him, 'How many years have you lived on this earth?'

'Ninety-nine,' answered the Hard-working Man.

'Show me your years.'

Now this Hard-working Man had planted a tree every day. For every day he had lived, a tree was growing. The Hard-working Man took the Final Judge and showed him all the trees he had planted, one after another. It took many days for the Final Judge to inspect the forest planted by the Hard-working Man. When he finished inspecting it he said, 'You have lived a good life. May eternal glory be your legacy in the world.' The Hard-working Man died peacefully.

The time came for an Idle Man to die.

'How many years have you lived on this earth?' the Final Judge asked him.

'Ninety-nine,' answered the Idle Man.

'Show me your years.'

But the Idle Man had nothing to show. The Final Judge saw only an empty space.

'Well, then, may you be forgotten,' decided the Final Judge.

The Idle Man died, and at that moment people forgot all about him.

The shining summit and the Stony Path

A Traveller stood at the foot of a very high mountain. Its summit was covered in eternal snow, but below, at its foot, roses were flowering. The traveller needed to climb to the lofty summit.

One day passed, and then another. The way to the Summit was via a narrow Stony Path. The Traveller gazed at the Summit. It shone in the rays of the sun. On the second night the Traveller slept on cold stones.

In the morning the Traveller awoke and again saw the Shining Summit. In the rays of the rising sun it was pink. The Traveller continued along the Stony Path. It was hard for him to breathe, and he could hardly place one foot in front of another. On the Stony Path he encountered sharp stones, ruts and holes. The Traveller sighed, wiped the sweat from his brow, and asked, 'Tell me, Stony Path, why is it so hard to follow you?'

'Because I lead to the Shining Summit,' answered the Stony Path.

