

Sukhomlinsky News



Planting trees at the school in Pavlysh



A New Year brings new hope

Dear reader,

I hope you are keeping well.

With the New Year just hours away, I would like to wish you all the very best for 2023, and hope that it brings peace and healing, especially for Ukraine.

*In this month's newsletter I am continuing to present translations of stories from Sukhomlinsky's **Ethics Anthology**, mostly from the section entitled 'Journeys to the wellsprings of thought'.*

It is hard to escape the impression that many of the stories presented here have been written more for teachers than for their students, though Sukhomlinsky may also have had his senior secondary school students in mind. One of his goals was to prepare his senior students for parenthood, and he would also have been aware that some of them would become teachers.

Sukhomlinsky's daughter has expressed the view that her father's whole educational philosophy can be gleaned from his stories, and the final story in this month's newsletter—'Sixty years later'—illustrates one of Sukhomlinsky's key ideas: that one of a teacher's primary objectives should be to instil a lifelong love of learning.

I hope you enjoy this month's offering.

Best wishes,

Alan Cockerill

Stories from An Ethics Anthology

The young orchard

A young teacher came to a little village school. The school had been built quite recently. The school building was as new and beautiful as a toy, but all around it was just wasteland.

The teacher said to the children, 'We'll plant an orchard around the school.'

The children worked joyfully on the orchard. Together with the teacher they turned the soil, dug holes, and planted little trees. For several years they watered the orchard and kept it free of weeds, and at last the orchard flowered. It was amazingly beautiful.

The years passed, and the children grew up. The teacher's first students became parents and brought their own children to the school. The teacher began to feel that old age was creeping up on him. He was frightened by the thought that his eyes would fail him and that his hands would begin to shake. The apple trees and pear trees in the school orchard also grew old and began to dry out.

The teacher decided that it was time for him to retire. He did not want the children to see him feeble and decrepit. But he was terrified by the thought that he would leave behind the dried out stumps of the old orchard. He worked day and night, and his first students, who were now parents and grandparents, came and helped him. They dug out the old orchard and planted a new one.

Two years later, when young apple trees and pear trees were standing proudly around the school, the teacher gathered all his students in the school yard and said, 'Farewell, children. I am retiring. I do not want you to see me weak and feeble. May this orchard flower here eternally.'

Stories from *An Ethics Anthology* (cont.)

Mathematics is an interesting subject!

Today in grade four everything is different from last year. Last year, all the lessons were taken by Ekaterina Stepanovna. Today, Ivan Petrovich took the first lesson, but Sergei Pavlovich took the second lesson. Ivan Petrovich teaches mathematics, and Sergei Pavlovich teaches geography.

Ivan Petrovich sat at his desk and immediately noticed Alyosha's dog Brovko sitting outside the window. This is Alyosha's fourth year at school, and it is the fourth year that Brovko has walked to school with him. He even carries a little bag with Alyosha's lunch in it. Brovko knows that the bag has a little pocket with something tasty for him to eat as well. Through all the lessons Brovko sits by the window and guards the little bag containing Alyosha's lunch.

Ekaterina Stepanovna was used to Brovko. If everything was like last year, and Ekaterina Stepanovna was taking all the lessons, she would have said kindly, 'How are you feeling today, Brovko?' and Brovko would have looked trustingly into her eyes, and happily wagged his tail.

Ivan Petrovich did not know Brovko, so he asked, 'And who is this?'

Alyosha answered, 'That is my friend Brovko... He waits outside during all my lessons...'

'You have a good, faithful friend,' said Ivan Petrovich.

When Sergei Pavlovich came for the second lesson, he also asked about the dog, but a bit differently.

'What is that?' he asked.

'That is my friend Brovko,' Alyosha answered. 'He waits outside during all my lessons.'

'I don't want to see him outside the window again,' said Sergei Pavlovich sternly.

Everyone in the class frowned and sat looking down at their desks. No-one spoke and no-one looked at the teacher. Everyone felt ashamed to look at each other, and Alyosha even felt ashamed to look at his dog.

When Alyosha came home, he started doing his homework. He found mathematics very interesting, and happily set about solving all the problems. He did not look at his geography homework.

The lonely teacher

A teacher worked in the same village for forty-eight years. He knew every single person in the village. Everyone came to him for advice—the mothers and fathers, grandmothers and grandfathers of his little students. They were all his former pupils.

Old age came upon him. His wife died. His son had died long ago on the frontline. The old teacher was left all alone.

One day after lessons he told all the students in his grade four class, 'Come to my home, children.'

The students came to the teacher's apartment, and all the walls were covered with bookshelves full of books.

'Sir,' asked one curious boy, 'How many books are there in your library?'

'Several thousand,' answered the old teacher.

'And how many books can a person read during their lifetime?'

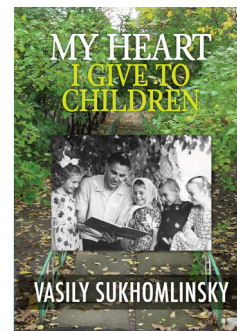
'Two thousand, no more.'

The students were silent. The old teacher understood why the student had asked that question. He led the students to his bookshelves, gave each student a book and said, 'I will not be working at school anymore. Please accept this present from me. Go home and

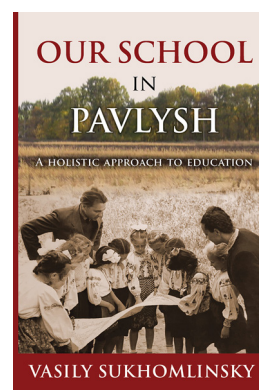
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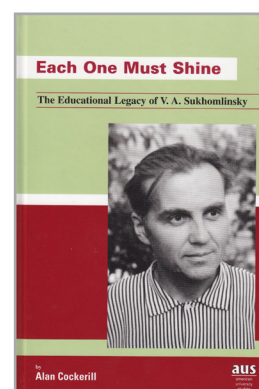
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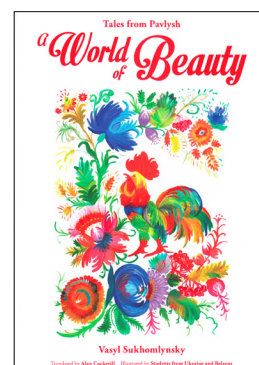
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tell your parents and friends to come and see me. I want to give them each a present.

For several days people came one after another to see the old teacher. There were five thousand people living in the village, and to each one he gave a book and said, 'This is the greatest treasure. May there be many more books in your home.'

The teacher had one book left. The oldest man in the village came to see him. Grandpa Ivan was one hundred years old.

'Why have you given away all your books, son?' asked Grandpa Ivan. 'How can you live without books? You will die all alone.'

'Those books are like my relatives. Now I have become related to everyone in the village and will never be alone.'

We like to draw

The children at a boarding school went home for the summer holidays. Only three children remained at the school—Marinka, Volodya and Vasilko. They had all just completed graded five. None of them had a mother or father.

The drawing teacher at the boarding school was Aleksandra Nikolaevna. She had only recently graduated from her institute. The grade five students often misbehaved at the young teacher's drawing lessons. The worst pranksters were Volodya and Vasilko. When they did not feel like drawing, they made paper planes and threw them around the classroom.

When they saw that Aleksandra Nikolaevna was not going away for the summer holidays, Volodya, Vasilko and Marinka were surprised. Why had she stayed at school over summer? In the morning the teacher came to the children's dormitory and said, 'Children, if you want, we can go for a walk in the forest.'

The children were so pleased! They really wanted to go into the forest. Vasilko, Volodya and Marinka took enough food to last a whole day, and Vasilko quietly whispered, 'Let's take our drawing albums. We can draw in the forest.'

It was fun in the forest. Aleksandra Nikolaevna knew lots of stories. After lunch Marinka and the boys took out their albums and began to draw. They drew the forest, the birds and the flowers.

'I didn't know you liked drawing,' said Aleksandra Nikolaevna in surprise.

'We love drawing,' said the boys. And Marinka added, 'I'm going to draw every day now.'

The cheat sheet

When he prepared for his geometry exam, Kolya wrote five cheat sheets for the five most difficult questions. He knew the answers, but deep down he was afraid that he would suddenly forget what he knew. So, just in case, he wrote the five cheat sheets and hid them up his sleeve. He practised using them, and found it was very easy to take one out

and place it underneath a sheet of paper in such a way as not to be noticed.

When Galina Yakovlevna called Kolya's surname, his heart began to race. He took the question paper. It was the most difficult question. Kolya remembered that the cheat sheet for this question was the top one.

Kolya sat at his desk and was about to slip the cheat sheet from his sleeve when his eyes met those of Galina Yakovlevna. The boy realised that his teacher had seen his fingers reaching into his sleeve to retrieve the cheat sheet.

In Galina Yakovlevna's eyes Kolya read bewilderment and hurt. She turned her eyes away and her face turned red with shame. The teacher got up, walked over to the window, and looked out at a lilac bush.

Kolya froze, with the two fingers of his right hand hovering up his left sleeve. A wave of mortification flooded his heart. He wished he could sink through the floor.

The abandoned kitten

A little grey kitten was chased out of the house. The kitten was sitting by the road, miaowing. It wanted to go home to its mother. People walking past looked at the kitten. Some shook their heads sadly, others laughed. Some were sorry for the poor kitten but did nothing to help it.

Evening came. The little kitten was frightened. It snuggled up to a bush and sat there, shivering.

A little girl named Natasha was walking home from school. She heard the kitten miaowing. Without saying a word, she picked up the kitten and took it home. The kitten snuggled up to the little girl and purred. It was as happy as could be.

A boy and his sick mother

A little boy's mother fell ill. The son was sad. He wondered what he could do to cheer his mother up. He sat on the end of her bed and said, 'Mum, if you like, I can draw the garden for you. It will make you feel better. You can pretend that you are going for a walk in our real garden.'

'All right, dear. Draw the garden for me,' said his mother.

The boy took a large sheet of paper and drew a cherry tree with ripe, red cherries, and an apple tree with pink apples. He drew a beehive and bees, and the deep blue sky. He began to draw the sun, but he could not draw it the way he wanted.

'Mum, why should I draw the sun?' he said. 'I can just open the window and you can see how bright it is today.'

The boy opened the window and his mother saw the bright sun shining in the sky. She saw it and smiled.





Stories

The Timurites

On the outskirts of a small town in the steppe, in a little white house, an elderly retired teacher lived all alone. She had been retired for ten years. The students she had taught during her final year at school had all grown up, and the very first students she had taught were now grandparents... Each month the postman brought her teacher's pension. Every three months someone brought a cylinder of gas for her stove. In winter an electrician came to check her heating. She had a telephone and could call a technician if her television was not working properly.

Everything was quiet, peaceful and satisfactory.

When her former students were still studying in the senior classes, they sometimes came to visit her. They gave her a hug, kissed her, and shared their troubles. They brought her books to read. But with each year they came less and less, and when her last cohort of pupils graduated from secondary school, they stopped coming altogether. The thread that linked her to the noisy world of children finally broke.

However, she was still sometimes visited by Timurites. That is what they were called by their leader, a big, red-cheeked lad in a red scarf, who always seemed to be in a hurry. When he first visited, the old teacher had the following conversation with him.

'Can we chop some wood for you?' asked the Timurite leader.

'No thank you,' answered the teacher. 'I have a gas stove, as you can see.'

'Can we bring you some water?'

'No, I have running water.'

'Let us sweep your floors...'

'There's no need, children. I can do that myself...'

'Then what do you need?' asked the leader of the young Timurites, nonplussed. The three other lads who had come with him were also at a loss.

'But this old lady is in the action zone for our Pioneer group,' said the team leader, pointing at a piece of paper.

The old teacher realised they were talking about her, and it pained her.

In autumn, a few days before the beginning of the school year, the Timurites came to visit her again. The big, red-cheeked lad asked, 'When is your birthday?'

'Why do you need to know that?'

'We're going to give you a book with an inscription... Perhaps we can bring you something else as well?'

The old teacher sadly shook her head.

Sixty years later

The old teacher sat under the spreading branches of a linden tree. He was enrolling children in the school. All was quiet on the green grass under the tree. The new students were shy, and all that could be heard was the restrained whispering of the parents.

A grey-haired old man approached the teacher. The teacher looked carefully at the old man, closed his eyes for an instant, and again examined him from head to foot, then looked him straight in the eyes. He recognised his first student. Sixty years ago, under this very linden tree, on a quiet summer's day just like this, he had enrolled him in the school.

'Is that you, Ostop?' the old teacher asked quietly.

'It is me, teacher... I have brought my grandson to enrol... a little Ostop.'

The old teacher and his first student embraced and kissed. The old Ostop sighed and quietly murmured, 'The years go by, teacher...'

The old teacher wept. Thoughtful, full of emotion, with tears quivering on his eyelashes, he sat silently for a long time, gazing at little Ostop. Above the spreading linden tree shone the deep blue summer sky, bees hummed in the hop flowers, and far in the distance you could see a dark blue band of forest on the horizon. Everything was just as it was sixty years ago.

'And now, my dear students,' said the old teacher, in an even voice only slightly agitated by emotion, 'Who can tell me why a person needs to study?'

Ostop was the first to raise his hand. He put up his hand but was overcome by shyness. The old teacher smiled. The old Ostop approached the teacher and said, 'Teacher, it may happen that my grandson does not learn something, that he will fail to read some page in the book of knowledge as well as we would both like him to. That is not really a problem. It will be a problem if he does not like to think. Thinking must become his passion. He must know why a person needs knowledge. For his whole life he must remain like the dry earth, ready to thirstily soak up every drop of knowledge that falls his way.'