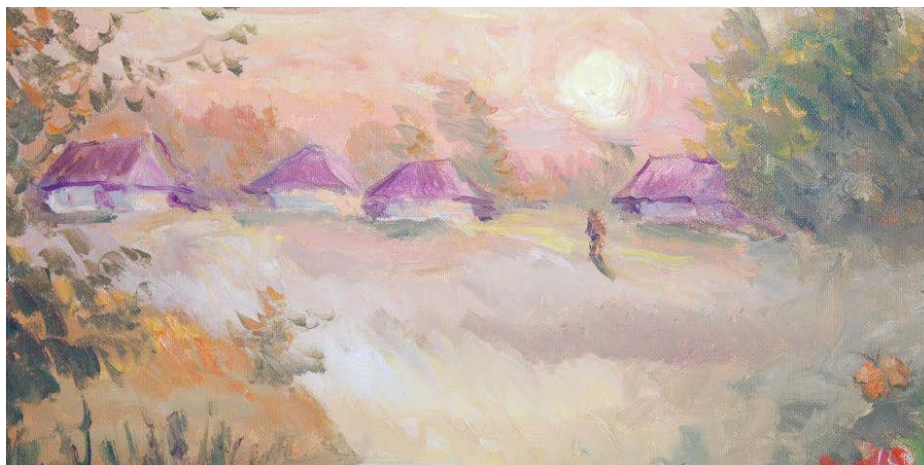


Sukhomlynsky News



The willow switch

Mytko really struggled with mathematics. Today the teacher was giving them a test, and Mytko was given a very difficult problem to solve. He sat thinking about it for a long time but could not make any sense of it. Discouraged, he began to draw on his piece of paper. He was upset that the other children were able to solve their problems, but he could not. Could it be that he really was dumb, as his father had said the night before?

The teacher saw that he was drawing. He went over to him and wrote in his school diary, 'Your son is idle again. Why are you not taking any action?'

Mytko's hands and feet went cold. His father was strict and would hit him again.

Mytko walked home sad and depressed. 'All right, since I'm good for nothing, hit me, hit me,' thought the boy, and a hot wave of anger filled his heart and flowed out in tears. Mytko broke a switch off a willow tree and tucked it into his diary.

That was how he handed his diary to his father, with the willow switch tucked into it.

His father opened the diary, read the comment, and looked at the switch. His face flushed red with shame. He sat deep into the night with the open diary and the switch in his hand.

Mytko went up to his father and touched his hand. His father reached out and hugged his son to his chest.

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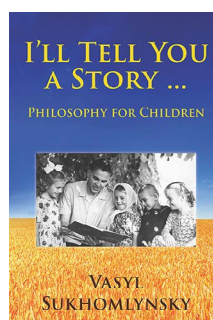
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Human relationships

Dear reader,

I hope you are keeping well.

*Once again I am offering you a selection of stories from **I'll Tell You a Story ... Philosophy for Children** that have not previously been published in the newsletter.*

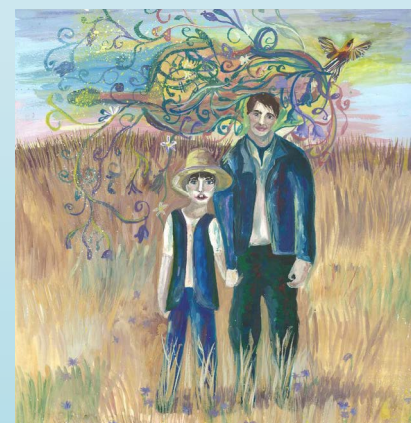
Many of the stories reflect one of Sukhomlynsky's prime concerns: human relationships. Several of this month's stories are about relationships between children and parents.

The lead story, 'The willow switch', takes aim at a common practice among some of Sukhomlynsky's contemporaries that he abhorred: the practice of encouraging parents to 'take measures' against children who were not performing satisfactorily at school. Stories like these seem to be aimed at teachers more than at students.

I hope you find food for thought in this month's stories.

Best wishes,

Alan Cockerill



From *I'll tell you a story ...*

I will always look after you

Little Katrusia's mother was always busy. She had to wash and iron their clothes and prepare their dinner early so she would be in time for work.

Katrusia's mother rarely smiled. Katrusia was afraid to ask what was grieving her but could see that she was often sad.

Then one Sunday, when they had some free time, her mother said, 'Katrusia, let's go into the fields.'

'Do you have to work today?' asked Katrusia.

'No, let's just go and have a break,' her mother replied.

Katrusia could hardly believe her ears. Were they really going to the fields just to have a break?

Katrusia flew, as if on wings. She picked some wildflowers and gave them to her mother. She stopped when she heard the song of a lark, and her mother stopped as well.

Katrusia and her mother sat down on a narrow path in the middle of a field of wheat. The wide steppe stretched out before them.

Katrusia's mother began to softly sing:

*In the field the wind is playing,
Yellow rye is softly swaying,
A Cossack loves a maiden dearly,
But dare not say so out aloud ...*

Katrusia listened to the song with bated breath. When her mother fell silent and turned and smiled at her daughter, Katrusia said, 'Mum, I didn't know you could sing like that. You are so beautiful, Mum ... I will always look after you.'

And the little girl burst into tears.

'Why are you crying, dear?' asked her mother.

'Because I haven't looked after you,' said Katrusia.

A heart of stone

A family suffered a great misfortune—the father died. His son followed his coffin to the cemetery, and they buried the father.

The young man returned home, and almost immediately his friends came to see him and said, 'Today our soccer team is playing the team from the next village. You are our best player, and we need you to come and play.'

'All right, I'll come,' said the young man. And he went and played soccer as if nothing had happened at home, as if his father had not died, as if there had been no funeral.

He had a heart of stone. How could he have grown into such a frightful, soulless, heartless person? It was because this young man had only lived to satisfy his own desires. He had never done anything kind for another human being. That was how he grew to have a heart of stone.

Mariika has two aunts

Petryk's grandmother gave birth to a boy. Petryk asked his mother, 'Is he really your new brother, Mum?'

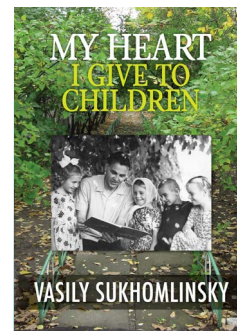
'Yes, he's my brother.'



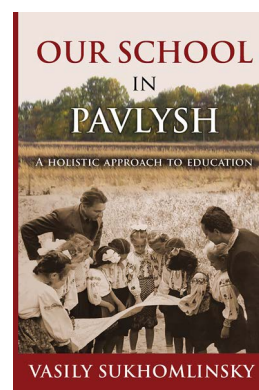
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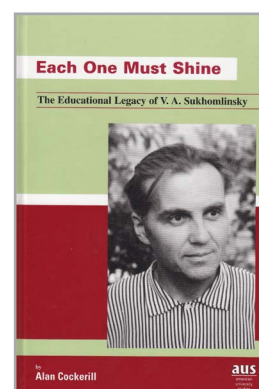
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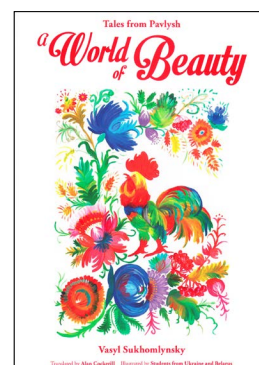
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'Is he my brother, too?'

'No, he's your uncle. When he grows up a bit, you can take him to kindergarten.'

Petryk's jaw dropped. He already had two uncles—his father's brothers—but those uncles cuddled him when they visited during the holidays. But this was something amazing: now he would be able to pick up his uncle and cuddle him. Petryk was happy: now he had something to boast about. Nobody else in his first-grade class had a baby uncle.

Petryk was so keen to tell all his friends that he ran all the way to school. But when he came home, he looked miserable.

'What happened at school today?' asked his mother, looking worried.

'Mariika's got two twin aunts that she takes to kindergarten,' said Petryk, 'And I've only got one baby uncle.'

My dad bakes bread

Two boys in grade one, Ivanko and Andriiko, sat together in the front row. From their first days at school, they became inseparable friends. They would go out together to play during the break, they were together when they looked at the colourful illustrations in the interesting books in the corridor, and they would run to the school dining room together.

One day, they were sitting together drinking tea and each munching on a bun. The buns were delicious.

'My dad baked this bun,' said Ivanko with pride. 'He works at the bakery and bakes bread. Where does your dad work?'

'He oversees all the bakeries in the region,' replied Andriiko.

'What do you mean "oversees"?' asked Ivanko, not understanding. 'What does he do?'

'Well, he oversees,' said Andriiko.

'Interesting ... My dad bakes bread. You can take a loaf of bread in your hands, and it smells delicious,' said Ivanko. 'What about your dad? What does he make that you can take in your hands?'

Andriiko fell silent. He simply did not know whether he could take something that his father made in his hands.

In the evening, when his father came home, Andriiko asked him, 'Dad, what do you make when you're at work?'

'What do you mean, what do I make?' asked his father in surprise. 'I oversee all the bakeries.'

'Can you take what you make in your hands?' asked Andriiko.

The father was even more surprised. He did not know what to say to his son.

'Dad, please bake a loaf of bread,' said Andriiko. 'Even just one loaf ... but it must smell delicious. Like the ones that Ivanko's dad bakes, so you can take it in your hands.'

Andriiko's father sat at the table deep in thought.

Mum and Dad argued

Yesterday, Tina's mother and father argued. Her father said something to her mother, and her mother hung her head and sobbed. Then she walked out of the room, and her father walked anxiously from one corner of the room to the other.

Today, when her mother and father came home from work, they did not eat together at the dinner table as they always did, with little Tina sitting between them. First, her father had dinner, and then her mother did. They each separately asked Tina whether she would like to eat with them, but she did not feel like eating.

When Tina was left in the room all by herself, her mother and father came in one at a time and stroked her head and kissed her, but it seemed to Tina that they were doing this in secret.

In the evening, Tina's mother sat at the table and started reading a book. Her father settled on the sofa and opened his book. Tina sat between them. She took her mother's hand and put it on the sofa, right on top of her father's hand. At that moment, Tina felt both their hands start. Her mother seemed to want to remove her hand from her husband's, but Tina would not let her, and a mischievous smile sparkled in her eyes. Her father held her mother's hand tightly in his.

How the swallow escaped

A swallow was flying high in the sky. A predatory kite saw her and chased after her, wanting to eat her. At any moment he would catch her. The swallow cheeped plaintively. She was crying from grief. Then she remembered her little chicks, naked and helpless. They were waiting for their mother.

'Who will feed you, my little ones, if I perish?' she thought. 'No, the cruel kite will not catch me!'

The swallow flew like an arrow and hid in her nest. The chicks were so pleased to see her, they chirped with joy.



My lark flew out the window

A mother had seven sons. The oldest was nine years old and the youngest was three.

The mother baked eight lark-shaped bread rolls—one for each son and one for herself. She took them out of the oven and put them on the table, and her boys sat in a row and could not take their eyes off them. They were light and fluffy and golden brown. They sat and looked out the window as if they were about to fly away.

'You go outside and play for a few minutes while they cool down,' said the mother.

Six boys went out to play but the youngest—his mother called him her 'little finger'—remained behind. The larks smelt so good that he could not go outside. He sat down at the table and his hand reached for a lark all by itself. It took the hot bread and brought it to his mouth. The mouth opened, the teeth did their work, and the lark disappeared. The little boy was shocked at what he had done and ran outside and played with his brothers.

The mother called the boys in, sat the seven brothers at the table, and gave them each a lark. There was no lark left for her.

'Where is your lark?' asked the oldest brother, who was her best helper.

'My lark flew out the window,' answered the mother with a sigh, and she rested her elbows on the table and became thoughtful.

Tears fell from the youngest brother's eyes ...

What is a lily-of-the-valley like?

A woman had a blind daughter who had never seen the blue sky, or white clouds, or the bright sun, or a pink flower. All she had seen throughout her life was a dark black night.

One day, the mother and daughter went for a walk in the forest. They stopped to rest in a peaceful forest glade. The girl was struck by the wonderful scent of the flowers.

'What is that flower that smells so nice?' asked the girl.

'That is a lily-of-the-valley,' answered her mother.

They sat on the grass. The girl stretched out her delicate fingers and gently felt the flower's large leaves, and the little bell-shaped flowers nestled among them.

'Those little bells are the lily-of-the-valley's flowers,' explained her mother.

'Mum, can you tell me what a lily-of-the-valley is

like?' asked the girl.

The mother leaned towards her daughter and kissed her gently on the forehead. 'A lily-of-the-valley is like my kiss, dear,' she said quietly.

What is tastier?

Some children set up a bird feeder on a tree in the garden. Every day they would bring sunflower seeds and wheat for the birds, and for the chickadees they would bring a small piece of lard. That day, as usual, they brought some lard and hung it on a thread.

Dmytryk came to the garden. He wanted to see for himself how a chickadee ate its breakfast. He sat near the window and watched. A chickadee settled next to the lard and started pecking at it. She took a bite and started singing joyfully. Then she took another bite and sang again.

'She is saying thank you for the lard,' decided Dmytryk.

He wanted to bring the chickadee something even more delicious. Since he loved *varenyky* with cottage cheese, he brought some of those for the chickadee and placed them in the bird feeder. He did not realise that chickadees do not eat *varenyky*.

(Note: *Varenyky* are a Ukrainian national dish made by filling non-sweet dough with a variety of fillings.)



varenyky

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