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Dedicated to the light memory of our colleague and mentor, artist, publicist, researcher of the history and culture of the Roma, Nikolai Bessonov (1962-2017), whose contribution to the development of Romani Studies, the popularization of Romani culture, as well as the recording and preservation of Romani memories of the period of national-socialism and the Second World War can not be overestimated.

Kremenchuk, 2018

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# "Child's face" of history

Thousands of pages about war have been written, hundreds of films have been shot, and a huge amount of lectures have been read. These themes are taught at school and university lectures. What is usually written in textbooks and scientific historical research? The focus is usually on the most significant battles, victories of the heroes, the fate of the leaders of the belligerents, the development of international diplomacy, the victory and defeat of the military forces, etc. Only with the development of historical science, with the advent of new approaches and methodological tools, first in the West and somewhat later in the countries of Eastern Europe, researchers attempt to turn the history of "human face". Representatives of humanitarian disciplines — historians, sociologists, culturologists, etc. — are beginning to be interested in everyday life. The investigations are carried out concerning the existence of an individual or a group, but not about the ruling regime, country or region.

There are dozens of collections of articles and monographs devoted to the military everyday life of the Second World War at the front, rear, in occupation, in partisan detachments, and so on. The Soviet ideological system also did not ignore the children's experience, but used it in a very specific way, reformatting under its own ideological needs. Thus, in the official Soviet discourse there were frequent scenes about the heroic feats of young Komsomol and pioneers and their place in the struggle against the enemy. The stories of children about their "non-heroic" experience for decades have been excluded from the general narrative of the war, because they did not correspond to the official doctrine of the center¹. That is why the communicative memory of children about daily life in occupation was long unnecessary and remained to be a "silent history".

In conditions of wars or armed conflicts, one of the most vulnerable categories of the population is children who perceive events in own way; they remember and reproduce this knowledge differently. It would seem what can be worse than being in the occupied territory, often without the main protector of the family – the father who was mobilized into the army? To live and daily beware of one's life, to get food for oneself, not only for oneself, but for the whole family? To search the ways for rescue in tragic conditions without any sufficient life experience for it. For many children and adolescents, the horrors of war were not limited to the above listed situations. If your family falls under the "special treatment", the chances of rescue are reduced at times. A factor that significantly impairs the situation and complicates the possibility of survival under already difficult conditions may be the affiliation of children to groups that are subject to the so-called "special treatment" of the belligerents — namely representatives of Jewish, Roma communities, children with mental and physical peculiarities, etc.

In view of this, we want to bring back the history one more face — the faces of Romani children who, during the Second World War, and their families, were victims of mass extermination by the Nazi occupation regime. Perhaps this approach will allow us to look at the history of genocide from a completely different angle, to find out about things that are not reflected in the pages of official documents.

<sup>1</sup> Rebrova I.V. Mir detskoy povsednevnosti v usloviyakh okkupatsii Severnogo Kavkaza // Vestnik Permskogo universiteta. 2014. № 2 (25) [Elektronnyy resurs]. Rezhim dostupu: http://histvestnik.psu.ru/table/104-2-25.

# Victims of the "unnoticed" genocide

Could the Roma even guess at the beginning of the war, what would be the fate for them in future? Hardly. In this regard, researcher of the history and culture of the Roma N. Bessonov noted that the Roma in the occupied territories, as well as many other people did not expect serious crimes from either the German army or the German authorities. "People of senior age remembered occupation in 1918, when the Germans proved themselves to be a "cultural nation". This situation has been discussed repeatedly in the Holocaust literature. The memories of the surviving Jews reflect the debates that arose in the summer of 1941, which often ended with a common solution: "We'll not go anywhere. The Germans will not do anything, we remember them perfectly. "Exactly the same conversations were also in the Roma families". But, as history shows, the consequences were tragic.

What do we know about these events? The figures and a poor description of the facts presented in several lines on the pages of school textbooks, isolated recollections in historical museums or on the pages of scientific publications do not reveal the tragedy of the situation of the Roma population of Europe and Ukraine in particular. What was the life of the Roma sent to the concentration camps? How did they succeed to survive in the occupied territories? Why did they perish, those who settled for a long time and it was almost impossible to distinguish them from their Ukrainian neighbours? Historians do not have enough documents or other historical sources to fully answer these questions. But was the lack of sources the only reason for prolonged silence?

For some reason, the theme of the genocide of the Roma has long remained on the brink of scientific research. And although with the achievement of independence by Ukraine, the theme of World War II was the center of numerous social discussions, and in the history of science a large number of works devoted to the course of military operations on the Ukrainian lands had been accumulated, and the Roma themes in these studies were in fact not covered. One of the reasons for this, according to the coordinator of the Institute of the Shoah Foundation in Ukraine A. Lenchovska, was "the actual ban on the study of the "ethnic" aspect of the war" in the Soviet Union<sup>3</sup>. In the historical picture of the war, constructed by the ideological machine of the Soviet Union, there was no place for representatives of various ethnic groups and peoples who inhabited vast territories of the former superpower. The victims of occupants and heroes of military actions or resistance could be only "soviet citizens", regardless of their origin and self-determination.

The complexity of the topic, according to researcher M. Tyaglyy, is also due to the simultaneous influence of many factors and initiatives of different levels that made the «"Gypsy" policy inconsistent and contradictory»<sup>4</sup>. In particular, the principles that determined the attitude of invaders to the Roma in the USSR, including Ukraine, were somewhat different from those that were guided by the Third Reich, so it would be very difficult to reproduce a comprehensive picture of the Nazi policy towards the Roma. In addition, local authorities also had an impact on the final

<sup>2</sup> Bessonov N. Tsygane SSSR v okkupatsii. Strategii vyzhivaniya / N. Bessonov // Holokost i suchasnist. Studii v Ukraini i sviti. – 2009. – № 2. – S. 22.

<sup>3</sup> Lenchovska A. Videosvidchennia Instytutu Fondu Shoa yak dzherelo do vyvchennia ta vykladannia istorii romiv Ukrainy u period 1941−1944 rr. // Holokost i suchasnist. Studii v Ukraini i sviti. − 2009. − № 2 (6). − S. 114−123.

<sup>4</sup> Tyaglyy M. Okupatsiina polityka ta dolia romiv Ukrainy // Ukraina v Druhii svitovii viini: Pohliad z KhKhl stolittia. – K.: Naukova dumka, 2011. – Kn. 2. – S. 865.

decisions. These differences significantly influenced the Roma in the conditions of occupation<sup>5</sup>.

# History at first hand

What else can the historians do when archival repositories don't answer the questions? Then they have to be diverted to those who may be more willing to dialogue, namely witnesses and participants of those events. In the context of our problem, this is especially topical, since the transfer of experience and the construction of memory of the common past in the Roma community take place mainly in the form of oral narratives and retellings which are transmitted from generation to generation. Therefore, it is logical that one of the main sources is the recorded interviews with the Roma, who experienced the adversity of the war.

But then the question arises, is there any particular peculiarity of remembering and recollection the events of the past just by the Roma narrators? For example, are the memories of Ukrainians, Russians, Roma, Jews, etc. different in any way? Were the differences in the stories of Roma-urban residents, Roma-rural residents and those who still had a nomadic way of life? In order to answer to all these and many other questions, it is necessary to attract the efforts of many other researchers to listen / read, compare and analyze the testimonies that we and our predecessors have managed to collect.

One of the largest projects in which the Roma testimonies were collected was the project of the Historical Video Documents Fund "People Who Survived Shoah". The foundation was founded by director S. Spielberg in 1994 to record on a video tape and save the memories of those who survived the Holocaust as well as the memories of other witnesses and victims of Nazi persecution. Interviews were conducted in a number of countries during 1994-1999. Most of the interviews were taken with Jews who survived the Holocaust. But the archive amongst others also has evidence of Roma and Sinti. Today it is one of the world's largest digital video libraries"<sup>6</sup>. Fund employees and volunteers managed to record 407 interviews with Sinti and Roma. The search work was conducted in 18 countries, and the collected evidences sound in 17 languages. It should be noted that the lion's share of evidences was recorded in Poland and Ukraine. There have been recorded 3 interviews in Belarus, 3 — Czech Republic, 10 — Russia, 6 — Slovakia, 9 — Yugoslavia, while in Poland and Ukraine — 181 and 135 respectively<sup>7</sup>.

Unfortunately, the collection of memories of the witnesses of the Roma tragedy began at a time when a significant part of the Roma, who were in adulthood during the war, died. The interviewed informants in the 1990s were mostly children or adolescents during the war.

# "... I didn't understand. What was the mind in my head?"

Children who witnessed military actions are now, in fact, the last generation, which can answer the questions of researchers and personally share experiences of wartime. These testimonies are very often not informative — if the aim is to reproduce the factography of war. However, they are incredibly valuable for the study of military everyday life, family life, local

Peresliduvannia ta masovi vbyvstva romiv na terenakh Ukrainy u chasy Druhoi svitovoi viiny: Zb. dokumentiv, materialiv ta spohadiv / Avt.-uporiad. M. Tiahlyi. — K.: Ukrainskyi tsentr vyvchennia istorii Holokostu, 2013. — S. 7.

<sup>6</sup> Lenchovska A. Mentioned work.

<sup>7</sup> Smith Stephen D. Audio-Visual Interviews of Gypsy and Jewish Victims of Nazi Genocidal Policy: Reflections on Language, Memory and Narrative Culture // The Holocaust in History and Memory. — 2010. — Vol. 3. — P. 41.

history and the history of certain groups of the population<sup>8</sup>, and, most important, perceptions and assessments of the events of that time and the influence of the traumatic experience of the war on their later life. Working with oral-historical sources, first of all, one must clearly understand that the received interview is not a section of the history textbook, which clearly and consistently presents an account of historical facts. It is rather a kaleidoscope from the layers of various social experiences of a person; a reflection of what and how it was remembered from the bygone and what an assessment the narrator gives to the past events. Analyzing the evidence recorded with the informants who were children during the occupation, we must remember that this has affected the content of the narrations, peculiarities of memory and remembrance.

The narrators themselves, for the most part, are very critical to the significance of their narratives, referring to their age. For example, a woman born in 1935 observed: "... as for me, at that time. If I was ten or fifteen years old [...]. I would know more. And so, I tell you what I remember". In fact, for children's memories, the fragmentary nature of the described events is typical. Quite often, respondents can not recreate children's memories of the marked period, so they tell what they remembered from the retellings of parents and other relatives of senior age. To describe this phenomenon prof. M. Hirsch in 1992 introduced the term "post-memory" to the scientific nomenclature. The researcher concludes that the children of eyewitnesses or participants of major events (wars, genocides, coups, etc.) are influenced by the experience of their parents and, in accordance with this experience, form their own attitude to the described facts. Often, "they "remember" only due to the stories, images, and behaviour of people among whom they grew up. The process of transmitting information takes place at such a deep emotional level that they begin to create their own memories" 10.

Children's memories of the war in adults' interpretations are a multi-layered text in which the borrowed memories and numerous cultural representations lie on real images that are left in memory. As a rule, a person embeds the memories of others into own ones if they don't fundamentally differ from the personal experience and correspond to the "emotional background sensations" associated with that time<sup>11</sup>.

It is possible that they can also recall certain episodes, but at the time these events occurred, they could not adequately assess and analyze the situation: "... I didn't understand. What was the mind in my head?" 12. However, such a critical attitude of informants to their own memories does not diminish their informativity. It is also worth noting that usually the most emotional events are settled in child's memory and they can be described in details.

# What do the witnesses of history remember?

In the conditions of the occupation the life gains a new rhythm, the established social ties are being destroyed or radically changed, the totality of other values and goals come to the fore,

- 8 Rebrova I.V. Mentioned work.
- 9 Transcript of Interview No. 48412 University of Southern California Shoah Foundation Institute (hereinafter referred to as USC SFI) // Archive of the Ukrainian Center for Holocaust Studies (hereinafter referred to as the UCHS archive).
- Hirsh M. Chto takove postpamyat? Rezhim dostupu: http://urokiistorii.ru/node/53287.
- 11 Rebrova I.V. Mentioned work.
- Transcript of Interview No. 49670 USC SFI // Archive of the UCHS.

among which, first of all — the preservation of life. As noted by the researcher of the history of military life prof. O. Lysenko, in contrast to the peacetime, threats to an individual and certain social (ethnic, confessional, political) groups during the war become systematic, being the main feature of everyday existence<sup>13</sup>. The realities of war had a significant impact on the usual way of life of the Roma, who were in the occupied territories, had to look for new survival strategies.

As the reconstruction of children's everyday life shows, the main plot lines from the life of children are tied to daily everyday practices. Informants in their stories often turn to episodes of suffering, wandering and constant struggle for survival<sup>14</sup>.

In this context, texts of the collected interviews are very eloquent. Among the most widespread stories that reflect the daily life of the Roma is the interaction with the non-Roma neighbours and occupants; forced displacement or hiding. Much of the Roma at the time of the war had long settled, had their homes, work. However, the realities of wartime forced them to move from place to place in search of opportunities for salvation. Informants recall that they had to leave their homes in order to escape cannonade and bombing: "Left slobodka, because there was a bombing and everything ..." <sup>15</sup>.

A detailed consideration of memories of this period helps in understanding the peculiarities of getting food and basic necessities. A very bright line through almost all the records is the subject of family relationships, emotionally complex are memories of orphanhood and forced early maturation.

Involving a larger amount of oral-historical sources in the future will allow to trace more clearly the regional specificity of the Romani fate, as well as turning to a wider range of issues, such as the establishment of mass fusillades, exporting to forced labour with the rest of the population, and the participation of the Roma in partisan movement, hiding the wounded partisans in the Roma homes. A lot of such testimonies are found in memoirs.

Sometimes, while reading memoirs, it is difficult to follow the events, partly because some respondents in the depicted period were nomadic and therefore less accurate about the names of the locals and the dates<sup>16</sup>. But it is unlikely that we can operate only with this explanation. As we and our colleagues during the analysis of the texts of interviews repeatedly had to deal with a situation where a person, although he was a child in a nomad camp, nonetheless quite accurately called settlements, routes and dates. The "nomadic" factor, certainly, plays a role, but it is not a crucial one. In this context, it is difficult to do any generalization, because in each individual case different factors are taken necessarily into account. For example, even the informant's level of education does not always determine the quality of the interview. In this regard, researcher N. Bessonov noted that "despite the lack of education, nomadic Roma empirically mastered two sciences: geography and arithmetics. As oral account was necessary for trade, Roma children strived to master these skills as soon as possible. Learning to count very early, they sometimes

Lysenko O. Istoriia povsiakdennosti yak haluz naukovoho znannia (povsiakdenna istoriia viiny: metodolohichni notatky) // Istoriia povsiakdennosti: teoriia ta praktyka: materialy Vseukr. nauk. konf., Pereiaslav-Khmelnytskyi, 14–15 trav. 2010 r. – Pereiaslav-Khmelnytskyi, 2010. – S. 16.

<sup>14</sup> Rebrova I.V. Mentioned work.

Transcript of Interview No. 49374 USC SFI // Archive of the UCHS.

<sup>16</sup> Lenchovska A. Mentioned work. – S. 119-121.

remembered for life all the exact figures, dates, etc" <sup>17</sup>. It is also worth taking into account the mentally-psychological profile of each informant, the ability and inclination to process information accurately, store it and reflex over it.

# "Mother went to tell fortunes ... to earn a piece of bread, and we were waiting"

Memories of war childhood reflect the dependence of children on other people, and first of all – their immediate environment – the family. They often encounter a description of relationships with family members, with their neighbours, peers, friends, and enemies. But unlike the peaceful time, when the main household worries lay on adults, now children often had to take care of themselves, how to feed up themselves, and sometimes – their families. During the war, many families were left without a parent, and elder boys assumed responsibility for providing the family with food. If there were no boys in the family, then elder girls usually began to work<sup>18</sup>.

The main daily problem of the Roma, like many other inhabitants of the occupied territories. was a lack of food. The retreat of the Red Army from the territory of Ukraine was accompanied by the use of the "burned-out ground" tactics. Everything was destroyed that could serve life support not only for enemy troops, but also for civilians. The most common elements of this tactic were: the destruction of stocks of food and crops, pollution or poisoning of sources of drinking water, the destruction of roads and means of transport, equipment, buildings and housing, sometimes even entire cities. At the beginning of the twentieth century the tactics of "burned earth" was recognized as a war crime. However, in the USSR with the beginning of the German-Soviet war, this tactic was "legalized" by official decrees of the SNK (Council of People's Commissars) of the USSR and the Central Committee of the CPSU (b) (The Communist Party of the Soviet Union), which obliged the party centres and authorities to destroy everything that could not be evacuated to the east. After the retreat of the Soviets, the "pumping out" of food was already continued by the occupants: therefore, for the peaceful population, the search for food turned into daily wandering, "a kind of craft: to exchange something, to resell it, sometimes to grow it on an orchard, or to steal, etc" <sup>19</sup>. In particular, the researcher of the Kyiv everyday occupation T. Zabolotna notes that the search for products was the main problem throughout the period of stay of the Nazis in Kyiv<sup>20</sup>. From the testimony of our informants, we see that such a situation was inherent in other regions as well.

Roma, who settled in cities, along with other citizens, had to adapt to the conditions of the occupation regime. In the families left without breadwinner, the main burden of householding was focused on the woman: "Mother went to tell fortunes ... to earn on a piece of bread, and we were waiting" <sup>21</sup>. The image of the mother, who now had to perform even the man's work (to take care of horses, to construct the tent, etc.), is one of the most widespread childhood memoirs: "My father was in the army. Mother stayed with us. Went about the villages, begged ... for bread ... potatoes ... . So that we did not die of hunger. [...] We had a small red horse, had a wagon. Mother

<sup>17</sup> Bessonov N. Narrativnyye istochniki kak odin iz informatsionnykh resursov tsyganovedeniya // Naukovi zapysky. Zbirnyk prats molodykh vchenykh ta aspirantiv. Tom 15. Kyiv, 2008. Roma v Ukraini: iz mynuloho v maibutnie. S. 74.

<sup>18</sup> Rebrova I.V. Mentioned work.

<sup>19</sup> Zabolotna T. Ibid. – S. 113.

Zabolotna T. Povsiakdenne zhyttia kyian v umovakh natsystskoi okupatsii (veresen-hruden 1941 r.) // Ukrainskyi istorychnyi zhurnal. -2007.  $-N^{\circ}$  5. - 5. 113.

<sup>21</sup> Transcript of Interview No. 49596 USC SFI // Archive of the UCHS.

herself harnessed it. Harnessed every day, and travelled from morning to evening. The potatoes, then bread in slices [...]. Only sometimes we had a piece of meat or lard. Very strong hunger experienced. And those who didn't experience, can't understand misfortune, poverty" <sup>22</sup>.

In a traditional Roman society, there is a complex taboo system associated with representations of "pure /dirty". However, according to the informants, we see that in times of extreme situations, the standards of what could and could not be taken in food were often radically changed. Thus, there was a ban on the use of the remnants of food from someone else's table: "... peeled the potatoes, onion, cabbage — and cook, and gave us the remnants" 23.

By the way, it's worth noting that not all occupants in the memoirs of children acted as potential enemies who scared. Some Germans, who lived in the houses of civilian population, helped them with food and household goods. In the memoirs of children you can meet a wide range of feelings about the occupants<sup>24</sup>. Among other things, along with stories about the ruthless extermination of entire families, there were exceptions where representatives of the German occupation power or ordinary soldiers who had their own families in their homeland took care of orphans, giving them the opportunity to get food: "The German, who lived in the neighbourhood, was happy (here – kind. – Aut.), and when the parents had been shot, he asked: "And where are the parents?" I say: "They were killed!" And he hugged me and wept. And he ordered to attach us to their table and gave us to eat. [...] And after that, every day we took a small pot and went and we were given a pea porridge, the remnants of bread. And so we lived" <sup>25</sup>. Recollections of the "human" treatment of the Germans to children, as well as "treating delicacies" is a fairly widespread phenomenon. In particular, the researcher O. Diakov in the reconnaissance of memories of children of war also cites several similar facts concerning the occupied Kharkiv<sup>26</sup>.

In order to feed themselves (and sometimes adult members of their families), children had to beg, as they were usually given more willingly than adults: "And I went to beg about the villages. Well, came to the house — give a piece of bread. Well, people gave. Thanks, did not refuse. They gave a piece of bread ... Well, lard was rarely given. Potatoes were given... I put it all into a bag and carried home" 27. So they could save their elder relatives from hungry deaths. But for young children, this was at times more dangerous than for adults, and sometimes it could even turn into a tragedy: "And the third sister, I say to you, — froze to death. Went to beg for bread and froze. We brought her, the dead, on sleighs" 28.

Provision of the minimum foodstuff for members of families often became the main deal of children and adolescents under occupation. Somewhere the children could get food where it was almost impossible to do it for an adult<sup>29</sup>: "I could earn at least a piece of bread. I could make

Transcript of Interview No. 49356 USC SFI // Archive of the UCHS.

Transcript of Interview No. 49670 USC SFI // Archive of the UCHS.

<sup>24</sup> Rebrova I.V. Mentioned work.

Transcript of Interview No. 49670 USC SFI // Archive of the UCHS.

<sup>26</sup> Diakova O. V. Spohady ditei viiny pro Kharkiv u chasy natsystskoi okupatsii // Natsionalna ta istorychna pamiat: Zb. nauk. prats. – Vyp. 5. – K.: DP «NVTs N 35 «Priorytety», 2012. – S. 71.

<sup>27</sup> Transcript of Interview No. 50052 USC SFI // Archive of the UCHS.

Transcript of Interview No. 49670 USC SFI // Archive of the UCHS.

<sup>29</sup> Rebrova I.V. Mentioned work.

money so that ... It was impossible to buy milk for my sister, but she needed milk, because she was a newborn. And my mother was sick, she lost milk, paralysis of the right side. And there was such a task on me in my ten or eleven years" 30.

One of the most common ways to make food is a trade or exchange household and clothes for food products. For this reason, it often happened to walk long distances to nearby villages. Also informants recall that together with the neighboring children went out on the street to clean shoes: "In order to earn a piece of bread, I cleaned the Germans', Italians', Magyars' boots..." <sup>31</sup>. An accessible form of earning was also taking care of younger children: "I went to the gadjos ("gadjos", "non-Roma" — Aut.) to take care of children. Then went to the Roma. They gave to eat" <sup>32</sup>.

### Adult children

The hardest thing was to endure the bad times of war for children who did not have adult's support. The most diverse life situations in which the heroes of memories turned out became the borderline between the world of childhood and the harsh realities of wartime. Someone was fortunate enough to get close to relatives, neighbours, someone was completely lonely, and someone was burdened with looking after relatives.

That's how informant describes his misfortunes, who, at the age of eleven, had to bring his family out of the occupied, hungry Kyiv to the village: "And here we were also evicted [...] out of the city [...]. Nobody was interested in anyone. Evicted and that's all, and go out. And so, with a sick mother, with a little child [...]. We spent the night here and there, begged. There were so kind people who took us overnight and who even fed" 33. Moving to the village sometimes gave more opportunities to avoid starvation: "On the way, we grabbed a wandering cow, who gave milk for kid. And we gradually settled down in this house, there was a garden, a land. We settled down somehow and started to live" 34.

In large families, it was not always easy to be elder children, since the latter ones in a line with adults had to take care of younger siblings. There was no any chance for their childhood or even studying. This is how one of the informants describes the situation of her elder sister: "During the war there were in the family, let me think, six of us. Three of us, and there is one more and ... – five. There were six of us, one girl died. Six of us. Well, five left. The elder sister was a babysitter for us all and prepared food. She couldn't go to school, because father didn't permit ... <sup>35</sup>.

The fate of completely orphaned children was much more complicated, because they had to take care of themselves. A great responsibility was focused again on the elder brothers and sisters who tried to replace parents. But in addition to the war, defenseless orphans had many other enemies: the cold, from which they had to escape; the famine that nobody and nothing could quell it; even the yard dogs, with which they have recently been entertaining, became dangerous: "The parents were beaten, and there were both of us... And ... the third sister? But I tell you, she froze

30	Transcript of Interview No. 49374 USC SFI // Archive of the UCHS.
31	Transcript of Interview No. 49374 USC SFI // Archive of the UCHS.
32	Transcript of Interview No. 49670 USC SFI // Archive of the UCHS.
33	Transcript of Interview No. 49374 USC SFI // Archive of the UCHS.
3/1	Transcript of Interview No. 1037/ LISC SEL // Archive of the LICHS

Transcript of Interview No. 49374 USC SFI // Archive of the UCHS.

Transcript of Interview No. 50052 USC SFI // Archive of the UCHS.

to death. Went to beg for bread and froze. We brought her, the dead, on sleighs ... Where could we put her? — Frost is forty degrees, put her in the outbuilding. And dogs came up and tore her. So ... (gesticulates) ... And the door ... was not in the veranda ... — Brother took it off, chopped and put into stove, burned. There was nothing to heat" <sup>36</sup>.

Somewhere they could get food not only for themselves and their relatives, but for others ... – partisans. There are frequently happened memories of courageous actions that not all adults could boast. For example, there are stories about the salvation and hiding of partisans: "There were partisans in the city. One of them lived in our house. I did not know, but brother Hrishka knew. This is an old neighbour's boy. He made a hole in the oven. You know the oven. He made a pit in the stole and hid there. And brother knew it, and said: "Halia, go to the old one, sweep the yard!" And there, the Germans smoke cigarettes and threw away cigarette butts. And we together with girls swept the litter, gathered everything, but, God forbid, to raise a cigarette. They didn't allow, became very angry. They did not want to be taken after them. And we swept, picked up the rubbish, and then sorted it out. I gave to that partisan" <sup>37</sup>.

As we see, in spite of the vulnerability, children still managed to survive somewhere. It is difficult for us to speak at least about the approximate number of such cases, because those memories that we managed to fix are just drops in the sea of life stories that got in the storm of wartime. But along with this it is worth remembering those who didn't manage to survive and whose stories will never be told.

# "No matter a Moldavian, or Assyrian – in order to survive"

One of the most common survival strategies was to conceal their ethnicity. This topic has already been reflected in the writings of prof. V. Vipperman. He came to the conclusion that the SS and the Einsatz Groups often faced difficulties in identifying the Roma among the local population, since they successfully hid their own identity<sup>38</sup>. N. Bessonov also says about mimicry as one of the strategies of survival: "As soon as it became clear that executions were carried out on a national basis, the 'Gypsies' began to actively proclaim themselves to be Slavs, Moldavians, Tatars, etc. There were cases when it helped even before shooting" <sup>39</sup>. This phenomenon can be illustrated by the story of an informant who, at the age of 11, lived in occupied Kyiv. He managed to escape thanks to the neighborhood with representatives of another ethnic minority: "I couldn't walk in the street because I would immediately be arrested [...]. But here in the masses of these Assyrians I somehow hid myself and I was not noticeable" <sup>40</sup>.

In order to get food somehow, it was necessary to communicate with the outside world. Those families were lucky which members, or at least, someone was "fair-haired", "light", that is, had no appearance that was perceived as "typical" Romani. More dark-skinned family members were a danger, because at any moment they could be recognized as the Roma, and it threatened the inevitable death of the whole family. Therefore, they had to be carefully hidden. This situation has

- Transcript of Interview No. 49670 USC SFI // Archive of the UCHS.
- 37 Transcript of Interview No. 49670 USC SFI // Archive of the UCHS.
- 38 Wippermann W. "Auserwählte Opfer?" Shoah und Porrajmos im Vergleich: Eine Kontroverse (Berlin: Frank & Timme, 2005), p. 121.
- 39 Bessonov N. Tsygane SSSR v okkupatsii. S. 17—52.
- Transcript of Interview No. 49374 USC SFI // Archive of the UCHS.

arisen in the family of another informant: "Thank God, our mother is a little bit white, she does not look like Roma, she could walk, she gave us something in order not to die from starvation, kept us a bit [...] Well, they could not say that she was Gypsy. They saw, but I didn't go with her. She didn't take me. "You are black, sit at home and don't go out into the street". I didn't walk anywhere. [...] My sister was a white girl, she went with her mother, and the brother didn't go too" 41.

We have already noted that it was difficult for the occupants to identify the Roma, and for this purpose they were caught up with the support of the henchmen from the local population. But this principle acted in the opposite direction, which is very often found in the texts of memoirs. In order to escape, sometimes even at the edge of the shooting hole, someone from a local non-Roma population could play a role of a patron, confirming that the suspect is neither a Rom nor a Jew. It is this situation that describes one of the informants: "They passed by motorcycles, horses, and then they grabbed me and said:" Are you a Gypsy or a Jew? "And I said:"No, I'm not a Jew". And those captives, thank them, said: "Sir, don't take this girl! She is Russian. She is neither a Jew and nor a Gypsy". So, the second German obeyed him, and said in his language: "Let her go!" [...] Thanks to captives I didn't die. And captives saved me" 42.

One of the most common survival strategies in wartime was the registration of false documents, which indicated another nationality. N. Bessonov on this occasion also notes that the Roma often saved the false documents, which many used before the war. "On the territory of Ukraine, some Kyshyniv camps tried to pretend themselves as Romanians and move to a less dangerous Romanian occupation zone. The task was facilitated by the fact that Romanian Consulates opened in large Ukrainian cities. The most experienced men, who spoke perfectly in Moldavian and visited Bucharest one time, went to the Consulates of Kremenchuk and Poltava. Having presented themselves to officials as Romanians who want to return to their historic homeland, they were able to answer verifiers and receive the desired passes for themselves and their families" 43. Depending on the region of residence, it could be Moldavian documents, Tatar, and according to the corresponding appearance — even Ukrainian or Russian. Here is what the informant, who lived in the zone of Romanian occupation during the years of occupation, mentioned: "And my father, when the war began [...] in the collective farm, asked the chairman to write a document that we were Moldavians. He gave him a horse, and he wrote a document [...]. And so we became Moldavians. The Germans didn't touch Moldavians. And many other people were sunk in the Buh" 44.

Such an experience of survival under the conditions of occupation has contributed to the further self-identification and self-representation of the Roma. Even several decades after the war, the survivors evaluated forced mimicry differently. The experience has become a warning for the future for many people and has developed desire to be the owners of "good documents", which would indicate "neutral" nationality (Ukrainian, Russian, Moldavian, etc.). Being the Roma in real life, they didn't want to be them on paper: "In the circle —Ukrainian. And I have a ... [...] And we did not want to. [...]. Because, you know, so on the street, so we are called Gypsies. And here we are

<sup>41</sup> Transcript of Interview No. 49653 USC SFI // Archive of the UCHS.

Transcript of Interview No. 50041 USC SFI // Archive of the UCHS.

<sup>43</sup> Bessonov N. Tsygane SSSR v okkupatsii. – S. 40–41.

Transcript of Interview No. 49372 USC SFI // Archive of the UCHS.

*Gypsies.* And according to the documents – *Ukrainians*" <sup>45</sup>.

But not everyone thought so. It is also interesting to look at the opposite reaction, which was absolutely different. Now that there was no direct threat to life, some informants were more likely to call themselves Roma (in the texts of memoirs "Gypsies" – Aut.) than anyone else: "And sometimes they say: "Are you not offended when we say – "Gypsies"?" And I say: "And why do you not call me "Jew"? As I'am Gypsy, that's right. And you are right. "Why do I get offended, if I'am Gypsy" 46.

Sometimes there happen stories of how the Roma, in contrast to the war years, defended their right to indicate true nationality in official documents: "Father is Gypsy, mother is Gypsy and my children are gypsies [...] Here it is a passport, but there is no mark "gypsy" in passport. She must indicate the nation, "Gypsy" should be. What nationality there is, so must be indicated" <sup>47</sup>.

# Who will be yesterday's neighbours today: observers, executioners, or rescuers?

Very often the Roma remained invisible to the occupation authorities. After all, as it has been already noted, not all of them led a nomadic way of life and sharply stood out against the background of another population. For the period of the Second World War, a sufficiently large percentage of Romany people have long been settled and worked as artisans, smiths, barbers, teachers, engineers, unskilled workers, collective farmers or simply had their own households. And at times when problem of death or salvation was raised, occupants didn't represent the greatest danger comparatively to those whom the Roma knew maybe all his life — neighbours, teachers, janitors, or simply acquaintances who could inform and disclose their ethnic origin.

In the territories of occupied Ukraine, the issue of the destruction or rescue of the Roma was most often solved directly on the places<sup>48</sup>. Due to the absence of German personnel, the representatives of the local population came to the fore. Often they played an important role in the execution of occupants' orders, in particular concerning the local population. The position of yesterday's neighbours appointed on secondary and auxiliary roles in the apparatus of local administration and military-political administration, could also affect the government's actions respecting the "Gypsy issue". In this context, the relationship between the Roma and the local population is placed in the triathlon "executioners — victims — observers" <sup>49</sup>.

N. Bessonov emphasizes that "in spite of stereotypes, Gypsies in the middle of the XX century were not exiles, surrounded by a wall of distrust and prejudice. The fact that half the potential victims have been saved can be explained by a number of psychological factors" 50. Often, the fate of the Roma was determined by their relations with neighbors. The people who lived near

Transcript of Interview No. 49944 USC SFI // Archive of the UCHS.

Transcript of Interview No. 49653 USC SFI // Archive of the UCHS.

<sup>47</sup> Transcript of Interview No. 49368 USC SFI // Archive of the UCHS.

Tyaglyy M. Okupatsiina polityka ta dolia romiv Ukrainy // Ukraina v Druhii svitovii viini: Pohliad z KhKhl stolittia. – K.: Naukova dumka, 2011. – Kn. 2. – S. 865.

<sup>49</sup> Tyaglyy M. Palachi — zhertvy — nablyudateli: natsistskaya antitsyganskaya politika v okkupirovannoy Ukraine i pozitsiya mestnogo naseleniya (1941—1944): metodologicheskiye zamechaniya // Naukovi zapysky. Zb. prats molodykh vchenykh ta aspirantiv / Instytut ukr. arkheohrafii ta dzhereloznavstva im. M. S. Hrushevskoho NAN Ukrainy. — T. 15: Tematychnyi vypusk «Romy Ukrainy: iz mynuloho v maibutnie». — K., 2008. — S. 358.

Bessonov N. Tsygane SSSR v okkupatsii. — S. 40—41.

by could warn of the approach of the German occupants: "... and gadjos warned: "Raisa, take the children, go out!" <sup>51</sup>. At their own risk, neighbours, or even strangers, hid the Roma in their cellars and sheds: "They pittied. Those who feared, did not take, because if they had found, they would have killed us and would kill them too. And those who received, said: "Be silent, so that nobody will hear and see ...". Hid in the cellars, and in the sheds, but not for a long time. They said: "Run away as soon as possible, because if anyone sees, we'll all perish" <sup>52</sup>. Or they assured the Germans that their suspicions were erroneous and the persons detained by them had nothing to do with the Roma: "So the neighbours came to this gebel commissariat (the gebitskomisariat — Aut.) and began to prove [...] that they knew me since my childhood, I grew up there" <sup>53</sup>.

Along with numerous stories of treason from fellow villagers, the witnesses also mention cases where local police assistants rescued Roma on the verge of death. The topic of rescuers is relevant not only to the Jewish people. Frankly saying, in the historiography of the Holocaust and in public discourse, it is now well-developed. Instead, we must state that episodes of rescue of the Roma, as well as the theme of the Romani genocide in general, are still poorly understood and are still waiting for their researchers. This process will be complicated by the fact that informants often could not remember the exact names of their savers during the interview record. For example, the story of an informant who, with her Jewish girlfriends, got in a Jewish colony prepared for execution: "Well, I went through, I did not reach the corner — the policeman ... Well, they grew up with my brothers together, and he gripped me out of this ... There was dust, I went together with children, with my friend Lily holding her hand. He pulled me up and says, "Where are you going, Lena?" And I said: with Lily. He said: now go home. And he put a jacket on me ... "54.

The image of the crowd, or the columns of people who were gathered for execution, is not a rare phenomenon and is often found in the texts of interviews. In such full of emotions stories we have repeatedly encountered the observers' recollections — non-Roma local people who came out to the streets, or from the courtyard they saw off the people who had been executed. But the motive for their presence was not always ordinary curiosity, because it was the last chance to save somebody and most often — children. In despair, parents who knew that they would never return. simply "threw" babies out of the column. They hoped that people who stood alone would save them from death. Here is how one of the informant mentions this: "And the Gypsies were shot. [...] They chased Gypsies, and Gypsies cried, and threw babies to the peasants in the courtyard. [...] And people took those children [...] They did not give up. They chased, and she took a child, cast [...] And people took away and went to the courtyard" 55. Why did strangers risk their own lives by taking away stranger's infants? The reason was the manifestation of humanity, or familiarity with the doomed to death? It could be their yesterday's neighbours, godparents, colleagues, or just friends. Obviously, everyone had their own motivation and reasons to do so, and not otherwise. A bright example can be a Ukrainian who did not have own children, she sent her husband to the front and remained alone. She brought up a rescued Romani girl as her own: "We had [...] girl Tanya. We went with her to the same school. She was also thrown away. And so she was taken away and

- 51 Transcript of Interview No. 49356 USC SFI // Archive of the UCHS.
- 52 Transcript of Interview No. 49366 USC SFI // Archive of the UCHS.
- Transcript of Interview No. 49374 USC SFI // Archive of the UCHS.
- Transcript of Interview No. 48412 USC SFI // Archive of the UCHS.
- 55 Transcript of Interview No. 49733 USC SFI // Archive of the UCHS.

brought up. And she grew up on our street [...] She was taken by mmm...what's her name, Aunt Dusia took her. She had no children, and her husband was at war. And so they are so, that's it... she threw her away and Dusia grabbed her and ran away with her child. Ran away, and the German followed her into the yard. And she closed it and fell to her floor, understand? That's how they stayed alive" 56.

A peculiar place in the subject of the stories of the Romani people is memories of the relationship with the Germans. As mentioned above, the classical plot in the testimony of informants was the salvation of the Roma family through the sentiment of German officers, who, in the face of small children, remembered their own "kinders" who were waiting for them at home. In this aspect, the following story is vivid and revealing: "My grandfather's memory was captured with a scene when an officer [...] grabbed him into his arms and began to play with him, he threw the child into the air and said "Kinder-kinder". Then the German came to my great-grandfather's and showed him a photo with his children. In some way, he explained great-grandfather that he had a few minutes to move the bridge. The officer ordered the soldiers to let Roma go to the other side. ... A few minutes after they were on the other side ... there was an explosion, the bridge was destroyed" 57. According to H. Hrinchenko, many recollections regarding the humanity and mercy on the part of the occupants may indicate that the respondents sought to find ways of narrative reconciliation with a memory of these events, a certain understanding with the recollected past, etc<sup>58</sup>.

Along with this, one can not ignore the topic of the relationship between the Romani people and the local non-Roma population. Even without focusing directly on this issue, we noticed that recollections of how the Roma were warned of danger, hidden, shared food, sympathized, so common in Roma memoirs that they could be singled out in a separate archetype. More detailed study of this phenomenon can obviously make the motives more understandable, open new facts and consequences, explain the psychology of neighboring and interethnic relationships. Of course, we can not now determine how well all interviewed cases listed in the text are credible. But even the very presence of such stories may indicate that perhaps the subconscious attempt to feel closer to the local non-Roma population and thus erase, or to reduce as much as possible the original "mine / alien" barrier.

# Their memory with my eyes. Author's view on the problem

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the prohibition on the study of the so-called. "ethnic" stories was disappeared automaticaly. In international scientific circles, there is a revival in interest in Romani topic, but it has to be noted that the history of the Romani genocide is still excluded from the national grand narrative<sup>59</sup>, and it takes a long time for domestic scholars to start paying attention to it along with others. Knowledge of these events is transmitted mainly within the community at the level of family memory. Neither Ukrainians nor their Roma neighbors have created a sufficient number of publications from which future generations could read about the fate of their ancestors. Even those few memories that were recorded and stored

- Transcript of Interview No. 49733 USC SFI // Archive of the UCHS.
- 57 Interview Storozhko T. with Tomenko N., august 2018 p. Personal authour's archive.
- Hrinchenko H. Usna istoriia prymusu do pratsi: metod, konteksty, teksty. Kharkiv: 000 «NTMT», 2012. 303 s.
- 59 Grand narrative is a system of notions, ideas, categories and symbols, a "coordinate system" that determines the entire historical policy, historiography and discourse within a limited region or territory.

in the archival repositories of scientific institutions and public organizations remain unclaimed — and above all by the Roma community itself. These materials are used mainly in the academic environment, and for the general public they remain silent voices of the past. Such a situation can not contribute to the effective solution of the problem of preservation of historical memory. And without communication with history, it is impossible to break the boundaries based on numerous stereotypes and biases and overcome the anti-Romani sentiments common in modern society.

It is possible to change the situation only by combining efforts and attracting, as actively as possible, Romani and pro-Romani youth to the popularisation of testimonies about the events of the past. This work is one of the first attempts of Ukrainian and Romani researchers, artists and public activists to cover the topic. We hope that updating the given topic, in particular, through the involvement of children's memories and the use of modern forms of art, will be an impetus for discussing the problem of preserving historical memory in wide circles of society.

If the urgency of working with the theme of memory for the author's team was obvious, then the choice of format was another challenge. Today, in a situation where the information society thinks mostly of visual images, it becomes increasingly difficult to interest the audience with historical texts. That is why we relied on the most vivid, small in scope, excerpts from the interview. Each selected fragment is a story about survival strategies: food search, livelihoods, support and salvation, heavy losses and the harsh nature of the war, faced by the smallest witnesses and participants themselves, children. It was important for us to create graphic images without limiting the usual illustration of stories. The author's idea of transferring personal experience through the bright symbols of things that became key in these memoirs, on the one hand, will make it possible to convey to a wide audience the few unique stories that were able to fix. On the other hand, it will bring the problem of war and childhood to another level of reflection, where the experience of survival in a hostile environment for a child of the Second World War could be universal and reflect the histories of hundreds and thousands of other children not only in the wars of the past, but also in the armed conflicts of the present, in particular , a topical for us war in the East of our country.

In different countries, the tragedy that happened to the Roma happened in different ways, but what was definitely common to all the numerous groups in different countries — the suffering of children. We hope that the search for common symbols and ideas about the past will give an impetus to the development of new forms of representation of the Roma themselves in public space. The project should also draw attention to the problems of childhood in the current conditions of increasing the level of xenophobia and romophobia, when, due to the inaction of the relevant authorities and aggravation of the displays of right-wing extremism in the spontaneous settlements of some socially excluded groups of the Roma, the smallest inhabitants, — children suffer most of all during attacks and arsons.



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### Olexander Kuzmenko

So, when the Germans occupied Kyiv, they needed means of subsistence. I could not sit at home, because we have nothing to eat, otherwise we would starve to death. Mom was expecting a child ... Yes. And my brother, he was a typical Jew. He was like a Jew, so he could not leave the apartment to go to the street. And I was a little less like. I was more like an Assyrian, being a kid. And next to us, not far from there lived a large Assyrian family. There were eight children of them. They were the same age with me.

So we were similar to each other. It was impossible to distinguish me in this crowd. And I, together with them, in order to earn some piece of bread, I cleaned Germans', Italians', Magyars'boots.

It was ... Here, where now ... On Tolstoy Square, where right now the former restaurant "Sport" is. Here in this, near this restaurant, and then there was a restaurant only for the Germans, and here we were cleaning the Germans' boots. We sat about ten or fifteen, so that. All black and all of a kind. So with such chests, two brushes and all cleaned their boots. I could not walk down the street, because they would immediately arrest me, because I looked like a Jew as two peas. But here in the masses of these Assyrians I somehow hid myself and I was not noticeable.

I could earn at least a piece of bread. I could make money so that ... It was impossible to buy milk for my sister, but she needed milk, because she was a newborn. And my mother was sick, she lost milk, paralysis of the right side. And there was such a task on me in my ten or eleven years<sup>60</sup>.



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# **Oleksiy Nalivayko**

I remember the Germans retreating. Quietly at first. When they retreated, we didn't even hear that the Germans had left the hut. And when mom got up at dawn, she said: "Hey, Nikolay, something is quiet in our village". And before that they wanted to shoot us.

Yes, my mother told me this already, in my mother's words, says that the car was covered and we had to be shot that night. The Gypsies were gathered to shoot.

Yes, we were already on guard, the mother was near the window ... And then, when morning had come, she said, I would get up, I would see if there was no that car? That car disappeared, and we waited yesterday for the end. And when they came out, she said: "Children, it's not here, everything is quitly, calmly".

And then, when it began to dawn, when they came out already, well, it wasn't already, almost half of the village was freed, so they began to burn it ... They burned warehouses with bread and then stood with guns and guard — if you want bread, go into the fire and take it, but they did not permit to extinguish the fire. So my father came into the flaming hut to get bread. Well, it was already burned, I remember that. And only when they had burned everything, then they left<sup>51</sup>.



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### Olena Kantemirova

As soon as the Germans ente<mark>red, they immediately — "Zigeuner" (eng. Gipsy)</mark> and set up, not to tell you that they set up a guard — no. But it was already above us and the Jews, they gathered immediately ... They did not gather us, but they said us not go anywhere — registration would take place. Those children whose fathers were Jews and their mothers were Russian, or vice versa, stuck blue stars on their chests. In my opinion, this star had six corners.

For example, in Kakhovka, we saw these stars on the chests. And these Jews already ... Nowhere ... They gathered ... For re-registration and led my friends and me with them.

I was taken from theirs to ... from the yard. When they came to take us, we were in the yard, playing. You understand, this is not that ... Well, as with a neighbour. And moreover we had ... There were no fences, nothing. We lived as one family. And they took me along with them.

Jews were led to execution. And I was together with them. "Well, I went through, I did not reach the corner – the policeman ... Well, they grew up with my brothers together, and he gripped me out of this ... There was dust, I went together with children, with my friend Lily holding her hand. He pulled me up and says, "Where are you going, Lena?" And I said: with Lily. He said: now go home. And he put a jacket on me ...

And he shouted to me: "Get out of here quickly." And I ran away, ran into the yard. Of course, the parents did not go out. I already ran into the yard myself and there I immediately went into the room and we did not leave again. Neighbours said not to go anywhere.  $^{62}$ 



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## Liubov Somenko

During the war there were in the family, let me think, six of us. Three of us, and there is one more and ... — five. There were six of us, one girl died. Six of us. Well, five left. The elder sister was a babysitter for us all and prepared food. She could not go to school, because father didn't permit ...

And I went to beg about the villages. Well, came to the house — give a piece of bread. Well, people gave. Thanks, did not refuse. They gave a piece of bread ... Well, lard was rarely given. Potatoes were given... I put it all in a box and carried home.

In winter we went to beg. Well, after the war went, eh... And during the war went to beg. Went about the huts and begged. And everything that people had given we put into a bag. There was such a bag<sup>63</sup>.

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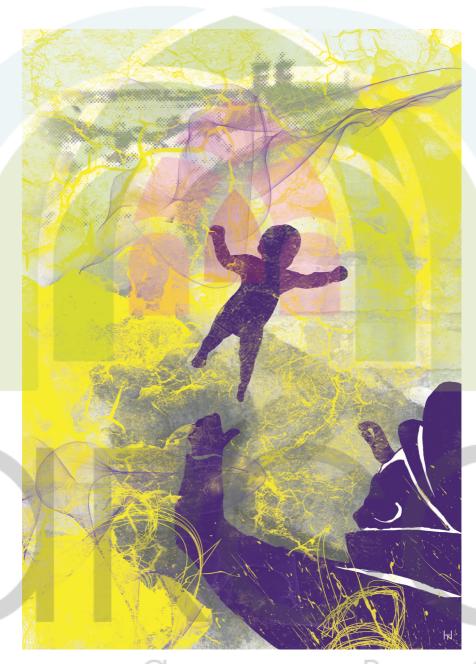
# Halyna Bilashenko

And the Jews lived in our city. Lived, the family was right around us: a man, a woman, two children. Then they left for Israel. The old man hid them in the basement. And the Roma from the street were beaten hard. Picked up, took to the mines and shot. And some of them hang who on the street, at the market place. Shot, the blood flowed directly by the river, two kilometers along the highway. At that time there was a "sosha" (highway paved with stones). Horror. And the Jews, and the Gadjos. All, all. Doctors, teachers. Partisans killed one German leader. So they shot about thirty men. Every third man. One, two, and the third one was shot.

There were partisans in the city. One of them lived in our house. I did not know, but brother Hrishka knew. This is an old neighbour's boy. He made a hole in the oven. You know the oven. He made a pit in the stole and hid there. And brother knew it, and said: "Halia, go to the old one, sweep the yard!" And there, the Germans smoke cigarettes and threw away cigarette butts. And we together with girls swept the litter, gathered everything, but, God forbid, to raise a cigarette. They didn't allow, became very angry. They did not want to be taken after them. And we swept, picked up the rubbish, and then sorted it out. I gave to that partisan. And who did know? The parents were beaten, and there were both of us.

And the third sister, but I tell you, she froze to death. Went to beg for bread and froze. We brought her, the dead, on sleighs. Where could we put her? Frost is forty degrees, put her in the outbuilding. And dogs came up and tore her. So ... (gesticulates).

The door was only in the house, but there wasn't in the veranda. Brother took it off, chopped and put into stove, burned. There was nothing to heat.<sup>64</sup>



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# **Vasyl Tomenko**

My grandfather often recollected the story of his childhood, as a German officer saved his family! This event took place at the end of the war, when the German army retreated. My grandfather's parents lived at that time in the city of Kremenchuk, a small town situated on the banks of the Dnipro River, and is therefore divided into two parts by the river. The only passing across the river was a bridge.

Leaving Kremenchuk, the German army sent its soldiers and equipment through the bridge. When the passing to another bank had been completed, the German command decided to blow up the bridge. A crowd of civilians gathered near the bridge who wanted to move to the other side, as they knew that there would soon be a Soviet army. But Nazi soldiers and policemen (who were Ukrainians) did not let anyone out.

In that crowd there was my grandfather with my parents. He was about 2 years old at that time. He sat on the father's cart, suddenly police came to them. They realized that my grandfather' family was the Romani one. The fight started, the policemen began to drag the members of grandfather's family to the side, far from the road, because they wanted to shoot them. To this hustle a German officer came to find out what was happening. The German officer ordered the policemen to stop!

My grandfather's memory was captured with a scene when an officer grabbed him into his arms and began to play with him, he threw the child into the air and said "Kinder, kinder". Then the German came to my great-grandfather's and showed him a photo with his children. In some way, he explained great-grandfather that he had a few minutes to move the bridge. The officer ordered the soldiers to let Roma go to the other side.

My grandfather's family quickly, without regretting the horse, began to pass the bridge. A few minutes after they were on the other side of the Dnipro and moved a little bit from the bridge, there was an explosion, the bridge was destroyed. That is, the members of my family were the last ones who crossed the Kremenchuk bridge built by the Germans for crossing.<sup>65</sup>

# Project team: why the chosen topic is important for us?

# Natalia Tomenko, artist, designer, activist.

The problem of memory preservation bothers me to the depths of my heart, because it's also a part of my personal history. The theme of the Romani genocide came into the life of our family during the Second World War. Fortunately, the memories given to me by my grandfather are full of humanity, which erases borders despite nationality and ethnic origin. But this is rather an exception to the rules, because the Genocide brought misery, suffering and death to the homes of many Roma.

# Volodymyr Yakovenko, activist.

My family is no exception, and also suffered, like many other Romani families, during the war. The memory of difficult times is kept in many families. But nowadays often seems that people have forgotten the lessons of the past. This is eloquently evidenced by events that take place in the world, including Ukraine. For many years, the Roma have been silent about the calamities that fell on their fate during the war. Now we are surrounded by hostility, xenophobia, attacks! It's time to remind us that we have once passed through these troubles...

## Tetiana Storozhko, historian, activist.

I began to be interested in the stories of the Romani people about the ancient times from my adolescence. So I learned about that wasn't described in the school textbooks and that wasn't discussed during history lessons. Realizing that, perhaps, besides me, these stories no one else would hear, intuitively I began to record them. Now, I quite consciously understand that it's important not only to collect memories. Everything must be done so that thousands of human stories won't be obliterated, along with their joys, pain and suffering. These voices must sound as loudly as possible, warning people of the danger of new catastrophes.

The project team expresses a sincere gratitude to our colleague **Mykhailo Tyaglyy** for the support and wise advice that directed the creative team of the project on the laborious way of realizing our idea in reality.

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In the project we used interview transcripts from the Institute of Visual History and Education of the Shoah Foundation of the University of Southern California from the Archive of the Ukrainian Center for Holocaust Studies

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