

Preface

Below is a short history of brother Eugene Dovgan. We pronounce in English as Dowhan. It was written some years ago by his own hand and published in a former 1997 Ukranian newsletter. One of his four daughters, Zoriana Bojczuk, recently translated it into English.

When one writes some stories of their own life, it is always too brief. Every time we visited the Dowhan home in the village of Zolochiv, there was always food coming from the kitchen, singing hymns and melodies, Bible questions and discussion, studies and lessons, and then came examples of memory and life that only the one who lived it was able to tell. You could see in his eyes, his faith, courage, conviction and joy of faith that carried him through years of struggle with the darkness of this world, opposition from enemies of truth and light, and of course the love of fellow consecrated family and brethren. What is written is all too short. Every name and place has a history of its own and would require a separate book.

In one of our early travels to Tulun Siberia in 1998, we first met nearly 20 Bible Students who had survived the Stalin years. We heard names who came and taught them from Poland and Ukraine. Names like Afanasiy Donchuk, Halushko, Kopak, Dvorchyk. Some sent or brought a manna, a volume or the Photo Drama, all of which was hand copied for each one. Then another name was shared: Stefan Vazivoda who remained and taught them. This Vazivoda name is now mentioned in the Dowhan history, but only so briefly. Vazivoda was deported to Siberia by Soviet authorities in about 1950. They didn't know they were deporting a shepherd of the flock for other sheep in Siberia. What stories are left to be told?

Sr. Zoriana responded to one of my emails as follows:

...Yes, there are many stories my father loved to tell us about his life and those of brethren, and my Mom still remembers many of them.

But this one I sent was written by him personally.

He was born on October the 9th, 1928, and finished his course on May the 8th 2021 - on the day of their 65 wedding anniversary with Mom.

Yes, that was the same brother Vazivoda from Tulun. They knew him well.

... We miss our dad so much but we are happy he is beyond the veil.

There is much more written in the "Lamb's Book of Life" Revelation 3:5; 21:27.
May we all be faithful enough to read the rest of the story.

— Jerry Leslie, 2021

Brother Eugene Dovgan

October 9, 1928 — May 8, 2021

It was a Hot Harvest Time... A woman is reaping in the field in a hurry and through a rustling of heavy ears she hears the voice of an elegantly dressed stranger: "Tell me how can I find a man living at this address?" After hearing the address and the name, the woman, slightly surprised, replied: "I am his wife..."

A former priest, co-worker of the Society, Brother Khomyak (who worked with Brother Russell), came to the village of Rykiv (now Polyany), having an address of one of its residents. He brought the most valuable thing he had — the Truth of God's Word. Having the address of that man, he decided to visit him and share his "treasure". Leaving the village, he left him a subscription to the Watchtower magazine. But this man was not so interested in the Truth as was his nephew — brother Vasily Kostiv, and later his brother Michael, and his brother-in-law Alexey Kovaliv with his wife Olga, and even their neighbor Kuz.

When there was a convention in Lviv (which was a distance of more than 70 km), brethren had only one means of transport: a horse and a cart. But they did not go to Lviv by horses, but left them several kilometers from the city, and continued by foot. During the break, they returned to the horses to feed them, and again went to the convention in Lviv.

During the Second World War in 1943, another sister knew the truth: Agafia Stepko, who believed in God's plan of salvation. Soon a gathering began to take place in her house. The truth also touched the brother Theodore Bayus, who was also a neighbor of the Koval family.

During the German occupation, all my relatives, including me, went to the Greek Catholic Church. On the day of some religious holiday my mother went to church, but on the way she met people who were returning from it. "What's the matter?" she asked. It turned out that the priest, fearing the arrival of Soviet troops, as the front line was already close enough, immediately fled the village. "How is this so? The shepherd ran away, and left the sheep?" It was the inherent conclusion that radically changed her life. Since then, she has become a participant in the meetings held at the home of her sister, Agafia Stepko.

But I did not stop going to the church, although from time to time I went to the house of my aunt Agafia to listen to the singing, and also began to read a magazine that was illegally published in Polish. On its last pages there were the last letters of those who were accused and sentenced to death because they refused to take up arms. The Germans allowed such letters to go to the family before they died.

... I remember a few letters... A son wrote to his father: "My dear. I'm your third son going to death, but I don't have another way." In conclusion, he quoted Psalm: "Whoever sows with tears will reap with joy." The second letter was written by a husband to his wife: "Dear Malgosia, tomorrow, when you go out on the balcony, I will be gone... I will be with the Lord." The third letter read: "Goodbye, world. There's nothing good about you. You are full of widows and orphans..." Another letter described how Ukrainian guerrillas forced one brother to take up arms. When he refused, the commander ordered to lay a loop on his neck and, hanging it under the tree, and then gave him the last word. After that, he ordered the soldiers to pull him up and shortly afterwards ordered him to be released. His goal was to frighten this rebellious man, but when he was lowered, he was already dead. The commander tore his hair on his head...

I read this, I loved listening to the songs that were sung at the meeting, but the world still had great power over me. Mom asked me to read the Bible, which she borrowed specifically for me. To reassure her, I read a section, and then I returned to my favorite books about the Cossacks and about Ukraine.

The front was approaching. The bombing began, which did not bypass our village. During one such bombing my mother was at a meeting at Brother Kovaliv's house. My father, brothers and several other families were in the basement of a neighboring house. The bomb hit a large room. Some had their feet struck, but everyone stayed alive. I was thinking then: maybe the mother's prayer saved our lives? It is there I decided that if I stay alive, I would live differently. That was my vow before God.

When the front line was left behind, all our family: grandparents, dads, moms and brothers, started going to meetings. At that time, a lot of people came to the meetings, many young people loved to sing, tried to organize a choir. Some of them later left meetings, but many remained faithful until the end of their lives.

Brother Alexey Kovaliv was forcibly taken to the army. He refused to take up arms and suffered many difficulties, he was on the verge of death, but returned home alive. We often had meetings in his house, as well in the homes of other brethren.

Brother Vasily Kostiv — the first who accepted the Truth — returned from Russia (he was taken by force to the Soviet army, later was in a concentration camp, from where he returned in 1946 disabled) asked us if we accepted the symbol of water baptism. None of us had been baptized yet. Therefore, most of our congregation went to a pond near the village to receive baptism. There were about 30 brethren baptized.

One brother taught us to sing on notes, so we had a small choir, and many people came to listen.

Around 1950 Soviet authorities began deporting the brothers to Siberia. One of them was Brother Vazivoda from Ternopil, who sometimes came to our meeting.

In 1951 we met brethren from Lviv, as well as from Lutsk. Every year on Christmas and Easter holidays we had three day meetings in Poliany.

Around 1963, the Soviet authorities began banning meetings. We were not registered as a religious community because then there was a unified registration under the leadership of the All-Party Council of Evangelical Baptist Christians. Repeatedly, representatives of the KGB came to us, repeatedly we were called to their office, warned, threatened. But we were still gathering, albeit more secretly and cautiously.

Now we have a freedom and it is hard to imagine with such things in the past. However, we know that this is also only for a certain time, because the “night” will come, where work will be impossible. Therefore, let us appreciate the days that we have now. Let us remember the words of Revelation: “Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.”



[Wedding Eugene and Maria]



[Early photo of the Dowhan family]

Mother and father: Euginia & Stephan

3 sons: Slavic, Eugene, Gregoriy

Small group of brethren.
Brother Kovaliv second row,
first on left



Class in Poliany.

Eugene is first on the left,
and his brother Grigoriy next to him.