**Name:** Tamara ANDREEVA

**Gender:** Female

**Age:** 88

**Country:** RUSSIA

**Name of the EBU national member processing the entry:**

All Russia Association of the Blind - VOS

**Number of words in the national language:** 1088

My Saviour

In the end of May 1941, at the school party I was granted presents and a Braille slate and stylus for my excellent results. There was a sign on this device and it said: To the best student Tamara Andreeva, Institute for the blind children, Leningrad, 1941. This was a priceless present for me: now I wouldn’t need to ask parents to help me to write my poems or any information I needed, with this device I could do it myself. I was really happy, I took care of this slate, even at night I kept it under my pillow.

In summer my mother and I left for vacation to the village where my granny lived and in August it was occupied by fascists so we were trapped. Local habitants and Red Army Men who were left behind their units formed resistance groups and guerilla bands. Mom and granny supplied partisans with food, made camouflage robes from bed sheets with the help of neighbors. They made paint of due color themselves. But there were traitors.

In the morning of January 1942 an enemy’s unit with policemen came to the village. They ordered us to dress up but didn’t allow to take anything with us. Mom asked me to leave the slate but I didn’t listen keeping it close to me.

- It is heavy, my dear! And no one knows what’s gonna happen!

But I insisted holding it even harder. Then my mom belted the slate around my chest with a wool scarf, take several jackets and a coat on me. As soon as we left our house it was set on fire. Almost all the village was on fire. It was like an Apocalypse! Children cried, dying animals moaned…

We were roughly pushed onto the sledge, where our neighbors were sitting already. And we went nowhere. When we reached a village, the sledge stopped. Someone died. The guards accompanying us didn’t pay attention to us. Mom quickly grabbed my arm and we ran to the nearest house, where we met a frightened woman. She screamed hysterically:

- Get out! I don’t want to die because of you!

She pushed us to the back door with her both arms and threw us from the high porch to the barnyard into a deep snowdrift. We lied in the snow trembling from fear, cold and despair. It was dark and we heard rare claps. Apparently, runaways were shot. And there was nowhere to run, but we needed to find a way out. We got out of the snowdrift and soon came upon a small building that smelled with hay. There we hid. Mom laid me against the back of the barn and covered with hay. She buried herself some other place. At last the fire stopped and the silence covered everything. We heard the snow crunch. Two men approached to the barn. I kept my breath. They came up to the barn and stopped.

All of a sudden I felt a rough push into the chest followed by a stronger one. The old board cracked behind me. It felt like I take off together with the barn. I can’t remember whether I knocked out. I wanted to cry up loud, to call my mom, but I realized I couldn’t do that: those men were looking for runaways to shoot them or to hang.

I heard the crunch of a snow under the feet of men walking away. Silence. I was frightened to talk, to call up for mom, to hear nothing in reply. It seemed like an eternity passed before I heard mom’s whispering:

- Sweetheart…

- Mommy! – I whispered back.

So I was alive. The bayonet’s way to my chest (no doubt it was a bayonet) was blocked by the slate.

- Shhh, shhh! Don’t be frightened: you are with your mommy! We will find a way out, - I heard my mother whispering.

I kept on crying and repeating: I am frightened… He will reach me! I’ll be set on fire! I feel like a fire beast is capturing me! I feel so hot!

I had been followed by this nightmare for many years like Scarlet from “Gone with the wind”. But the time had passed and it was gone.

It was very dark and cold. As we got out of that barn we went searching for help. Passing by a house we heard a child laughing and decided to knock. A woman opened the door and led us to a warm room without asking a thing. Four children looked at us curiously. The older, John, was twelve like me. When they took off my clothes the boy saw the device.

- Wow! What is this? Is this a khight’s armor? – he wondered.

Meanwhile my mom was studying two holes on my sweaters, jackets, coat and scarf which belted the device around my chest.

- No, this is not a knight’s armor, - I answered. – This is a slate – writing device for the Blind. And today it saved my life.

He missed the last words studying the slate carefully.

– You 're kidding! Two iron plates with holes and some dots at the edge of one of them. Is it possible to write anything on it?

- Give me a sheet of paper and tell me what to write.

John thought for a while and said:

- I want my dad to come back home from war as soon as possible.

He was looking at the dots and kept on wondering:

- How can you write anything and then read it using dots? And who invented this thing? – asked John.

- Louis Braille. At the age of thee he hurt his eyes with something sharp and became totally blind. So he invented the system for writing and reading for the Blind from all over the world. He was working in Paris, teaching the Blind. This device was named after him – a Braille slate and stylus. All the blind people from all over the world remember him with gratitude.

John listened carefully and asked:

- Give me this sheet of paper. I will keep it and show my friends. And tell them about this French guy.

My Saviour was with me in a guerilla unit in a forest, crossed the battle line on a U-2 plane, spent several months in a hospital with me, served me for dozens of years as my working slate. Now it is kept in the School for the Blind Museum in St Petersburg.