

# 1000+ STORIES

**OF WOMEN AND GIRLS  
FROM RUSSIA'S WAR  
AGAINST UKRAINE**

**VOLUME I**



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Compiled by: Olena Buchynska, Olena Davlikanova, Iryna Lylyk, Oksana Yashkina et al.

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The first volume of this publication contains stories of girls and women whose lives have been changed  
by the war forever – military officers, territorial defense fighters, medics, diplomats, human rights activists,  
volunteers, entrepreneurs, refugees, mothers, sisters, daughters.... These are real-life stories they shared in  
the framework of interviews or wrote down themselves. Their experiences, their opinions, their fates. We pay  
tribute to girls and women tortured and murdered by Russian occupants and we are grieving for hundreds of  
those whose lives were taken as a result of this unjustifiable cruelty, nurtured by imperial ambitions and pride  
for bloodstained «grandeur».

Over safety concerns we don't mention surnames of some women and girls upon their request along with  
selected details as they themselves or their relatives are still staying in the occupied territories. As the warfare  
is not over we are not able to present the full range of stories from our defenders and medics in military  
hospitals. Some photos are blurred due to similar reasons. But we do hope that after the end of the war, these  
stories will be republished in full and help punish war criminals!

The views expressed by women and girls in this publication are their personal views, which are presented  
without censorship. Their judgments do not necessarily reflect the views of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation or  
organizations where compilers work.

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# Introduction

*A Red Viburnum in the meadow has bent down low,  
For some reason, our glorious Ukraine has grown  
so sad, oh...*

\*\*\*

*Red Viburnum, please, do not bend low, You have a  
white bloom.  
Glorious Ukraine, Your people are freedom-loving,  
please, do not be gloom.*

*(Hymn of Sichovi Striltsi,  
the Ukrainian kozaks' army)*



\* It is a Ukrainian patriotic march, written by the composer Stepan Charnetsky in 1914, in honor and memory of the Sich Rifle-men. The red viburnum (a deciduous shrub that grows four to five metres tall) is referenced throughout Ukrainian folklore. The song celebrates the Ukrainian people's aspiration for independence and was banned in Soviet times.



On February 24, 2022, the Russian Federation launched a full-scale invasion into Ukraine by order of Vladimir Putin. Around 5 a.m., the residents of Ukrainian cities woke up to bombing and shelling. Although the war against Ukraine has been waged by the Russian Federation for eight years, beginning with the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and establishment of pseudo-republics in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, neither Ukrainians nor the civilized world expected to experience or witness the untold atrocities and war crimes against civilians committed by the Russian occupiers in the weeks that followed.

Over the course of years of Russian propaganda, the narrative of "fraternal peoples", has been replaced by a call to "liberate Ukraine from fascists, nationalists and Banderites<sup>1</sup> and protect the Russian-speaking population". In reality, Ukraine is a country led by a Russian-speaking ethnic Jew who won an unprecedented majority in the 2019 democratic parliamentary elections. Nazis were never found, and both Russian- and Ukrainian-speaking citizens rose up side by side to defend their towns and villages, their homes and families from the uninvited "liberators". Having realized that the narrative of the "fraternal" liberator would not work and the invaders would not be greeted with flowers and polyanitsa bread<sup>2</sup>, the Russian Federation has initiated actions that might be later classified as a genocide against the Ukrainian people and aimed at the total destruction of the country's economy. Russia has targetted not only military facilities, but has also bombed critical infrastructure, hospitals, kindergartens, schools, maternity hospitals, theatres, administrative buildings and even residential areas and condominiums inhabited by the people who could not or decided not to evacuate. Russian soldiers are shooting civilians, raping women, kidnapping mayors, volunteers and activists. They have created inhumane living conditions and humanitarian disaster. They violate agreements on humanitarian corridors; get engaged in looting; and forcibly deport the population of occupied Ukrainian cities to the Russian Federation through filtration caps.

<sup>1</sup> The term derives from the name of Stepan Bandera (1909-1959), head of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists formed in 1929.

<sup>2</sup> Palyanitsia is a type of Ukrainian hearth-baked bread. In modern times it is used as part of official welcoming ceremonies being offered, for example to high level delegation members, as a symbol of friendship and benevolence.

\* Discrimination of the Russian-speaking population of Ukraine was one of the Russia's excuses for invasion. This statement is nonsense just like all the other statements regarding Ukrainian hunta, fascist government or Ukraine as an artificial non-state formation.

« All stories have been written either by the researchers after the interview with protagonists or their relatives, or by the women and girls themselves (in such cases we did not translate the texts written in Russian)\*. Out of respect for the respondents, we have retained the original vocabulary and spelling and have not censored evaluative judgments, because that is a perspective of those who had looked the war in the face. For security reasons, in the first edition we have chosen not to publish the names of some women and girls, as well as certain details of their stories at their request. It is because they themselves or some of their loved ones remain in the occupied territories. For the same reasons, some of the photos are blurred. While the war is ongoing, we cannot present the full range of stories of defenders from the Ukrainian Army and medics in military hospitals. But we hope that after the victory of Ukraine all the stories will be told in full and help punish war criminals!

»

As of now, thousands of civilians have been killed, including more than one hundred children. The cities of Mariupol, Volnovakha, Bucha, Irpin and Hostomel have been almost completely destroyed.

Many studies will be devoted to the war crimes committed by the political leadership and army of the Russian Federation. There will also be deliberation regarding potential collective guilt and responsibility of the Russian people, part of which supports the actions of their president, already condemned as a war criminal by some world leaders. Evidence is being collected for the UN International Court of Justice in the Hague.

Books will be written and films will be made about the heroic struggle of the Ukrainian people, not only for their independence and freedom, but also for the future of Europe and, more widely, the democratic world as a whole.

This collection seeks to contribute to this task and present the stories of women and girls whose lives are now divided into before and after the war – servicewomen, territorial defense fighters, doctors, diplomats, human rights defenders, activists, volunteers, businesswomen, refugees, mothers, sisters, daughters... These are their experiences, their opinions, their fates.

We also pay tribute to the women and girls killed and tortured by the Russian invaders. Their lives were prematurely ended in acts of unjustified cruelty rooted in imperial ambitions and a perverse sense of pride and "greatness" nourished from blood and sufferings of others.

These are only 100+ out of 20 million stories. We hope and trust that they will act as a reminder to the world of the twenty-first century that only balanced and wise policies in combination with the lessons of history well-remembered may prevent such bloody wars.



« The first part of the book consists of stories depicting the horrors of war, evidence of war crimes and crimes against humanity. These are stories about women and girls who lost their lives; the stories of those who were / still are under occupation or close to the battlefields, as well as the stories of children of war. The second part of the book is devoted to women and girls who defend our land – servicewomen and fighters in territorial defense, those who stand for Ukraine's freedom and independence on the diplomatic front; these are the stories of activists and volunteers, as well as women who keep our country alive by performing their professional duties; there are also stories of women living abroad for a long time who contribute to the victory of Ukraine overseas. The "snowball method" has been used for searching protagonists. Collecting interviews we have learnt from some women and girls about other people with unique and often tragic experiences. At first it was planned to collect a hundred stories. However, in the end we gathered more and decided to publish all of them, because the world needs to know what this war "without rules", which was started in 2014 by Russia, did to the fates of Ukrainian women and girls.

»



## Chapter I. Gone With The War (stories about those who lost their lives, as well as stories of widows)

*Today the pain of loss is still too strong. Many people are not ready to talk about the murdered relatives, friends, colleagues...But Ukraine will remember every Ukrainian whose life has been ended abruptly by the Russian occupiers' bullets and bombs.*



**Iryna Tsvila**

*52 y.o., teacher, designer, "The Warrior of Light", Kyiv  
(the story was told by her brother Oleh Tsvily)*

It is hard for Oleh to speak. He lights a cigarette and tries to pull himself together. With tears in his eyes, he is in a great deal of pain. He agreed to tell his sister's story, because he is sure that people like Iryna create the history of our country. They are the source of national pride and should be recognized both throughout Ukraine and the world.

### **Oleh's story**

Iryna was killed on the second day of the invasion – February 25, 2022. Although the war for her began in 2014. I am trying to understand why the best people like

Iryna choose to defend their country, though they have neither physical strength nor military skills. However, they have a clear conscience and love for Ukraine. Why do they die when they love life so much? There is only one answer – they become angels and keep us safe. They will not let us go the wrong way, hand over the interests of the country to the occupation forces, forget everything that the invaders did to our people, our cities, villages, maternity hospitals, drama theatres. These people are our moral compass, our conscience. They gave their lives for the love of Ukraine and our happy future in the European family.

Iryna had always been a fragile girl, with creative gifts, sincere and caring. Most of all she loved children, animals, flowers and photography. Iryna was a primary school teacher. Until 2014, she had been working with children. She also brought home helpless and sick animals from the streets and took very good care of them.

In Brovary<sup>3</sup>, where Iryna had most recently lived, she had grown the best rose garden. There were roses of all kinds and colours. My sister made bouquets and ikebana

arrangements, and then took pictures of them for postcards and calendars, which were in great demand. She was talented in landscaping and it became her second occupation. After seeing fabulous cascades of flowers and plants in front of the sister's house, residents of Brovary and the neighbouring towns started ordering designs for their own gardens. Everything Iryna put effort into made the world a better and happier place!

Our large family lives in Kyiv and the region. Until 2010, like most Kyivites we spoke mostly Russian. Iryna was the first in our family to become interested in the history of Ukraine. She switched into

« —————  
**D**on't be sad, – said Alice. – Sooner or later everything will become clear, everything will fall into place and line up in a single beautiful pattern, like lace. It will become clear why everything was needed, because everything will be correct.

*"Alice's Adventures in Wonderland",  
Lewis Carroll (Iryna's favorite quote)*

»

<sup>3</sup> Brovary is located within seven kilometers from the capital of Ukraine, Kyiv, and has a population of more than 100,000 inhabitants.





Ukrainian and started greeting us with the slogan "Glory to Ukraine!". At first, we thought it was weird, but then got used to answering "Glory to Heroes!" She passed on to the whole family her love for our history, the Ukrainian language and our identity. Now we all speak only Ukrainian, we are ready to fight and we are fighting for Ukraine, thanks to Iryna.

Iryna had been at the barricades since the early days of the Revolution of Dignity. As a photographer, she created a huge archive of photos and videos of those turbulent times. When the war started in 2014, she went to the

front together with the volunteers. She had no military skills, but knew very well that the army at that time was very weak – without a volunteer movement or without civil society support it would not be possible to defend the independence of our country. Since 2014, Iryna had been fighting in the Sich Battalion.

After the end of the active phase of hostilities, she patrolled the liberated Ukrainian cities – Sloviansk and Kramatorsk. Her task was to ensure the internal stability and security of the population. She also ran a pro-Ukrainian rising awareness campaign among the population. Iryna felt lost when she returned from the rotation. Kyiv was living its life, with fireworks and restaurants, clubs and boutiques welcoming visitors. Everyone seemed to have forgotten that soldiers were dying in the East, people were suffering from shelling and lack of living conditions. The war was ongoing. This contrast shocked her. It was almost unbearable for Iryna to be among the people who she thought were absolutely ignorant. She could not fit in a 'peaceful' life. So the breaks were very short and she always went back to the frontline.

However, a few years ago, my sister returned to civilian life and her garden, devoted herself to design. She created gorgeous jewelry: earrings, necklaces, bracelets, brooches. Together with her daughter, they designed collections made of natural stone and fresh flowers. Their creations attracted

« —————  
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 ————— »



Iryna's daughter studied in Poland, but when she felt the imminence of a full-scale attack on Ukraine, she came to Kyiv and is now helping to defeat the enemy.

I believe that Iryna was, is and will be an example of a Person with a capital letter! Her daughter, her brothers and sisters, the people who knew her, will continue her work for the benefit of a free and prosperous Ukraine. We will win and live in the new country Iryna dreamed of!

<sup>4</sup> Vatnyk is a political slur, used in post-Soviet states and based on an internet meme that was introduced in 2011 by Anton Chadskiy, which denotes a steadfast jingoistic follower of propaganda from the Russian government.

the interest of buyers overseas. Iryna and her daughter donated the earnings to charity and the army.

On the first day of the full-scale invasion she went back to the front line. It hurts a lot that Iryna left immediately to defend the country and died, while at that time many men were trying to cross the border, hiding in their expensive flats, or behind their "important" posts. It's extremely frustrating that people of high moral character who understand the meaning of the words "State", "independence" and "national identity" go to defend the country, while opportunists, bribe-takers, and "vatnyks"<sup>4</sup> go into hiding. The fragile, educated, talented woman lost her life, while at the same time in Bukovel, a ski resort in Western Ukraine, you could barely make it past the expensive cars of the rich men who had fled from Kyiv after the first shelling.







photo by Vasylyna Borysiuk

### Yuliia Zdanovska

*21 y.o., teacher (mathematics and computer science),  
volunteer, Kharkiv  
(as told by her parents – Olena Vynnyk and Yan  
Zdanovskyi)*

*I want children living in villages, small towns and big cities to fall in love with math and computer science. I want them to see these subjects not as “tough nuts”, but thrilling and interesting activities. I want them to get the best STEM education no matter where they are.*

#### Yuliia's dream

It is heartbreaking to listen to Yuliia's parents, to watch a video about her shot by her friends and another one made by her colleagues from the «Teach For Ukraine» organization, to read posts by her Kyiv National University professor Bohdan Rubliov and comments under her mom's post from staff of Yuriivska secondary school where Yuliia worked. Why does this bloody war steal the best of us? Why did this talented girl die? She had already done so much as a teacher. Despite being so young, she had a talent to unite people, engaging them in life-changing activities and projects. A girl with fiery red hair and a big loving heart, with dreams and plans, so eager to fulfill them. It is a huge loss for her family, for the country, for the world!

We are given a truly miraculous mercy – staying alive and paying tribute to Yuliia, creating a new country she so desperately wanted to live in.

We get the permission of Yuliia's mom to publish her Facebook post (unabridged).

#### From the Facebook post of Yuliia's mom

Our glowing red-haired sparkle, Yuliia Zdanovska!

We were and will always be proud of you!

You were loved so deeply by all your relatives, friends and everyone you knew and always will be loved by us!

You had it all:

- immense sincerity and unbelievable soul that you shared so generously with everyone,
- intelligence that frightened me sometimes when I saw you explaining something scientific and those math problems you solved,
- and the outer beauty.

I spent too little time with you – when you were 14 you were invited to Kyiv and enrolled in the Ukrainian Physics and Mathematics Lyceum of Taras Shevchenko Kyiv National University. We communicated mostly via phone and sometimes you stayed there even during vacation, because that usually was the period of scientific olympiads.



You couldn't choose between mathematics and computer science – maybe that is why you sometimes scored second, not first, in those competitions for geniuses. All your triumphs are modestly kept in a thick shabby folder with certificates and diplomas here, in your room. The brightest one was at the European Girls' Mathematical Olympiad-2017 when you crushed the Russian team – your personal silver medal! Thanks to these olympiads you visited more countries than I did in my twice longer lifetime.

Everybody thought you'd become a scientist, but you had a different dream. You wanted to change our educational system to make sure that every child can get the best education anywhere, as good as in the most prominent Kyiv lyceums. You wanted to demonstrate how exciting and capturing science may be for children. Last year you got your Bachelor's diploma at the graduation ceremony and someone wished you to become a professor at Harvard. I still remember your reply: «I don't want to be a professor and definitely not going to Harvard but I will consider a proposal to become a Minister of Education in Ukraine».

They wanted you to stay for a Master's course but you decided to become a teacher in a small village in Dnipropetrovsk region supported by enthusiasts, just like you, from the «Teach For Ukraine» initiative. I knew you were going to make it, but...

It was impossible to stop you from doing what you assumed to be the right thing – I must admit, you made mistakes, quite a few. But you will never make a single one any more...

You picked the most peaceful profession – a schoolteacher. When the war broke out you were full of desire to protect but weapon skills were probably the only skills you did not have.

Then you noticed an announcement – the Kharkiv territorial defense HQ announced the need for volunteers' support. There was no chance you'd listen to me. You did as you wished. You chose to become a volunteer, no matter what tasks to carry out. You wanted to stay in Kharkiv but not in the hide. You preferred to expend all your energy in the most efficient way.

Every evening you sent a standard «I'm OK, going to a shelter with the guys» message.

On March 3 at 6:41 p.m. you messaged your friend in Telegram that you were fine.

At 6:43 p.m. the connection was lost forever, the longest minute I've ever experienced. Next day we found out that the occupants' missile hit the volunteers' group in the centre of Kharkiv...

Your life wasn't long but it truly was bright. I know this flame will light the way for many.

But I don't know how to go on without you – it's been a week and I still check the clock waiting for a short call or a video-message...

I want those monsters to burn in hell for destroying our children and future!

GLORY TO UKRAINE!

GLORY TO HEROES!

DEATH TO ENEMIES!



Yuliia's parents are volunteers at an NGO «Station Kharkiv»<sup>5</sup>. They have a very tight schedule and it was hard to find some time for an interview.

#### The Story of Yliia's Father:

Yuliia was a member of «Teach For Ukraine» which is a part of the global program «Teach For All»; the idea is that people unfamiliar with teaching or young teachers without experience should find a vacancy in any village school and work there for two years. She applied for membership a

year ago while completing her Bachelor's course at Taras Shevchenko Kyiv National University. She was so much welcomed for the best Master's programs at Ukrainian and foreign universities but she decided to become a teacher. She spent half a year at Yuriivska secondary school in Dnipropetrovsk region.

Yuliia studied at the well-known Kharkiv Physics and Mathematics Lyceum or School №27. Having finished her ninth year she was invited to Kyiv and became a student of Ukrainian Physics and Mathematics Lyceum under Kyiv National University n.a. Taras Shevchenko. She realized how hard it was for children living in small cities and villages to benefit from the principle of equal opportunities when it was about education quality. Yuliia's classmates came from small Ukrainian towns to study in Kyiv and they claimed to be truly lucky to get such a chance. Then she said how great it would be for children from any Ukrainian town or village to get the best mathematics and computer science curricula, like she had in the lyceum. So, when she finally got her Bachelor's degree she started making her dream come true as a teacher in an average school.

Some years before, being at high school, she initiated the establishment of an IT-unit in the «Quanta» club to ensure access of children to mathematics and computer science. It was purely a volunteer initiative. The premise was provided by the university, while sponsors bought computers. Yulia and her friends prepared thoroughly for

«  
**Professor Bohdan Rubliov remembers Yuliia since her first olympiads. He initiated a special free-of-charge project at the Mathematics Department of MIT for Ukrainian high school students called «Yuliia's Dream». So, eventually her dream is about to come true. Now school-children from the 9-11th grades from Ukraine can study and engage in research projects at one of the most renowned universities in the world.**  
 »



photo by Vasylyna Borysiuk



photo by Vasylyna Borysiuk

every lesson, making programming, logical and mathematical problems look fascinating for attendees. She was so enthusiastic, an altruist at her best.

Professor Bohdan Rubliov remembers Yuliia since her first scientific olympiads. He initiated a special free-of-charge project at the Mathematics Department of Massachusetts Institute of Technology for Ukrainian high school students called «Yuliia's Dream». So, eventually her dream is about to come true. Now Ukrainian school-children from the 9-11<sup>th</sup> grades can study and engage in research projects at one of the most renowned universities in the world.

#### f From the Facebook post of Yuliia's mom

My dear Yuliia!

You have already become famous! We all knew You will – your teachers, friends and colleagues. But why at such a horrible cost!

Your dream about new Ukrainian schools will come true thanks to your friends and followers.

You keep fighting for our peaceful future with all Ukrainians and our foreign friends.

<sup>5</sup> NGO "Station Kharkiv" works to promote the inclusive and non-discriminatory access of IDPs to aid in Ukraine, disregarding age, gender, and political view. It was one of the first NGOs in Ukraine to provide support to IDPs. It was established on 1 June 2014 by a group of volunteers who reacted to the calls coming into the Red Cross hotline. URL: <https://www.peaceinsight.org/en/organisations/station-kharkiv/?location=ukraine&theme>





### Lidiia Panchenko

85 y.o., Yasnogorodka village

Lidiia was born in 1937 and lived all her life in the village of Yasnogorodka, Kyiv region. Those were no easy times. She had to face fascist invasions twice: first – during the Second World War, when until 1943 the village had been occupied by Nazis; second – in the current Ukraine's Patriotic War. Lidiia often shared fragments of her childhood memories: the arbitrary cruelty of the Germans, her parents' tears and, above all, the terrible famine. She always proudly mentioned Soviet troops as heroes and liberators. Could she ever have imagined that

a nation that had always proclaimed itself the direct heir of the USSR and took all the credit for the victory in World War II would come to her home and take away the most precious thing – her life?

Lidiia went through the pain many times: the loss of her husband and, worst of all, the loss of her beloved daughter due to a terrible illness. She worked hard as a cleaner all her life. However, she did not lose her vital optimism, and was always a friendly and bright person. Her beloved granddaughter Oksana

« —————  
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————— »



Still frame images are taken from the video uploaded to YouTube "When granny died, we were going to get some bread" – how a village and a zoo Yasnogorodka survived the month under shellings. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JOKZ3c2cjr4>



reminded Lidiia of her daughter; they lived quite peacefully together with her son-in-law and his new wife. Less than a year ago, they made a renovation of the house, investing all their money and inspiration in it. At the beginning of the year, Lidiia said: 'Now I am perfectly happy: in my dream house and among the dearest people!'

But on March 5, 2022, this happiness came to an end; the "liberators" shot her through a window of her beloved home from a machine gun. That day, Russian invaders entered the village, shooting people at the checkpoint, including a local cleric. People say that after the killing, a tank ran over the bodies. Lidiia's house just happened to be in their way.

Can you imagine a "liberator" deliberately firing a machine gun at civilians? How can Lidiia's killer look into his own grandmother's eyes afterwards? "Fraternal people", Russians, you have to live with that!

Lidiia's family escaped a fate like hers – they were in a local shop at the time and, learning that the enemy had entered the village, they managed to reach their brother who lived at the other end of the village. The son-in-law and other men soon returned to retrieve the mutilated bodies and rescue one wounded man – enemies were everywhere.

Lidiia's son-in-law went through the Soviet war in Afghanistan and says that it is a terrible feeling when the enemy speaks a language that you considered your second mother tongue all your life! Taking the body away, the fellow villagers saw Lidiia's house and the family car for the last time, because the very next day those turned into ashes – the enemy shelled the house. The family was then left with no place to live, no money, no documents, no valuables. Nothing has left from their previous life.

Lidiia and her fellow villagers could not be buried in her native village due to continuing relentless fighting. It was decided to temporarily bury them in Fastiv<sup>6</sup>. Therefore, the fulfillment of her last wish – to be buried next to her daughter – depends on the victory of Ukraine.

<sup>6</sup> Fastiv is a city in the Kyiv region.







**Tetiana Georgievna Khodiuk**

*82 y.o., mother, pensioner, Irpin  
(told by her daughter Kateryna Ilchenko  
in a Facebook post)*

I have come to my senses a little and now I am able to write this post. This will be my last post in Russian, but there are several reasons for that.

This is my parents' house in Irpin. My father built it practically with his own bare hands. After graduating university he stayed in Russia for many years to come. It was not so easy to move to

Ukraine in Soviet times with no free labour and real estate markets. It was a long way – from Sterlitamak

to Volgograd, from Volgograd to Chisinau and from Chisinau finally to a settlement not far from Kyiv. He rejected an apartment and asked for a land plot because he wanted a house.

My mom is Russian by origin. She was born in Cheliabinsk. I was also born there. We still have some (sort of) relatives living in the Russian Federation. Her brother said in the last conversation they had a couple of weeks before the war that he liked Putin, although he didn't agree with all his decisions. Mum was outraged: "How can you say that? He is a murderer!"

When the war started, her blood brother didn't even call. I was told he was worried and went to church to light a candle for peace.

On the night of March 8, a shell hit our house. Mum was inside.

The house was always full of guests when I was a schoolgirl and later a student. My friends for many years remembered Mum's feasts. This house hosted our relatives from Russia. They loved it, as well as the clean piney smell of Irpin, the beauty of Kyiv, our hospitality.

The window upstairs on the left is in my room. There was a large library – my grandma used to collect books, which were standing on the shelves mixed with my university textbooks and photos. Directly below is the living room. The table was always set there with our "brand" white and gold crockery, a German dinner service that my father had bought at an exhibition in Moscow back in the 1970s, and which people always marvelled at. Everything related to my personal history is destroyed. There is nothing left. Not a single item, not a single picture. And most importantly, no Mum. I feel nothing but hate!

This part of the town is currently in the thick of the fighting. It is impossible to get there, to shift the rubble, to bury the dead.

« **Everything related to my personal history is destroyed. There is nothing left. Not a single item, not a single picture. And most importantly, no Mum. I feel nothing but hate!** »







### The story told by Iryna Sushkova

*25 y.o., editor of the Obozrevatel, a widow, Bodakva village, Poltava oblast  
(with the author's permission, we publish her previously posted on Facebook letter to her deceased husband, Viktor Sushkov)*

I'm about to write the scariest words of my life. For the last time I am going to write in Russian, because I spoke it only with You. It is hard but I have to do it as I want the whole world to know about You!

I'm sitting next to my dead husband. My life lies next to me in a closed casket. My life, which wiped my tears and said that

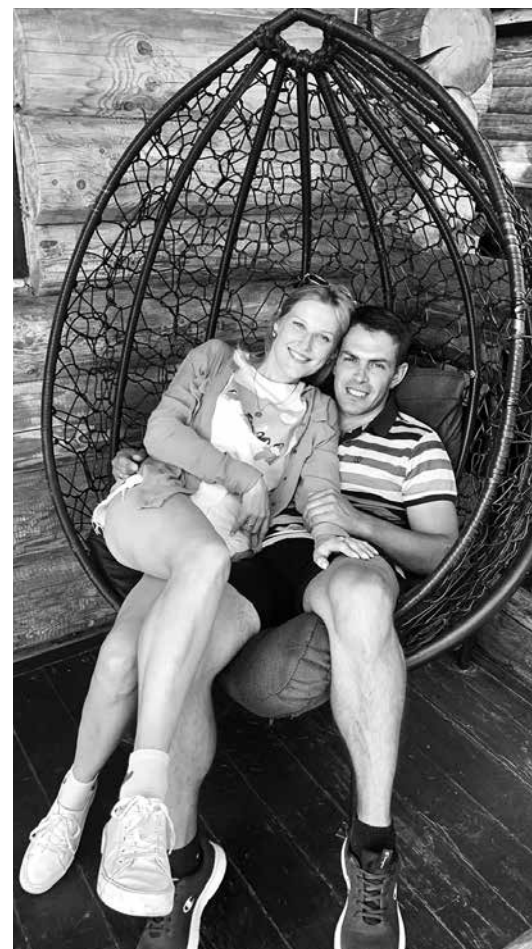
he would never leave me. Who caressed me all night when things went wrong. Who bragged about me at every turn. And I bragged about you. I am grateful to Heaven that you were in my life. It feels like I don't exist anymore.

« I'm sitting next to my dead husband. I am a widow at 25. Inhumans stole my life. They have taken You away, my love. They have taken away our unborn children. They have stolen our future! »

I do not know a purer, kinder and more worthy man. You were the best at everything. Not because you were mine. Just because that was all you. You were appreciated everywhere.

I remember your every word. Each was full of love. You had no other words for me. If You managed to bring home something extraordinary, You immediately started planning how we would share it. No matter which difficulties I was going through, You helped me to go on.

You rushed back home from work with pockets full of chocolates to make me happy. You always shared home meals with others to brag about my cooking talent. You were never afraid of anything. A smile beamed on your face every day, even in the hardest moments of our lives. "I am warmly dressed and eat well" was your reaction to all my questions when You were away and I was worried. You made plans for the years to come. "Have I ever denied you anything?" – that is how You responded to all my complaints. "Forget about it, the main thing is that you are healthy and happy" or "We will have a



daughter just like you" – that is what You were telling me every single day.

You always helped me, no matter what I asked for. "Are you a commander?" – You joked with a sly smile. "It's even worse," – I answered, – "I'm the commander's wife" – and I kissed You on the nose.

I could tell You anything, even things one would never reveal, but You always understood.

After the wedding, You said, "Now You are my "home" forever."

I knew that our children would have Your eyes. A long time ago I decided which gift to give You for our first wedding anniversary, but now I have to choose a wreath for the grave. In the last conversation, You said that You guarded my dream. Now I will guard Yours for the rest of my life.

You are an officer with such a moral compass that these Russian morons could not even dream of. You are my heart! You are my soul! Forever. I love you immensely and am proud of You.

I curse these fascists! They have taken You away, my love. They have taken away our unborn children. They have stolen our future!

I'm sitting next to my dead husband. I am a widow at 25. Inhumans stole my life! Fucking russia stole my life!





## Chapter II. Under Occupation and close to the Enemy

*For safety reasons we do not disclose certain details, in some cases even names and pictures, which may potentially harm courageous women facing the enemy. We will definitely republish their unabridged stories when the threat is gone.*

Irpini. Photo by @misha.djos







**Svitlana Lukash**

*33 y.o., social worker, a new mother, Kyiv*

The 24<sup>th</sup> of February was the day that split my life into “before” and “after”...

Before... I have a wonderful family – a loving husband, a 5-year-old son and I am a happy expectant mother about to give birth to my second boy. Since the first days of my pregnancy my husband agreed to be present at childbirth. Just like all moms-to-be I am quite picky about children’s clothes, accessories, all those plans on nursery refurbishment. I am worried about the delivery process and how to prepare my elder son for his future “company”. February 27<sup>th</sup> is my pregnancy due date and everything goes as planned.

Since January I’ve constantly felt anxiety, but still thought it was because of hormones.

After... On February 24<sup>th</sup>, 2022 I woke up because of that loud rattling noise and couldn’t understand what was happening. So I tried to awaken my husband, saying “I think the war has started”. And then there were loads of calls and messages from frightened friends and relatives. We were watching our neighbours running with their stuff to cars and hastily driving away. We couldn’t leave and hide wherever as in just a couple of days I was to give birth. I was just standing at the window and crying – never felt so helpless. My husband tried to comfort me saying that would not last for long because in the XXI century people use diplomacy instead of weapons.

I don’t quite remember the following two days – just that we were often running to a shelter; terrifying raid



« According to a protocol, with every alert all mothers had to go downstairs to the basement with their newborns. Even those with C-section had to walk – delivery nurses literally carried non ambulant patients from ICUs. Due to hostilities initiated by Russia, I had to leave my native city with a 7-day-old baby...No forgetting and no forgiving!

alerts; I had almost no sleep, crying all the time in fear and panic. Almost all our friends and neighbours fled elsewhere. We even watched some home birth videos to get prepared – I was so afraid! Days felt like years and it seemed to us that we were dead and simply stayed in hell as all my biggest fears suddenly became a reality.



On February 26<sup>th</sup>, 2022 I came to the maternity hospital to get examined. My doctor said I had five more days to wait and offered to stay in a ward. Because of constant explosions and raid alerts in Kyiv, I just couldn’t think of being away from my husband and son. So I went back home. And later on that day I felt my first contractions. Because of curfew my husband couldn’t bring me to hospital – it was extremely dangerous! We had to call an ambulance that drove us to the hospital accompanied by a sickening air raid siren. Intervals were getting shorter and shorter but instead of a labor ward I was brought to a basement with exhausted and frightened pregnant women sitting on chairs and surrounded by medical staff. I was just about to give birth and my doctor decided to relocate me to a ward. I kept persuading myself that my labor would go smoothly because I had to return to my family. It all happened so fast, I barely stepped over the threshold of the ward. Doctor had to just cut a cord and rushed back to the basement because of another alert. I was left alone with my boy in a room, feebly lighted, curtains were tightly closed. My tiny son was placed under a lamp, two meters away from me, lying with a dropper on a couch. I wanted to protect him in case of shelling. I do not know how, but I managed to walk over to him on my trembling feet.

According to a protocol, with every alert all mothers had to go downstairs to the basement with their newborns. Even those with C-section had to walk – delivery nurses literally carried non ambulant patients from ICUs.

If you delivered a child yourself then you definitely remember all the smallest details, the urge to hug your child and ensure a sterile environment not letting anyone even breathe around. We found ourselves in a completely opposite situation, just praying for the break between alerts to be longer.

Due to hostilities initiated by Russia, I had to leave my native city with a 7-day-old baby. Now we are safe.

No forgetting and no forgiving!





**Khrystyna Dzholos**

*34 y.o., PR-manager, Mariupol*

Escaping an occupation is just the beginning. Millions of Ukrainians now literally sleep on their suitcases, some even have to live in them. We will never be the same friendly and carefree people. Right now my hometown Mariupol is a burning hell, sodden with fear and despair. An immense black hole.

On March 15<sup>th</sup> we managed to leave the city under a shellfire, taking a huge risk. We had to stay in the field for a night, in the grey zone because we couldn't manage to stick to the curfew. It was freezing cold. But we survived to keep calling the world for help – everyone who is staying in Mariupol needs help! It is not a hero-town, it is a place soaking in terror, death and

afflicted by these atrocities.

There was no humanitarian convoy; nobody helped us leave. There was no communication with the city council. I pushed my son into a car just before a missile hit the neighbouring yard. We attached a sign "CHILDREN" on a car window and drove under fire merging into self-forming convoys. Nobody was saving us, we did it with God's help!

Connection with those left in the city is lost. They also have no gas, no water, no medical aid. Injured people with torn limbs just bleed heavily in the yards and along the roads and no one can help – these are civilians, our friends and relatives. The deceased are simply covered with soil right where they die, and their families will have to look for the graves of their dearest all over the city. Not sure they will be able to find them. People are mostly killed when out walking in search for water, standing in lines next to wells or cooking soup over open fires. I mean it – we were melting snow to cook pasta.

My family was hiding in Gymnasium №2. Three days ago a missile hit the building. Windows were partially shattered and a woman was injured with a shard of glass in her thigh. She was lying on the first floor and begged for poison to stop the pain because nobody could get her to hospital. For nights and days we were trapped in basements listening to massive shellfire swishing sounds; walls were trembling and we just tried to guess where a rocket would hit next.

Some units of our city hospital still operate and personnel bravely save lives, managing to carry out even surgical interventions. That injured woman I mentioned was taken by the Red Cross a day after, I hope she survives. Two missiles hit my block, two hit the yard and a man lost his limb.

There are almost no specialized bomb shelters here, no ventilated bunkers – just cold and damp basements in the best case. In my mother's house there is not even that.

To those in power – you have to negotiate for green corridors and move women, children and the elderly away from that hell!!! I pray for my relatives, every civilian in Mariupol and all Ukrainian soldiers. The enemy came to our city and left us no choice. But this has to stop! There is nothing more precious than human life!

As for now citizens have no food, no medicine, no water (if it stops snowing)! Drugstores and supermarkets are either burned or looted. Nobody takes the dead bodies away. Police recommend people to put the bodies of relatives who die of natural causes on balconies, open all the windows and if a chance comes bring their corpses to church.

You may truly believe that you understand how awful a real hell in Mariupol is, but if you hadn't been there – you simply don't. I hear the sound of a raid alert and I have no fear because in Mariupol there was no electricity for 16 days and no single sound warned us about strikes.

I beg you all to stop this! If Russian tanks "protect" the city by hitting the residential areas where people are being burned alive – what kind of "protection" is that?!!! I am not familiar with military strategies but I have no clue why this place and these people are being destroyed.

I don't know what will happen but I pray that this nightmare is not repeated elsewhere in Ukraine. Do not look away! Look at a woman who gave birth in a hospital under fire; a pregnant woman who died in the same hospital with her unborn child; a terrified mother covering her son from shattered glass in the hallway; an old man whose chances to survive being left by himself are close to zero; injured civilians left without any help and dying in the course of urban combat; or the deceased whose bodies remain lying on the streets for days and weeks.

TV channels show you ruined and burning buildings but nobody shows people set on fire. DO I REALLY HAVE TO BURN MYSELF TO PERSUADE YOU TO HELP? I BEG FOR YOUR HEARTS – CHOOSE US TO STAY ALIVE!







### Kateryna Fuhlevych

31 y.o., journalist, host of Odesa TV Channel, Kherson

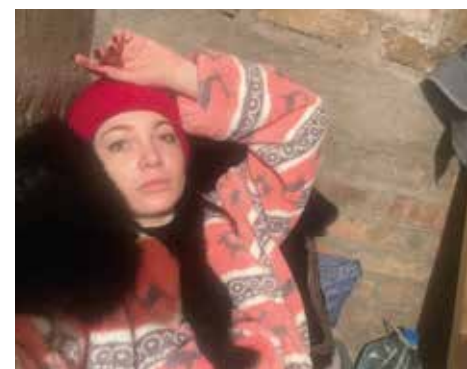
I can't even find the right words to describe what the war looks like! At 4:30 a.m. I heard explosions in Odesa. That moment I realized peaceful life was over. Telecom coverage instantly disappeared. I remember those thoughts mixed in my head: the basement in my house in Kherson; the insufficient amount of fuel in a tank; the lack of a substantial food reserve. I hastily collected some most important belongings, including documents and means of communication – everything I had time to stuff into two bags. It was madness.

My Mom managed to call me – my parents live in Kherson – and I heard her anxious voice: "Please, don't leave us!", "Come home!", "Hurry, please!" They already heard the first hits from MRLS "Grad", tanks and APCs, and saw several jets.

I knew that Kherson was a place of primary strategic importance after the occupation of Crimea, as the Kakhovske water reservoir is located here, which is the key water supply source for the Southern territories. It was very dangerous to move from Odesa to Kherson. The worst was happening in the fields close to Mykolaiv – we saw black smoke where the missiles were hitting the military bases and airport. I was driving and crying – I just couldn't believe it was happening. I saw thousands of cars moving in the opposite direction, to Odesa. People were trying to flee from this tragedy, to escape death, but I was going to hell instead.

My decision was affected by several factors: supporting my parents in this difficult time, and my professional duty. As a journalist, I have to go right to the "eye of the storm". I haven't seen my parents for ages, but this family reunion happened to be not that joyful occasion one would imagine. We were crying all the time out of despair. But we had to survive, so I "unsealed" an old basement we used to keep jam and pickles in. Nobody had used it for years, but it was the only option. I invested all my talent to try and make it relatively comfortable. My dad did not believe we would need to use it but at the end we had to spend 20 long days inside.

Ukrainian Armed Forces and territorial defense tried to counter those attacks for 48 hours but the forces were uneven – Russians brought so much heavy weapon from Crimea to the Kherson region. It was impossible to keep control over the Antonivsky bridge connecting two banks of the Dnipro river. The bridge was partly destroyed with explosives and our soldiers had almost no chance to survive.



We didn't come out of the basement for 24 hours – deeply stressed, we prayed for the residential infrastructure to stay intact. Yet after the invaders had broken the defense, they started attacking the residential areas and people left the city in panic, abandoning their property. We stayed in this damp basement on the dusty ground, freezing, and listened to explosions – each burst and every jet.

We had to keep ourselves warm: layers of sweaters and headwear with coats on top of all that – that is how we slept. I remember trembling because of fear and chill. From time to time we went upstairs to make some food, but these horrible loud sounds never stopped, they seemed to be so close.

We thought that terror wouldn't last long but unfortunately it did, now nobody dares to predict when it's gonna end.

In Kherson, Russian invaders occupied the premises of the Security Services and police, burned down the Fabrika shopping mall with a petting zoo. People rushed to save the animals. I've seen truly apocalyptic scenes – buildings, cars, shops and piles of goods just turning to ashes.

I'm still trying to report as a journalist – mostly from my basement – to stay sane. Live reports for my channel, posts on Facebook, reporting about life under siege, actions of Russian "liberators" in a city with no authorities, no protection, no respect to human rights, but with looting, constant fear and extreme vulnerability instead. A city where one cannot find food, water or medicine. All shops are closed. People have to stand in endless lines to get bread or withdraw cash from ATMs, with sometimes up to 500 people in a queue. I just show via my channel how the city looks today and how madly depressed its dwellers are. We live almost like cavemen: if you get fire – you'll get food; if you get water – you won't die.

The life I lived three weeks ago seems so distant and devised. This war goes on and on and it feels like we are losing ourselves. This is a new reality and we are trying to adjust to it still keeping faith in our victory and the world!!! We are the strongest and we will thrive!! Glory to heroes!

« We stayed in this moisty basement on the dusty ground, freezing, and listened to explosions – each burst and every jet. My dad did not believed we would need to use it but in the end we had to spend 20 long days in it. ... We thought that terror wouldn't last long but unfortunately it did, now nobody dares to predict when it's gonna end. »

« Live reports for my channel, posts on Facebook, reporting about life under siege, actions of Russian "liberators" in a city with no authorities, no protection, no respect to human rights, but with looting, constant fear and extreme vulnerability instead. A city where one cannot find food, water or medicine. »





**Olha**

*35 y.o., Kherson*

One golden rule I'll stick to after our victory: NEVER postpone a date for tomorrow! On February 23<sup>rd</sup>, I planned to go on a date with a very nice man but we decided to reschedule the meeting for later that week. Now I am in Kherson and he moved elsewhere. Not sure if we ever meet at all.

Today our city is occupied and even worse – it is blocked. Apart from realizing the very fact that we are in war I was deeply shocked of how fast russians were to reach my city – just in one day they covered the distance from Henichesk<sup>7</sup> and we all felt the terror of shellfire right away.

Let's be honest – people in Kherson didn't believe that this war would actually occur till the very last moment. Days before it broke they had been sort of relaxed. Even the territorial defense was not organized in a proper way.

On the doomsday, car owners managed to flee right away, the rest of us turned into "hostages" because all trains had been canceled that very evening. Those who stayed immediately ran to buy all the food and medicines they could get. And now I know for sure that was the right strategy – in fact, today Kherson is in a humanitarian crisis (no medicine, food or sanitary items).

Thank God there were no air bombings like in Kharkiv, Mykolaiv and Kyiv. From February 24<sup>th</sup> to March 1<sup>st</sup>, when Antonivsky bridge had not yet been taken, the city was only shelled. Within the first days of invasion we lost 35 civilians according to the city council. We still don't have statistics regarding our men from territorial defense but it seemed like they were almost unarmed while facing the enemy: someone was trying to stop APCs with Molotov's cocktails. Hard to say how many of them died... a lot... But the occupants didn't allow people to take away the defenders' bodies – they were lying along the roads and streets of our city.

Currently evacuation is impossible. Even if you manage to get through checkpoints, nobody guarantees you will not die from tank fire. This is exactly what happened to my colleague: fortunately, he and his relatives stayed alive but he lost his vehicle. Now it is possible to evacuate only to Crimea.

Our mayor didn't betray us – before March 13<sup>th</sup> (this day is celebrated as the Day of Kherson liberation from fascists), when occupants wanted to proclaim the establishment of a so called "Kherson People's Republic", our MPs organized an online meeting and voted for non-recognition of any russian authority in Kherson.

<sup>7</sup> Henichesk is a port city along the Sea of Azov in Kherson region, over 200 km from Kherson.

The first days of invasion were marked with intense looting. All shops were closed but we launched a volunteer network with a key task to accumulate a certain reserve of food and medicines to protect the most vulnerable categories.

On March 5<sup>th</sup> we realized that the city had been occupied and every day residents gathered for protests at noon: 10 000 people came the first day. Of course, we don't try to stop enemy's tanks and APCs with bare hands as we all have families we care for. These gatherings, though, are our way of saying we do not surrender.

My friends joke: "One more groundhog day". Every morning we "hunt" for food, after lunch we gather at the meeting, later we turn into volunteers and inform everyone of important developments as the aggressor destroyed our telecommunication equipment and stations to broadcast their shitty propaganda. Unfortunately it works in some sense.

I want to leave this place! I am an activist and people like me are in a hell of jeopardy while staying in an occupied city. Occupants somehow got the lists of names of journalists, activists, policemen, territorial defense fighters etc. And I am concerned about my mom and an under-aged daughter. And I am concerned about my mom and 16-year-old daughter. So, we are waiting for our army to liberate us.







## Hanna Yamchynska

*36 y.o., mother of children with special needs, musician, Klavdiievo-Tarasovo village*

I have three sons: 13-year-old twins and a toddler aged two. My elder sons were diagnosed with complex cerebral palsy at birth. Adam and Timur are completely helpless in external environment: they can't perform some basic self-sustaining functions or move autonomously, Timur doesn't speak. We have a very tight and structured daily schedule as any simple action for my boys turns into a challenge. The biggest problem is moving around as I can't physically lift a pretty heavy teenager, so my husband has become my sons' arms and legs...

We realized the war had started when explosions in Hostomel made the ground tremble. Despite repeated promises to bomb only military targets we knew that the mad aggressor would not limit to that. So we started looking for transport to evacuate the children. Local people panicked and massively fled from Hostomel. It was impossible for our large family to find a car owner to pick us up. In a couple of days bridges in Irpin and Borodyanka were destroyed, hostilities activated in Makariv on the same day – these neighbouring peaceful towns were turned into "hot spots". We had no chance to escape...

We had to stay in a half-empty house prepared for sale – there were windows in every room, even a bathroom. We picked one room and my husband transformed it into some kind of a fortress: he boarded up the windows from the outside and made some stanchions. Of course we realized those efforts were useless in case of shellfire.

Shops were emptied pretty fast and we just found ourselves completely unprepared for such challenges. But the world is full of kind people. We will always be grateful to Ali, our neighbour. Being quite a busy dad (Ali has three daughters) he supported us enormously by bringing food, even milk, which was almost impossible to get. Villagers established a sort of a territorial defense squad to give a faint feeling of safety to those who stayed.

In three days we were cut off from the electricity and water supply. We survived thanks to our own well and gas. There were no air raid alarms in the area, so we never knew when to hide. Instead we heard roaring jets above our house and sounds of bombing. On the fifth day mobile connection disappeared. For a week the only source of information



were our villagers who told about Kadyrov's beasts and their atrocities in surrounding areas...terrifying as it is.

We spent two weeks in hell. I managed to stay sane by forbidding myself to be overwhelmed with emotions – I had to dissolve my fear and rage to save my children. One day I was washing dirty dishes and couldn't believe I started thinking of this warfare nightmare as a routine. People can adapt to a lot, you know... but I did not want to! I knew that somewhere out there people are free to walk outdoors under a peaceful sky! And my children are vulnerable. We were almost out of diapers and I didn't want them to get infected so there was no more time to hesitate.

On March 7<sup>th</sup> our neighbour found out that villagers are organizing a car column to evacuate. He just ran to the market square and begged people to pick us up as we had disabled children but the only answer he got was "Everyone has children".

On March 8<sup>th</sup> we woke up early to dress up, feed the children and try to reach the gathering point in hope to find transportation. It is pretty difficult with two kids with special needs. Eventually we were late for about 5 minutes. All the vehicles had left. We came back home full of despair. That same day a huge occupants' convoy passed by our village.

Later that night I found a Telegram group where locals discussed evacuation and safe routes. I found out that everybody knew of our situation but it was a dead end – no more buses planned and no more space in cars left. The moderator said we had to hope for a miracle... and the miracle happened.







On March 9<sup>th</sup> we woke up at 5 a.m. and went to the village square with nothing except our IDs, boys' wheelchairs and a pram. Ali begged different drivers to take us but no one had enough space. Finally we got some help.

In our minivan there were 8 adults, 4 children and a dog kept in a trunk. We had to leave wheelchairs and my younger son's pram, as those did not fit in.

Over 20 cars in the convoy, each with white "flags" made of fabric and signs "CHILDREN" on windshields, headed to look for a safer place. We knew that the previous convoy was ambushed, while going through some of the occupants' checkpoints. Here and there along the road I saw dead bodies and body parts, mostly of Russian soldiers. In the fields there were many recent mass graves with crosses made of branches. I realized those were the graves where our military buried the enemies. The difference between us is obvious – they attack our homes and kill civilians, while we try to protect ourselves and treat the deceased occupants in a humane way.

It felt like an endless way to go, sometimes through the woods. I was afraid we would get stuck in swampy ground loosened by tanks. I didn't cry until we stopped at a gas station near Zhytomyr<sup>8</sup>, then all my emotions burst out...

I am immensely grateful to my neighbour Ali. He also moved his family away. Miracles happen to those who deserve them and Ukrainians deserve one more than anyone else. Glory to Ukraine!

« On March 9 we woke up at 5 a.m. and went to the village square with nothing but our IDs and children's wheelchairs and pram. Ali begged different drivers to pick us but not many had enough space. Finally we got some help... In our minivan there were 8 adults, 4 children and a dog kept in a trunk. We had to leave wheelchairs and my younger son's pram.

»

<sup>8</sup> Zhytomyr is a city in north-west Ukraine, regional center, more than 100 km away from Klavdievo-Tarasovo village







**Alla Skoryk**

*38 y.o., mother of two, editor-in-chief of «Suspilne Chernihiv»<sup>9</sup>*

This nightmare started on February 24<sup>th</sup> approximately at 5 a.m. My driver who was taking someone to Boryspil airport on that day called me saying: «Wake up! It's war!». At 5.30 I put the children (Oleksandr (10) and Danylo (3)) in my husband's car and asked him to drive the kids away to the West. He was still sleepy and didn't protest against my instructions but already driving he called me, being angry at both of us for not pushing me in the trunk.

I didn't pack my stuff, just hoped that common sense prevails. I also planned to bring the kids back in about two days, so I just drove to the office. I did not prioritize buying medicines and fuel or withdrawing any cash, cause I trusted my intuition. Unfortunately, it let me down this time.

At 6 a.m. the city was already turbulent: people heard explosions, knew of the combat at the checkpoint and victims at Nizhyn SES airfield. There were huge lines in front of the shops, ATMs and gas stations. I decided to buy some fuel and started making some live reports for the channel while waiting in line.

People tried hard to leave the city and all roads were jammed. At 7 a.m. we had the first ambulance column coming to the city – now I know they were saving border guard officers who were in the front defense line.

Then this non-stop marathon started – live reports, comments for radio and TV, posts in social networks and texts for a website. There was no bomb shelter in the office, so the only option was to stay on the first floor during the air raids, where the radio station was located. Thus I managed to inform people about current events despite the danger.



<sup>9</sup> The Public Broadcasting Company of Ukraine



sky-rocketed – we felt no hunger and worked 24/7. We reported to Ukrainian and international media. I somehow learned to ignore explosions and continued doing my job. Emotions took over only when I saw the devastated city and suffering of people!

My first real shock: when «Iskander» rockets aimed Chernihiv, five in one day. Russians tried to hit the city council but destroyed a dentistry, a cinema, a shop, a kindergarten and a block of apartments. These were the first cases of locals losing their property, health and lives.

My second shock: air raids. 8 bombs hit 2 schools, apartment blocks and people standing in a line next to the pharmacy. As a result, 47 of them killed, many injured, some are missing (we assume



My first night in the wartime: I decided to go to my friends not to stay alone but that was another mistake. They lived in a neighborhood which was heavily shelled by enemy's artillery that very night. Windows were covered with duct tape, mattresses placed as barricades. No one was able to sleep – the shellfire was unimaginable.

Having survived that, I decided to move with my colleagues into a small house to continue working. We called that place a “shack”. There was no basement but the first floor was half-underground, so it felt safer. Our adrenaline

« 8 bombs hit 2 schools, apartment blocks, people standing in a line next to the pharmacy. As a result, 47 of them killed, many injured, some are missing (we assume that some of them burned to ashes, so it is impossible to conduct identification). Some of my friends lost their homes. One raid affected hundreds of families... My colleague lives there and he has a video with those cluster projectiles – hope this will go directly to Hague!

»





that they burned to ashes, so it is impossible to conduct identification). Some of my friends lost their homes. One raid affected hundreds of families.

My third shock: people died even in queues, trying to buy bread and water. My colleagues witnessed this tragedy. Alina filmed everything. A multiple launch rocket system "Grad" hit the residential area and civilians standing outdoors. Next day the central part of Chernihiv was attacked by cluster projectiles. Everything was destroyed by shellfire from «Uragan». And again they hit the residential blocks and peaceful people. My colleague lives there and he has a video with those cluster projectiles – hope this will go directly to Hague!

I tried to work to get rid of this tension to give myself no time for deep reflections. I cried at night thinking of my children. We had never parted for such a long time. Danylo just turned three but his voice was so serious when we talked on the phone: "Mommy, I am holding on. But when will you come?"

Then the electricity supply and Internet connection in the city became too poor to allow me to do my job properly. So, I switched to peeling potatoes for territorial defense. The only chance for me to inform people on the current situation was to use those random moments when connection was stable.



And one day a thought struck me – I have to go to my children. I got into my car and drove away. It was the day when several cars were shot by russian tanks. The road took me four days. 120 km per day maximum under shellfires. There was almost no fuel at gas stations and at the same time unbelievable traffic.

On the one hand this war took everything from me – my home, people I care about, my children lost their school and friends; russian jets are turning my native city into ruins. On the other hand my faith in people has never been so strong and I do hope that Ukraine will finally protect its right to freely pave its own path. The Russian warship is already heading in the right direction<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> A reference to the incident that took place on Zmiiny (Snake) Island on Feb. 25, 2022. Ukrainian soldiers being at the base on the island were live-streaming the demand of a Russian warship to surrender. One Ukrainian soldier, Roman Gribov, responded: "Russian Warship, go f--- yourself."

Chernihiv. Photo by Alla Skoryk







**Liubov Iliusha**

*64 y.o., retiree, village in Chernihiv region*

When this war started I was in my native village. Having graduated from the secondary school I was enrolled first to Cherhihiv technical college, then got my lawyer's diploma in Kyiv State University. Many years I spent in the capital but I always wanted to return to my village after retirement and I did.

Even though our village is located far from big settlements, on February 24<sup>th</sup> we heard those damned bombs very clearly. Rural life is quiet, so first I thought of thunder. Like many people of my age I wake up early. My neighbours were still sleeping, so I couldn't ask anyone what was going on.

When I finally learned the truth, I could not believe it: how come that was happening in 2022? Russia, the neighbouring country, all this time trying to convince the world in their brotherly affection, is bombing us!!! At first it seemed to be a kind of a misunderstanding... we hoped the attack would not last long and in several days everything would turn to normal...but it happened quite the opposite. Soon enemy's tanks stopped in the village nearby (my relative actually counted them and informed our territorial defense).

Having realized the situation as it was, I felt the RAGE. And it kept growing nurtured by massive looting and violence brought to our peaceful home by russians. I tried to find the best way for a sick retiree to assist our defenders. A post office was closed, so I couldn't even send our soldiers some food. However, the head of our village found a way out and offered to collect some vegetables, pickled food and lard for the army. Almost all the villagers brought something! I was so proud of them! It gave a feeling that our unity would help to win the war soon. Just look at those elderly women who stayed in the village having no military experience and gathered to stand for Ukraine! We all can help in various ways – supporting people around us, sharing food, seeds, wood, fuel. We are a generous and friendly nation!

Every morning I go to my stepmother's house to help. Before the war our relationship was not that smooth – we argued and sometimes even didn't talk for months... now, when the enemy is close, it is my duty to provide support the way I can. I also bring food and wood for stoves to



people, who arrived from neighboring cities and towns to hide in our village from the autricities, and they gratefully help me in return. Nobody even mentions any money or something and such talks are considered offensive (there is no cash in the village now).

This year flowers will bloom in my yard later than usual. Maybe it's because of the weather or just the soil full of people's tears. In any case the sun will warm the world and bring us hope. We'll thrive just like those crocus flowers in my garden!



Chernihiv. Photo by Alla Skoryk





**Kateryna Romanenko**

*40 y.o., shop-assistant, Kyiv*

My boyfriend called me at 5 a.m. that day and told me about explosions. He said: "Keep the kids safe. I can't get to you now..." He works at a warehouse in the suburbs. I definitely felt no fear, mostly pain and despair. I just could not mentally cope with the whole thing. At first my family – me and my two children and my mother – tried to follow those instructions we heard on TV. For our residential area finding a bomb shelter appeared to be a challenge. We were supposed to hide in the basement of a local clinic which had nothing in common with a real bomb shelter and was located 500 meters away.

Moreover, it was fully packed with moms with infants. I thought it would be a right thing to not occupy a young mother's place. So I told my mom and my 13-year-old daughter to stay there, while me, my 14-year-old son and my partner returned home.

I will always remember the night when fear tightly grasped my heart...

February 28<sup>th</sup>... we could not sleep listening to massive shellfire and bullets swishing close to my window. Hours of street fighting next to our building. Then suddenly silence stunned us for a moment and later we heard ambulances' sirens (approximately 12 vehicles) and then – silence again...

In the morning I went outside and saw a lot of shattered objects and more than ten dead bodies. Despite a panic attack I thought about my children. I decided to bring them to a safe place in the West, where my grandmother lives. My brother went there with his family as well.

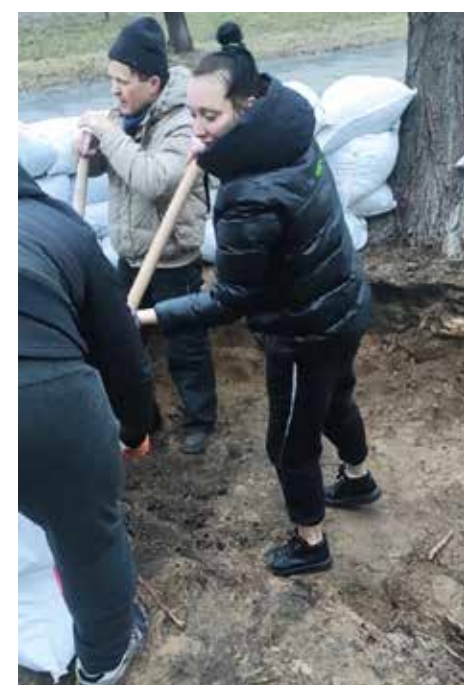
I often ask myself – why did I stay? It has nothing to do with love or my injured back which would have suffered in evacuation trains – it just felt like the only right option to me.

When my relatives were safe, I started actively preparing my city to counter the enemy despite my health issues: we were digging the trenches, filling sacks with sand and soil, and establishing checkpoints using everything we could find. If someone told me – a woman who cherished her

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that, I would never believed it.**

»»



femininity so much – that I would do all that, I would never believed it. Today we help the elderly neighbours with food and medicines, and take care of abandoned pets. We even took a parrot from the streets, as he was left outdoors by his previous owners to die.

« —————  
**M**y country helps me become  
a better version of myself.  
————— »

Sometimes I get really scared when I see rockets hitting the blocks or when my neighbours drive away from the city every day. But this is my choice. I guess our victory will require thousands of such choices. My country helps me become a better version of myself. Glory to Ukraine!







**Olena Shershniova**

*33 y.o., psychologist, TV-expert, Kyiv*

I remember a black crow sitting at my window on February 23<sup>rd</sup>. That was probably an omen. The next morning at 5 a.m. we woke up because of a raid alert.

Me, my husband and our 3-year-old-son dressed hastily and ran to a bomb shelter. We couldn't believe that it was happening. I felt nothing but fear and despair. There were many families with children in that shelter. Adults were terrified but children seemed to be mostly curious. A little girl standing next to me whispered: "I know what is happening here – the loud sounds are giants' fart". I immediately thought of Roberto Benigni's movie "Life is Beautiful". A father tried to

distract his son with games from the fascist atrocities, played hide-and-seek and offered various quests. And in the Ukrainian version there are also giants.

We spent four days and nights in that shelter going outside inbetween the alerts to grab food and get a breath of fresh air. Later people somehow adapted to the new reality and started returning to their homes fortified with mattresses in hallways and duct tape on windows, where one needed to always be dressed to urgently leave an apartment in case of a life danger.

On March 1<sup>st</sup>, the aggressor hit our TV tower and one of my colleagues died – Yevhen Sakun, operator of "Kyiv LIVE" channel. Death was all around.

More sad news to come – a close friend of ours named Mykola Halibarenko was shot next to his house in Novobohdanivka. I couldn't understand how a 72-year-old man could possibly threaten anyone... It came to me when I heard a woman from that village telling the whole story: russian military set some kind of a campsite there; they broke into civilians' houses, shot people, raped women, held children in basements, stole food and personal belongings...it was hard to accept that our friend died for no specific reason. Someone killed him just because he could do so.

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My colleague from the "Ukraina" channel Iryna Samsonenko gone missing. She tried to flee from the occupied Irpin but was taken as a hostage. I also lost connection with my mom's best friend Valentyna Sokhatska who stayed in Mariupol right before the siege. I was appalled by this expanding madness and wanted nothing but all that to stop.

Currently I am staying in Kyiv – like many other people I act as a volunteer and organize free psychological support for survivors and IDPs. Together with Ukrainian media I provide intense information support to our citizens. It is important to take care of our mental state and prevent emotional breakdowns – it is crucial for us to stay strong and sane. Glory to Ukraine!







### **Tetiana Malysheva**

*36 y.o., radio host, Kyiv*

For three weeks I was falling asleep in a bomb shelter thinking if I ever woke up. I remember every crack on the ceiling I was looking at and prayed for it to remain intact.

It is already the 23<sup>rd</sup> day of the war which started so long before the end of February 2022. Eight years ago Russia occupied Crimea and established fake republics. Since November 2021 we've been regularly getting news about the accumulation of russian military at the border for the so-called "drills". Finally, Russia attacked us on February 24<sup>th</sup>, 2022 early at 4:30 a.m.

That morning I got a call at 7 a.m. from my husband's grandfather. He lived in a village not far from a Ukrainian

military base which russians shelled massively. Instantly my blood pressure went up but I still had to go to the office. On that day we were supposed to discuss if Kyiv bomb shelters were accessible for the disabled in case of a potential attack.

I appeared to be one of the early birds in the office. But even being at work did not help to get rid of emptiness and despair my soul was filled with. There was no chance to launch the planned discussion as a special breaking news session was on air for hours with my colleagues constantly updating the population on the current situation. So I just helped them to search for information and involve regional journalists and experts.

That whole day we were going to and from a bomb shelter reacting to each and every air raid alert. This sound just sucks life out of you, turns you inside out and paralyzes. In these circumstances an ability to hide ASAP means survival.

It is good that my grandma Valya had died long before this nightmare. She was 16 and went to Cherkasy to take a passport photo. There she was seized by German soldiers and moved abroad to work at a factory...she managed to survive Holodomor and WWII. I am glad she is not witnessing the genocide of our people organized by russians and their mad leader.

On February 24<sup>th</sup> I took a subway to get home. I saw people bringing their stuff to the stations and arranging a self-made "bed". There was a mother curling around her child on the floor. Why the hell do people have to sleep on the granite floor in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

« **I am still afraid of the darkest hour to come as russians keep shelling the cities where many civilians are still fighting for survival. Many are dead, millions left the country and became refugees. This is our new reality.** »

I stayed at home that night despite my colleague's warnings. The shelling was awful, I was barely holding on and wishing for all that to stop. At 7 a.m. I went to a shelter with a small bag, took some food and a yoga mat. Of course I took my cat Nessie with me – she was so stressed being surrounded by strangers.

In the bomb shelter there were hundreds of people, children, elderly, dogs, cats, rabbits and hamsters. We all were extremely terrified, confused and exhausted.

It was my first night in such a place with strangers around, there was no chance to get some proper sleep as children cried and begged parents to return home. You don't hear raid alerts being so deep under the surface but mobile apps notified us about it immediately.

That evening a lady brought in some soup and tea and shared with everyone. I will always remember the taste of that tea with gratefulness. I was reading the news non-stop. I just couldn't keep my eyes away from the screen longing to find out which objects were hit by every single rocket. One of them fell on a house in my street. Every minute in the shelter I was wondering if my home was still intact.

Gradually this torpor was gone and I wanted to be helpful. I transferred money for the needs of our army and volunteers supporting our territorial defense, posted messages from official sources, and tried to block russian accounts spreading fake data. There are so many desinformation channels that must be blocked! The information front is also very important.







I am still afraid of the darkest hour to come as russians keep shelling the cities where many civilians are still fighting for survival. Thousands are dead, millions left the country and became refugees. This is our new reality.

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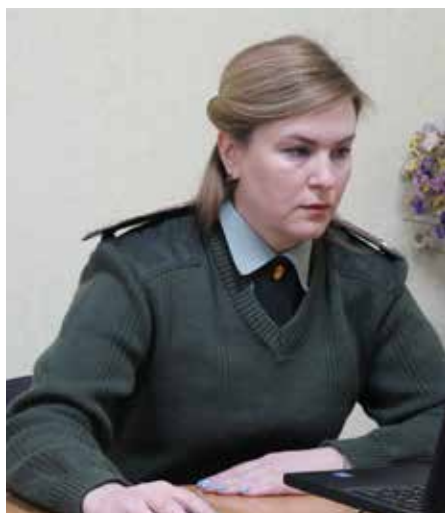
————— »  
Even now while I am writing this the raid alert is on. I wish my country never hears one again..

Ukrainians accumulate their love of freedom, unity and courage to withstand the enemy. I believe in my army and my people!

Okhtyrka and Trostianets, photos by Viktoriia Nikitina







**Svitlana Yushchenko**

*41 y.o., mother of two, head of PR sector (Academy of State Penitentiary Service of Ukraine), psychologist, volunteer, Chernihiv*

This war changed my life on February 24<sup>th</sup> when I got a call from a colleague at 5:30 a.m. We woke our kids up and checked emergency backpacks. The children were entirely confused.

I had to go to the office. My husband wanted to tank a car at a gas station. We had no idea then that bombing would start so soon. So we had to find a shelter instead.

The shelter was filled with people, with frightened crying children. Anxiety, distress, despair. Later we found out that a

city psychiatric hospital was bombed.

My husband and I have been volunteering since 2014. I guess it somehow helped us to assess the current situation and make the right decision to move our children and parents 200 km away from Chernihiv.

Then things got even worse with regular alerts and massive shellfire in residential areas. 54 people died in one house at Chornovola street and many were injured... My colleague was killed. Every message showed how brutal the enemy was – they attacked kindergartens, schools and hospitals. Only several pharmacies and shops remained open; there were endless queues.

Later that day we got first requests for help – warm clothes, food and tea for our soldiers, and military footwear. It was a huge responsibility to meet people's expectations. Again and again we had to make multiple orders to get the required items. We never knew if we would be able to deliver them – once a rocket fell metres away from a gas station where we stopped.

« —————  
**L**ater that day we got first requests for help – warm clothes, food and tea for our soldiers, and military footwear. It was a huge responsibility to meet people's expectations. Again and again we had to make multiple orders to get the required items. We never knew if we managed to reach another destination – once a rocket fell metres away from a gas station where we stopped.  
————— »

People supported each other, municipal services kept the city clean and restored the electricity supply.

The decision to leave the city was a hard one but we couldn't stop worrying for children and parents, so we started packing at night, in complete darkness, calling our friends and asking them to leave as the threat of siege was growing. At 6 a.m., completely exhausted, we gathered a convoy of cars and started a truly dangerous journey trying to avoid occupants on our way. The youngest passenger we evacuated was only three weeks old.

On the following day I finally reunited with my children. We had no idea where to go further but it was impossible to stay in the region with active hostilities. My son couldn't reach his friend via phone and I did not tell him about the atrocities we had witnessed. The only thing that comforted me a little was the thought about humanitarian aid we had delivered to shelters before leaving. At first we decided to stay in the western part of the country but after Ivano-Frankivsk<sup>11</sup> got bombed I knew we had to send our kids abroad.

Now my children are safe and with friends – they were kindly hosted by Germans in the Zoritz village.

We chose to stay in Ukraine because people need our help, they require medicines, food, transportation. Unfortunately the situation in Chernihiv is catastrophic – no electricity, gas, water and heating. Hospitals critically lack generators and medicine. Occupants even block the roads to cemeteries, so bodies are buried temporarily in the yards of residential blocks for further reburial. 14 people were killed in the line waiting to buy bread. A family trying to leave Chernihiv was shot. Russians want to liberate us from the fascism but instead they act like fascists themselves.

Municipal and regional authorities are doing their best to keep the city alive. We have become a shield protecting Kyiv from this plague. I guess Europe would not be happy to border such an aggressive neighbor. I urge Europeans – You need to boycott their natural resources and commodities, because You pay for our deaths!!!

Not sure if my house is still standing and if my friends are alive. I have lost connection with them and now the only bridge we used to evacuate people is demolished.

« —————  
**W**e have become a shield protecting Kyiv from this plague. I guess Europe would be happy to border such an aggressive neighbor. I urge Europeans – You need to boycott their natural resources and commodities, because You pay for our deaths!!! The world should not be filled – russia's ideology is centered around violence and aggression, which will never be accepted as values by the civilized countries! Stop ignoring the genocide and ban broadcasting of all the russian channels spreading this deathly virus of propaganda.  
————— »

<sup>11</sup> Ivano-Frankivsk is a city located in the West of Ukraine, not far from the borders with Poland, Slovakia, Hungary and Moldova.



Sometimes I am about to give up but the faint hope for peace and victory helps me to keep going. The world should not be filled – Russia's ideology is centered around violence and aggression, which will never be accepted as values by the civilized countries!

Stop ignoring the genocide and ban broadcasting of all the Russian channels spreading this deadly virus of propaganda.

« —————  
**A** family trying to leave Chernihiv was shot. Russians want to liberate us from the fascism but instead they act like fascists themselves.  
————— »

Borodianka, photos by © Oleg Veremienko





## Chapter III. Children of War

*Now you sleep happily,  
What sorrows drab can be  
You do not know;  
You'll learn too rapidly  
Heartache and woe.*

*The hour goes wearily!  
The minute – drearily!  
Woe does not sleep...  
Lullaby, dearie, to  
Live is to weep.*

*Shameful detestably  
To yield to destiny!  
Your hour will come.  
With fate contesting – your  
Sleep will be done...*

*("LULLABY" by Lesya Ukrainka.  
Translated by Vera Rich)*



Last peaceful summer in Kyiv, 2021

### Twins Elina and Diana

*3 y.o. (their mother's story)*

I woke up because one of my daughters asked me for milk. It was around 5.30 a.m.. I glanced at the phone and saw a colleague calling incessantly. Strange noise was coming from outside. My husband entered the room and said: "The war has begun!" Those words echoed in my head for a long time, my legs and arms just got numbed. Fear filled up the whole body and I felt like I was falling into the abyss. I still am. I looked at my three-year-old daughters, one still sleeping so sweetly and peacefully in her bed.

I still refuse to believe that it is happening to us. War! In the XXI century! In times of digitalization, artificial intelligence, Hadron Collider. War!!!! Despair, shock... I was feverishly thinking what to do now, trying to quickly gather the most important things, but my body refused to obey. What to grab first? Special food, bottles, a thermos with hot water to prepare infant formula,

cookies, warm blanket.... A favorite teddy bear or a doll? A potty or diapers? What else?

### Do our children deserve all that? Why???

They are just making their first steps into this world. They are trying to understand it, looking at it with their searching eyes. Why should our children run away, hide in shelters, be afraid of the sound of air alarms instead of playing in playgrounds?

When my children first heard the siren and got frightened, the only good enough explanation, which crossed my mind, was to tell them it was a signal to hide from an evil wolf. Like in their favorite fairy tale about three piglets. We need to take the most valuable things, hold mom and dad by the hand and hide. It's been a month since we have been hiding from the "evil wolf" at every alarm. The girls take the most important things with them, choosing between the bear, the bunny, the chocolate and the doll.

It's especially scary when the "wolf comes" at night.

- Mom, I'm scared...
- Do not be afraid, darling, I'm with you.

« —————  
**S**ometimes it seems that children at the age of 3 do not yet realize what war is, they can play, run, laugh during the day. But when they start drawing, they choose only black color... I remember my grandma sharing her memories of the Second World War. At the beginning of the war she was only four years old, almost like my daughters now. These stories felt so distant and impossible, but now my children are also the children of war.

»



At this moment I am hugging my two little daughters and I am also very, very scared. First you hear the siren, then the sky becomes horrifyingly humming, and then you hear explosions. It's so scary that you can't move or breathe. But you need to be strong, for the sake of the kids.

I will never forget the crimson-blue sky when we quickly ran to the station to catch a train, having only essentials to cover the children's needs.

The very fact that at one point you have to leave everything – your home, your well-ordered life – and flee the war, is still hard to accept. I am overwhelmed with disgust, hate, pain, despair, but I hold my kids' little hands tightly and run in search of shelter.

Today at a playground the girls were playing, running, laughing. Then one of them came up to me and said, "Mom, look, there are plates and cups..." and she started crying.



I hugged her, turned my head and looked at the sandbox. There were children's toy plates and cups just like the girls used to have in their toy kitchen, at home.

– Mom, I want to go home...

Little eyes were full of tears and I cried with her.

– Me too, darling, me too...

Sometimes it seems that children at the age of three do not yet realize what war is, they can play, run, laugh during the day. But when they start drawing, they choose only black color:

– Darling, what is it?

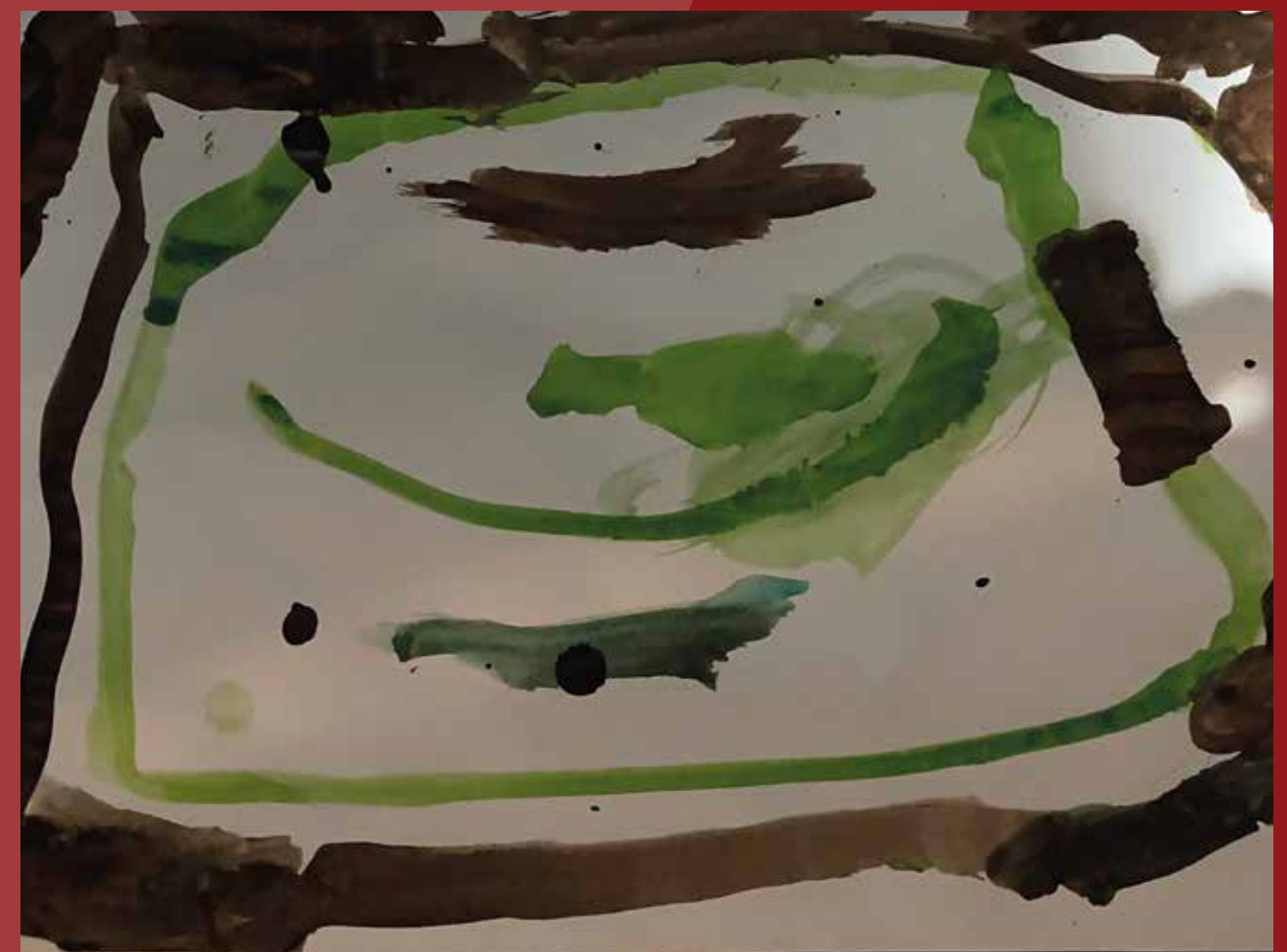
– It's a wolf and a night...

My kids call the war a "wolf". Like the main characters of their favorite fairy tale "Three Little Piglets" they had to leave their home, all their toys. Now they know what fear is. They are deprived of a peaceful sleep.

I remember my grandma sharing her memories of the Second World War. At the beginning of the war she was only four years old, almost like my daughters now. These stories felt so distant and impossible, but now my children are also the children of war.

We will never forget!

We will never forgive!







**Antonina Kupchenko, 7 y.o., Odesa**

*(we talked to Antonina with the consent of her mother Natalia)*

My mum says that I am unique, although I don't think so. I am 7 years old. My name is Tonya.

My dad says I'm a Hurricane Antonia, because I don't like to keep still. He and I often play racing games and I also like it when Dad spins me around or tosses me up.

I'm all grown up and independent now. I have two "real" teeth growing (ed. – shows a gap instead of front teeth). I also know how to make scrambled eggs and omelets. My parents always smile when they eat my cooking.



**Every day together with my Mum I go to a volunteer organization to cook for servicemen. There are a lot of people there. Everyone jokes with me and calls me "our boss"... On weekends Dad and I don't go to drawing and arithmetic classes anymore. We help Mum and our army.**



Until recently, I did ballroom dancing and karate. Mum said that I got at least a little tired there and gave her and Dad a break after work. On weekends, Dad would take me to drawing and mental arithmetic classes. I have plenty of drawings. Mum decorates the walls of my room with them.

I really want to become an actress; I make home performances. Mum says that good actors know English well. So I try to learn it, I even attended special courses.

Until all my friends from the neighborhood fled, we used to get together every night and go roller-skating or biking. I have a lot of friends, but now there are none – Oleh is in Moldova, Karyna is in Romania, and I don't know where Tanya is.

I have a white tomcat and a black female cat at home. Recently another cat became a member of our family, because it was left by our relatives who had gone abroad from the war.

Lately my parents have often repeated the word "war". Mum sometimes cries, and Dad has become gloomy and does not play with me or smile as he used to. I still get scared of the air raid, hiding in the bathroom. Recently we saw a drone being shot down by a missile. It looked a lot like fireworks and at first I thought someone was celebrating something.



pre-war photos

We stayed in our hometown. Every day together with my Mum I go to a volunteer organization to cook for servicemen. There are a lot of people there. Everyone jokes with me and calls me "our boss". We wake up early, go out to cook and come back around 4 p.m.. My dance and karate classes are closed. On weekends Dad and I don't go to drawing and arithmetic classes anymore. We help Mum and our army.

Now school classes have started remotely. I'm happy to see my classmates, at least online.







### Nadiika (girl's name changed)

14 y.o., Mariupol  
(the story told by her relative Olena Konstantinova)

Nadiika and her mother, fortunately, escaped from Mariupol. It was scary not to have been in touch with them for weeks.

While I was hoping to get a message from them, my close friend lost his eldest daughter, a 20-year-old girl, Tetiana Kotlubei. A Russian missile hit her house in the heart of the city. Her boyfriend denied evacuation and stayed in Mariupol to find his beloved. Risking his life he dug up the wreckage with his bare hands to get the body and bury his fiancée.

I heard from the news that Russian rockets fell on the Drama Theatre, where Nadiika and her mother were hiding. I saw what was left of it. Those weeks turned into my personal hell. Another friend of mine, who also, fortunately, left Mariupol, told me she saw the missile hitting the Drama Theatre. At the time of the attack she was on the Water Tower<sup>15</sup> trying to catch a cell phone signal.

The last time Nadiika and I met was New Year's Eve. Nadiika is a very smart girl with advanced linguistic aptitude. She was going to enter the Mariupol Lyceum next school year. She received a scholarship for free English courses from the US Embassy, and began to study German at school. A year later Nadiika was ranked second with a translation of a fairy tale into German at a competition among schoolchildren held by the Mariupol University for the Humanities. Nadiika is serious, reserved and a little introverted.

When the bombing and shelling of the city began, she and her mother were on the left bank, which was the first to fall under Russian artillery. At first they tried to shelter in a basement. But the basement was cold and damp, and the shelling did not stop. So they preferred to stay in the hallway of their apartment according to the "two-wall room"<sup>16</sup>. When Nadiika called, she said she was very scared. Each explosion made her hug a cat harder... At one point, her mom packed up to move in with Nadiika's grandmother, who lived nearby. Nadiika insisted on taking the cat with them.

The shelling intensified day to day. It became impossible to stay in the house. At that time, they heard reports of the evacuation of Mariupol residents to the territory controlled by Ukraine, which was to take place from the Drama Theatre. A neighbour took Nadiika, her mother and grandmother from the left bank in the direction to the Drama Theatre. There were totally eleven people in his car driven by hope. Nadiika and her mother were placed in the car trunk.

<sup>15</sup> The Old Water Tower is an architectural monument of Mariupol.

<sup>16</sup> The rule of two walls means that a person is believed to be better protected if stays in the part of an apartment separated from the outside with two walls. One wall stops the projectile, the other protects from shell-splinters. In reality, it just gives an illusion of safety, while everything depends on the trajectory of a missile.

Little did they know. Russians had not let evacuation buses pass and pick up civilians.

All those hoping for the evacuation settled in the Drama Theatre. They lived in the basement for two weeks. Nadiika said that the cat behaved so quietly for the whole first week that no one even noticed the pet in her bag.

Volunteers brought food directly to the Theatre. Nadiika and her mother went outside only when they needed to find water. They melted snow to drink. I hadn't heard from them since March 5<sup>th</sup>. Nadiika's mother called me on March 13<sup>th</sup>. She was desperately crying. She told me it was impossible to survive constant shelling. She begged to find out if there would be the evacuation after all, if they had a chance to get out of that hell alive. I knew that 25 municipal buses from Mariupol had been destroyed by direct fire.

The next call was on March 15<sup>th</sup>, when the first cars managed to leave Mariupol. Nadiika's mother was trying to find anyone who could take the three of them but failed. I offered to send only Nadiika to Berdyansk, where I could meet her. But her mother refused to part. That day I started searching for a car offering any sum of money for rescuing my relatives from Mariupol.

The next day a bomb fell on the Drama Theatre. Honestly, in my heart I buried them.

Twelve days later I saw Nadiika and her mother on a Russian channel. They gave interviews. As Nadiika's mother later said, that was a way to let us know that they were alive. A Russian journalist told them where evacuation buses to Russia could be found. On the day when the shelling was less intensive, the three of them decided to leave. After a month spent in a basement, Nadiika could not keep herself from admiring every little thing she saw: "Sky is so blue! Look, a bird!"

Nadiika later said that when the bomb fell on the Drama Theatre, they were in the part of the building that was not severely damaged. When they came out of the basement, they went to the nearest church and stayed there for twelve days. During those days they saw the light only when they lit a candle.

Her mother later said that both times she had called me in March, she had to go up to the water tower to boost the signal, risking being killed by shelling.

Until they reached Russia, they had no access to information. They did not know what was going on with the country during that month. The severe stress caused by a month in the basement was enhanced by the horror of what she learned on the way to Russia.

« Nadiika's mother called me on March 13<sup>th</sup>. She was desperately crying. She told me it was impossible to survive constant shelling. She begged to find out if there would be the evacuation after all, if they had a chance to get out of this hell alive. I knew that 25 municipal buses from Mariupol had been destroyed by direct fire. »



Nadiika sent me very calm messages: "We are doing fine. We are healthy. The cat is with us. They are taking us to Rostov. We tried to go to Zaporizhia, but could not. I can't bring my mother to her senses. It is impossible to calm her down." She also said, "Yes, it was scary, but I am ok." She reacted to everything very calmly. Now she lives in a hostel with her mother, her grandmother and the cat.

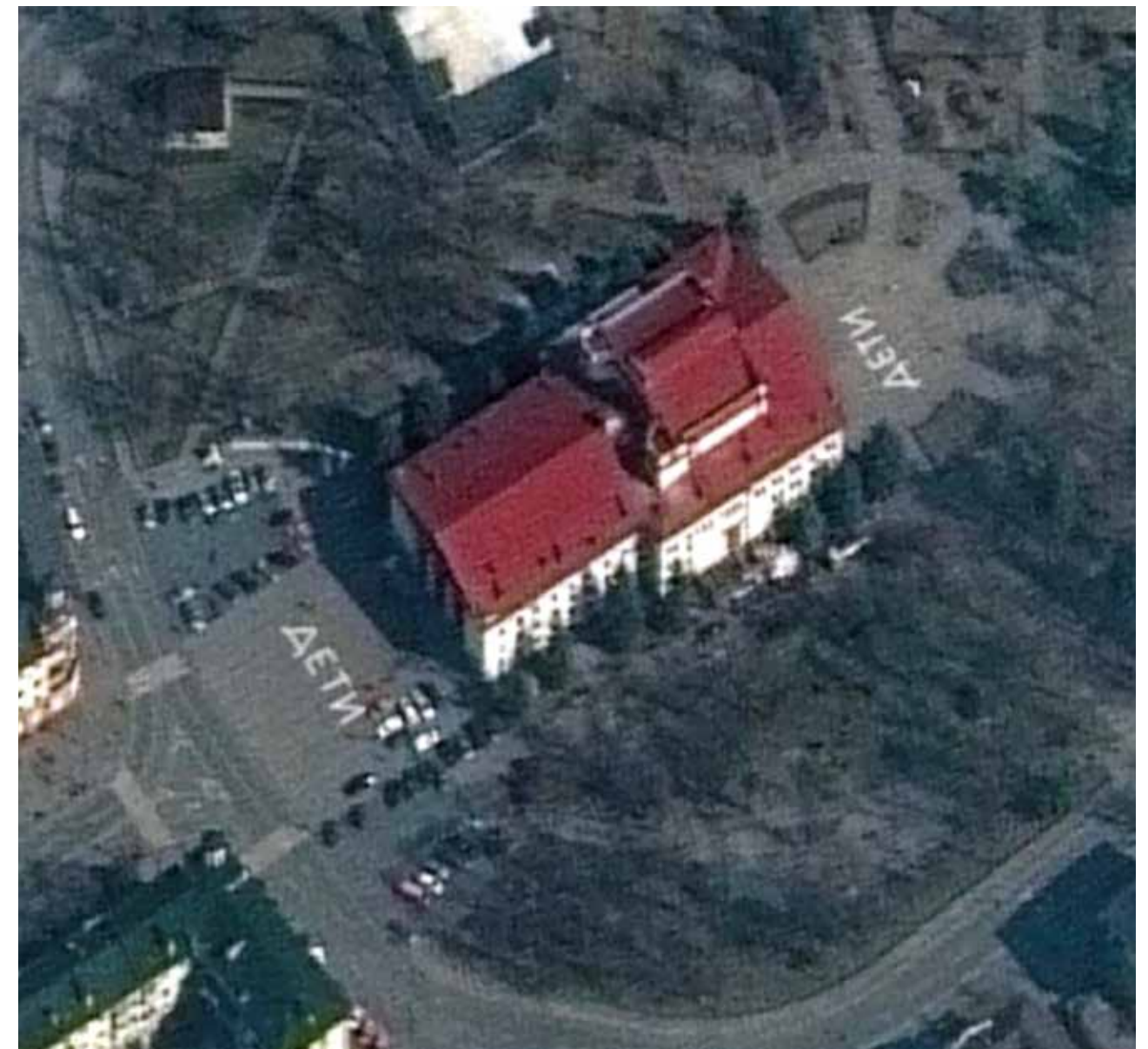
I left Donetsk in 2014, so I know that when a child seems calm at first glance, this means only one thing – stress will manifest itself later. The children who have undergone terrifying events need psychological help. The first month a person's mind is concentrated on a thought "how to survive", and in two or three months one realizes that everything you loved is lost: your home, friends, school...

So far, Nadiika does not want to mention what she experienced in Mariupol. She dreams of returning to her city not knowing that there is nowhere to return to.

« —————  
**N**adiika and her mother found water coming out of the basement. When it was snowing, they melted it. I hadn't heard from them since March 5. Nadiika's mother called me on March 13, crying that it was impossible to survive the constant shelling... She begged to find out if there would be the evacuation after all, if they had a chance to get out of this hell alive. I knew that 25 municipal buses from Mariupol had been destroyed by direct fire.

————— »

**The Drama Theater in Mariupol.  
The word "Children" can be seen from space.  
Satellite image as of March 14, 2022**



Source: Maxar





**Vlada**

*16 y. o., schoolgirl, Vyshhorod*

On the evening of February 23<sup>rd</sup>, I was anxious, especially after watching the evening news. But as usual, I set the alarm clock and went to bed to get a good sleep before school tomorrow.

In the morning, I was woken up by an unusual fuss. I remember very well the moment I got out of bed and felt the floor tremble. That was when I realized the scope of catastrophe – a war had begun.

We decided very quickly to leave the city. During those last 10 minutes in the apartment, I managed to collect the most important things and call a few friends who lived in the neighborhood. Around 5:20 a.m. a message came from the class teacher saying classes were canceled. But it was crystal clear for the whole city that lost its sleep – all plans for that day were canceled. For me, even now that morning is probably the brightest and most horrible memory of my life.

I remember the events of the next few days very poorly because they were constantly repetitive: spending nights in unfamiliar places, then an air raid, hiding in a shelter, browsing latest news. As soon as the siren stopped blaring, or explosions and gunshots subsided, we packed up our belongings and continued our way towards the West of Ukraine. It was a nightmare and I could not weak up.

The only routine that kept me going was chatting with my friends. Although sometimes we had to wait endlessly for someone's reply – a message that everything was OK, that everyone was safe. We are still waiting for a reply from one of my friends who hasn't been in touch since March 6<sup>th</sup>, along with her whole family, and no one knows what happened to them, where they are.

On the fifth day of the war, we reached the border, but my father had to stay because of martial law and total mobilization.

After all, going abroad was a very difficult decision for our family, because my mother and I had to leave everything that constituted our lives and all our loved ones there – in the middle of the warfare, in a half-ruined country where I grew up and connected my future with. And now some people force me to leave everything behind.

« **The war leaves an imprint on everyone. Now the usual sound of a washing machine can cause a storm of emotions. It reminds of the sound of a helicopter, which not so long ago caused panic. And it's scary to realize that my family in particular is still very lucky to have left our city for safety, even though others are going through things day by day that no human being should ever face.** »

Now, being abroad, I also constantly read the news. It's hard to break away from what connects you to your home. But it is also important to distract oneself, otherwise it is impossible to come to one's senses again, to meet a new reality. Of course, getting used to something new is not easy: all those habits that I have never thought about before, now take on a completely different meaning.

Actually, the war leaves an imprint on everyone. Now the usual sound of a washing machine can cause a storm of emotions. It reminds of the sound of a helicopter, which not so long ago caused panic. And it's scary to realize that my family in particular is still very lucky to have left our city for safety, even though others are going through things day by day that no human being should ever face.

This year I will finish school and go to university... I don't know if in these new circumstances I will enter the educational institution I have chosen for myself... But I know that some Ukrainian schoolchildren will never have such a dilemma because their lives were ended too prematurely by senseless and ruthless war.

« **This year I will finish school and go to university... I don't know if in these new circumstances I will enter the educational institution I have chosen for myself... But I know that some Ukrainian schoolchildren will never have such a dilemma because their lives were ended too prematurely by senseless and ruthless war.** »

Shelter for the time of air raid





## Chapter IV. Two Circles of War (stories of servicewomen and those fighting in territorial defense)

*While the war is going on, for security reasons, we present only a few abridged stories of the Ukrainian women-defenders, not publishing their real names or other details. However, after victory, we will issue a full edition, honoring their exploits, which not only the people of Ukraine but the whole world should hear about!*



### «Ember»

*sniper, 35<sup>th</sup> Mykhailo Ostrohradsky Marine Corps Brigade  
(the story is published with permission of Ukrainian Navy Command)*

Many people think that a sniper is not a female profession. But our ladies just rebut this idea. We want to introduce a sniper with the codename «Ember». She was enlisted to AFU because of her strong wish to make her younger brother feel proud of her – he is a military officer as well.

In 2017 «Ember» was transferred to one of the Navy battalions – 35<sup>th</sup> Mykhailo Ostrohradsky Marine Corps Brigade. Since that day she had been regularly sent to take part in operations in eastern regions.

«  
These are not humans but true fascists...even fascists weren't so mean and despicable like these bastards. We will definitely win and I am ready to fight till my last breath! I am so happy our people finally opened their eyes and saw their monstrosity!

This January her contract expired and she decided to have a break. But it was so short that she did not even unpack

her backpack. Just in a month a full-scale invasion began and «Ember» returned to her comrades to defend Ukraine:

- We have to kill them all! These are not humans but true fascists... even fascists weren't so mean and despicable like these bastards. We will definitely win and I am ready to fight till my last breath! I am so happy our people finally opened their eyes and saw their true face!

Glory to Ukraine!







**Liudmyla**

*26 y.o., military, Donetsk / Kyiv*

I am from Donetsk. I was born and raised there. I was brought up by my mother and grandmother. In 2015 they had to leave because of Russian aggression in the East and four years later my grandma died, far from home. She was only a month away from her 80<sup>th</sup> birthday...

The war started for us in 2014. I was almost 19 y.o. at the time and was serving in the Donetsk detention center. Since my childhood I had been dreaming of becoming an officer. For me, honour and dignity are not just words. I saw a lot of

arbitrariness around and I wanted to change something. "If you want to change the world, start with yourself!"

At first I participated in rallies for the Ukrainian future of Donetsk. Peaceful resistance to the Russian occupation did not yield the expected results, so in July 2014 I started serving in a volunteer battalion. We were trained in the use of weapons, to provide first aid and to drive vehicles in combat conditions.

I went through some hotspots. There I learnt what real friendship is and the true value of life. During my service I received contusions, but I didn't go to a hospital back then – it was a hard time, each soldier was worth his/her weight in gold.

« —————  
**A**t the beginning of March I persuaded the doctor to discharge me, picked up my belongings and equipment and returned to my military unit, where I am needed.

» —————



A few years later I transferred from the regiment to become a police instructor, sharing my valuable experience and skills. But then we were dissolved, so I transferred again, this time to a police escort. That move pushed me to come back to what really drove me. So I signed a contract with the AFU.

After the training, my long-time dream of joining the Marines Corps came true! It was a pleasant surprise, as there were no other women in the Marines. I served as a gunner. I had a fancy 12.7 mm machine gun. It was very interesting, a lot of training on land and at sea. My fellow soldiers helped me with everything.

In June 2019 we went on a rotation with the Marines to a combat zone where I received a medium concussion. I was in position, covering others, when our spot was shelled. I did not want to go to the hospital, but the commander ordered to because he saw my condition. Now I am really grateful for that! It took a month of treatment, followed by a medical examination, and I was back in my squad.

In 2020, I enrolled in an officer course at the Military Academy to complete my training and obtain my first officer's rank. A year later, I graduated and was assigned to the Navy. It was super important to me. During my time in the Marines I had had very close friends who died in battles, so I came back to continue our common path.

The training also influenced my personal life – I met my husband there. He is also an officer. He has been with me since I was in the Marines, supporting me during my training.

The second round of the war as of 2022 caught me in a hospital in Kyiv, where they treated the occasional effects of concussions. At the beginning of March I persuaded the doctor to discharge me, picked up my belongings and equipment and returned to my military unit, where I am needed.







## Alina

*27 y.o., Kyiv City Council deputy and volunteer  
(Army SOS), Kyiv*

A month of war. Eight years of war. Nothing has changed dramatically in my life.

My military unit had been at the front long before February 24 – since 2014.

My bug-out bag looked like a backpack stuffed with my belongings, medicine and body armour, which had been laying in the closet for a year. In December 2021, I just added my dog's documents.

Despite the fact that it has been almost two years since I returned from the war to civilian life, this life has not made

me “civilian”. From February 24, the semi-savage nomadic life in war conditions very quickly became usual.

A month of full-scale war brought the loss of friends, who were to live, fight and celebrate our victory. It breaks my heart! Some of my comrades-in-arms are now in Mariupol. And I want to howl in my sense of impotence.

A month of full-scale war brought a lot of pain from the deaths of children, newborns and even unborn Ukrainians and their mothers.

My rage and hatred for the Russians had filled all the cells and vessels of my body long before the full-scale invasion. This is manifested in my totally negative attitude to everything related to the aggressor country – Russia. That is why this month has not opened my eyes to anything new. They have already been opened for eight years.

The war has already left scars all over Ukraine. Starting February 24<sup>th</sup>, the entire country in the centre of Europe has been learning how air raids, phosphorus bombs, missile strikes, “Solntsepek”<sup>17</sup> and other deadly weapons of mass destruction feel like.

This month of full-scale war has united us. It has also taught us not to be afraid to wish death to “Rusnia” (Russians). “Rusnia are not human beings” is now an axiom for our nation.

One month of war. Eight years of war. We will win!

« —————  
**T**he war has already left scars all over Ukraine. Starting February 24<sup>th</sup>, the entire country in the centre of Europe has been learning how air raids, phosphorus bombs, missile strikes, “Solntsepek” and other deadly weapons of mass destruction feel like.  
————— »

<sup>17</sup> Heavy flamethrower system.

Chernihiv, photos by ©Vlad Logvinenko







## Ania

31 y.o., doctor, cynologist, Kyiv

For me, as for many Ukrainians, the war began during the Maidan events in 2014. I have always been a conscious citizen, and at that time I decided that I could benefit my country as a doctor. At the same time, I "adopted" my beloved "little boy" – a Belgian Malinois named Zaris, the smartest creature on earth.

At that time, the AFU were active in the East of Ukraine, they had succeeded in liberating many territories and the search for our dead soldiers became an urgent matter, with the primary concern of underground search. In Ukraine at that time only one dog was properly trained, so noticing Zaris's ability to search, we began training. The hardest part was finding the necessary cadaver odour samples, it seemed to be almost

impossible. But I succeeded! We spent a year and a half on obtaining materials and training, but it was worth it – we reached a record depth of 25-30 metres and started working actively in the field.

In 2018 the humanitarian programme "Cargo 200" was stopped. Finding out that there was a growing need for medical personnel in the demarcation zone, I took Zaris with me and left. During the first rotation I did not even know where exactly I was going. I just knew that I had to do it. We were going to those places, where regular ambulances, being in great fear, refused to go. But people in those territories needed our help too.

At the same time, I trained Zaris to search for explosives. Our experience did not go unnoticed by the relevant structures, to which I was repeatedly invited as an expert. Our last rotation to the East lasted for almost a year – a very long time... We were carefully following the news on the expected Russian invasion to be ready any moment. But after the second false start, it seemed less and less likely to happen.

That night I got home around 4 a.m., my mother had just finished work too. We even laughed about another war start date and went to bed. An hour later, I jumped out of bed, woken up by the familiar sounds that can't be confused with anything else. My first thought was: "I'm in the East. I have to grab my body armour and run..." But as I opened my eyes, I realised that hours, days and even

« **Before the war, many European pet food manufacturers intensively exported their goods to Ukraine. Now we have an extremely negative experience of communication with many of those companies. They refuse to help. I think that history will not forgive such an attitude. This war really shows who is who to the world! The search for our dead soldiers became an urgent matter, with the primary concern of underground search. In Ukraine at that time only one dog was properly trained, so noticing Zaris's ability to search, we began training... We spent a year and a half on obtaining materials and training, but it was worth it – we reached a record depth of 25-30 metres and started working actively in the field.** »



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In the next few days my "tin" will be fixed and Zaris and I will return to Ukraine, where we will be useful to the army again. So far, Zaris has been able to search for the dead, explosives and tobacco products, which are often smuggled and sometimes considered to be a sort of wartime currency. There are now many requests for this kind of work. And then... the war will be over and we will get our long-awaited Ukrainian record as the Donor Dog (most blood donations). Now we have 49 of them.

<sup>18</sup> Lanos is a subcompact car produced by the South Korean manufacturer Daewoo.

<sup>19</sup> A nickname for the car.

months to come would soon change the life of the whole world.

After calling every possible agency and getting a temporary refusal, I realized that we would be called when all hell breaks loose. So I decided to take advantage of the temporary time lap and move the family out. I crammed Mum, grandma, uncle and four dogs into an old Lanos<sup>18</sup> and off we went. It had only been two months since I got my driving license and a friend gave me his old "tin"<sup>19</sup> to learn to drive. All that combined tangibly increased the overall stress in an already pretty stressful situation. It was a real trial by fire!

Now, thanks to a volunteer we met in the East, my family is safe in Warsaw. I am also staying here until the end of the week. We managed to organize humanitarian aid for the animals, because they also need help, as most cities in Ukraine are already on the verge of stocking up on pet food and medicine. I would like to thank our Polish friends, who have fully taken care of the financing and the organization.





## Chapter V. On the Diplomatic Front and at the Decision-Making Level

*«Today the Ukrainian people are protecting not only Ukraine. We are fighting for values of Europe and the world, sacrificing your lives for the future»*

*President of Ukraine  
Volodymyr Zelensky*



**Olena Galushka**

*33 y.o., board member of the Anti-Corruption Action Centre, Kyiv*

Since the beginning of November last year, I have been closely following intelligence statements and expert opinions on a possible large-scale Russian attack on Ukraine, which I have taken very seriously. Back in December, my colleagues and I discussed that Kyiv would be possibly bombed. Of course, then it seemed completely unrealistic and impossible, but it has happened.

« —————  
**R**ussia is committing war crimes in Ukraine. In fact, Russia is violating the Geneva Conventions, they are bullying and killing civilians, they are attacking civilian targets, they are maximally violating the rules of war, and they must be held accountable for that. Not only Putin, but all those who carry out his criminal orders must understand that they will be brought to justice at their own Nuremberg trials.  
————— »

On February 22, two days before the war had started, in his speech, Putin actually unveiled his intentions to wage war on Ukraine. He talked a lot about democracy in Ukraine, about anti-corruption activities, listing all the bodies we created (NABU, SAPO, Constitutional Court, NACP). He even mentioned that the High Council of Justice is currently being cleared by a specifically established body (as a result of our efforts) that includes international experts<sup>20</sup>. We clearly see that one of the reasons for this war is Putin's desire to prevent the building of a true democracy in Ukraine. And that's exactly what we have been busy with for the last eight years. This is the strategic direction in which Ukraine is moving slowly but surely. The Russian war stopped this movement. Russia is now destroying not only democracy, but also our country, its sovereignty, and the Ukrainian people.

Ukraine's post-Maidan reforms have laid a very important institutional framework for a full functioning democracy. Many reforms have already begun to work, we can notice their benefits. Even now during the war, we see decentralization working, local leaders becoming real wartime leaders. We see how united and solidified Ukrainians are with the national idea, which we have also been building for the last eight years. The reforms have already begun to bear fruit, which I am very proud of. After the victory we will continue to do so.

Now my colleagues and I have moved to Warsaw, where we have founded the International Centre

<sup>20</sup> The Parliament of Ukraine adopted laws amending the rules of functioning of the High Qualifications Commission of Judges of Ukraine (HQC) and the High Council of Justice (HCJ) – two key authorities responsible for the selection and supervision of judicial personnel. The acts provide for the members of the HCJ and HQC to be vetted to ensure that they meet the impeccable track record requirement. This helps to fight the judicial “mafia”. Selection is to be carried out by a committee which includes international experts who have the right of veto in order to ensure the transparency of the process. The adoption of the legislation has been welcomed by the EU, the US, the G7 countries and representatives of public anti-corruption organizations.



for Ukrainian Victory. We advocate for the decisions of foreign partners who must help us win. The key areas of our work are:

- Advocacy for military aid to Ukraine. This is the most important area, because the country needs not only any help, but specific weapons that will help it win. First of all, it is air defense and missile defense that will protect our cities and prevent the tragic experience of Mariupol from being repeated. In addition, we need tanks, artillery, ammunition and more.
- Advocacy for sanctions. We insist that Russia be punished most severely for what it is doing to our country. We have launched the **#BlockPutinWallets** campaign, which calls on Western governments to impose sanctions on Russian oligarchs and their families, freeze their assets and deport them from Western countries. But now we have expanded the scale of the campaign and are joining the advocacy of a full embargo on Russian gas and oil imports by European countries. We advocate the inclusion of Russia in the FATF (Financial Action Task Force on Money Laundering), an international anti-money laundering and counter terrorist financing body, founded by the G7 countries. Its decision will make international transactions with Russian residents virtually impossible.
- Advocacy for the Marshall Plan, i.e. the plan to restore Ukraine after victory. We already see that the costs of rebuilding the country will be incredibly high and we need to start thinking how to attract these funds and how we will rebuild the country.
- Documenting war crimes and advocating for a tribunal. Russia commits war crimes in Ukraine. In fact, Russia is violating the Geneva Conventions, they are bullying and killing civilians, they are attacking civilian targets, they are maximally violating the rules of war, and they must be held accountable for that. Not only Putin, but all those who carry out his criminal orders must understand that they will be brought to justice at their own Nuremberg trials.
- Improving humanitarian policy. At present, humanitarian aid to the population in need is largely provided by Ukrainian volunteers, Ukrainian business, while international humanitarian aid often does not achieve its goal. That needs to be changed.

My personal opinion is that we need to demand from the Western partners a full embargo on energy from Russia as soon as possible. The losses of Western economies, which our Western partners emphasize, are not comparable to what Ukrainians are currently experiencing. On the one hand, Western governments say they have managed to block two-thirds of Russia's gold and foreign



exchange reserves and say Russia will not be able to finance the war, but as of April 1 since the start of the war (February 24), Germany alone has paid Russia more than 5 billion euros. Russia has a source of funding for the war, and the longer European countries delay this decision, the more tragic experiences we have in Ukraine, like Mariupol. This is literally genocide of Ukrainians financed by the European Union. If we start working on the diversification of gas supplies now, if Germany takes into account the experience of Ukraine and will not rush to shut down nuclear power plants as part of its reforms, then the enemy's resources can already be depleted with a concerted effort.

As a person who criticized President Zelensky a lot, I must say that, like most of his critics, I discovered him from a completely different side during the war. Although, I do not believe that after the victory all reforms will take place effortlessly, I still expect that after our victory it will be easier to work on reforms and mobilize the government. We will actually have to rebuild the country. Therefore, the future tasks will be more challenging and will require greater cohesion and cooperation of the whole society with the authorities. Also, in this context, we look forward to a swift decision by the European Union to consider our application for membership. This, in my opinion, will also be an impetus for the completion of all the reforms that we had started before the war.

Our future is Victory, and then intensive work to rebuild our country. Membership in the European Union and NATO. Happy and peaceful life in a militarily and economically strong country without fear of Russian aggression.

I also see Ukraine as a role model for other countries seeking their own path of transformation, trying to get free from Russia's influence. Everything we did after the Maidan events in the country and everything we will do after the victory suggested many non-standard solutions to the standard problems faced by the majority of the population of our planet: corruption, corporatism in the judiciary, problems with the police. When we suggest effective solutions to these problems, in the future they can be multiplied in other transitional democracies, in other countries that want to carry out similar reforms.

I believe that Ukraine's status as a geopolitical player will change greatly after our victory. Leaving some objectivity that we have struggled with for a long time behind, the country will definitely gain subjectivity.







### Halyna Yanchenko

*33 y.o., Deputy Chairman of the Servant of the People faction in the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine of the 9<sup>th</sup> convocation, Chairman of the Interim Investigative Commission on Investors' Rights Protection in the VRU, Secretary of the National Investment Council, member of the National Anticorruption Policy Council, has two children, Kyiv*

The war came to me, as it did to many Ukrainians, on February 24<sup>th</sup> at 5 a.m., when I woke up from explosions in Kyiv. I have a son and a daughter, 5 and 10 years old, respectively. We realized that the worst had happened. By 6.30 a.m. I was in the government quarter, like many other deputies. We met to discuss the current situation

and to hold an operational session of the Verkhovna Rada and approve the Presidential Decree on the imposition of martial law.

I realized that Ukraine was facing a large-scale invasion by the Russian occupiers and needed to prepare for unprecedented challenges. On the same day, we launched an initiative for Ukrainian refugees. After such bombing, it became clear that millions of people would flee. Creating conditions in Ukraine and abroad for our internally displaced persons and refugees to find a place to live, especially in the early days of the war, was of paramount importance.

This is how the Prykhystok (Shelter) initiative was born. It is a decentralized online platform **prykhystok.gov.ua**, where every citizen can offer aid to other citizens, including free housing. We made a call through acquaintances, through social media and received a huge response in support of the initiative. 50 volunteers, among them IT specialists and designers, joined the development of the Prykhystok. Literally, IT specialists developed and launched the website overnight. Volunteers agreed to work in the call centre.

Today it is the most visited and most popular platform for providing free housing or shelters to Ukrainians, which works in 40 languages both in Ukraine and other countries around the world. Thanks to this initiative, more than 40,000 IDPs and refugees, without the participation and assistance of the authorities, directly managed to find free housing in different regions of Ukraine and other countries.

« **After such bombing, it became clear that millions of people would flee. Creating the conditions for our internally displaced persons and refugees in Ukraine and abroad to have a place to live, especially in the early days was of paramount importance. This is how the Prykhystok initiative was born. It is a decentralized online platform <https://prykhystok.gov.ua/>, for any citizen who can offer assistance to other people, including free housing.**

»

A few days ago, we were invited to join forces with the government to develop a programme of partial reimbursement of utility costs for people who host IDPs from other regions free of charge. Everyone who registers their housing at the Prykhystok participates in the program. Currently, the website has been given the domain gov.ua in order for this initiative to receive the status of an official initiative, which will increase people's trust in it. Today, the synergy of people, volunteers and our government is very important.

Another initiative I am involved in is the global movement to boycott transnational companies that have remained in Russia. Like many people around the world, I believe that, in fact, such companies literally fuel the Kremlin's military machine. As long as they remain in Russia, they are complicit in murders of Ukrainians. It is cynical and hypocritical to continue earning money in Russia, because this is bloody money, obtained at the cost of lives of Ukrainian children and women. We united forces to launch the #BoycottRussia initiative. The group has supporters in the EU, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States of America and in Canada. We have developed the visuals and called on everyone to boycott such companies. Our aim is to explain that they do not understand the concept of social responsibility, they are cynical profit makers, not caring what they profit from and what the consequences of their actions are.

Today, with the joint efforts of volunteers, we have launched a video about Colgate. They decided to cheat a bit, saying that they are leaving the Russian market, but will remain with basic necessities, which is the main business of this company. The creators have made the video in which the brand's advertising slogan "Colgate Smile For Good Protection" is shown against the background of all events in Ukraine, the bombing of Ukrainian cities, the destruction of residential areas, civilian casualties, the work of medics trying to save the injured.

The third initiative I am working on is no less important from my point of view. I mean, the calculation of the losses. Russia has caused terrible damage to infrastructure, cities and people. Of course, no one can compensate for the loss of lives taken by the Russian invaders, but we believe that these are Russians who must pay for the destroyed cities. They simply wiped 90% of the buildings in Mariupol off the face of the earth. We are working to build new homes for people, hospitals, schools and kindergartens. We are currently gathering information on such destroyed facilities, and, by involving construction experts, we will consider what resources are needed, how long it will take, and what programmes should be developed, so that we can rebuild Ukraine and people can return to their homes after our victory.

These are the main areas. In total, I am involved in seven projects. These include the introduction of sanctions against Russian citizens, the organization of rations for evacuees. We also consider

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»



the possibility of organizing temporary camps for people and work with Canadian developers and architects. I devote much time to raising awareness. On a daily basis, I join European, American, Canadian, Mexican media channels in order to tell the whole truth about the war in Ukraine. There are many areas that we work 24/7 on, we do not have weekends. These days, all of us are trying to do everything we can for the people and for the victory of Ukraine.

Of course, I can't stop thinking about my children. They are as safe as possible in our time. I miss them very much, and I don't know when I will see them or if I see them ever again, because no one can guarantee that nothing happens to me in a day or an hour. I'm afraid I may never see them. That's the only thing I'm afraid of ...

**f** Now it's official. Our #PRYKHYSTOK has moved to gov.ua domain and become a state website. The transition will be smooth, the in.ua address will also be active in the nearest future, and all submitted housing proposals will be valid.

I am happy that we have managed to gather a cool team of volunteers (after the victory I want to find all of you, meet you live, hug and thank you). In one month, we started a professional and powerful service from scratch, thanks to which more than 55,000 Ukrainians found free temporary shelter.

Nevertheless, I dream every day that the moment, when all Ukrainians can return home and no longer seek temporary shelter, will come soon. This day is sure to come. In the meantime, let's roll up our sleeves and work hard!

## #BoykottRussia #StopWarInUkraine

Nestlé will stop selling KitKat and Nesquik in Russia due to aggression in Ukraine. But there are at least 30 brands from Nestlé which will stay on the Russian market. Like Lion. Nestlé should stop funding the Russian budget and sponsoring war in Ukraine.



#SiemensHealthineersAG says that it continues operating in Russia "not to deprive Russians of cancer treatment". At the same time Russia deprives cancer patients in Ukraine of any treatment by dropping bombs on hospitals. Siemens Healthineers AG, stop financing the war in Ukraine!

Do not be silent, write on their page #SiemensHealthineersAG:



## #BoykottRussia #SaveLivesInUkraine

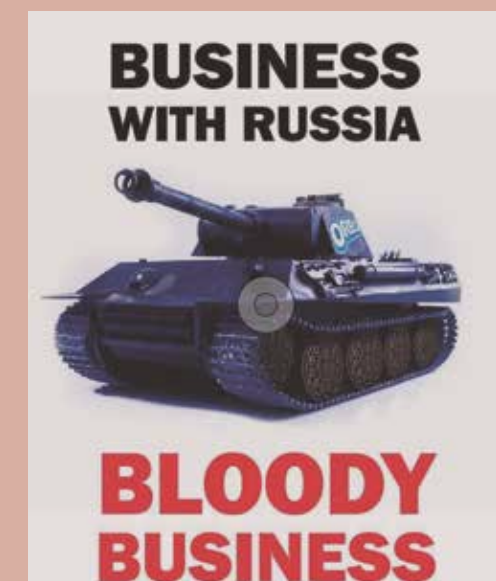
"ONE PLANET. ONE HEALTH" is a slogan of #Danone. It doesn't correspond to what they really do. Danone still hasn't stopped doing business in Russia, it's sponsoring the aggressor country. I call on all consumers in the world #boykott the Danone. Please, choose other brands for which people's lives have value.



The Calvin Klein and Tommy Hilfiger stores in Russia are temporarily closed, and commercial activities are suspended but not terminated. Unlike the Polish LLP Group, which completely left the Russian market. Unfortunately, it is impossible to temporarily suspend the war. Every company that still has an office in Russia is sponsoring massacres in Ukraine.

Write about it #CalvinKlein:

Another idea for truthful #Oreo advertising. The owner of these cookies, brand Mondelez International, has no plans to leave the Russian market and continues trading "food" like they say. Every Oreo cookie sold in Russia is turned into a spare part for Russian weapons.







Галина Янченко разом з Alojzy Malarski та ще 31.

3 квітня о 16:24 · 🌐

Frankly, I thought I got used to the atrocities of this horrible month of the war. I was wrong. New photos from Bucha, Irpin and other liberated territories near Kyiv are beyond humanity.

Men were shot in the heads with their hands tied behind backs. Women, who were raped first and then tortured to death and left on the streets or somewhere outside. 280 (!) corpses in a mass grave in Kyiv region. They killed innocent kids and mined playgrounds. I still can't get over it! Such acts of Russian atrocity is proof that Nazism has revived in Europe again, 80 years after WWII. Nowadays Ukrainians are killed just for being Ukrainians.

Putin isn't a new Hitler, he's much worse than Hitler. He's annihilating the whole country in central Europe in front of everyone. He's trying to wipe our peaceful country off the face of the earth, although we haven't declared war.

We need weapons and support to stop the destruction of our country. We need our sky to be protected by powerful Air Defense Systems that can stop Russian missiles and bombs from hitting us. Without them Putin is just an old psycho, who's bluffing and threatening the whole world.

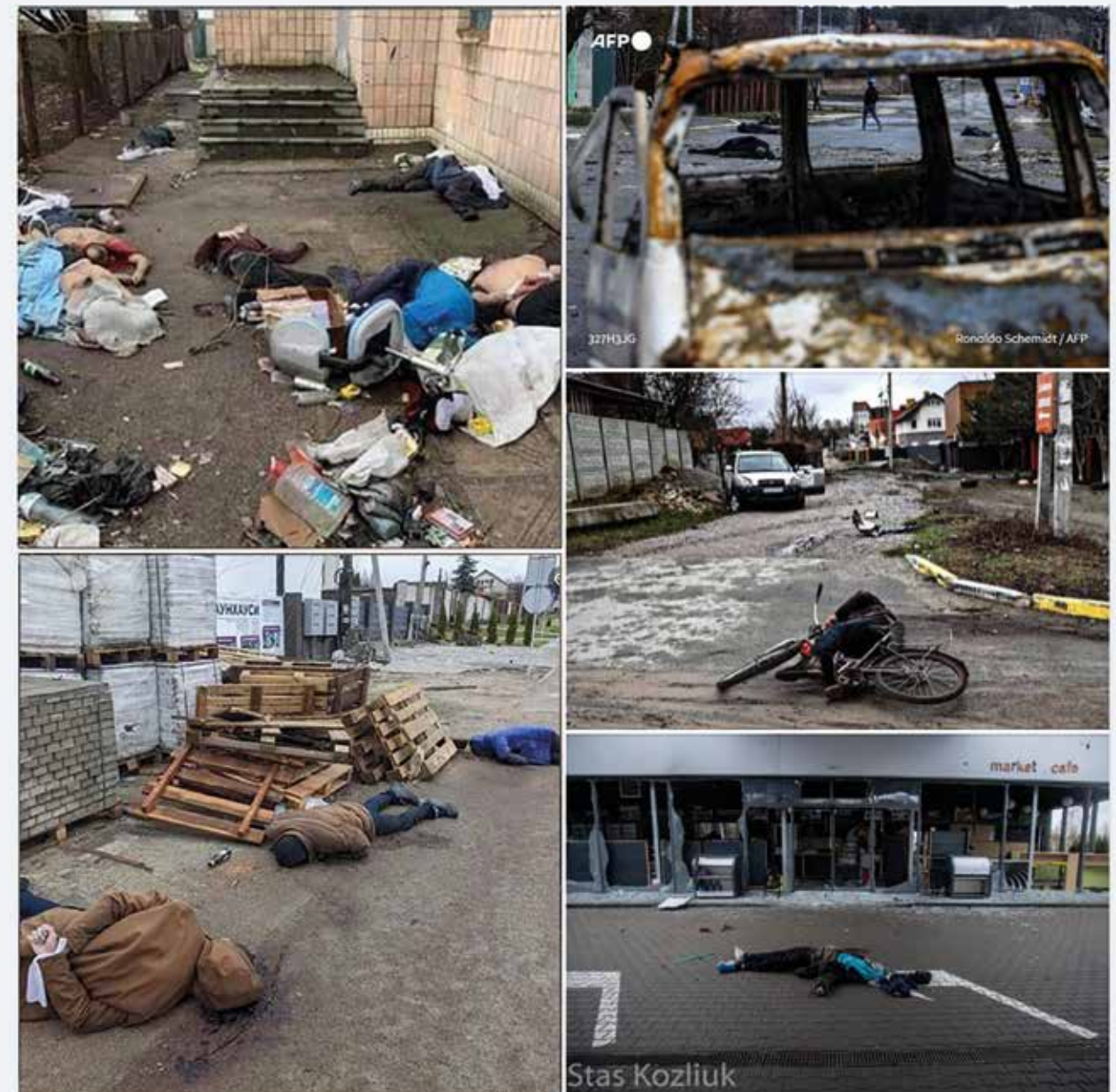
Keep on repeating the message above in foreign mass media! I hope, foreign politicians will hear it and will act accordingly. The only thing that makes Putin so powerful is the fear in foreign leaders' eyes. Putin is getting incredibly nervous because he can't see this fear in Ukrainians or in Ukrainian politicians' eyes.

While our colleagues from the EU are acting slowly and doing the risk assessment on avoiding WWIII, it's already going on in Europe, in Ukraine. What's the point of being afraid of something that has already happened?

Everyone can help us to stop it!

Write to country leaders, politicians, parliament representatives requiring that they provide us with military help and shelter the sky over Ukraine. More severe sanctions on Russia have to be imposed to prevent further war financing!

To defend our peaceful cities and towns, to avoid more casualties – don't be silent, help us to defeat Russian evil!



🙄👍🙏 89

23 коментарі Поширили: 52





## Oleksandra Matviichuk

38 y.o., Centre for Civil Liberties, Kyiv

The first emotion I had at the beginning of the war was ANGER! We lived in our country, minding our own business, putting efforts into building democratic institutions, constantly evolving... And in order to stop Ukraine on this path, Russia demonstratively launched an offensive on four fronts, killing civilians, ignoring international humanitarian law, and trying to destroy us just because we have the dignity to say that we have the right to make democratic choices.

From the first day of the war, I received a huge number of offers to leave Kyiv, to which I replied: "I don't need help with the evacuation, you better help us win!" The main reason why I

decided to stay in the city is love that replaced anger. Love for our Ukrainian values, which we defend today.

Frankly, not only Russia, but also the West did not realize how strong we are. They all believed that Ukraine's defeat was a matter of days. But together we have proven that Ukrainian people are much more courageous than any foreign army.

On the first day of the war, we resumed the activity of the Euromaidan SOS, a volunteer initiative, which works in different directions. The first one we started with may be called "logistical". We maintain a database of initiatives across the country that cover the needs of evacuation, defense, assistance to people and animals, provide information and contact people who will benefit from such initiatives. Every person, every Ukrainian family today lives its own unique story, which becomes the history of the entire Ukrainian people, the Ukrainian nation; a story full of pain and hope.

As for my family, my mother is safe now, she managed to flee, but I have been out of touch with my father for several weeks. It's my constant pain. As a doctor, he remained in the temporarily occupied territory and I have no idea what has happened to him.

We are active in the international arena through the Diaspora, international human rights networks, partners and friends

« I was invited to give a speech at the opening panel of the OSCE event for 57 participating countries. I participated online because I didn't want to leave Kyiv at such difficult times. »



Photo taken at OSCE event

around the world. We are constantly conducting thematic campaigns, including closing the sky, SWIFT sanctions. We are starting a new one on the humanitarian corridors. This is a huge problem, because the Russian Federation does not give permission for their openings and shoots people who are trying to escape. We have recently asked the international organizations of the Mission to ensure an international presence in the hotspots.

We have Facebook and Twitter working 24/7 to report information that is useful for people, not just news. We publish information in different languages, and there is a whole group of translators ensuring that. A whole team of people tirelessly make editing. We broadcast information on human rights violations abroad.

Another important initiative that we have launched recently, but which is gaining momentum every day is documenting war crimes. Now we are purposefully collecting video evidence of intentional attacks on civilian targets and civilians. Committing war crimes on a large scale is the enemy's tactic in this war. Today, we can already say that these are targeted shelling of civilian objects: temples, schools, hospitals, kindergartens. This is not an error, it is common in all cities where the aggressor's army is advancing. In addition, in cooperation with government agencies, we began to make a database of prisoners and missing persons.

Women play a pivotal role in each of these initiatives. In these difficult times, women are everywhere: they have joined the territorial defense, they are engaged in logistics, provide medical care at the forefront, document war crimes... Women today are really in the vanguard of fighting for the values of the free world!

Looking at this wave of solidarity that has engulfed Ukraine, when people help each other, risking their lives for the sake of those they have never seen before, you realize how fantastic it is.

« I don't need help with the evacuation, you better help us win!" We have recently asked the international organizations of the Mission to ensure an international presence in the hotspots. Another important initiative is documenting war crimes. Now we are purposefully collecting video evidence of intentional attacks on civilian targets and civilians. The enemy commits war crimes as a tactic for this war. »





**Olexandra Matviychuk** ✓

28 березня о 16:29 · 🌐



Euromaidan SOS Appeal regarding illegal movement of Ukrainian citizens from Mariupol and other Ukrainian cities to Russia  
26th of March. 2022

Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, the city of Mariupol is under siege and struggles under constant shelling. According to the local authorities, 80% of the urban infrastructure is destroyed resulting in an overwhelming humanitarian crisis.

Izium, Volnovakha, Irpin, Ivankiv, Bucha, Gostomel, Chernihiv and other Ukrainian cities came under fire from the Russian army, which for several weeks has thwarted attempts by the Ukrainian side to deliver humanitarian aid and evacuate civilians. Instead, the Russian Federation commits war crimes in the form of illegal displacement of civilians from Mariupol, Volnovakha, Gostomel, etc. to the territory of the Russian Federation.

According to official records, this maleficent practice already affected a few thousand people from Mariupol, mainly from the city's left bank. Relatives of the forcefully removed inform that many either lacked IDs or the documents were confiscated. Affected people are relocated against their will to Russia directly or to the temporarily uncontrolled territories of Crimea or the Donbas region. These acts of aggression against civilians are accompanied by an intense disinformation campaign claiming that Russian forces now control several Ukrainian cities in the area, and other government-controlled cities refuse to take in refugees.

There are numerous reports of Russian filtration camps for forcefully relocated Ukrainian civilians to be settled in distant regions of the Russian Federation. One of such camps is already operating in Dokuchaevsk of the Donetsk region. Russian Federal Security agents interrogate the prisoners if they have relatives serving in the Ukrainian army or police. The actions described above directly contradict the provisions of article 49 of the IV Geneva Convention Relative To The Protection Of Civilian Persons In Time Of War of 12 August 1949. Additionally, the actions mentioned above violate the provisions of Article 85 of the Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I), and other commonly accepted provisions of the International Humanitarian Law.

Moreover, the forceful relocation of civilians cannot be treated as an evacuation since the Russian Federation did not occupy or control

Mariupol prior to these events. Even if speak about forced relocation of civilians on temporary occupied (by Russia) territories, the actions on behalf of Russian forces are still in direct violation of the established norms of the International Humanitarian Law because: 1) civilians are relocated outside of the occupied regions without any appropriate military or humanitarian justification, people are moved to the remote Russia regions to "bolster economy"; 2) the confiscation of IDs and other documents signifies that relocation is not temporary because Ukrainian civilians will not be able to return; 3) the Russian occupation forces separate families, take away mobile phones and force people to work under duress; 4) Russia continuously refuses to establish safe passages to allow civilian population to evacuate from besieged cities to safe locations controlled by Ukrainian government; 5) according to numerous records, Russian forces opened fire on civilians fleeing war zones to safer regions controlled by Ukrainian government. These actions clearly indicate that Russian forces commit war crimes in direct violation of Article 8 (2)(b)(viii) of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

On March 24 the International Committee of the Red Cross contacted the Ministry of International Affairs of the Russian Federation with the plan to open a new office in Rostov-on-Don, Russia.

It is our firm belief that if such an office of the International Committee of the Red Cross is on the territory of Russia, its main goals should be the protection of the rights of Ukrainian civilians illegally relocated, prevention of further transportation of Ukrainian civilians to the remote areas of the Russian Federation, helping relocated civilians to restore legal documentation, contact their relatives, and return to Ukraine.

We would like to draw additional attention to the role of the ODIHR, OSCE, the Permanent Council of the OSCE in Vienna, the European Commissioner for Human Rights, monitoring mechanisms of the European Council, the relevant regional initiatives and mechanisms of the UN, the United Nations Human Rights Council, The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, and the International Committee of the Red Cross to use all available mechanisms and means to protect Ukrainian people who were forcefully relocated to the Russian Federation, and to ensure that Russia abides by the norms of the International Humanitarian Law.

The appeal is open for signing by CSOs. If you support the request, please fill out this form: <https://forms.gle/BPgjetuCguDzJZ819>





**Olexandra Matviychuk** ✓

27 березня о 17:37 · 🌐



Euromaidan SOS: the List of the Activists Missing or Detained by Russia and Proposals regarding a Joint Action Campaign Aiming to Protect Them 26 of March, 2022

Euromaidan SOS draws attention to the persecution of local government officials, journalists, religious leaders, volunteers and civil society activists on the territories of Ukraine temporarily occupied by the Russian Federation following its invasion in February 2022.

We receive appeals from civil society activists and their relatives who have suffered from threats, physical violence, enforced disappearances, arbitrary detentions and other forms of persecution in Melitopol, Kherson, Berdyansk, Kakhovka, Slavutych and other cities and settlements.

In 2014, Russia already pursued a deliberate policy of a kind in order to quickly gain control over Ukrainian territories. At the time, pro-Russian illegal armed groups were either physically eliminating people with active stands who could peacefully resist the occupation or evicting them from the region.

Today, Russia applies the same policy deliberately, as it cannot hold occupied cities due to the active resistance of the local population.

Given the growing number of hostage-taking cases, these actions should be considered as a prohibited method of warfare. The correctness of such an approach is confirmed by the specific purpose of these actions, namely, to force civil society activists to cooperate with the representatives of the aggressor country or to terminate public activities of human rights defenders, journalists and other persons protected by the international humanitarian law.

Euromaidan SOS reminds that in the context of an international armed conflict, the detention of civilians is strictly prohibited under Articles 34 and 49 of the Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons as of 12 August 1949 and Article 75 of the Additional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions as of 12 August 1949 regarding protection of victims of international armed conflicts (Protocol 1) as of 8 June 1977.

In addition, the rescued civil society activists report on the threats, illegal physical violence and inadequate conditions of detention, which violate the guarantees of treatment of civilians and is to be considered a war crime.

In connection with the above, Euromaidan SOS urges:

1. representatives of civil society in Ukraine and other countries to join the campaign to protect people who have been left alone with the occupier, and to do so, to fill up this form: <https://forms.gle/enr5822SvPrJZC6Y7>

2. people who have witnessed a person's detention or have any other information about persecution in the occupied territories, report it in the form: <https://forms.gle/d9g8q51BikCE5pnN9>

3. ODIHR OSCE, the OSCE Permanent Council, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, monitoring and convention mechanisms of the Council of Europe, geographical and thematic mandates of the United Nations, UN Human Rights Council, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA), International Committee of the Red Cross to ensure an international presence in Ukrainian territories, temporarily occupied after the Russian invasion in February 2022, and to take active actions to protect civilian activists from persecution.

Below we provide a public part of the list of representatives of civil society, who as of March 26, 2022 are missing or being illegally detained by Russia (the list is not full and data is constantly being updated):

1. Tetiana Bezliudna, deputy of the village council of Andriyivka village, Chernihiv region;
2. Dmytro Vasyliiev, secretary of Nova Kakhovka city council, Nova Kakhovka, Kherson Region;
3. Volodymyr Karabero, head of Manhush territorial community of Mariupol district, Donetsk region;
4. Oleksiy Kartsan, head of the village of Hremyach, Novhorod-Siverskyi district, Kharkiv region;
5. Victor Marunyak, head of Starozburyiv united territorial community of Starostyn district, Holoprystan city council of Skadovsk district, Kherson region;
6. Yevhen Matveev, Mayor of Dniprorudne, Zaporizhia region;
7. Oleksandr Musienko, head of Chulakiv united territorial community of Holoprystan district, Kherson region;
8. Yuri Palyukh, secretary of Skadovsk city council, Skadovsk, Kherson Region
9. Oleksandr Ponomarev, member of Ukrainian parliament, disappeared in the city of Berdyansk;
10. Serhiy Pryima, head of Melitopol district council, city of Melitopol, Zaporizhia region;
11. Ivan Samoidyuk, first deputy mayor of Energodar;
12. Mykola Sikalenko, head of Tsyrukuniv united territorial community of Kharkiv district, Kharkiv region;
13. Volodymyr Tyurin, deputy head of civil-military administration of Shchastya, the city of Shchastya, Luhansk region;



14. Oleksandr Shapovalov, mayor of Beryslav, Kherson region;
15. Mykola Masliy, deputy of Kupyansk city council, Kharkiv region.
16. Tetiana Svrydenko, head of Ivankivka village council of Vyshhorod district, Kyiv region;
17. Zarivnyi Oleksandr Hryhorovych, City council official; Oleshkiv City Council of Kherson Region.
18. Mykhailo Reznikov, pastor of the Church of Evangelical Baptists, Mariupol, Donetsk region.
19. Andriy Fomenko, minister of the Church of Evangelical Baptists, Mariupol, Donetsk region.
20. Vasyl Vyrozub, priest of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, Odesa region.
21. Dmytro Bodyu, bishop of the "Word of Life" Christian Evangelical Church, Melitopol, Zaporizhzhia region.
22. Serhiy Tsygipa, public figure, Nova Kakhovka city, Kherson region.
23. Max Levin, photojournalist, disappeared on Front Line Near Kyiv.
24. Kumok Mykhailo, publisher "Local News – Melitopol", Melitopol, Zaporizhzhia region.
25. Khropun Volodymyr Vasyliovych, Red Cross volunteer; Kyiv region.
26. Julia Ivannikova-Katsemon, Red Cross volunteer; Kyiv region.
27. Mykola Budalovskyi, head of the village Andriyivka, Chernihiv region.
28. Olexandr Medvediov, head of Snovsk territorial community;
29. Bozhko Hryhoriy, Businessman, former deputy of the Chernihiv regional council, Chernihiv region.
30. Dmytro Afanasyev, deputy of Korabel' regional council, Kherson region
31. Dmytro Takadjy, head of Nyzhni Sirohozy urban-type settlement, Kherson region.
32. Sukhenko Olha Petrivna, head of Motyzhyn village, Makariv united territorial community, Kyiv region.
33. Talalai Ihor Viktorovych, volunteer (transported people from Mariupol to Dnipro), Mangush, Donetsk region.
34. Julia Payevska, volunteer and paramedic, Mariupol, Donetsk region.
35. Oleg Myroshnyk, Bilovodsk settlement mayor, Luhansk region.
36. Vasyl Mitko, Nikolske settlement mayor, Donetsk region.



**Olexandra Matviychuk** ✓

24 березня о 13:59 · 🌐



Global Initiative "Breaking the Vicious Circle of Russia's Impunity for Its War Crimes" (short name "Tribunal for Putin")

Ukraine has been fighting against new Russian armed aggression for exactly a month. The Kremlin uses war crimes as its warfare tactics. Foreign observers are talking about huge losses, and we feel the pain and suffering of civilian people. No military purposes may justify such actions.

The Russian Federation and its leaders have escaped responsibility for war crimes in Chechnya, Moldova, Georgia, Syria and Africa. Russian military leaders have never been punished and thus, were encouraged to commit more and more crimes. This time we unite our efforts to break the vicious circle of impunity.

The Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union, the Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group and the Center for Civil Liberties are establishing a global initiative to bring to justice the perpetrators of war crimes committed during the armed aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine.

We work with the most authoritative NGOs in their regions: Chuguyiv Human Rights Protection Group, Northern Human Rights Protection Group, Cherkasy Human Rights Protection Center, Kherson Regional Foundation for Compassion and Health, Kherson branch of the Committee of Voters of Ukraine, Territory of Success, Odesa regional branch of the Committee of Voters of Ukraine, NGO "MART" in Chernigiv, Educational Human Rights House Chernihiv, Podil Legal League, Human Rights Group "SICH" in Dnipro, "SIM" Legal and Political Research Center in Lviv and other organizations (the list is being updated). This initiative is joined by public receptions of the UHHRU in Kramatorsk, Toretsk, Mariupol, Pokrovsk, Chernivtsi, Cherkasy, Uzhhorod.

We will be documenting the events which have signs of crimes under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes) in all regions of Ukraine which became the targets of attacks of the Russian Federation.

In particular, we will collect evidence and facts about intentional attacks on civilians, civilian and protected sites, intentional murders, tortures and cruel treatment, rapes and other forms of sexual violence, forced disappearances, use of protected individuals as "living shields", repressions against identified groups (Roma people, LGBT communities, religious people), the use of indiscriminate weapons in populated areas, etc.



We will work at the international level to immediately use existing mechanisms of the United Nations, Council of Europe, OSCE, EU and the International Criminal Court to stop the brutality of these violations. We welcome organizations from Ukraine and other countries that would like to join and become our partners. We would also eagerly coordinate our actions with international organizations and networks, government agencies, public associations, volunteer initiatives and groups who also engaged in this work to achieve our common goal.

Contacts of the representatives of the Initiative:

Oleksandr Pavlichenko [pavlichenko@helsinki.org.ua](mailto:pavlichenko@helsinki.org.ua)

Oleksandra Matviichuk [avalaina@gmail.com](mailto:avalaina@gmail.com)

Yevhen Zakharov [zakharove@gmail.com](mailto:zakharove@gmail.com)



Kharkiv, photos by © Vlad Logvinenko







**Svitlana Startseva**

*56 y.o., Deputy Director of the Public Utilities and Housing Policy Department of the Ministry of Community and Territorial Development, Kyiv*

Everything that happened on February 24, 2022, I had already experienced in 2014 in the Donetsk region. I am from Donetsk, I carried my parents under bombardment on my shoulders. I have crossed the line of demarcation many times and I know a lot about the war. That's why when the war started in Kyiv, it was devastating to me! I was looking at the people who rushed to their cars on the morning of February 24<sup>th</sup> and left the city, and decided that I would not go anywhere. I started from scratch eight years ago and I can't give up and run away from the war again. Now I work and try to help those who are fleeing the war, suffering from the destruction of their homes, cities, and their lives.

The Ministry of Community and Territorial Development unites the work of territorial communities in Ukraine and mobilizes them to perform all tasks set by the President of Ukraine, the Government and the Verkhovna Rada. The most pressing issue for the Ministry today is the resettlement of people who were forced to move to other regions of Ukraine in order to save their lives and the lives of their loved ones. We are working to create appropriate conditions for IDPs. We help regional state administrations, which have become military-civil administrations since the imposition of martial law, to provide communication and organizational mechanisms so that some citizens of Ukraine can flee and other ones can shelter them. To this end, on March 19, 2022, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine adopted Resolution №333 "On approval of the procedure for reimbursement of costs for temporary accommodation of IDPs who moved during martial law and do not receive monthly targeted assistance to IDPs to cover accommodation costs including the payment for housing and municipal services." This is one of the first regulations developed by our Ministry to help both those who move and shelter them.

Currently, together with the deputies, we are working out reimbursement mechanisms for payments to the Ukrainians for their destroyed or damaged housing. As of now 5 draft laws regulating this issue have been registered in the Verkhovna Rada.

The staff of our Department and the staff of the Ministry of Regional Development (primarily its leadership) are involved in the development of these draft laws. We strive to accelerate their adoption and move on to developing a financial procedure for reimbursement. It is planned that citizens who lost their homes as a result of the armed aggression of the Russian Federation will be able to either buy housing on the market immediately, or spend the money provided to them on construction. I believe that the adoption of this law is also important to people to know that they will not be left alone with their problems.

In addition, we participated directly in preparing proposals for the resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine "On approval of the procedure for determining damage and losses caused to Ukraine as a result of armed aggression of the Russian Federation", which provides reimbursement to all businesses, including: agro-industrial complex; entrepreneurs; energy complex; infrastructure facilities that provide livelihoods (water utilities, heating networks); managers of the housing stock.

We are currently developing the Methodology for calculating losses and the legal framework for the losses reimbursement.

The principal focus is on children. Today, under the auspices of the Ministry of Social Policy, the State Emergency Service and the State Service of Children's Rights Protection, the Children Headquarters has been established to develop mechanisms for the protection of minors.

In the current martial law, the economic situation is extremely complicated, within the payments for public utilities. For objective reasons, people cannot pay them in full. Therefore, the Ministry is working in this area. We also try to eliminate the consequences of emergencies.

These days, we are arranging meetings with regional state administrations, local governments, the Association of Ukrainian Cities, the Association of United Territorial Communities, which will consider the Cabinet of Ministers Resolutions №332 and №333 on receiving housing and accommodation for IDPs, as well as awareness-raising work among the population directly in territorial communities. To facilitate the search for housing, volunteers have created and the government has supported the electronic service "PRYKHYSTOK" (Shelter) at <https://prykhystok.gov.ua>.

The Ministry constantly monitors the destruction and damage of infrastructure and housing construction on the basis of reports from regional state administrations. All destroyed houses are registered, information about the owners of destroyed houses is collected.

« **Today, according to rough estimates, at least half a trillion dollars is needed to repair the destruction caused by the invasion of Russia.**

Today, according to rough estimates, at least half a trillion dollars is needed to repair the destruction caused by the invasion of Russia. »

To provide our citizens with temporary housing, we are currently working in two areas:

1. collect information on the needs of modular homes where refugees from Luhansk and Donetsk lived after the 2014 Russian military aggression. At that time there were six modular towns in Ukraine, where refugees were accommodated. European countries offer such homes as humanitarian aid for rapid deployment in safe areas in Ukraine. This aid is already on its way to Ukraine;
2. establishment of various funds as soon as possible, including social housing stock, which local governments can independently form from the premises that have not been damaged, and convert them into housing for those who lost it.

For permanent housing, the work will be conducted in two areas:

1. housing under preferential programmes;
2. housing under reimbursement programmes for destroyed housing.

I strongly believe in our Victory! We will build a new beautiful country and I'm optimistic about the future.





**Iryna Shumik**

*39 y.o., Director General of the Directorate of Vocational Education of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, Kyiv*

After February 24<sup>th</sup>, we all switched to a 24-hour work-mode. Now days off or workover do not exist for us, because we realize the importance of tasks that the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine is facing today. Personally I, holding a position of this level, feel a great responsibility for those people who stand next to me and behind me. Of course, constant air strikes (I'm in Kyiv now), devastating reports of deaths and destruction are derailing me, but I constantly feel support from colleagues who are now in touch by all possible means. This unity inspires me and helps to go on. My

grandfather, a native of Volyn, once said: "Hold on, kozak, You will become an Ataman one day"<sup>21</sup>. The war made me realize the true meaning of this proverb. I have no right to be weak.

The Ministry of Education and Science has created a website <https://saveschools.in.ua/>, which presents the latest information on the state of affairs: the number of children of war is 7 million; the number of damaged educational institutions is 649 (as of March 27, 2022), 74 of which were completely destroyed. The information is provided in Ukrainian and English, as we are trying to convey the consequences of Russian aggression to the civilized world. Data is also presented as infographics on the destruction of each region of Ukraine with photos of destroyed schools and universities. So far, there is a lack of information about the Luhansk and Kyiv regions. As for the Chernihiv region, there is no connection with people at all, in Mariupol, in fact, there is nothing left of educational institutions. The information we receive from colleagues is constantly being updated on this website, so it is absolutely trustworthy.

Currently, the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine is working on a new procedure for admission to institutions of higher, professional and vocational education, where we try to maintain transparency and unity of approaches to assessing knowledge. At the same time, we want to make this admission campaign friendly and convenient for young entrants who are experiencing great stress this year, and some of them are even deprived of the opportunity to attend school.

An All-Ukrainian online school helps to organize the education of those children who are in the zone of active hostilities or have relocated. The Ministry has ensured that access to this school is free and easy. In addition, school lessons are broadcasted on television channels according to a single all-Ukrainian schedule, which is published on the Ministry's website. Other private online schools, such as the Atmosphere School and the Optima, accept all those willing to attend them for free.

Today some educational institutions in the Kherson and Donetsk regions, where teachers, being under occupation, organize online learning. The experience of distance learning gained by teachers and children during the pandemic has become an advantage in our new reality.

Truth to be told, we are facing many challenges, in particular in the field of vocational education. First of all, it is difficult to conduct practical classes, while acquiring a profession is based on mastering certain skills: a seamstress has to work with a sewing machine; a chef has to cook in the kitchen. Therefore, today we have significantly restructured curricula and guidelines. We continue to maintain work in the regions where

it is possible; in other areas, we are looking for additional resources and tools. All the recommendations and information materials are posted on the Ministry's website. Now we are negotiating with international partners to provide access to online simulators to ensure the opportunity for our students to develop practical skills.

Today, students who fled can apply for academic mobility programmes. We are grateful to our European partners, who support the idea that our students have to study following national curricula and graduate from Ukrainian higher education institutions. Thus, exchange of these programmes and adaptation of educational content are ongoing.

The biggest problem is that children are stressed, confused, and often have no idea what to do. So now, in addition, we are preparing an educational chatbot, which is aimed to summarize all the information about education with access both from abroad and in Ukraine.

In recent days, many different opinions about the organization of the educational process and training during the war have been expressed among the public. I am very surprised by the position: how can we talk about education, schools are destroyed, we are in basements, children are traumatized, etc. To leave children and the youth without education now means to throw them into darkness without the light in the end of the tunnel. It means leaving them to their own devices, with their fears and psychological traumas caused by the war. I do not understand those people who consider such approach to be right.

I think that most of those who sow discord and panic among the people are on their couches watching TVs in safety. Because those who actually suffer, not leaving bomb shelters for days, entertain and educate their children in every possible way – sing songs, draw, learn poems, read books.

Obviously, one of our advantages in this war is education!

« **The Ministry of Education and Science has created a website <https://saveschools.in.ua/>, which reports trustworthy information: the number of children of war is 7 million; the number of damaged educational institutions is 649 (as of March 27, 2022), 74 of which were completely destroyed. The information is provided in Ukrainian and English, as we are trying to convey the consequences of Russian aggression to the civilized world.** »

<sup>21</sup> A Ukrainian proverb meaning good things come to those who do not give up.





**Svitlana Salomatova**

*54 y.o., President at the Geopolitical Alliance of Women, Head of the Delegation of the Ukrainian Women in Support of the United Nations, Kyiv.*

The XXI century. Europe. The neighboring country is taking over territories, smashing everything around: killing children, women, men, millions of families living in freedom and fighting for their right to an effective model of the state, destroying cities and villages, roads and airports, factories. Our country... Against this background, the invading country led by the insane sadist holds thousands of official meetings and concerts aimed at strengthening the fighting spirit of the Russians to destroy Europeans as enemies .

It sounds like a thriller, but it is not. This is the reality and the tragedy of our times.

Soon this contagious virus of the “Russian spiritual staples” will spread across Europe, and the “liberators” will kill civilians further to the West. Get ready, Europe! Balanced policy does not work any more.

These days, I am in Romania, where I brought my family on March 6<sup>th</sup> – two elderly people with unstable health and a minor.

I have always believed that everyone can be useful when doing what he/she is capable of best and enjoys. Today, my two main tasks are to make the lives of Ukrainian women and their children in Romania as comfortable as possible and to continually inform the international community about the war crimes committed by the Russian Federation in Ukraine.

This week, as the head of the independent delegation of Ukrainian women to the UN, I was honored to represent Ukraine at the 66<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission on the Status of Women. I told the international community about the state of affairs in our country: the need to close the sky over Ukraine, about Mariupol, about the violation of international norms and agreements by Russia, about the intentional killing of women and children...

A burning issue, which was raised during the specific event within the session, was the problem of clearing the Ukrainian territories of mines. Today, 1/6 of the territory of Ukraine is mined and we must

« —————  
**T**his week, as the head of the independent delegation of Ukrainian women to the UN, I was honored to represent Ukraine at the 66<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission on the Status of Women. I told the international community about the state of affairs in our country: the need to close the sky over Ukraine, about Mariupol, about the violation of international norms and agreements by Russia, about the deliberate intentional killing of women and children...  
————— »

think about the consequences today. We will definitely win! However, almost 100 years are needed to completely demine our territories. That is why we have created an international consortium, which includes leading experts in this field and NGOs that will take care of this issue.

Such initiatives will help clear our land from the invaders’ mines, the sky from their planes and missiles, and the hearts of Ukrainians from bitter tears.

With the help of our Romanian friends, we have already achieved a lot. In the first days we met with the Ambassador of Ukraine in Romania, Paun Rohovei. As a result, an educational project with the Embassy was launched. After a meeting with the Mayor of Bucharest, Clotilde Armand, we got a wonderful room in the heart of the city for 600 m<sup>2</sup>, and designed it to organize leisure for at least 30 Ukrainian children, which in turn will give their mothers time and opportunity to adapt and think about the future. We do realize, if we do not win the war soon enough, women will have nowhere to come back to and have to look for a job or develop their own businesses. Therefore, employment of Ukrainian women is a priority.

I would like to thank all the countries supporting Ukrainians who stayed penniless and whose homes are completely ruined. Thank you, friends!

We will never be defeated! Ukrainians will never give up!

Glory to Ukraine!





## Chapter VI. Our Hands, Shoulders and Wings (stories of volunteers, activists and working women)

*Don't hesitate to go ahead and cross the line,  
Keep Your eyes on the goal, be sure.  
You have a mind, a heart, a spine,  
Your thoughts are pure and views – mature.  
(Ukrainian band «No Limits»,  
a song «Will»)*

Volunteers. Photo «Second Home Ivano-Frankivsk».







**Olga Shulgach-Popenko**

*42 y.o., family doctor, Kyiv*

The morning of February 24<sup>th</sup> started for me like any other. Due to extreme workload that doctors had been experiencing during the picks of COVID-19 pandemic, I simply did not hear any explosions in the morning. I was getting my underage daughter ready for school when my ex-husband, who lives in Irpin, called me to tell that the war had started... I did not hesitate for a moment to stay in Kyiv and help patients, most of whom became like family to me over the years.

On the first day, only four doctors went to work. Others either lived in remote districts and could not get to the clinic, or hurried out of the city. For many, in the first days Kyiv seemed to be the most dangerous place. A large number of my colleagues were literally stuck in Irpin, Hostomel and Bucha<sup>22</sup>.

For the first few weeks, people were hiding in the basement of the clinic using it as a bomb shelter: women with small children actually lived there, going out for a few hours a day to eat and bring what they needed. However, after the detection of a coronavirus infection in one of the families, it was decided to close the basement. Thus, the only available bomb shelters for my patients were two subway stations, located at a distance of 1.5 and 2 kilometres away.

Today we have five doctors working from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. seven days a week. Our functional responsibilities have changed dramatically: in addition to the usual consultations, online consultations have been added, because we cannot abandon internally displaced persons. Before war, a doctor was responsible only for prescribing medicines, today the issue of logistics is also on our shoulders. I constantly liaise with volunteers, who deliver medicines to patients. A burning issue is the transportation of medicine to patients in other regions of Ukraine, or even abroad. I've never talked on the phone so much!

« —————  
**O**ur functional responsibilities have changed dramatically: in addition to the usual consultations, online consultations have been added, because we cannot abandon internally displaced persons. Before war, a doctor was responsible only for prescribing medicines, today the issue of logistics is also on our shoulders. I constantly liaise with volunteers, who deliver medicines to patients.  
————— »

Patients' inquiries have changed significantly, too. Vaccination services are still in demand, especially among those planning to travel to the EU; members of the Armed Forces and the territorial defense come with a variety of complaints starting with the common cold and ending with moderate injuries; patients who need to take specific medicines on a regular basis but can not get them in drug stores, because not everyone is able to stand in line for 3-5 hours.

<sup>22</sup> Towns around Kyiv that suffered a lot from Russian invaders.



Martial law forced doctors to develop communication and management skills: today, all my colleagues who stay in Kyiv, has many contacts of volunteers and pharmacists. We reached them to find necessary medicines, sometimes buying them ourselves and sending them to those in need. However, it should be noted that now, thanks to the city authorities, we have such stocks of basic medicines that we could only dream of in pre-war times.

But the most important skill I had to acquire was providing psychological support. Most patients, mostly young people, are experiencing panic attacks, insomnia, fear and despair. Someone has already lost loved ones or can't get in touch with them for a long time; or wants to evacuate children, but has neither possibility nor funds to do that; or worries about property. An acute feeling of helplessness and uncertainty about the future unites them all.

I can't show my patients that I am also scared and sometimes even panic. I can't tell them that a week ago I spent three days in a row at the railway station waiting for the Lyman-Lviv train, trying to send my daughter to my parents in the Rivne region. However, the only train that passes by the town of my childhood never arrived, as it was severely shelled on the way. On the fifth day of the war, I shouted at my ex-husband, my daughter's father, to leave Irpin immediately, and I kept in touch with him every minute as he broke through enemy checkpoints and lonely forest paths.

Just after a 30-minute conversation a person is relieved might even be able to get some sleep for a few hours in between air raid sirens. Therefore, I do not have the right to give up for even a minute.





## Darya Dranovska

37 y.o., HR director at Eridon Agro, Kyiv

On February 24, I woke up in Kyiv to the sound of an explosion. An explosion! In Kyiv!!!

I thought I was dreaming. This was followed by the second explosion, the shockwave shook windows. I was reading the news at 5.30 a.m. and I was feeling sick with fear. I was able to force myself to eat only two days later. That Thursday was endless, horrible, impossible. But something must be stable in life. For me, this is my job. I work as an HR director in an agricultural holding, which includes eleven agricultural enterprises. We are doing a very important job: cultivating the land, milking cows and raising bullocks.

Therefore, if you do not know what to do – just do your job! Do what you do best! I pulled myself together and went to the office, like most of my colleagues. But we didn't finish the working day, because when the fighter jets flew over our offices, everyone went home. It was not much calmer at home, explosions were heard in Hostomel and Bucha in the evening. The decision did not come immediately. After several hours of arguing and hesitation, in order not to scare the children, we decided to go to one of our enterprises further from the capital. My mother, my sister's family with two underage children and I got into a car with one bag of belongings and drove away from Kyiv. We were sure it wouldn't last for more than a couple of days. Along the way, my colleagues helped to find a house in the village, met us and brought steamed milk to the children. People are amazing! I will never forget that support from both my colleagues and strangers.

I have always been dreaming of working not far from home and now my dream has come true: I woke up the next day in a village 90 km from Kyiv, in a detached house without water, heating or electricity, with two small children and having no warm clothes. But there was also good news: the company's office was located very close, 7 minutes walk. Well, be careful what you wish for.

In our new reality, the issues of sowing, repairing equipment, cattle fattening or milking have changed to other tasks: getting machines for the territorial defense, finding fuel for our Armed Forces, providing a loader to build a checkpoint, evacuating a colleague from Bucha, paying salaries a week earlier and tons of such tasks. At first, it was strange to talk about all of that with our agronomists or engineers, but the war quickly transformed our daily lives, adding new challenges. The problems that would have brought me out in a cold sweat a month ago became routine.

« —————  
**I**s it considered to be ethical to keep tractor drivers, who we desperately need in the field, but who are willing to join the army? Sowing is about to start... The worst thing for us is that no one is sure that enemy tanks will not trample the land where our tractors are working now. We don't know if we manage to harvest in the fall.  
————— »

Spring is always the busiest season for farmers. There are always a lot of non-standard and even creative tasks. But this year the tasks the life has set were extreme! For example, you need to find money in a day to pay employees their salaries and bonuses, which amounted to millions of Hryvnia<sup>23</sup>) a month earlier, because no one knows what will happen next, maybe this money can save someone's life. It is necessary to find guards with weapons that could accompany diesel fuel trucks, because fuel was found only in another area, and transportation is dangerous now. It is needed to transfer humanitarian aid to Kyiv, transport body armor for territorial defense... If our Armed Forces need trucks, we give them what they need and then look for solutions to replace our vehicles. Is it considered to be ethical to force tractor drivers to continue working, because we desperately need them in the field, when they are willing to join the army? Sowing is about to start...

The worst thing for us is that no one is sure that enemy tanks will not come to the lands where our tractors are working now. We don't know if we manage to harvest in the fall. Even more worrying is the situation on animal farms that are extremely sensitive to any logistical changes. Feed, medicine, and consumables are needed every day. Milk must be shipped daily. Workers have to be at their workplaces every day.

« —————  
**I**f you do not know what to do – just do your job! Do what you do best!  
————— »

Agriculture is a long game. It's about investing effort and money, with faith in your land, and the skills of agronomists to get results in many months. Our production cycle lasts for twelve months, so we usually plan carefully a year in advance. We used to. Until February 24<sup>th</sup>. But not today. Our planning horizon has shrunk to only one day.

But we are still going to sow! Only three employees, out of nearly 1,500, have fled the country. Several more relocated to the western regions. 99% of people stayed put. This is neither bad nor good. That is a fact. We are about to sow! As long as we have this opportunity, we will work on farms and in the fields. We love it and we know how to do it. The heads of our enterprises have not slept for over a month. But everyone is angry (in a constructive way) and ready to do everything to ensure that Ukraine is well-fed, strong and free!



<sup>23</sup> Ukrainian currency.





## Ievhenia Minaeva

27 y.o., marketing specialist, Lviv / Sumy

There is such a Russian town of Sudzha. It takes an hour and a half to drive there from Sumy.

Sumy is my hometown, although I have been living in Lviv for the last six years. When I had heard about the Russian troops on the borders, it felt as if all the "red alarms" in my head erupted. Because it was to Sudzha that military hardware and personnel were recruited from all over the Kursk region.

So, a few months before the X-day, I was almost sure there would be a full-scale invasion. Dictators of that kind do not fold when

stakes are that high. Moreover, because of the situation inside Russia, Putin needed an external enemy. That's why I started preparing for the war beforehand.

One can imagine how weird I seemed to others and myself when I filled a couple of canisters with fuel and bought a few boxes of important goods. My acquaintances, related to the Armed Forces, in a way shared my anxiety. It was thanks to their instructions that I prepared myself and told my family what to do before and after the probable attack.

On February 24, I woke up angry at a hotel in Truskavets. I was infuriated that it occurred to someone to test warning sirens just when citizens were overly alarmed by the news. I picked up the phone, and read: "Zhenia, this is war!" As I remember now, the first thing I saw was the news with the headline "A Breakthrough in Sumy oblast".

Our city was surrounded very quickly. By the way, as of March 20, Ukrainian Armed Forces repelled the attack near Sumy so skilfully that I think the Russians have already regretted three times that they had come there at all. We are kidding that the "Second Most Powerful Army on the Planet" could have brought the whole world to its knees, but it was too busy getting it in the neck like that in a small village near Sumy.

I don't feel like describing how my family got out of there. They are here, safe and sound! We are experienced tourists and it helped a lot. Being a tourist means having skills to adapt quickly to any conditions. Now we appreciate the small and big everyday joys even more.

« **Today every volunteer is a warrior of the second front. However, I have not heard of a single volunteer demanding his/her name engraved on a gold plate with a list of merits. I don't care if those who I have helped remember me. There are no individual credits in volunteering. At all. Just imagine: depending on the request complexity, packing one car with different goods for the territorial defense in a hot zone may involve from 3 to 100 people to assemble and deliver.** »



gained in business school is really helpful now. Today every volunteer is a warrior of the second front. However, I have not heard of a single volunteer demanding his/her name engraved on a gold plate with a list of merits. I don't care if those who I have helped remember me. There are no individual credits in volunteering. At all. Just imagine: depending on the request complexity, packing one car with different goods for the territorial defense in a hot zone may involve from 3 to 100 people to assemble and deliver.

Do you know how it works? With the eruption of the war, different group chats in the messengers appeared and filled up with messages of all kinds. People we know from businesses, studies, work, hobbies, holiday trips, etc., started uniting spontaneously in groups and teams without specific goals and roles, in complete anarchy, but with maximum efficiency. They brought in their talents, services, opportunities and resources to share and exchange quickly for the benefit of Ukraine. This may sound confusing, because I am writing this after a sleepless night of hunting for

From day one, I jumped headfirst into volunteering. Just the day before the full-scale invasion, I was supposed to become a partner in a business that was appealing to me. But with missile attacks all over the country, I realized that I could not think about work. Brainstormings, deadlines, tasks do not matter at all when some of my friends grab machine guns to defend Ukraine! I could be a pretty good sniper, but as of now I can be more useful doing other things.

I know it's time to add a paragraph to describe how much our volunteer group has done. Honestly, I can't. No words can describe all that. In a month, we turned more than half a million Hryvnias into batteries, body armours, flashlights, walkie-talkies, sleeping bags, thermal imagers, etc. We worked for 10-14 hours daily, without any weekends, just nonstop. Driven by this hellish energy. This is a kind of passion, thirst, mania. Our slogan is "Find, buy, deliver".

I don't see any sense in providing details. But I can say that marketing and management experience along with the experience







turnstiles. The name, the reputation and the trust mean a world to a volunteer. Our names are the keys to doors that used to be incredibly difficult to open.

It is true to say that the volunteer community is quite closed. We do not work with strangers, neither customers nor contractors. The criterion of trust is important, as there are currently notorious risks of sabotage, misinformation and banal incompetence. Therefore, trust is the fuel that makes a complex mechanism of volunteer work running.

To be honest, I could write a book about how we are living now. How broken are our dreams from before, how beautiful are our dreams that grew up on the ruins of the old ones. How I hate and adore my volunteer work: the context is awful, the people and the

process are great. How I love the phenomenon of spontaneous volunteer barter, which sometimes resembles a new kind of platonic love between people with common values. How I hate the invaders and why I am ready to join the Armed Forces, the territorial defense and the guerrillas, if I have the opportunity... Each Ukrainian has so many stories to tell.

I want these stories to be heard after the victory. Now we have a lot of work to do to make this victory happen as soon as possible. Sending hugs to the readers, wherever you are. Everything will be Ukraine!



Ivano-Frankivsk. Photos by Iryna Perevozova.







**Iryna Perevozova**

*47 y.o., head of the department, professor,  
Ivano-Frankivsk*

"This is absurd! ... It can't be real!" – These were my first thoughts in the morning of February 24, when I heard explosions near the airport. Then the son asked: "Mom! Is this really war?" "Dear, call Darynochka, and come to me immediately! We must be all together!"

Children... All mothers are well aware of this paralyzing fear for children. Resilience, firmness of spirit and cold mind disappear when your children are in danger. And it does not matter how old they are!

A seven-year-old daughter of my friend from Dnipro called me via video chat: "Ira! They are throwing bombs at us", my heart sank, I could not breath. The only thought in my head was "God help them!" I needed to start breathing deeply – in and out, in and out. I calmed myself down and realized that I have no time for fear, confusion, or self-pity. I have to act, namely, to divide tasks among my children; ensure that my parents who have been seriously ill for many years are safe; call my brother and hear that everything is under control in Odessa; contact University colleagues and explain what to tell our students; prioritize what exactly needs to be done...

And then, there was a continuous vortex of calls, events, information, people... People I care about, those I helped, hosted, sent necessities or wrote messages to, those I was trying to reassure or who were trying to reassure me... And those I will never hear again because they are gone... As for others, now is not the time to explain, analyze and understand why and when the gap was formed between me and those whom you considered friends in Russia, Belarus and abroad. There still will be time for that...

These couple of weeks unveiled to me how much I love my Motherland and what true friendship is. Clear communication, support, coordination of joint actions to solve a specific problem are precious. I could write a lot about shell-shocked children, pregnant female IDPs and mentally traumatized people fleeing the war from Kharkiv, Kherson, Sumy, Mariupol, Kyiv; about hundreds of emails to my friends and colleagues asking to shelter such people in different countries around the world; about thousands of phone calls to volunteers, calls to friends in Bucha, Mariupol, Chernihiv and Sumy,

« **H**ow could it happen?! Why is NATO procrastinating with providing a no-fly zone over Ukraine?! These are the questions that keep me awake at night, not sirens at all...  
Pretty soon, spring will take its course. Flowers are going to blossom, it will be warm and sunny. I wish that by that time not a single sound of shooting or bombing is heard in any part of the country; that no one calls me in the middle of the night asking for shelter or help. I want to receive only good news. Then I will be strong enough to focus on my own struggle, with the disease, which, like the invader, strives to take my life.

»

who spent weeks in basements and cellars; about efforts on turning the university dormitory into a comfortable temporary shelter, searching for medicines, bulletproof vests, helmets, and everything else for the needs of the territorial defense and the Army... Yes, I could, but I won't, because I was not alone and I was in my hometown, where, thank God, there are no street fights! While out there, our soldiers, civilians and children are dying! This must be stopped immediately!!! How could it happen?! Why is NATO procrastinating with providing a no-fly zone over Ukraine?! These are the questions that keep me awake at night, not sirens at all...

Pretty soon, spring will take its course. Flowers are going to blossom, it will be warm and sunny. I wish that by that time not a single sound of shooting or bombing is heard in any part of the country; that no one calls me in the middle of the night asking for shelter or help. I want to receive only good news. Then I will be strong enough to focus on my own struggle, with the disease, which, like the invader, strives to take my life.







## Aliona Kryvuliak

31 y.o., La Strada-Ukraine NGO, Kyiv/Makariv  
Surprisingly, I remember almost every minute of February 23<sup>rd</sup>.

It was an extremely hard day at work. But today I would give anything for it to return. I wish that day could last forever. At the time, I couldn't even imagine that it was the final day of a truly happy life.

On February 23<sup>rd</sup>, I hold a meeting with the National Hotlines consultants, whose work is ensured by the NGO "La Strada-Ukraine"<sup>24</sup>. The topic was the "Emergency Response Plan of Consultants of the National Hotlines in the Event of Military

Action." I was running the meeting thinking to myself: "Well, no. We live in 2022. What kind of full-scale war can we talk about? Well, Russia is not that crazy to decide on that!"

At about 6 a.m. on February 24<sup>th</sup>, I was awakened by my mother's call:

- Aliona, how are you?! I heard on TV that they are bombing Boryspil!
- Mum, turn off the TV!!! Stop watching that bullshit!! Why did you wake me up so early?!!

I yelled at Mum and hung up. "Nonsense!" – I thought to myself.

Later I was kicking myself for a long time – how could I not hear the bombing?

Until that day, I never heard the siren sound... On February 24<sup>th</sup>, 2022, I first heard that horrible and scary howl...

What do I need to do? Get dressed, take the bug-out bag, go down to a bomb shelter... I didn't have to go to work... Oh I want to go to work so much!!!! I just wanted that day to be

<sup>24</sup> La Strada aims to prevent human trafficking and to protect and realise trafficked persons' rights. This is done by providing access to adequate assistance and support to victims, and via information and knowledge exchange, capacity building of NGOs and other stakeholders and cross-sectoral cooperation.

« —————  
**I provide psychological support 24/7 to all children who address the National Hotline for Children and Youth. Sometimes it seems to be not a significant contribution to the future victory, but that's what I want and can do. Doing my best! Let this little brick also be laid in the foundation of my country's victory!**  
————— »



exactly like the day before... But in a new reality I was running to the bomb shelter! Bomb shelter!!!

- Mum, I'm fine... Sorry I yelled at you this morning... I'll come home today... I'll try... I love you very much...

In the evening I went to Makariv<sup>11</sup> and hugged my parents tightly. It seemed to me that in all my life I hadn't hugged my parents as tight as I did then.

Shelling... Explosions... This is my hometown of Makariv... The town where I was born, made my first steps, said my first words, went to kindergarten and school... I love my hometown so much... Russians wiped it off the face of the earth... They killed people... Civilians ... They didn't care – women, children, the elderly... They didn't care whom to shoot... I hate them so much... Godless beasts...



A shell hit my classmate's house... Fortunately, everyone survived... My classmate has no home any more...

The occupiers killed my friend and my first love... People I knew very well... They are gone...

I'm afraid for Mum... She's a conscript... She's a medical worker... She helps our boys... Lots of blood... Torn body parts... So scary... Mum, I love you so much... You are my HEROINE...

What about me? I provide help and support to children

<sup>11</sup> Makariv is an urban-type settlement in the Bucha Raion, in the Kyiv Oblast (province) of Ukraine.





who apply to the National Hotline for Children and Youth. Despite the war, the La Strada-Ukraine managed to resume telephone and electronic counseling of two National Hotlines – the National Hotline for Children and Youth and the National Hotline on prevention of domestic violence, human trafficking and gender-based discrimination.

Every day I communicate with children from different regions of Ukraine, including the temporarily uncontrolled parts of the country... Every day I hear: "Tell me, when will the war end?", "I'm so scared... Can you just talk to me?", "They killed my friend... Now I want to kill them...", "I went

with my grandma to Lviv... And my parents stayed in Kharkiv... They will be killed. I'm afraid for them...", "I think I'm losing my mind... I am panicking all the time... I can't cope with all that..."

I provide psychological support 24/7 to all children who address the National Hotline for Children and Youth. Sometimes it seems to be not a significant contribution to the future victory, but that's what I want and can do. Doing my best! Let this little brick also be laid in the foundation of my country's victory!

All this time my 6-year-old nephew Bodia has been with us. We protect him from war, from news... We can't protect him only from sirens... But when the siren howls, we start playing the game "Dress up in 15 seconds". We also have games like "Pack a bag" and "Who gets to the basement first?" I never thought I would play such games with a 6-year-old kid. But the war is making its adjustments. Bodia really wants to go to school and constantly asks when he may return to school, when he may go for a walk, when he may play with friends... and so many "when" that I have no answers to.

But I know... I know for sure that everything will be Ukraine!







**Natalia Kupchenko**  
50 y.o., administrator (Odessa)

Until February 24<sup>th</sup>, 2022, I had been having a happy life. We had been living together for 25 years with my husband. Seven years ago, our first child Tonia was born. We had enjoyed every day – worked, helped our parents, and watched our daughter grow. I used to work as an administrator at a mall entertainment facility, but before the war it had been closed due to the pandemic. Thus, I had been a housewife for the last few months.

There was no panic or fear at the beginning of the war, it is because hostilities did not take place in our city. Several missile attacks, the constant arrival and departure of Russian warships, one of which sunk (i.e. went where it was sent by the defenders of the Snake Island), constant air raid alarms, gloomy and worried people, checkpoints, empty streets, military vehicles – that is how the war came to Odessa.

On February 24<sup>th</sup>, the feeling of confusion was quickly replaced by a desire to act, to do something to protect the city, my family, and to help our army. In my younger years I used to work as a cook and even run our own cafe together with my husband. So when a friend of mine asked me to help a volunteer organization with cooking for our soldiers, I immediately agreed.

From the first days of the war, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., my daughter and I worked for the Odessa volunteer organization "Unbreakable". This one is a part of the Ukrainian South Chef Association. We are just the cog of a huge machine that started working to help our army, the territorial defense, children and retirees in Odessa. All residents of Odessa rallied to defend the city. A lot of cafes and restaurants completely switched to providing lunches for our soldiers and retirees.

Our organization feeds about 500 people a day. Lunches are homemade and very delicious. Women and men, sometimes whole families, come to us every day to help with peeling potatoes, onions and carrots. Citizens

« **Our organization feeds about 500 people, including the military personnel, the territorial defense and retirees. Lunches are homemade and very delicious. Women and men, and sometimes whole families come to us every day to help... I can't even remember the time when the residents of our seaside city were so united.** »



bring in home-made pastries, pickles, and sweets. Chefs, drivers, administrators – all of us – are contributing to the victory with their time, money, fuel etc. People weave camouflage nets in the markets and make Molotov cocktails near shopping malls. Supermarkets and entrepreneurs provide free products to volunteer organizations, locals bring clothes, medicine and money. I can't even remember the times when the residents of our seaside city were so united.

Volunteers affectionately call my daughter Tonia "our boss". She is seated in a place of honour at the head of the table during lunch, when all get together after work. I understand that it is hard for her to work with me every day, but seeing people with big hearts and a good sense of humor helps her be resilient. Odesans are joking even during the war, otherwise they can't live<sup>25</sup>.

Several times I was offered to go to another country, but so far we have chosen to work here, waiting for the victory in my native Odessa.



<sup>25</sup> Odessa is the third most populous city in Ukraine and a major seaport and transport hub located in the south-west of the country. It is also considered to be the capital of humor.





**Larysa Radkevych**

*52 y. o., teacher  
(Donetsk until 2014, Odessa since 2015)*

When I agreed to write about my journey to and from the war, I thought deeply and even got angry. How to fit eight years in two pages?! Just write "was", "did", "felt", "thought"? Something has already been processed, and something still hurts. It hurts so much that it's scary to touch.

For me, the war started a long time ago, on February 20<sup>th</sup>, 2014, with the annexation of Crimea. Centuries seem to have passed since then. Eight years of life in the war equals several lives of an average person. But this challenging time has become a part of my life, the

lives of my fellow Ukrainians. My relatives have settled in different parts of Ukraine – from Mariupol, which is burning under the air strikes of Russian invaders, to Kyiv, Cherkasy and Odessa regions. It is because War 1.0 scattered our family all over the country and War 2.0 shuffled us all like a deck of cards again... Two rounds of war. It's like two circles of hell. Endless hell inside and out.

My war began on May 8<sup>th</sup>, 2014, when I was admitted to a volunteer unit in the city of Dnipro. Our first task was to counter the attempts of saboteurs to enter the city. Sounds cool! But in fact, the "Pilot", the "Counselor" and I were checking cars entering the city. For two days in a row, no shifts. Later there were barracks, training grounds, admission to the battalion, trips to the hot spots – Mariupol, Novoazovsk, the border with Russia. Then medical care, duty, guards, the first wounded. Peski. Ilovaisk. The dead. Mothers and wives of the fallen Heroes. Everything merged into one big stream. The flow of grief, pain, despair and hope.

It is still hard for me to divide the events into separate days. It was one long day without the beginning or the end. There was only "today", no "tomorrow". On that "today" you met People. Worthy, brave, extraordinary. I was honored to be among them and a part of them.

But one morning in July 2015, I felt like I was losing my family. Because they are somewhere there, far away. And I'm not with them. "So it's time to come back from the war, because you can stay there forever," I thought to myself. A naive girl, I had no idea what it was like to come back from war. It took me six long years.

Six years of relentless work on myself. Living and mourning the loss of my fellows. Looking for new meanings of life. Sudden awakening that "tomorrow" does exist, and I don't know what to do with it. I was learning to feel

<sup>26</sup> In late summer of 2014, the Ukrainian Armed Forces battled pro-Russian separatists for control of the town of Ilovaisk, in the border region of Donetsk. That had been the deadliest battle in the war of Ukraine for its freedom from the totalitarian Russian regime before the full-scale invasion in 2022.



the taste of life again, to build my home, to plant roses, to study, to understand what to fight for and what to let go.

On February 24<sup>th</sup>, 2022, all that was reset. The Ukrainian War for Independence entered the second round. War 2.0.

I met the war on the porch of my house. At 5.45 a.m. I heard explosions. "It's started," flashed through my head. I returned home and packed an emergency backpack. I called my husband, messaged the relatives. I realized that I will stay here, where I am needed. Because Odessa is my home now, my friends are here.

What am I doing right now? It's routine, which forms the basis of everyday life. That gives me the strength to pass the test again. I support my husband. I teach and support my students – those who stayed and those who fled. I work with those who find themselves in difficult living conditions. I continue to study. I host those who run from danger to safety. I volunteer. I take care of my seven cats and six dogs. I take care of myself. I am waiting for a message from relatives left in Mariupol.

I'm home. I do what I can. Here and now. For my country.







**Iryna Hrydzhuk**

*44 y.o., entrepreneur, Vyshneve city*

On February 24<sup>th</sup>, I woke up, like most Ukrainians, to the sounds of explosions. Of course, I didn't even want to believe that the war had started. But...

On the same day, I witnessed panic in stores, on the roads, near ATMs, etc. The majority of the population was not ready for such a development of events at all.

Our small town turned into a ghost city in just two days. Most of the residents left; cafes, stores, post-offices and pharmacies were closed, basically all the infrastructure vital for a city.

Yards and playgrounds are silent, no cars in the adjacent areas. Only huge queues of frightened people at the doors of a few food stores. Very soon the shelves were emptied. The picture was apocalyptic.

The first day I was in terrible despair. We either ran to a bomb shelter, or waited in line for fresh bread or medicine. On the second day, residents of our block who stayed created a chat "Neighbors" to help each other solve various everyday issues. Also, those men who were not in the army enlisted in the territorial defense. Some very young boys and their grandfather Alexander made anti-tank hedgehogs from whatever they could find. We collected suitable bottles and made Molotov cocktails. Women wove nets, cooked meals for those at checkpoints, etc.

Our production is located next to my house. We have been sewing clothes decorated with designer embroidery for many years, selling in Ukraine and around the world. We gave all the previously sewn comfortable clothes (sweaters, pants, T-shirts) to those who needed them: to the army, to territorial defense and to hospitals.

« —————  
**When I am asked if we hear explosions, I answer that the noise of the embroidery machines drowns out the sounds of explosions. The home front is an integral part of the war front. We are working hard, accelerating the victory!**  
————— »



Every day we send our products from the UkrPoshta post offices to different parts of the world. In my opinion, small and medium-sized businesses must work. It is the time to recover from shock, proving by our example that Ukrainians are a strong and hard-working nation.

Today our range is dominated by products with Ukrainian symbols. By exporting our products with unique embroideries, we try to draw the world's attention to Ukraine, to our pain, to the fact that now we are one-on-one with the enemy.

By selling or distributing our products on the domestic market for free, we raise the fighting spirit of Ukrainians and we are very proud of that.

When I am asked if we hear explosions, I answer that the noise of the embroidery machines drowns out the sounds of explosions.

The home front is an integral part of the war front. We are working hard, accelerating the victory!

Everything will be Ukraine!







**Ievhenia Davis**

*52 y. o., psychologist, Kyiv*

The beginning of the war was not surprising: when the last employees of the Russian embassy had left the day before, I realized that something serious and unseen was yet to come. When I heard first distant explosions, the brain quickly outlined the situation: my house is located near the railway station and my apartment is on one of the last floors – this is bad news; there is underground parking – this is good news. The experience of surviving the earthquake in Tokyo was very useful, as I knew too well that my life depends on the speed and clarity of my decisions.

Looking at people around, whose internal dark sides and instincts started manifesting themselves, I thought that the ability to reflect on and win one's internal struggle, to resist one's own fears in such times form personality and demonstrate one's true attitude to others.

Since the early days, my friends and I decided to help our defenders. We started by preparing and packing food at the "Satori" restaurant, providing it for free to everyone who needed it. Over time, online communications were established regarding the needs of the military and representatives of the territorial defense. I am very proud that my friends, the owners of the restaurant, turned out to be amazing people!

I am a doctor and psychologist with quite rich practical experience. However, even the most thorough theoretical training is not enough to prepare a specialist to communicate with people in critical conditions, when it is difficult to predict which behavioral and adaptational patterns manifest themselves. Which words to find to reassure a grandmother with a granddaughter whose parents stayed elsewhere not having time to return home from a business trip; or a couple of retirees who have lived all their lives in the Soviet Union, for whom the very fact of Russia's attack on their home is a psychological trauma? I had to be empathetic and radiate confidence, calmness, understanding, optimism, which many lacked in the first days of the war!

My personal tragedy helped me finally decide on my mission in this war – my closest relative, my aunt, found herself in Kharkiv, at the epicentre of the bombing. From the first day of the war, I talked to her every two hours day and night. She is a teacher and was confused and depressed by the atrocity that was going on around her: the five-storey buildings opposite were falling like houses of cards; everything around was burning, the historic buildings on her home street were destroyed. I tried my best to calm the aunt down, consistently persuading her to leave her hometown, which she refused to do stubbornly. Only when the windows in her apartment were broken by a hit wave, using

« Looking at people around, whose internal dark sides and instincts started manifesting themselves, I thought that the ability to reflect on and win one's internal struggle, to resist one's own fears in such times form personality and demonstrate one's true attitude to others. »

all possible words, using other people's examples, through an appeal to the associations, I managed to persuade her to leave.

Since then, I have chosen psychological help as the main area of my activity. Today, my contribution to the future victory is to help people understand the individually effective patterns of behavior in crisis situations. Different people come to me, sharing their pain. Children are especially vulnerable under such circumstances. They need attention and help. It hurts to see how the brightest period of life, childhood, is painted in black and gray, when every siren leaves a terrible imprint on children's souls. In the near future I plan to implement children's psychological rehabilitation group programmes.

As a member of the National Psychological Association of Ukraine, I am currently working with colleagues on group classes for volunteers and the military personnel.

Of course, our consultations are absolutely free. Sometimes it is necessary to hold consultations at night. The worst case to work with is a panic attack of a person staying at home or in a shelter during shelling.

War changes feelings: it makes the soul and heart deeper! All the people of our Ukraine are now being united for peace and freedom as opposed to the terror and looting promoted by Russia.

« Children need special attention and help. It hurts to see how the brightest period of life, childhood, is painted in black and gray, when every siren leaves a terrible imprint on children's souls. »





## Chapter VII. Running from the Atrocities of War (stories of refugees and IDPs)

*We did not expect that from this Spring!  
The one loving. The one life to bring.  
Assassins tried darken her sunbeams,  
Mercilessly shelling our dreams!*

*Tamila Shevtsova*

Motyzhyn, mass burial, photo by Vira Balatska







**Larysa Drozdova**

*51 y.o., PR expert, SE "ANTONOV", Hostomel*

On February 24<sup>th</sup> I was at home in Hostomel<sup>27</sup>. At first we heard explosions close to the "Antonov" airport, then all over the town. On that day I came to my office at "Antonov Airlines" at 9 a.m. In an hour, we faced an attack by helicopters "Alligator", Mi and Su. After two or three hours in a basement I felt like enough is enough. So, I went home accompanied by a rumble of bombing. Miraculously I managed to get home safe and witnessed a "flock" of helicopters heading towards the airport. Our precious An-225 "Mriya", the biggest cargo plane on the planet, was to take off that morning, but as the sky was "closed" by Russian air forces, it could not "spread its

wings". Later we were informed that our magnificent plane was destroyed completely. I had been crying for weeks. But then it occurred to me that now I have what to live for – to rebuild our "Mriya", to dream a new Dream.

I had not left Hostomel when there was still a chance to do so. I thought I could wait out. However, it became very clear pretty soon that the war was not a matter of days. The occupants blocked all the vital town infrastructure – electricity, water, gas, or the Internet were gone. We had to charge our phones using



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————— »

vehicle batteries or the generator at one of the schools, which turned out to also be very handy for cooking as well. Dozens of children and elderly were hiding in that school – they were all frightened, kids were crying all the time. One day being full of civilians it was intentionally shelled!!!

Later occupants' tanks and other military vehicles were based on the territory of our condominium. Severe street fights were taking place literally under our windows; the dead bodies of both soldiers and civilians were lying everywhere.

<sup>27</sup> Hostomel is a town about 20 kilometers from the capital. Its airport is the main hub of Antonov Airlines. Antonov cargo planes are well-known, especially the biggest aircraft in the world: the Antonov An-225 "Mriya" translated as the "Dream."



More and more Russians were flooding the town like a plague. They settled in vacant apartments, which belonged to my neighbours. It took us three weeks to finally get another chance to flee with our neighbors – 20 people with only essentials in two vehicles. Russian soldiers didn't restrain us that time but at each of four checkpoints inspected us thoroughly. They even checked chats in messengers.

We were lucky to reach a detached house in a village with no electricity or gas, but with water and a stove. At least it was warm. We had spent a couple of days there, when we got a piece of information that it was possible to get to Ukraine-controlled territory. But we had to cross the river Irpin by ford in March. Imagine walking in extremely cold water reaching your chest! Nobody complained about wet clothes, when afterwards we were walking a couple of kilometers towards our destination, as we managed to get out of hell alive.

The next week I was too exhausted to talk to anyone, just gave a couple of short calls of comfort to those people who had been trying to reach me, while my phone was off the grid.

One day I noticed an announcement regarding the formation of a volunteers' group for the organization of a targeted evacuation of Hostomel citizens. We basically had to go from one address to another and check each basement trying to find people and inform them about evacuation as there was no telecom coverage. The group consisted of three women and a man named Mykhailo who wanted to find his fiancée Svitlana.



A growing despair made my daughter and me stick to a very risky decision to try and leave Hostomel. We wanted to reach a nearby town by crossing the field, which might have been mined already. But what choice did we have? Unfortunately, we ran into Russian troops, who did not allow us to pass.

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————— »



When we got to her home, a local resident said that there were no civilians left – all died. Michael became pale as death, but I insisted on rechecking the basement. It was a miracle! We found nine people in a shelter along with Svitlana and her mother. The eyes of Mikhail and his fiance were filled with tears all the way to Kyiv.

We helped everybody out of the basements but our convoy was attacked – four of us were killed and stayed on that road forever. We had no chance even to bury them as we had to save those still alive.

While still in the town I was trying to yell a simple idea that women and children had to be evacuated immediately into the heads of our officials from local authorities. Every minute of delay came at such a high cost turning the lives of many waiting for salvation in vain into hell.

My cry for help was heard too late. If I am ever asked what hell is, I will say that hell is when it gets too late! Too late to say "I love" or "I'm sorry". Too late to enjoy the peaceful sky or the company of a beloved person. Too late to help; too late to evacuate; too late to stop the tragedy; too late to save lives...

The Hero-City Hostomel lies in ruins. No infrastructure has remained. There is no school, no kindergarten, no kids' playgrounds any more. And there are almost no locals left – some were killed, some left their homes.

But I do hope that soon our town will be free and happy again, because Hostomel is a place where the Dream lives (ed. – Mriya)!







**Elzara**

*33 y.o., artist, Irpin*

My name is Elzara. I am an artist and I've fled to Poland a couple of days ago. It appears that numerous generations of my family have been suffering from russian aggressive policies.

I am a Crimean Tatar who was born far away from her native land – my ancestors were deported to russia long ago and I remember stories about Crimea my relatives told me when I

was a kid. My family tried to go to our people's homeland every summer. Somehow my grandfather managed to get a small patch of land. It was quite far from civilization but he wanted to build a house there. He literally had been building it with his bare hands – a brick to a brick – every summer.

« —————  
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 ————— »

In the year 2000 we finally moved in – my parents, me and my new-born brother. The beginning of a new life from scratch was still hard (especially for me as a teenager) and full of uncertainty, poverty and fear but we returned to the place where we belonged.

Truth to be told, it was there, on my land, where I faced discrimination from russians who massively relocated to the peninsular after deportation of Crimean Tatars in 1944, when our property was given to russians who have always tried to isolate us and marked our ethnic origin as inferior. I was





constantly reminded that I was not Russian, not Aryan. It's good that I was strong and stubborn, so I didn't let them break my spirit.

Fourteen years of my life till the spring of the year 2014 had been turbulent but still happy. Then Russia came again and took my home away for the second time. My husband and I had to relocate to Kiev oblast. Just the two of us but with a strong desire to live and thrive. And so we did – we managed to launch our own jewelry brand without any external support. My husband taught himself all the production processes and used my sketches for inspiration to make jewelry. We invested everything in two workshops (one for production and another one turned into my art studio) and our apartment where we planned to live happily ever after. Our home was beautiful, every detail was considered with love.

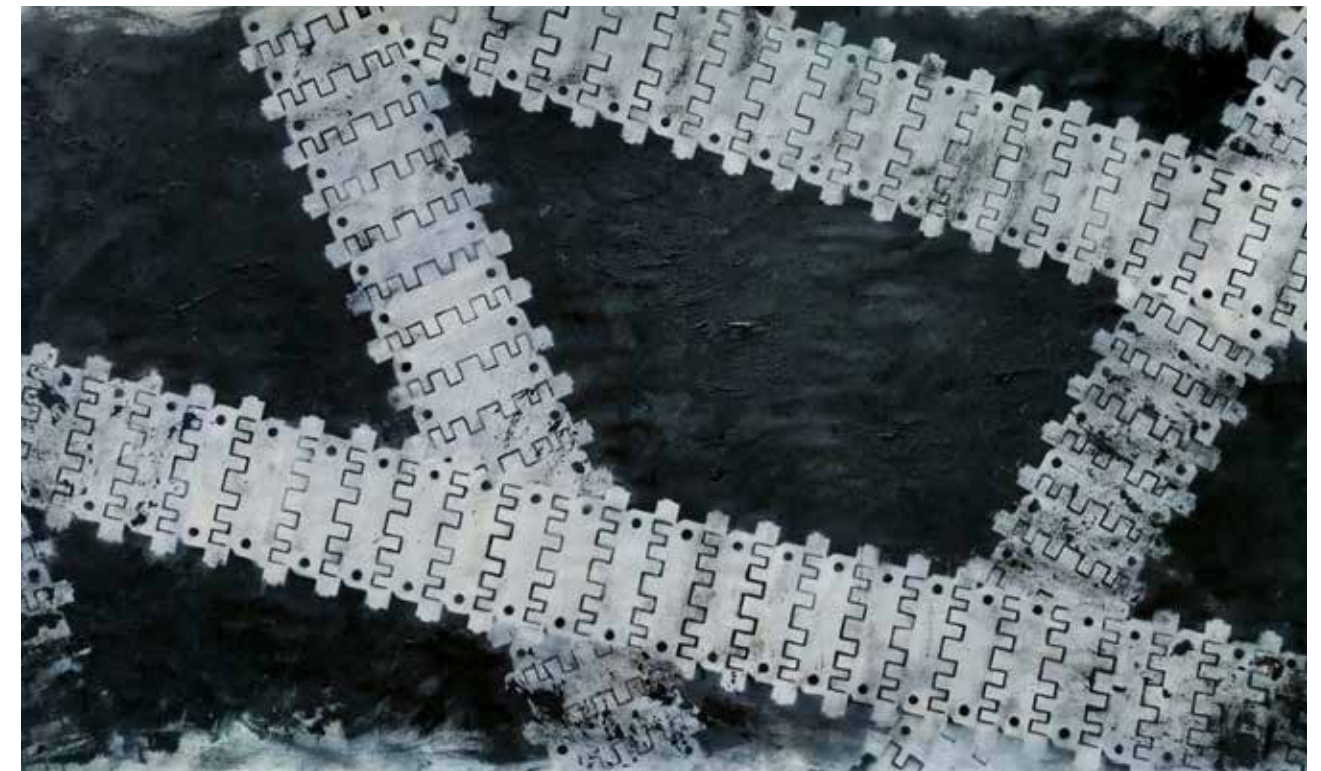
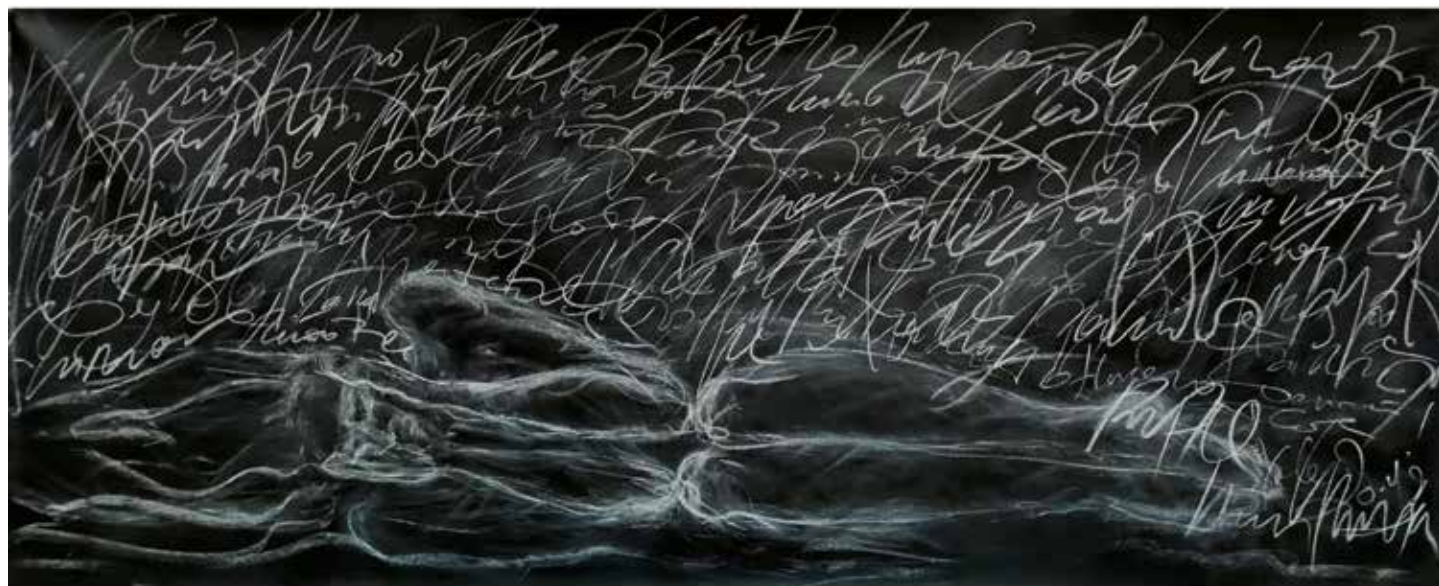
« —————  
**W**e all need to keep going on, even when it feels like there is no energy left. I continue painting to express my feelings, because we need to talk about our pain and the world needs to know our stories.  
————— »

But they came one more time! They destroyed my home we had been working so hard and for so long to create!! They destroyed the whole Irpin! And many other cities of my beloved Ukraine.

By the end of 2021 I already had no doubt Russia would invade. It was crystal clear to me after all those messages about “military training” at Ukrainian borders that the invasion was imminent. Why was I so sure? Because I know Russians too well.

My anxiety manifested itself in my canvas. I created several paintings dedicated to the war. On the last one, which I started on February 23<sup>rd</sup> and never finished, a girl was taking off her high-heeled shoes to change them to military boots. But I hope that very soon I will paint canvases about our victory and the strength of the Ukrainian spirit!

I will always remember the early morning of February 24<sup>th</sup> as the worst moment of my entire life. One can never forget the sound of a whooshing missile heard for the first time. It seems like I still hear it. We had been wandering from one basement to another looking for a solid shelter. Bombing,



shelling, shooting and bombing again... Our town looked like one from an Apocalyptic movie – the dead bodies on the streets, abandoned and decomposing, because no one could bury those people under endless shellfire.

It was unbearable and we finally decided to move to Kyiv, just a day before they blocked the town. It turned out to be a life-saving decision.

The day I found out that Russians destroyed my home, I realized that all the strings were cut off. So, I decided to fight my own battle at an artistic front. I collected what I could from my workshop and went to Poland by myself. It was very hard to start looking for a new place to live, to start from scratch...

Now, while the war continues, my works take part in exhibitions abroad. The money from sales is sent to help Ukraine and our army.

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————— »





**Olena Liashenko**

**41 y.o., Bucha**

My child is only six months old so my phone is always switched to a silent mode. That night it was vibrating non-stop – my colleagues were bombarding me with messages about missiles and explosions. Then I heard these horrible sounds myself.

I simply couldn't imagine that a war would start, I hoped it wouldn't last long but anyway I packed some diapers and documents in my backpack.

On that day we were to visit an orthopedist and get an ultrasound check – it was important as my child had been previously diagnosed with hip dysplasia. Obviously, the clinic canceled that appointment.

Tsunami of explosions. I saw missiles swooshing metres away from my roof. Some people were running with suitcases to their cars, others were already rushing back from shops holding huge packages with groceries. A bunch of neighbours crowded near the entrance to a basement.

I could not imagine my elderly mother and a baby in the basement, especially during the COVID-19 epidemic, so at first we stayed home. However, pretty soon explosions were heard closer and louder, so there was no other option but to go downstairs. At that time, we did not know that we would never cross the threshold of our apartment again.

It was almost impossible to get used to this wet and chilly basement. I used a wooden pallet as a bed for the baby, while my mom and I curled on the floor. It was choking to change clothes and diapers in the freezing cold.

All the people in the basement either had no transport to escape, or didn't want to leave their homes. Some were too frightened to even attempt.

More and more people were coming as the shellfire was getting more and more intense. Each of us brought in one's own story, one's own pain. Some had already lost their homes. Day by day the situation was worsening. It became very dangerous to go outside from the basement. Every day I thought: "It can not be worse than it is today". But I was wrong.

« —————  
**P**eople tried to stand in door thresholds as it was believed that increases chances of survival in case of demolition of the building. I held my baby and prayed, those hours turned into eternity. The plaster was falling from the ceiling, the walls were shaking. I lost my hope to stay alive.  
————— »

I no longer distinguished days of the week or dates on the calendar. On one of such monotonous days filled with whistling, howling and roaring of "Grads" and tanks my child woke up crying at 4 a.m., cause she was cold and hungry. People tried to stand in door thresholds as it was believed that in such a way they increased their chances of survival in case of demolition of the building. I held my baby and prayed, those hours turned into eternity. The plaster was falling from the ceiling, the walls were shaking. I lost my hope to stay alive.

Residential areas were shelled ruthlessly. A chemical factory not far from our shelter was bombed. Three missiles hit our house. People had no mobile connection, no access to information, but still many decided to flee.

I also knew we had to leave but there was nobody to help us. Our local friends could not get fuel. Our friends from other cities did not have to risk their lives driving under shellfire. And then a miracle happened. By accident I met a man who wanted to try to escape the town, but hesitated – he wasn't local so didn't know the roads well enough. I begged and insisted... Finally he agreed and later said that it was my determination that pushed him to undertake an attempt.

While driving along that something that used to be called roads not that long ago, I simply couldn't recognize my hometown in the ruins I saw. Dead bodies were lying on pavements. Our car was the only one on a highway. The road ahead was covered in dark gray smog. Local residents told us that it was because of the battles and told us to turn around. But I knew too well that we could not go back either.





So, we turned on a narrow forest path and finally reached the first relatively safe village. My savior had to go to Kharkiv, a city in the north-east already bombed by russians, and save his family. While I had to save my child and continued my trip in the opposite direction to the West with other kind people.

I was crossing the Romanian border with no belongings at all except for two toys to calm my child down. But I've met many kind people since the start of this nightmare and my gratitude is immense. As for now we are in Germany, finally safe. Thus I have to concentrate on my baby's health issues and figure out how to help him.

I get some news from the Bucha inhabitants' messenger groups. These chats turned into a novel about a life in basements. Recently I got a message that one of our neighbors was shot. After that previous news that the Chechens had been breaking into our apartment just faded. I also haven't heard from some of our friends and relatives for weeks, I hope they are alive. Human life must be precious!

« —————  
**I** dream of coming back home. My daughter, although still very small, also wants to return to her toys. She is afraid of darkness. My baby is really traumatized. But most of all I want to wake up from this endless nightmare...  
————— »

I dream of coming back home. My daughter, although still very small, also wants to return to her toys. She is afraid of darkness. My baby is really traumatized.

But most of all I want to wake up from this endless nightmare...

Kyiv, photos by Kyiv City Council







**Antonina Hordovska**

*48 y.o., teacher at Kyiv Children's Art School #5 and her daughter Kira, 11 y.o.*

I think many Kyivans felt pretty much the same on that day. We were woken by explosions – the road to Hostomel is not far from our home. Then I heard an alert – a fire brigade drove to Hostomel. I realized the war had started when I saw the first post from my friend, a journalist, “Putin, we will never forgive!”.

At first we panicked. Everyone started posting information about shellfires in social networks, later we learnt it was a mistake as we unwillingly worked as “fire spotters” and the

enemy used our anxiety against us.

Initially many people left Kyiv by buses, cars and trains – it seemed like half of the capital inhabitants moved out. My husband joined the Armed Forces, my son joined a territorial defense, so I just couldn't leave them, I wanted to help.

My daughter Kira and I were hiding in the nearest shelter – a dirty basement with leaking pipes. Children there were crying, dogs barking, cats meowing, parrots shouting out loud. At some point, I realized that I had to first stop panicking myself, and then calm others down, otherwise we would all fall into an abyss of despair.

We already learned to distinguish the type of missile by its sound, as well as guess the distance from us. In three days my husband came and warned me that the basement wasn't good enough to serve as a bomb shelter because it had no emergency exits in case the building collapsed.

Thus we could have ended up in an underground trap. My daughter and I moved into the shelter of one of the schools nearby, but it was already packed with people. So on the fifth day we decided to return home.

My husband and I worked like little bees. Not in the sense that we worked hard, but in the sense that our work was not noticeable, however, it was part of the coordinated work of a giant hive working for one goal. For example, I made sandwiches for the defenders, my husband delivered them, so they ended up where they were meant to be. Such a well-established chain where everyone contributed to a joint victory.

I also helped the elderly who were afraid or reluctant to leave their homes. They kept sitting in their apartments with their pets having no one to assist.

Another thought crossed my mind – as an art teacher I wanted to help children who were frightened and depressed. Art lessons are a great tool to minimize the effect of negative emotions. My daughter

« ————— »  
**A**t first we panicked. Everyone started posting information about shellfires in social networks, later we learnt it was a mistake as we unwillingly worked as “fire spotters” and the enemy used our anxiety against us.  
————— »



Kira invented the so-called “bottles of fear”. She drew a bottle and then colored it from the bottom up to mark the level of anxiety. I was really concerned when I saw that most of the bottles in her album were colored black up to the bottleneck.

First I tried to follow the curriculum of our art school, but that approach was not working well, so I let the children decide what they wanted to draw. We discussed and came to an opinion that we would make a series of artworks called the “The Force of Good”. I hope these paintings will be exhibited after the war.

Then I got calls from my friends living in Chernihiv, Irpin, Slavutych. They told me about a true massacre. Chernihiv was heavily bombed. In Irpin my friends had been hiding

for three days in a cold garage, in a car repair pit, eating raw buckwheat. Despite a non-stop shelling they decided to try to escape and were almost shot by russians on the road. Missiles reached our district in Kyiv as well on the 19<sup>th</sup> day of the war, so I decided to take my child away from the danger.

A volunteer, who brought humanitarian aid to Kyiv, agreed to give us a lift to Lviv. We were warmly welcomed there. My daughter's music teacher advised us to go to Poland – a music school founder named Anna was ready to host Ukrainian refugees. And so we did.

Polish people were very hospitable and supportive at the border, trying to provide any type of help they could.

Miss Anna gladly sheltered us in her school – a very energetic and compassionate 69-year-old lady who gave some music lessons to my daughter! Her teaching method is based on the method of the famous violinist and music teacher Shunichi Suzuki.

We have a very diverse company here – two teachers from the Luhansk region, a woman with a child from Kolomyia, and women from Kharkiv and Kyiv regions. We all shared the same pain. Each of us worries for relatives, friends, our homes, cities and the fate of the country. Being from different regions, we are all united as a nation.

Unfortunately I can't deliver lessons online to children staying in Kyiv because of poor Internet connection. But, I'm planning to launch an art-project involving local kids and little Ukrainian refugees who will work together on an Easter banner. It will help kids to make friends and share cultural experiences.





I want to return home so much! I think about my son all the time and pray for him. The other day I managed to get through to him on the phone. He caught a cold and coughed, but did not want to upset me. He said that it was someone next to him coughing. But I heard his commander asking if he took his anty-cough syrup. And I felt a bit relieved because there were people caring for him out there. As a mother, I feel better knowing that.

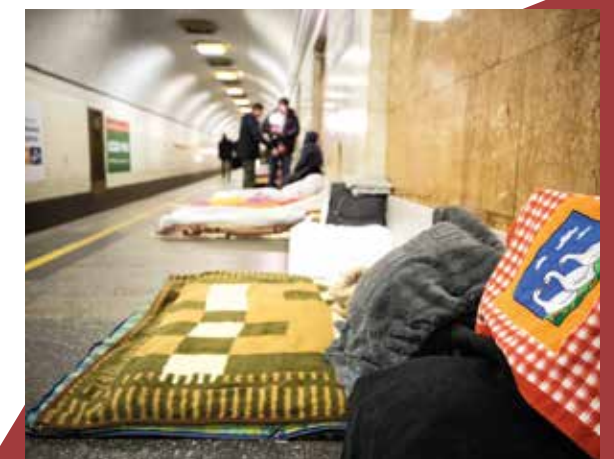
Oh, the Luhansk girls are inviting Kira and me to have dinner together. They were crying today. They worry for their relatives and the city. They said that their entire neighborhoods, peaceful residential areas, were destroyed.

But we all believe that the force of good will defeat those who bring war and death to our land!

« Art lessons are a great tool to minimize the effect of negative emotions. I let the children decide what they wanted to draw. We discussed and came to an opinion that we would make a series of artworks called the “The Force of Good”. I hope these paintings will be exhibited after the war. »



Kyiv, photos by Kyiv City Council







**Alla**

*75 y.o., retiree, Kyiv region*

I was born in 1947, in Soviet Central Asia. I guess my mom had to flee there in the times of the Second World War and didn't return home. I don't remember her and know nothing of her fate, but my foster parents took me soon from the orphanage. When I was six, we moved to Ukraine, my foster mom's Motherland.

I had not witnessed WWII hostilities but I saw the scars it left on souls of the people and suffering of entire generations. As a post-war child I never imagined the world would face such pointless cruelty one more time.

My daughter woke up on February 24<sup>th</sup> from a shellfire and called me ordering to pack immediately. She lives 100 km away, so I actually had a couple of hours to fit seventy years of my life in just one suitcase. I never wished to leave. Back then nobody could imagine those inhumane crimes committed by the enemy in the days to come. Even now I can't believe that the new reality for Ukraine is constructed of mass killings, rapes, siege, raid alerts, shellfire... how come this has become possible in my peaceloving beautiful country? How come all this terror actually takes place in the XXI century, in the heart of Europe?

At first we moved to the western region, hoping to return soon. Then my daughter's friend offered free shelter in Poland. We literally spent two and a half days at the border in a car with our two cats. I will never forget the kindness of volunteers bringing soup and hot tea every day! Thank You from all my heart! You are saving people's lives!

Having crossed the border, we were extremely exhausted, but finally reached our destination. However, because of daughter's work we had to move further once again.

My greatest desire right now is to return home. Due to my age it's harder for me to keep up with the world spinning round so quickly. It is twice harder when you are forced to move to a completely unfamiliar surrounding, to be among the people whose language you do not speak. But my daughter doesn't allow me to go back showing the news from Ukraine about a senior home with people in it ruined on purpose with a direct shot made by a russian tank in Kreminna; about 96-year-old Borys Romanchenko who survived German concentration camps, but not russian "salvation"...



Russia must be demilitarized and denazified right now and for good! Unless it is not done, the world will not be able to live in peace.

« —————  
**R**ussia must be demilitarized and  
denazified right now and for good.  
Unless it is not done, the world will  
not be able to live in peace.

» —————

I could have never imagined a war would define the trajectory of my life again and turn me into a tumbleweed. I just hope russia will be properly punished for all this evil and suffering we are going through.

I want to go back home so much!!!





**Nataliia Yakymenko**

*34 y.o., accountant, Myrhorod and Kyiv*

When I lost my job in Myrhorod due to COVID-19, I had to move to Kyiv with my children and look for something new.

I will never forget that day. It was supposed to be my first working day so I had sent my children (10-year-old twins) to my mother-in-law the day before. In the morning I woke up from the sounds of explosions, looked out of the window and saw people hastily jumping into their cars. My first thought was about my daughters. Will I ever see them again? I can't remember how I got to my mother-in-law's house located half an hour drive away. Just know that it took me more than two hours under the shellfire.

I knew I had to protect them. Having no savings I agreed to settle temporarily in a small village near Vinnytsia. After

several days filled with fear, that old house with a clay oven and an outdoor toilet seemed to be a warm and welcoming shelter. I decided to help families moving westward and offered three of them to stay for a couple of nights with us before traveling further on. But on March 4<sup>th</sup> the suburbs of Vinnytsia were hit by rockets. The illusion of safety was ruined.

I realized there was no totally safe place for me and my children in Ukraine anymore. I returned to Kyiv to convince my sister and my niece to flee abroad and all together we headed to Lviv on an evacuation train. Thirteen hours of very controversial experience: compassion and unity, on the one hand, and men occupying seats while pregnant women are standing in corridors, on the other hand.

Lviv railway station was flooded with people. Our despair, pain and rage were almost palpable. To cross the border we had to wait for a train to Shehyni for several hours. One of my daughters had a fever. Thank God, we met another family and agreed to share responsibilities – some of us were looking for the children inside the railway station building, while the others were standing in a queue. My children were sleeping on cardboards in the hall. In eight hours we managed to squeeze into the train. My daughter was nosebleeding severely, so there were blood stains all over our clothes and we had to explain where the blood came from so many times. Then we had to walk 4 km to the border – we left at 5 p.m. and finally reached it at 6 a.m. My profound gratitude to volunteers both in Ukraine and Poland helping us to survive – carrying suitcases, sharing warm food and blankets. But there are mean people too, ready to steal from a child or grab everything ignoring the others.

« I knew there was no truly safe spot for me and my children in Ukraine anymore. »



Currently I am staying in Wroclaw, at my old friend's house – I know how hard it is to get used to such a huge noisy company. My girls couldn't sleep properly within a week, waking up from every tram passing by.

I do hope we'll return to Ukraine as soon as possible. On Monday our children will go to Polish school, while my sister and I are going to contribute to volunteer's movement to help our citizens looking for safety here.





## Chapter VIII. Our Homelanders: Protection and Support from Abroad

*Don't hesitate to go ahead and cross the line,  
Keep Your eyes on the goal, be sure.  
You have a mind, a heart, a spine,  
Your thoughts are pure and views – mature.*

*(Ukrainian band «No Limits»,  
a song «Will»)*







### Iryna Zemliana

*34 y.o., media expert, safety trainer for journalists, Institute of Mass Information (IMI), Kyiv*

What I have been doing since February 24<sup>th</sup> is just a continuation of my activist commitment that had started before the Revolution of Dignity (Maidan). In 2014 I wrote a song "Vitya, ciao!"<sup>28</sup> offering the President Viktor Yanukovich to leave. For all my initiatives I was awarded a medal of the Duchess Olga, given to me personally by the fifth President Petro Poroshenko.

After Maidan I held regular safety training sessions for journalists at test ranges. There we imitated everything journalists may face in hot spots – explosions, mines, trip wires. We trained them to survive under shellfire, to deliver first aid, to report observing ethical principles and to interact with the military. I also wrote several manuals on reporters' safety.

My emergency backpack was prepared a month prior to the war. I had some kind of a plan but I didn't want to believe it would be needed. However, I couldn't sleep properly for a couple of weeks prior to the full-scale invasion, as I analyzed the threatening messages from Russia.

I remember the last peaceful day – somehow I knew it was the last one. I met my friend in a café and also took important documents and a laptop from the office. I didn't want to leave them to the enemy. The following night I didn't sleep at all. After the first explosion I waited for five minutes and woke my friend up saying: "The war has started!". Thirty minutes later we were already in a car, leaving Kyiv. First we went to a village nearby but then they started attacking Hostomel and we departed to Vinnytsia region. After a warning from my friends that I was on the death list of Ukrainian activists who were to be captured and killed by occupants, I crossed the border with Poland.

In 48 hours we were in Warsaw. I met my old friend from Poltava, who had been living in Poland for several years already, Nataliia Panchenko. We are both very active and always joked: "It's good that we don't live together in Poltava any more, because either we would have resolved all the problems of our city, or it would disappear from the face of the Earth, because we would smash it up."

During the Revolution of Dignity Nataliia organized Euromaidan-Warsaw. It is not operational now but the network of people ready to gladly join our campaigns remained.

<sup>28</sup> This song is an interpretation of an old Italian antifascist song "Bella Ciao!" sung by the anti-fascist resistance movement in Italy. "Vitya Ciao!" was very popular in Ukraine in the times of the Revolution of Dignity. It reflected the spirit of social revolt and disagreement with a sudden shift in the President's external policy from Euro-integration to Pro-Russian stand.

We knew that many trucks that deliver commodities to Russia were crossing the Polish-Belarusian border, mostly with sanctioned or luxury items. For example, some drivers told us that they are transferring Martini to comfort Russians just a little bit because they also suffer. So we decided to block the border physically.

I remember very well Nataliia and myself standing with Ukrainian flags in our hands. At first there were thirty people blocking the way for 72 hours. Later the Polish police pushed us to deblock the truck queue. Just imagine, we managed to keep a 30km line of trucks! Trucks with European plates were free to go.

The next day we appealed to Ukrainians through social networks to join us at the border. In four days we assembled approximately 400 people. No vehicle was able to move – a 55km line was formed. The Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki noticed and reacted to our initiative expressing his full support and asking the EU leaders to settle the issue.

While the EU authorities were contemplating the border closure, new trucks kept arriving. Mr. Morawiecki presented the issue for consideration at the meeting of the European Council. The Baltic states supported his position on the issue but the Chancellor of Germany Olaf Scholz and the President of France Emmanuel Macron were against it.

« —————  
**A**fter a warning from my friends that I was on the death list of Ukrainian activists who were to be captured and killed by occupants, I crossed the border.  
————— »





So we decided to come to Berlin with an appeal to Olaf Scholz, signed by dozens of CSOs from Poland, Ukraine and other states, with the request to close the border. We also brought baby shoes which belonged to a girl killed in Mariupol and offered Germany to sell them to Russia taking their tight trade relations into consideration. The liberal German media were sobered up by that move.

On April 4<sup>th</sup> we are planning to block the German-Polish border. We do realize, of course, that is a risky endeavor, but it's the only way to influence the Germans. We think the initiative will last a maximum of two hours until police disrupts the demonstration. And we also expect to be fined. But when people try to push us away and send us home, I tell them I have none – my home is in ruins.



Our key task, as I see it, is to prevent European politicians from living their comfortable lives and paying less attention to Ukraine. They are dependent on public opinion, thus we need to talk to the citizens of the EU countries so that they, in turn, start pushing their leaders to implement strict and effective measures against the aggressor.

Before the full scale invasion I had had many opportunities to immigrate but I never wanted to. I dream of coming back to my country. No one can destroy Ukraine and its people.

I understand that victory will not be instant or easy for us. And even if Russian army leaves our territories, Putin's regime still shapes Russia, so we will be threatened again. This will be a long exhausting way to pave, a deeply tragic one, but we need to get rid of this plague forever.







## Maryna Yaroshevych

*32 y.o., Advocacy Lead at Promote Ukraine, Director of EU-Ukraine Program at "Ukrainian Prism", Brussels*

I am a mom of a 1-year-old son, being pregnant with my second child, so I do not get much sleep. But on February 24<sup>th</sup> I was awakened by a call from my mom at 4 a.m. She told me: "Pray for us! The war has started!"

What happened next? News, calls to parents, relatives and friends, discussions of priority actions, cries of the awakened son, who probably felt our anxiety... Then – social networks, calls to the Embassy of Ukraine in Belgium, where we live with my family, with questions about coordination of actions.

Since 2015 I've been intensely advocating for Ukrainian interests and needs in international organizations. It was my job – and even more so, my vocation. Due to pandemic and my maternity leave I mostly spent the previous two years doing other things, but war changed it all. There was no time to think of my "delicate situation", while in the first hours of war many people were ready to go out on the streets. So I had to find a legitimate way to protest very fast. In Belgium you must get a permit from the police for any demonstration and this process usually takes several days. Thanks to team-work, getting a permit became a matter of several hours.

We organized protests next to the Russian embassy and the permanent mission of Russia in the EU. We were well-prepared – brought a loudspeaker, flags and other national symbols. Since then we've had over twenty public events organized by activists and volunteers, with the immense support of the NGO "Promote Ukraine", involving the European Parliament MPs, other European officials, Belgian politicians, sympathizing NGOs and ethnic communities.

It's a drop in the ocean but nobody intends to stop. On the second day of the war we found ourselves an office and established the Coordination Center. Over a hundred volunteers, including thirty foreigners, have already assisted the Center in its eight fields of activities we are currently busy with.

Within a week we realized that coordination itself wasn't enough. Refugees were coming to us with a variety of problems from the ones we had been working on. We couldn't just send them to other agencies without sufficient support. Thanks to Promote Ukraine's reputation we have received support for launching a "hot line" with a follow-up on every opened case. One week later we got a designated space from the European Parliament to launch a Ukrainian Hub. Ukrainian civil society

« **We fight on two fronts: it is not just the greedy occupant we fight with, but also the western hypocrites who are ready to pay for the mitigation of the consequences of the war, instead of providing us with sufficient and timely support. All those endless "deep concerns"... But it is our fight, and therefore this will be our victory, the free-spirited unconquered people!**



received keys to the premises from the President of the European Parliament Roberta Metsola.

Our next step is arranging the systemic functioning of this "front-office", to accumulate even stronger support from international organizations, countries, business and citizens.

I am writing these words realizing that they may be perceived as boasting or some kind of a primitive self-promotion, which they are not. They are also not an attempt to stress that people like myself are not lazy and being abroad do whatever they can. After all, here, in a safe country, we can not truly understand what it is like to hide in a bomb shelter at sub-zero temperatures with a small child and worry about a husband in a front line or territorial defence with no proper protection or weapons.

However, it is a different kind of challenge to live in those parallel universes. You are torn apart among so many tasks – to take care of the baby longing for your attention, to rescue relatives and friends from the hot spots, to collect and transfer humanitarian aid brought by your neighbours, and



**H**ere, in a safe country, we can not truly understand what it is like to hide in a bomb shelter at sub-zero temperatures with a small child and worry about a husband in a front line or territorial defence with no proper protection or weapons. However, it is a different kind of challenge to live in those parallel universes... It is a cynical world where they are ready to listen to you only when you look and speak as is customary in this society.





at the same time to formulate bullet points for bilateral meetings with European decision-makers, to prepare oneself for interviews and (attention!) to ensure you have an appropriate look.

The latter irritates me the most, but it is a cynical world where they are ready to listen to you only when you look and speak as is customary in this society. No, of course we are not talking about conformism. There were times when emotions took over and I cried, talking about the grief of our nation and the victory of our soldiers. There was even a moment when I allowed myself to shout and reproach politicians for their lack of understanding of what we are going through. But in general, in order to be accepted and heard, one has to wear a mask and tear it off only after the interlocutor's trust is won.

At times I get so frustrated that it seems I am ready to give up everything and go work in a humanitarian aid sorting center to simply pack clothes and first aid items. But then I think that my major professional experience, connections and drive have not been simply granted to me. It is not a mere coincidence that I happen to be here doing what I do.

Moreover, I do not have much time as I am about to give birth to my second child soon. This motivates me to work harder and faster, as I think of all those Ukrainian women forced to give birth in bomb shelters, basements or in the Underground. So I have no time to waste!

We fight on two fronts: it is not just the greedy occupant we fight with, but also the western hypocrites who are ready to pay for the mitigation of the consequences of the war, instead of providing us with sufficient and timely support. All those endless "deep concerns"... But it is our fight, and therefore this will be our victory, the free-spirited unconquered people!

Glory to Ukraine! Glory to heroes!







**Sasha Delemenchuk**

*38 y.o., HR activist, co-founder of volunteer initiative «Euromaidan SOS», director of «Tbilisi Shelter City» project, Kyiv-Tbilisi*

On February 23<sup>rd</sup> I hosted a big online event and I wanted to spend the following day with my family. I was in Ukraine at that moment, close to my 78-year-old mother. However, on March 15<sup>th</sup> we started our long journey to Tbilisi.

Right after the beginning of this war my «Euromaidan SOS»<sup>29</sup> team reunited and we started responding to various requests. This was one of our key tasks during the Revolution of Dignity: to serve as a bridge between requesters and responders. Now

we had to do the same thing again, along with volunteering, such as organizing food for the elderly and access to medicines. We joined our colleagues from other human rights organizations in an intense advocacy campaign – we used all available international contacts to raise awareness about what was happening in Ukraine.

The raid alerts in Kiev were one after the other and I couldn't really work effectively, so I decided to move to Georgia with my mother, to continue my work from there.

It was a long and uneasy trip: Kyiv – Lviv – Uzhorod – Budapest – Tbilisi. It took us six days. But we met so many kind people who tried to make the journey easier for us. The hardest part was to cross the Hungarian border – we had to walk on foot across the border at night. I tried to carry our suitcases and help my mother go at the same time. Then I was bringing suitcases a little forward and returning for my mother. When a Ukrainian border guard approached us, I began explaining that those were my suitcases and that there was nothing suspicious about them. But he simply took them and carried to the checkpoint. On another side, a Hungarian border guard ran up to us and also grabbed our suitcases and accompanied us to the car waiting to drive us further on.

Since 2005 I've been involved in human rights activism. In my CV you'll find the Civic Freedom Center, Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union, OSCE, Global Fund for Women, etc. In 2016, together with my colleagues from Ukraine, Georgia and Germany, we launched a project in Tbilisi called «Tbilisi Shelter City». I've been actively involved in its work for the last six years already. This project aims to support human rights advocates, activists, lawyers and journalists who face threats to their lives or freedom, professional burnout, or constant stress. We help them with rehabilitation – three months in a safe place with psychological and medical support. So far we were able to help 300 people,

<sup>29</sup> A grassroots initiative created in response to the violent dispersal of a peaceful student demonstration on Maidan Square, November 30, 2013 for providing legal and other assistance to persecuted protesters across Ukraine.

among them Ukrainian HR activists, in particular those who stayed close to the separation line and in grey zones.

We are also ready to launch a separate «UA\_Rehab» initiative, a program of mass support exclusively for Ukrainian HR activists and volunteers to recover in a safe environment. In addition, we plan to outreach people from these groups in those places where they are currently located. This is a 12-month program. After the war, we plan to keep supporting those people who are providing support to others now.

We've always had a very strong Ukrainian community in Georgia. Now we help them to collect humanitarian aid and funds. In just a week we have already collected 1.000.000 € from different donors and sources!

One more plan is to open a Ukrainian school for children who had to leave their homeland because of the war.

I see the future quite clearly – we will win! Even though we will pay an unimaginably high price. The recovery process will be resource-consuming. During this process we have to ensure that human rights will remain a priority. To give an example – many of our police officers who defend us today are also getting used to using arms against occupants, but when we come back to a peaceful life, they will have to work with the detained. We want to ensure that there will be no abuse of power and that we will have no tolerance for discrimination. And, of course, we have to prevent potential disputes within our society that could arise when people start to compare their wartime experiences or blame those who moved abroad.

This victory must become a kind of quantum leap for us, because Ukraine has finally gained subjectivity in international relations. And as horrible as it may sound: Ukraine must use this as a window of opportunity. It should become a victory not only gained on a battlefield, but also on diplomatic, economic and human rights fronts.







**Anna**

*35 y.o., art expert, writer, Michigan, USA*

For me, this war started long ago with the first attack on Donetsk. I spent many of my adult years in Kyiv and I live abroad now, but I was born in Donbass. All my roots are there, in the Donetsk region. To me this region is about my childhood memories, my most beloved ones. When I was a schoolgirl, I asked my grandparents to tell me about our land and I've always perceived it as a Ukrainian territory. It is my Donbass, taken away by occupants in 2014.

I adored my grandparents – they raised me and gave me so much love. The last time we saw each other was in 2013.

When I was leaving, I promised to return from the USA in six months and hug them again. I couldn't have imagined it was actually our last encounter – after the hostilities broke out we were parted forever.

« —————  
**I am looking forward to receiving  
the news of peace one day and the  
message that Donbass returned to  
Ukraine.**  
————— »

A missile hit our yard. Their apartment was damaged. I begged them to leave but my granny was afraid of leaving in an evacuation convoy – those convoys were regularly shelled. Because of all the stress her health deteriorated and she simply couldn't be transferred, physically. My grandpa died first – there was no proper medical aid in those conditions, and my grandmother passed shortly after that.

It causes me so much pain – I see them in my dreams and I can't cope with the fact that I will not see them ever again.

I've been watching news about atrocities in Mariupol for weeks. My great-grandfather was born there. He was an engineer and contributed to the construction and development of the famous "Azovstal" plant, which was almost ruined due to heavy bombardment. The city itself is in ruins. I can't imagine how my great-grandfather would have responded to that – he was a veteran of WWII and now russians bring death and destruction to his land.

My grandpa was an engineer as well, he designed the electronic equipment for the Horlivka mines – now they are all flooded. My grandma spent 40 years saving people's lives as a doctor – but when she required medical care herself nobody was able to ensure it. My hometown is completely deserted, as the separation line goes right around its suburbs. These heartbreaking stories I have to add to my family archive.

This war will be over someday, and I want to visit my region again – Horlivka, Donetsk, Mariupol. I know these places are already completely unrecognizable, but I have to go see the graves of my grandparents.

Now the whole country is under threat due to full-scale russian invasion. I gave myself the task to collect humanitarian aid. Last week my husband and I sent six huge cars loaded with medicines, surgical expendables, clothes, baby food, hygienic items, flashlights, sleeping bags, blankets; tactical first aid kits, vests, gloves and handheld transceivers. I also donated to "Food of Life" which supports refugees, the people in the streets and those sheltered in the Kharkiv subway. The Ukrainian community in Michigan united to send the cargo and donations to the Ukrainian Red Cross, Serhii Prytula's Foundation, "Povernys Zhyvym" ("Come Back Alive") and other CSOs. I always pray for the elderly that they receive this valuable support, as these people are so vulnerable and defenseless due to their age and health condition – just like my grandparents once.

The Ukrainian diaspora is actively sending letters and requests to senators and Congress representatives – we demand to close the sky, to take in Ukrainian refugees and to finally consider the Budapest Memorandum. Every week we hold these gatherings where we explain the situation to the average American. These awareness-raising activities are really important.

Today I've been informed that my aunt's house was damaged after a shellfire – I feel relieved that nobody got hurt. I am looking forward to receiving the news of peace one day and the message that Donbass returned to Ukraine.







### Viktoriia Nikitina

*33 y.o., Managing Director of Blue Sky Windows,  
Vice-President of Ukrainian-Australian Chamber of  
Commerce, Melbourne (Australia)*

I was born in Odessa, spent my childhood and teenage years there. When I was 22 my parents migrated to Australia. There we founded our enterprise specializing in production of uPVC windows. Many Ukrainian migrants are employed by us, including ones residing in Ukraine and working remotely. We left Odesa ten years ago but I still have a very strong connection with this city – a lot of my friends and relatives live there so I try to visit them as often as I can.

There is a Ukrainian diaspora here in Melbourne called «Association of Ukrainians in Victoria». At first it was quite hard for me to interact with local homelander – they were

quite suspicious towards Ukrainians coming from eastern and southern regions, mostly Russian-speaking. But after February 24<sup>th</sup> it all changed completely – this tragedy united all of us, even ones far beyond Ukraine.

When the warfare broke out it was 2 p.m. in Melbourne. One of my colleagues came and said that russians bombed Kharkiv Aviation Institute. I had a panic attack, and could not do anything except sit there and cry. When I finally pulled myself together, I immediately called my grandmother who first thought of thunder strikes hearing explosions. I also informed our employees from Cherkasy and Zhytomyr.

At first it was a feeling of despair, then depression, later I felt nothing but rage and hatred to monsters who turned millions into victims. Then came an overwhelming sense of helplessness – realization that there is nothing you can change. I could just call people, transfer money, but I still wanted to do more.

« —————  
**I** heard different stories about  
Australians helping my country. ...  
**In two weeks I decided to leave for  
Germany and engage in volunteering.  
A week ago I flew to Frankfurt – there  
was nobody from the volunteers’  
organizations in the airport. So I  
arrived at the Main Railway Station  
and approached the first volunteers I  
saw saying: “Good afternoon! I speak  
German, English and Ukrainian. I want  
to help. Where can I put my suitcases?”.  
Having got my negative COVID test I  
started helping Ukrainian refugees right  
away... I will try to help in any way. I  
dream of peaceful and thriving Ukraine.**  
————— »



I heard different stories about Australians helping my country. Someone went back to Ukraine to save relatives, someone donated to AF. One businessman from Queensland, who was born in Okhtyrka,<sup>30</sup> went to Germany, bought a small truck, loaded it with Starlink terminals, modems and other items for the military and drove it himself to the hot spots.

In two weeks I decided to leave for Germany and engage in volunteering. I had a six-month university course in Germany (joint degree program), so my language skills and knowledge of the country helped a lot. My partners were very supportive, giving me a chance to run the company in remotely. I picked Germany also because many Ukrainians I knew fled there to seek shelter. They had some issues with accommodation and paperwork so I thought I would be useful.

A week ago I flew to Frankfurt – there was nobody from the volunteers’ organizations in the airport. So I arrived at the Main Railway Station and approached the first volunteers I saw saying: “Good afternoon! I speak German, English and Ukrainian. I want to help. Where can I put my suitcases?”. Having got my negative COVID test I started helping Ukrainian refugees right away. Also I used my business contacts in Austria and Germany to find suppliers of protective vests and other military equipment for our AF.

I’ve already volunteered in Frankfurt, Mainz and Heidelberg. As a volunteer I realized refugees had problems with registration in different parts of Germany. So now I am trying to create a unique script – kind of a roadmap with all necessary information and algorithms of actions to successfully register in Germany.

I dream of peaceful and thriving  
Ukraine!



<sup>30</sup> It is a Hero City of Ukraine located in the Sumy Oblast, in the East.





**Maryna L.**

*41 y.o., business development manager, Paris*

«Maryna, I am so frightened!».

It was a call from my mother at 4 a.m. Paris time. Honestly, I hate these unexpected night calls! They always bring bad news.

I heard her trembling voice and felt completely helpless. She sounded like a small child who was completely lost. My dad was with me in France at that moment. He came for a short visit. We had plans – to go to exhibitions and Paris neighborhoods, maybe even to Normandy.

My mom was alone in our summer cottage, just like my younger brother was alone in Kyiv. We could not be together. The only thing we could do was stay in touch via phone and Internet, supporting each other.

I don't remember any sadness, panic or rage – I was just caught in a sort of a limbo for a whole week...Those days are like a blank page in my memory.

My family is a mixture of cultures – Russian and Ukrainian. I cherished both parts of my heritage, which defined me as a person. But after the beginning of the war, communication with all my russian relatives was lost. There were no scandals or disputes – it just occurred. It is good that my grandmother Mania did not live to see this moment – the betrayal of the family members! Well, that is ok. I will survive.

I helped my father to reach the Ukrainian border but I had to return to Paris – I have an 8-year-old son and it is my responsibility to take care of him. It was hard to let my father return to a place where active hostilities take place. But my family will never abandon their homeland. We are discussing our plans for summer and autumn without any “if we win” forecasts – I strongly believe in our victory and we do not accept any other scenario!

My friends from different countries started offering support, such as shelter and money for refugees. This pushed me to start volunteering myself and I am grateful to all of them.

French society demonstrates solidarity and supports Ukraine in different ways. The government launched an online-portal **parrainage.refugies.info** for citizens who are ready to provide any help to

« ————— »  
**M**y family is a mixture of cultures – Russian and Ukrainian. I cherished both parts of my heritage and it's always been a part of my life. But after the first day of the war I literally lost all my russian relatives. There were no scandals or disputes – it just occurred. I think I am able to cope with that.  
————— »

refugees: temporary accommodation, information and translation support in administrative centers or collection of humanitarian aid.

France joined the other 27 EU states and approved a decision to provide temporary protection to Ukrainian refugees. This status guarantees the right to employment, free medical aid and ADA allowance.

I try to do everything I can. This includes helping newcomers to handle the local bureaucracy (as a translator), giving advice on children's enrollment in schools and language courses, visiting mass gatherings supporting Ukraine and coordinating joint activities with Secours populaire, Association l'abbé Pierre, to cover the prioritized needs of my homelander fleeing from the war. On March 23<sup>rd</sup> we are going to launch a round of fundraising in our city.

I received an offer from my son's school administration to deliver lectures on Ukrainian history for children. My son helps his peers to adapt in this foreign to them environment.

I am always ready to help anyone with what I can! And I have no doubt the Victory is ours!







**Yevheniia Grippa**

*37 y.o., entrepreneur, Donetsk-Kyiv-Tokyo*

As for any Ukrainian from eastern regions, this war started much earlier for me – in 2014. They took away my native city – Donetsk. Many Ukrainians then had to build a new life from scratch, heal the souls pierced by the war.

I moved to Kyiv. I bought an apartment and launched my own business – selling Japanese personal care products and household chemicals. I can't say that time has healed my wounds, however, I managed to find my place in a new environment and finally to not wake up from nightmares.

On February 24<sup>th</sup> I was still in Tokyo. The day before I met my old friend from Donetsk and we spent a nice day walking the streets of Kyoto. The next day after lunch (there is a 7 hour time difference between Ukraine and Japan) we received a message that war broke out in Ukraine. I remember feeling completely paralyzed. The next few days were like an endless marathon of news and calls from my relatives and friends, and I was crying all the time.

On February 26<sup>th</sup> I heard about an anti-war gathering so I notified all the Ukrainians I knew personally and asked them to join. There were so many people there – not just our homelands but also Japanese and other foreigners. Suddenly I realized that my helplessness was fading and I found my way of contributing to the resistance of Ukraine and helping my people.

Once I volunteered at a gathering, collecting donations for humanitarian aid. The idea was just floating in the air. Together with other volunteers we managed to plan one of the most spectacular events to support Ukraine. Together with florists we launched an initiative called «Flowers for Ukraine». A famous Japanese florist provided three hundred free decorative sunflowers. Later, other manufacturers joined and for the second event we received a thousand flowers. This is something really unique for the Japanese! We presented those sunflowers as a Ukrainian symbol<sup>31</sup> and sold them to people, donating all the money to humanitarian

<sup>31</sup> Throughout Ukraine's history, the sunflower has been used as a symbol of peace. In 1996, U.S., Russian and Ukrainian defense ministers planted sunflowers in a ceremony celebrating Ukraine's abandonment of the world's third-largest nuclear arsenal, which it inherited in 1991 after the collapse of the Soviet Union.



«  
**We can see that the citizens of so many states have already united to support us in this fight against the aggressor. We hope that global leaders will behave the same way!**  
»

organizations in Ukraine. We are now expecting to get even more flowers and organize such events in other cities around the country.

The Japanese people are so empathetic – adults, the elderly and even children who came to give the money they had. Some even refused to take the flowers and simply left a donation. We can see that the citizens of so many states have already united to support us in this fight against the aggressor. We hope that global leaders will behave the same way!

I know for sure we will restore our country. The scope of the devastation and destruction caused by Russian aggression is unprecedented for Ukraine, and so we have to think about our future. Thus, I am now negotiating with a company which is ready to help our country with construction waste recycling. All we need now is to find partners in Ukraine.

Despite being so far away from my homeland I still try to be helpful – not just with words, but with actions!





# ABBREVIATIONS

- AFU** – Armed Forces of Ukraine
- APC** – armored military vehicle
- ASAP** – as soon as possible
- ATM** – automatic teller machine
- CSO** – civil society organizations
- CV** – curriculum vitae
- EU** – European Union
- HCJ** – High Council of Justice
- HR** – human rights
- HQ** – headquarters
- HQC** – High Qualifications Commission of Judges of Ukraine
- ICU** – intensive care unit
- ID** – identification w abbreviaturu
- IDPs** – Internally Displaced Persons
- MP** – Member of Parliament
- MRLS** – multiple rocket launcher
- NABU** – National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine
- NACP** – National Agency on Corruption Prevention
- NATO** – North Atlantic Treaty Organization
- NGO** – non-governmental organization
- OSCE** – Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
- PR** – public relations
- SAPO** – Specialized Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office
- SE** – State Enterprise
- SES** – State Emergency Service of Ukraine
- SOS** – "Save Our Souls" (SOS is a distinctive Morse code sequence to ask for help)
- STEM** – science, technology, engineering, and mathematics
- uPVC** – unplasticised polyvinyl chloride
- US** – Unated States of America
- USSR** – Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
- VRU** – Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine
- WWII** – Second World War

# COMPILERS



**Olena Buchynska**, PhD in Economics, Associate Professor, Department of Marketing, Kyiv National Economic University named after Vadym Hetman



**Olena Davlikanova**, PhD, Project Coordinator, Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Office in Ukraine



**Iryna Lylyk**, PhD in Economics, Associate Professor, President of Ukrainian Marketing Association, Kyiv, Ukraine



**Oksana Yashkina**, PhD in Economics, Professor, Department of Marketing, Odesa National Polytechnic University

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The book contains photographs provided by the heroines, their relatives, as well as Ukrainians who suffered or witnessed these terrible events.

For any additional information, please, contact [olena.davlikanova@fes.kiev.ua](mailto:olena.davlikanova@fes.kiev.ua) or [for.good.ad@gmail.com](mailto:for.good.ad@gmail.com)



## «ОБПАЛЕНА МАЛЬВА» 33-го За мотивом однойменного твору композиторки Галини Овчаренко

– Що, ростеш?

Не рости... Я прошу, не рости.

Не рости, бо тобі не дадуть  
зацвісти. А, проте...

Прорости!

Прорости через все.

Прорости крізь усе, що мовчанням  
кричить. Ти ж зосталась одна. Ти  
сама...

Закричи! Я прошу: закричи!

Закричи, поки ще не німа!

Закричи, клянучи, кличучи,  
перекаленим цвітом уся клекоци.

Клекочи!

Клекочи – не тужи! Клекочи –  
бережи!

Збережи чорні пуп'янки видутих  
жил. За усіх!

За усіх недоїд! За усіх недожив!

За усіх недолюб! За усіх не  
доцвів! За усіх недоспів!

Чують зорі високу тебе.

І Земля, і Дніпро, і Дунай:

перехлюп, перелив, переплив,

переплач – через край...

Переплач!

Переплач за усіх. Гулом горе  
гірчить, цідить цівкою немоготи...

Тісно горю в землі, де вже квітів  
нема.

Ні зернинки нема.

Але ти прорости.

Бо голодному торю знекровлених  
плес неможливо пливти.

Але ти – відрости...

Відрости, прорости, зацвіти!

Запалай!

Зарости затуманений,  
зморений край тим, що кращого  
є у тобі.

Молодій! Рожевій! І рости!

Чуєш, Мальво! Рости!

І зрости до небес!

Подивись – чий то голос вгорі?

Голос – твій.

Голос мови твоєї

ВОСКРЕС!

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