



#WARDIARY 3: FROM NOMADE TO A SETTLER

Posted on 14. März 2022 by Lina Zalitok

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16th day of war in Ukraine. I was very much surprised as I read "third week of war in Ukraine" in one of my emails. After the third day of war I wrote that it felt like the third month of war. But then time stopped. Every day I feel like it were the third day of war. Every day is somehow similar. I never know which day it is and always get surprised when I accidentally see "Wednesday" or "Sunday" on my phone. But it is difficult to surprise me with atrocities that the Russian barbarians are continuing every day. Three days in a row I watch in TV from time to time all the scenes in Mariupol, Sumy, Baryshivka...etc...with no emotions, although Baryshivka is rather close to my place. I hope that Russian troops still find it not reasonable to waste bombs for my town. The last three days I almost don't wake up at night and sleep well: Most of my friends managed to leave all the dangerous places, so I don't follow online notifications about air alarms. Also, there are no bomb alarms at my place any more, at least for now.

The greatest relief I felt was at the moment as I knew that my friend's parents managed to leave Kharkiv. I somehow thought, it had not been possible any more. However, my friend Olga (I changed her name, just in case) managed to organise their whole trip from Kharkiv to the very west of Ukraine being in Berlin and guiding them all the way through from hell to peace, by giving instructions on mobile phone. They had been sitting under shelling in a basement for at least six days. On March, 6, the supermarket in Olga's residential area was shelled at noon while people were buying food. One woman lost her leg. In the news they said that 15 persons were injured and 4 persons died. Olga heard stories from her neighbours and saw some picture of the scene after which she cannot see the red colour without shudder. She told me that there were pieces of human meat. Now she has been living in Berlin for several years, but she went almost every day to that supermarket when she was at school. Other buildings in her neighbourhood were also bombed down to earth and some people were buried dead under ruins. "How can I live

now when all my memories from my Kharkiv are destroyed?" - she asked me and I didn't know what I should answer. My lovely TV tower in Kyiv which I thought to be destroyed after one of the bombings turned out to have survived...

Any way, Olga's parents managed to escape this hell and I hope that my psychological support and some information about the route and curfew hours, which I could find in some chats with friends and social media posts, were of some help. It was so strange to hear Olga telling me (being in Kyiv region) in WhatsApp call from Berlin "We need to find out if there is still a bridge near that town in Poltava region." I asked another friend, whose parents live in Poltava region, about that and she confirmed to me that the bridge was still there.

Olga's parents tried to cross the border twice after standing many hours in a line, but both times without success, because her father is 59 years old. Olga told me, he looked like he was 70 and his hands trembled: he had done a lot of hard physical work as a builder. Men under 60 years are not allowed to cross the border. "Is it an argument that I have bad health, if I have no teeth?" - Olga's father asked his daughter on the phone. Finally, my colleague helped to find a room for these two exhausted people in a western Ukrainian city overfilled with "refugees" (I still cannot call Ukrainians refugees, so I use ""), where they had to get used that people didn't switch to Russian while talking to them. Just in time as Olga's father desperately decided to go all the way back to Kharkiv where he has a house, which he had built with his hands during all his life.

During the first days of war I had to look for comfort words as Olga felt guilty because she didn't manage to persuade her parents to leave Kharkiv before the war. She was sure, there would be war weeks before, but her parents wouldn't leave. Sometimes we have to admit that we are not responsible even for our dearest people and that they are capable of and entitled to taking decisions by themselves even if these are wrong decisions. I learnt it in another context, so the pain back then pays off as an argument which I use now to calm down those friends whose parents don't want to leave Ukraine. But I still remember as Olga called me one day before the war and asked me if I knew how to get from Kharkiv to Berlin and if the law on state of emergency was already in force. According to this law, her father wouldn't be allowed to cross the border or enter any airport (we didn't know exactly). I thought, it was not necessary to escape the country back then (it was several hours before the war started) and that there wouldn't be war or at least that it was not likely...Later she told me that many of her friends (who are 20 something now) left Kharkiv several years ago, because they didn't feel safe living so close to Russia.

With every person who left Kyiv, Bucha, Kharkiv or even Ukraine I felt more relieved and even cheerful. My greatest worry is now the parents of my friend in one eastern town who don't have any food in their town, although it is still quiet there. So now my usual questions to her are: "Is it quiet? Is there still food?" "There is competition to get bread, but fortunately they have some potatoes and canned food." - my friend answered today. Of course, I also worry about blockaded Mariupol and other towns, but this is somewhat different feeling. It is like big dark abstract suffering which I cannot change. Thousands of people thrown back by violence to stone age.

In contrast to all the people, about whom I feel so happy when they leave and reach safety, I would feel rather sad if my two friends, who are staying not far away from me, would leave their place. It feels so good to know that they are not far away. With every friend who leaves a relatively safe place, I ask myself "And what about you?". I rejected several offers to leave Ukraine or at least move to the west. I don't know how realistic these offers were as I don't

have a car and there are no trains close to my town. Apart from that, I cannot drive a car. So it would have been a quest to find my way to respective evacuations.

Before the war, I thought it was more important to learn to dance beautifully as soon as possible than to finally get my driving licence. I started my driving course in December 2019 and then in January 2020 I started a new job. Anxiety about being always available on my new position and corona somehow interrupted my enthusiasm (I really liked driving a car). And then I started to learn dancing. In Ukraine driving schools give you two years for learning and taking the exams. So yes, game over. Also, another reminder that your needs are much more important than any job unless you are a soldier or a doctor, of course. Driving a car is now to my mind one of survival tools. It feels especially disappointing after my dearest German friend offered me with lots of enthusiasm in her voice to buy a car and send it to me so that I could drive to Germany. The same friend who didn't stop motivating me to get myself together and get that driving license. It would have been romantic, if it were realistic. Although I admit, my inability to drive a car is not the only reason why it's not possible. 

Many friends abroad offered to me and my parents their place to stay. Moreover, a big part of me and my life is already in Berlin: I still have a lot of my belongings at cellars of my four friends. I didn't manage to bring them to Ukraine as I suddenly got an internship offer in Kyiv and later a job. Until now (and still, for obvious reasons) I actually didn't want to bring them to Ukraine, because I was never sure that I wouldn't go back to Berlin where I had studied and worked for several years. That would mean that I would have to transport that stuff again back from Ukraine to Berlin.

I always told that Germany and Italy were my second motherlands and missed them every six months. I also regularly had Fernweh (German word for "wish for traveling or living far away") and wanted to leave it all and start exploring new culture every two years. After 2013 I moved to a different country every two years. I had thought it was boring to live in your own country, because there were not enough foreigners and intercultural challenges. I have never had a cosy apartment and I always tried to buy as few things as possible to be able to move immediately and without regret to a new place.

But after the war started, I feel like my feet got roots. I feel like a tree.

I cannot and don't want to move. Here are some thoughts about possible reasons which come to my head:

- The most apparent one is that my home town is not Bucha or Mariupol or other town being bombed or blockaded right now.
- I don't have children to take care of.
- I want to stay with my parents as much as possible. They don't want to move...yet. My father may not leave Ukraine even if he wanted to (he doesn't). I don't want to hear about the possible suffering of my parents from distance. I'd better share it with them. We already share it, but for now it is a rather light version of suffering: We still have food, water, heating and first of all peace.

- But the most important reason for sudden disappearance of my cosmopolitan spirit is probably this English proverb "My home is my castle". I feel myself the most powerful here.
- Not less importantly, I want to leave my country because I want to and not because some idiot decided to invade it.
- Apart from that, my life seems to have no sense without Ukraine. Right now I don't see any meaningful future for myself except for writing down my impressions from this nightmare, which still doesn't appear real to me.

Of course, I don't exclude that if it gets more dangerous, maybe I will still change my decision. On some days I do feel like a maniac were approaching my home or like there were a monkey with a grenade close to me, as my home is not far away from Chornobyl nuclear station. But I do realize that it's rather irrational fear. In the first days it was so strong that I was pretty sure that I was doomed to death. Now I think it's 70/30. 70% likelihood that I will survive.

von Lina Zalitok

Bildquelle: © Lina Zalitok, 2022. Ein Hund, scheinbar unbeeindruckt von den Kampfhandlungen, sonnt sich im Heimatort der Autorin.