



## #WARDIARY 7 OR #NODANCEDIARY

*Posted on 28. März 2022 by Lina Zalitok*

Über einen Monat nach Beginn des Kriegs Russlands gegen die Ukraine reflektiert Lina Zalitok in ihrem 7. Eintrags ins #WarDiary über die Rolle des Tanzens in ihrem Leben.

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31st day of war. I spent already one month in my town. It is still relatively quiet, if one ignores air sirens. Recently I cannot get rid of the feeling that I am rather useless in stopping this war here. Actually like anywhere else. The only difference is that here I could become meat for missiles or bullets one day. It would be not much meat though. My 50 kg don't take much space, so it is not much likely that a missile is going to hit me. Also, I still believe that our Army won't let the barbarians come here. But you never know. Death has always been my favourite topic. To be honest, I could die soon because of anything else in any other place in the world. As people in Odesa say, you have to die because of something (надо же от чего-то умереть).

I have nothing to lose, which gives me a lot of power and makes me almost fearless. I don't have any achievements, any possessions, I don't have children, I am not even in love. Not completely fearless, because I know that I am more than 50 kg meat. I have a life to lose which I could finally live according to who I am and what I want (if I find out). Since my school-years I have been told that I have a great potential. I agree: I feel it in my veins, especially strongly since in October I got 30 years old and realised that I have been holding my life passion in prison and not allowing it to see the daylight.

After my last birthday I started to dance every day, alone and in dance classes, at dance parties in Kyiv and abroad. I had been learning to dance with a constant feeling that I should hurry up. I felt some mysterious time pressure. Maybe it was because I turned 30, maybe because 'carpe diem' has always been my inner mantra, maybe because I thought that because of corona, dance classes would again be prohibited or maybe because my body somehow felt, that this war was coming, even if I hadn't thought much about the possible war. I had just thought that I had to make the most of every day and that I had to learn to dance as a long as it was still possible. Before another Corona

outbreak, before I decide to move to another country (my dance teachers in Kyiv are wonderful), before I get too old, before I get married, etc.

Combining a full-time job with dancing was anything but easy, so in order to save time for commuting, I moved into a flat in the building next to my dance studio, with a small dance room with a big mirror. In November and December, I visited three dance festivals in Cracow and spent one workshop weekend in Germany with a genius dance teacher from the USA. I took a plane every two weeks and I didn't feel bad about environment, because after corona pandemic started, I only once travelled to Berlin by plane. Apart from that, I didn't have enough vacation days left to travel by train. All of these three lindy hop dance festivals started on Thursday evening and ended on Sunday. On Thursday the dance party ends at around 3 a.m., on Friday at around 5 a.m., on Saturday it is the biggest party ending at 6 a.m. and on Sunday at around 3 a.m. I danced as much as I could and till the very end of each party. During the day, on Friday and weekend I would also go to some 3 hours of dance classes each day with international teachers. On Mondays, I would already be working in my office. I felt unstoppable and driven by some powerful force. I felt so happy many dozens of days in a row that I often couldn't fall asleep.

Lindy hop changed my personality and I (re)discovered the importance of my body. Social dancing is like a life metaphor, so I couldn't help sharing my insights and experience in a dance diary, which I started to write on my Facebook. In this way I combined the passion for dancing and for writing. I even wrote some poems. It was like coming back to myself, because I hadn't been writing since I was 22 years old or something. After feeling lonely in Kyiv during one year or so (it had seemed to me impossible to make friends when having a full-time job) and continuing to hang out online with my friends in Germany, I finally met lots of wonderful people in Kyiv, because lindy hop is not just about dancing, it is a community. Almost all of my dance friends were like me dancing very intensely before the war escalated. We had a sharp feeling of life. It was sharpened by corona, but two weeks before the war it was even more sharpened by the expectation of war. Here is what I wrote in my #DanceDiary on February, 18:

"As for possible war and the question about having fun during hard times, remember the Dance of Death and the burying rituals of many ethnicities like hutsuls who dance and sing during funerals. Dancing helps me to feel more alive, come back to myself (at least partially) and realize that I am stronger than all the anxieties and life difficulties. To illustrate, lindy hop and authentic jazz were not invented by happy rich gentlemen and women, but by slaves. For me dancing is even more inspiring during hard times (also personal ones), because then I dance in spite of all. There is something powerful in the word combination "in spite of all". To summarize, dancing is to my mind life- and love-affirming." I also commented on one of the posts of my dance friend explaining why it was not light-hearted to dance in times of war anticipation: "Let's "dance out" our fear and suffering! Lindy hop and solo jazz were invented by people with a tragic fate, who, despite slavery, found the joy of life in self-expression and music."

On February, 22 I was too late for my evening dance class because of work and I somehow ended up in a bar next to my flat where there was live music. I ordered ice-cream and wanted to finish one work task. I felt so cool: It was my first time going alone to a bar; it was the first time I went to that music bar close to my flat where I couldn't go before because of lack of time; I had a wonderful job; I was living in Kyiv centre like a protagonist of the book I recently translates into German; but first and foremost, I was listening to live music in a bar full of people IN SPITE OF all the war anxiety. I even posted a short video of the concert as a Facebook story with a hashtag #FuckWar, but deleted it

after one hour, as it suddenly seemed to me irrelevant and inappropriate. Later, when the war escalated, I thought, it was stupid of me: I had better packed my bag for quick evacuation that evening. However, I am happy that that evening I spontaneously decided to visit that bar and to walk through the famous Kyiv Food Market for the first time.

It's been 31 day since me and many of my friends have not been dancing. I was wrong that dancing was necessary for life, at least it is not necessary for My life, at least for now. Many of my dance friends, who have been dancing and even teaching many years, stopped dancing. I am so sorry for them, because for many of them it is their profession and they cannot live it for the second time, the first one was because of corona lockdown. But there are Ukrainian dancers, mostly living abroad, who continue dancing now. Frankly, it hurts a lot to read that they still dance and go to dance festivals. I click away all the photos and videos from the recent dance festivals like one clicks away photos of an ex-partner after a breakup. I haven't been listening to jazz music and haven't been watching dance videos since the war escalated. Before the war I did it every day to get some inspiration or to learn something new. Some days ago my dance friend sent me a lindy hop video illustrating solidarity, but I couldn't force myself to click on the „Play“-button.

Several days ago I cancelled my participation at „Jazz Roots Festival“ in mid-April in Paris, where I was going to go together with my dance teacher. As we booked it in January, it felt like a dream to us. To me because it would be my first solo jazz festival (I just started dancing solo) and because I love Paris and because I was going there with my dance teacher like equals although I was a complete beginner. To my dance teacher, it seemed like a dream because the year before she couldn't go there because of Corona. The organisers reimbursed our fees very quickly and I am very thankful for that. The organisers of Retro-weekend dance festival in mid-March in Warsaw also reimbursed us very quickly. Wizzair cancelled our flights and reimbursed us without waiting for our reimbursement request. It was nice, because I wasn't sure I would manage to put myself together to ask for reimbursement. I still have a ticket for another dance festival in Turin starting on April, 29 and something stops me from cancelling my participation. Maybe the same thing which stops me from deleting all my Google calendar notifications about my dance and yoga classes. I still see them every day like a reminder that there was a different life once upon a time and that maybe one day it will continue.

This Thursday I moved out of my flat with a dance room with a mirror in Kyiv where I used to walk through beautiful streets reminding me of Brussels. Maybe because of art nouveau buildings or because of hills. The war was not the only reason for my decision. The flat owner made a bad impression on me on the very first day. Several days ago he asked me either to take my things from his flat or to pay a rent with „a good discount“. I chose the first option and he told me to pay the rent for two „extra days“ of „staying in Kyiv“, because we signed the contract on September, 22. He also deducted 100 UAH (some 3 Euro) monthly "discount" from my bail (Kaution), which he had given me for a wardrobe purchase, which I didn't buy in the end. Such thorough calculations surprised me, then made me angry, later I found them ridiculous, now I pity him, because he sounds like a person with mental problems.

He didn't pay me back the rest of the bail, so I didn't give him my key back. The Scroogeseemed to be totally unimpressed by the war escalation and was sure he was going to find a new tenant easily. Later he promised to me on the phone to transfer the rest of the bail „in the near future“ and complained to me about his financial losses because of the previous tenant and problems with health. I told him everything I think about him, and he answered to

me that I was the one who was unfair in wartime. He does have his own key from the apartment and could enter it. But maybe it is uncomfortable to think that some other person has a key from your apartment...

The good thing is that he is not Ukrainian. He has the same citizenship as those barbarians who invaded my country. I don't care about the money, it is about justice. Quickly packing my things to the sound of air sirens was a special experience. But having found an unknown man who was ready to transport my belongings from Kyiv to my town without asking for any remuneration, was much more special. I had texted to my Ukrainian dance friend living in Germany that I was looking for a car and he sent to me the phone number of this man five minutes later. Later my friend told me: Everything is all right, you got this flat when you needed to dance, now you don't need to dance, so you gave it back.

The first weeks of war escalation my body felt like a stone, I started again to live only in my head like many years, before I (re)started dancing. My bad posture was back. But on day 17 or so I suddenly started to feel that my body was waking up. Then I started to feel the strength in my body and all the changes after months of intensive dancing. So all of that was not in vain. Some days ago I had also two online warm-ups with two dance teachers who organised them to raise our spirit. We moved our bodies, but we didn't dare to dance. In the first days of war I said I would never dance again. I feel like there is a funeral every day. And there is indeed a daily funeral, in different parts of Ukraine, with or without funeral ceremonies, with individual or mass graves like in the Second World War. I cannot dance when my people are dying. But now I think that maybe one day I will dance, I am almost sure I will dance, because it is wonderful and I won't let those barbarians take happiness and love away from us.

*Bildquelle:* © Oleksandr Kovalenko, 2022. Die Autorin des Beitrags auf ihrer letzten großen Tanzparty und das erste Mal auf der Bühne mit einer Jazz-Nummer in solo.