

First I want to say Thank you to all the people here for joining us at Big Gig! Also, I want to thank all the people from the United Kingdom for helping the Ukrainians. My family is deeply touched by such a warm welcome here! Special thank you to Durlston Court, all teachers, parents, and everyone who helps us here! I'm really grateful to the people who helped us get here And of course, a huge thank you to our lovely host family. I love you all guys, you are all amazing, everything you're doing warms our hearts so much.

Let me tell you a bit about our life and how it has changed. For every Ukrainian, life divides into "before" and "after" ...In our "before" we had normal lives filled with a usual everyday routine like every person in this world. We lived in a small town on the Azov seashore called Berdyansk, it's very much like Lymington where we're living now. We had our dreams, our plans, our houses. We had a future. And when it started. For us, the war started at about 5 in the morning with the sounds of explosions.

Russian troops launched missile attacks on the military locations of my town. The blast wave was so strong that windows broke in some houses.

It is difficult for me to describe what I felt at that moment, it is a mixture of paralyzing fear and numbness. There had been talks about the war for a long time, but no one could believe that this would actually happen. On the fourth day of the war, Russian troops entered our town and occupied it. I remember very well the moment when I went into my children's room, they were playing on the floor, I looked up and saw a Russian tank through the window, the muzzle of tank was looking in our direction. Without a sound, I just took the children into another room. This was the first time I had a panic attack.

And then an endless series of days began, in which heating, electricity, mobile and Internet services disappeared in turn. Food and medicine began to fade from supermarket shelves, and Russian troops completely cut off the supply to our town ... At first, air-raid sirens constantly sounded and we ran to hide. The basic rule sounded like this - there should be two walls between the windows and you, so that missile fragments do not reach you. We put our blankets on the floor and counted the minutes in total darkness. But since we learned that the Russians are shelling the cities of Ukraine with bombs that breakthrough nine-story buildings to the bottom, we stopped hiding, because there was no point in it.

At first, the inhabitants gathered every day for meetings in the centre of the town and opposed the Russian invasion. Russian soldiers filled the city, they were everywhere, right down to the playgrounds, and they stood there with weapons. My children have never seen armed people before. It was scary.

And then people started disappearing. The occupiers grabbed the activists right on the streets and took them somewhere... And then they filmed a video of them, who, in dead voices, asked the inhabitants to cooperate with the occupiers because they came to save us. It became unbearable to breathe in the town. The only emotion that I remember from those times is the animal fear for the lives of my children. The fear was so strong that I could not eat or sleep. Every day there were panic attacks just from the mere thought that armed Russians could enter your house, see Ukrainian ribbons, and books in Ukrainian, and take you prisoner. It became impossible to stay. Our home stopped being our home. Packing things, I said goodbye to my house forever. But the most precious things remained there - the memory of the first steps of our children, the first laughter, pictures and growth marks on the walls.

It was scary to leave, there were military operations in the region, all the time we were hearing the sounds of distant sounds of missile attacks, there was no mobile and internet service, we were inside of an information vacuum, and we did not know the situation on the roads. But the despair of life there overcame the fear of the road.

Our destination was the city of Zaporizhzhia, which was in territory controlled by Ukrainian forces. In fact, we left the house but went home to Ukraine. Ahead of us was a road that normally took only two hours by car. We spent 10 hours on this path. We drove through 17 enemy checkpoints, where we were met by armed Russians, who checked our documents, car, our things. If they did not like something, they could simply take the person for interrogation or not let them go further. They said why you are going to Zaporizhzhia, soon it will be the same as in Mariupol. All I wanted to ask is, why do you want to make a semblance of Mariupol out of a peaceful city? But they had rifles, and I have children in the car...

On the windows of our car were pieces of paper with the words Children and pieces of white cloth tied to the door handles. We believed that this would help to get us safe and sound. But there were people it didn't help at all. Along the way, we saw civilian cars blown up by mines, civilian cars shot by shells, wrecked tanks and military vehicles. It was the longest day of my life. But we are lucky, because they let us through and did not leave us to spend the night in an open field under missile strikes, as happened to many people later.

And then there were three weeks of travel in Europe, we drove thousands of kilometres through breathtaking landscapes, but it did not cause delight, because it was not an adventure, but an escape from the war. We met wonderful people on our way. And we continue to meet them. Now we are here and safe. But everything

that is happening now in the occupied territories is a disaster. Russian troops do not allow humanitarian aid to pass from the territory of Ukraine. They bring goods from the Crimea, which cost twice as much as here in Lymington and New Milton. There is practically no jobs in the city, and people from the destroyed Mariupol continue to arrive every day. Every day, more than a hundred locals go to help centres for food and hygiene products that they cannot afford. Our volunteers are making titanic efforts despite the constant threats from the occupied authorities and are trying to help everyone. Especially vulnerable in this situation are children with their needs for formula, diapers, fruits and vegetables. With your help, we want to make life a little easier for children who are in terrible conditions of the occupation regime.

Thank you for your attention and your invaluable support. I want you to know that every Ukrainian in the world is immensely grateful for everything you do in our common fight against world evil!

*Kateryna Bazelyuk*