

*A Commemoration of
two Years of Russia's full-
scale invasion of Ukraine*

SUSK 

DIGITAL ALBUM

24.02.24

SUSK is commemorating the second anniversary of Ukraine's fight for freedom with a digital album, capturing the voices of youth impacted by the war. Submissions include experiences, events, and emotions related to the conflict. Our goal is to showcase a diverse range of perspectives, highlighting both the loss and resilience within the Ukrainian community.





Marta Krueger

Pain and Sorrow

Oil on Masonite

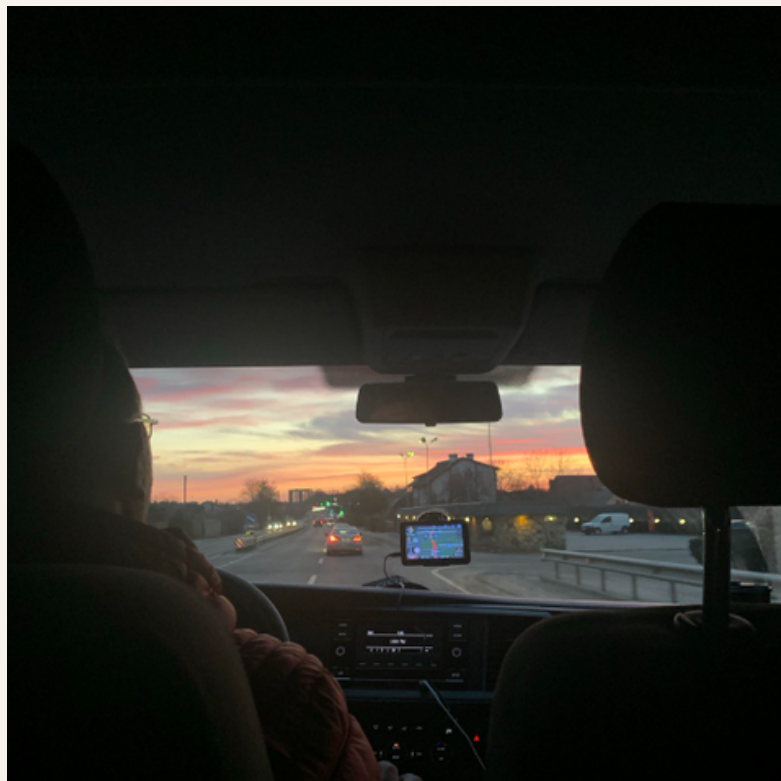
9.5" x 11"



This painting is a personification of *Наша Україна*, but also the anguish, and the spirit of Ukraine that screams within us all.

**February 25, 2022, 7:02 am
Near Lviv, Ukraine.**

Solomiia Horbatso



Dad was driving me, my sister, and my mom to the Ukraine-Poland border. We were in line for 16 hours that night and did not get even close to the checkpoint. At midnight mobilization began and all men were denied crossing the border. Mom refused to drive herself without our dad. We headed back to Lviv. Radio LUX FM was playing the news non-stop. We started seeing tanks and military trucks on highways heading East.

**February 26, 2022, 6:44 pm
Smilnytsia Customs (UA-PL).**



Me, my sister, our mom, and my best friend, who was an orphan, crossed the border with Poland on foot. We waited for a few hours with hundreds of others in large groups until Polish officers would let us enter Polish territory. We were lucky to stand there for only a few hours before the night and before it started snowing. There were already dozens of volunteers helping officers coordinate logistics and get us food, hot beverages, and blankets. There were few blankets, and they were given to small kids and elderly only. Then there were buses going to the closest cities in Poland that started opening places for refugees.



February 28, 2022, 8:22 pm
Hotel Kolejorz, Muszyna, Poland.

Solomiia Horbatso



Me and my mom were volunteering at the hotel that was transformed into a refugee center as we know the Polish language. Within a couple of days, Polish people would bring tons of warm clothes, hygiene stuff, and even kids' toys there. We would play in the halls with kids, so that their parents could figure out documentation, contact with relatives back home, etc. At that point, everyone still believed it all was a short-term measure, and we would return safely soon. At the same time, this hotel's management was planning how to manage that stay for at least a month.

August 23, 2023, 4:36 pm
Lviv, Ukraine.



My first visit home after 18 months away. Lviv has changed. There are protective constructions on all historical buildings or monuments for the least. This photo was taken during the air alarm. That is why there are no people on the streets. My city is alive, it's far from the frontline, but it still trembles with every other siren.



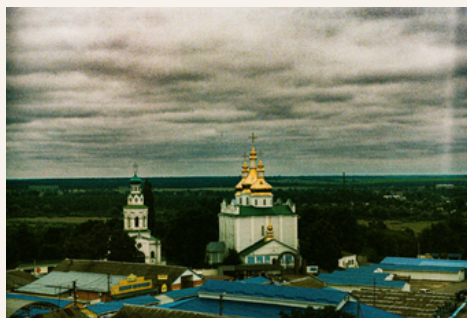
A Cemetery Somewhere

Nolan Orvold

I'd never met my great grandparents. Similarly I barely knew my grandmother. She passed away when I was very young. This is not to say that a few years back when I came across a picture of my great grandparents grave, I did not feel a strong sense of internal sadness and desire to know all about them and their lives. They immigrated to Canada in the early 20th century from a small town called Tysovets. I only know this because it was etched into their gravestone that now lays in a Saskatchewan cemetery. Tysovets exists in the Bukovinian ethnic region of Ivano-Frankivsk, Ukraine. It wasn't until 2023 that I was able to visit one of the home countries of my ethnically diverse immigrant family. I'm not sure what drove me to travel halfway across the world, to a country currently at war but on this day I had found myself in the heart of the mountains that my family once called home. We arrived in the small village around 11pm. The sun had already slumped behind the mountains that surrounded us. In the Carpathians the mountains are much different than those we recognize in Canada. They are densely covered with forests, almost instilling an insulating feeling I had never felt before. It was soothing, peaceful yet had an undertone of pain and sadness. The night brought a trickle of rain as if the gods above began to weep for what has returned to this land once again. We sat at a table covered by a handmade wooden shelter. There was enough room for 10 tables. The other guests at the hotel had headed off to bed except for one quiet table on the far end of the shelter. Their voices drowned out by the small waterfall that ran behind the perimeter of the hotel.

The smell of food erupted from the kitchen, being simultaneously beat down by the cool misty air of the night. Though I was traveling with my Ukrainian friend and his wife this place was new to all of us, the trees, the sounds, the smells. I could see this curiosity painted on his face like the lights of a runway. We could both only hold our breath and admire the world around us. To him this was familiar yet new. To me this was new yet felt of home. For the first time in my life I felt connected to who and what I was supposed to be. As if a ball of yarn had been pulled neatly into one single thread.

I originally wanted to document this trip. I remember months before planning out how to record or to film my adventure, even going as far as to write a daily journal but reality sunk in very quickly. I had picked up an old 35mm camera. Produced in the Soviet Union I was always sentimental to these quirky connections we can create. I never struck pen to paper but I lugged around this heavy camera that felt like it was scraped together from an old soviet tank. For now the Photos would need to suffice. It's said they speak a thousand words. As the Sun rose the next morning piercing the somber dew that coated the mountains I had decided. This is a story that needs to be written after it's all over. As we packed into the car that morning I sat with my thoughts trying to untie the yarn that had been balled up overnight. When, what is all over? The trip? The war? My life? I promised myself when my pictures were developed I would write what I felt in them. Though as of yet I have found myself incapable of taking them in to get developed. Maybe this story is not for me to write. Maybe it's to be written by my grandchildren one day prompted by something etched on my grave, in a cemetery somewhere in Alberta.



Passports: A Meditation On My Family, Ukraine, and War

Tamara Stecyk

It is the Saturday night of Ukrainian-Catholic Easter weekend. The kitchen lights shine warmly onto my family's faces. There is laughter and then silence. My dad asks us, "Do you want to see something?" He disappears from the room, and reemerges with a folder. Placing it on the table, he opens it to reveal crumbling fragments of yellowed paper. They are passports. An unmistakable and unforgiving logo is printed across each page; I am looking at the nazi insignia. I open it to see a very rare photo of my grandmother's face in youthful glow. She was only twenty years old. I am twenty-one. Suddenly, I feel sick.

I am 15, visiting my grandmother every Saturday at her residence in Rosemont. She is 15, being taken from her family. I am twenty years old, beginning my first year of university. She is twenty, working in a forced labour camp as a prisoner of war. I am fifteen. My grandmother is telling me about the boarding house she lived in at my age. She tells me that she would lead the girls she bunked with in stomping on the floor in the middle of the night, disturbing the guards a floor below them. When the guards would come up, the girls would pretend to be asleep. She is 93 years old and laughing. I don't think I understand completely. I am twenty one years old and I can feel the crumbling paper in between my fingers; I finally understand. Except all the levity is gone. My grandmother is not laughing anymore, she passed away 3 years ago. These pieces of disintegrating cardstock feel like air in my hands, but they carry a weight that I cannot describe.

"Anna Krawec: Ukrainian". Even my parents never really knew where exactly my grandmother was born. Whatever had preceded the war was left behind with the trauma that accompanied the following years. The moments that made up the first 20 years of my grandmother's life were boiled down into a decaying document. I can remember her stern face. I can remember the smell of her perfume. I remember the person. My grandmother died during Easter-time; her favourite time of year. A year after she had passed, our house smelled of her perfume. No one knew where it came from. Maybe she had come for a visit.



I often think of my grandmother's dementia and the paranoid delusions she had of Russian invaders. "They're in my vents!" she would yell frantically in Ukrainian. "They called me, they told me they are coming to take me away". Frustration filled this period of time. My father would try to pacify her: "MA! No one is coming for you". Flash forward to February 24th, 2022; Russia has announced its invasion of Ukraine. I can hear my grandmother's laugh. I can see the fear in her face. I remember her premonitions of wartime and how she always loved to be right. It is the weekend of Ukrainian-Catholic Easter and eight weeks since the war officially began. My father brings out the documents that prove this has happened before. I stare at my grandmother's young face. I look at the dates that say the year is 1942. I look at the headlines that read: "Massacre in Bucha, Ukraine", April 2022. I feel my head swimming. I turn over crumbled pages in my hand. I imagine what it felt like for her to carry this as she was moved from her village in Halychyna to Demberg, Germany. Tucked somewhere safe, the only proof of her existence. The only scrapings of her past life.

My family pours over the documents; they are both relics and reminders. I wish I could bottle the emotions I feel and diffuse them to everyone who apathetically watches the news happening in some country far away from their own. We sit and remember our grandparents. We think of the country they came from. Tonight, we will pray for the people who look so much like my grandmother. The people who are living a familiar tale, not even three generations old. I only hope our prayers are answered soon.



**YOUR
STORY IS
IMPORTANT
TO BE
HEARD.**

Please share your story with us, send an email to info@susk.ca

Mariupol Resident Statement

Kateryna

Kateryna, 30 years old. I lived in the city of Mariupol for the past 11 years before the full-scale invasion began. For the first five years, I lived in the Seaside district of Mariupol (when I studied at the university), and for the next 6 years in the Central district, where the office where I worked was located. I had to be in all areas of the city in connection with work....

Unfortunately, the city was not ready for war, the shelters were in terrible condition and there were not enough of them. In addition, some shelters were closed even during shelling....

Since the beginning of 2014, when the connection with the city of Donetsk was interrupted, the factories stopped working at the same capacities as before, there were a lot of layoffs at the factories. Many people lost their jobs. I don't know where those people went, and whether they got a job or not. But the war had a great impact on people and the standard of living. On the one hand, positive changes were felt, but at the same time, the standard of living of most people did not improve significantly....

Christmas and New Year 2022 were remembered as some kind of fairy tale. Looking at old photos from the time before the war, one realizes that we were happy, even though we constantly complained about some little things...

Now there is no city, no people, no children and their smiles. Being in the blockade without light, water, heat and communication, we still had hope that Ukraine would stand up. And let Mariupol perish, but the enemy cannot break the whole of Ukraine...





My war effort *Emmy Lebed*

As a second-generation Canadian who sits here writing comfortably from the safety of her home in Canada, I would be remiss not to acknowledge that my reflections on the last two years cannot compare to those who either left Ukraine or are still there today. It would, however, be a disservice not to highlight a necessary contribution that millions of Ukrainians in the diaspora have made. This is my experience with the war effort in Canada.

Every December, my dad recalls the story of when my Grandfather, who like my other three grandparents, escaped the Soviet Union during WWII and ultimately fled to Canada. My Dido arrived in Halifax on December 24th, 1948. On Christmas Eve, he was given his first warm meal in Canada by the Salvation Army. My dad reminds me of this point every holiday season when we walk by Salvation Army volunteers ringing their bells for donations.

When Russia's full-scale invasion began, the primary feeling I experienced was guilt. Guilt that while I watched the war unfold on the news, my family and friends back in Ukraine were living it. That feeling was quickly paired with the insurmountable feeling of helplessness. I simply couldn't fathom how I, just one person, living halfway across the world, could do anything to help the men and women on the frontline fighting for freedom. But I kept coming back to the story my dad tells me every Christmas. How every year I donate to the Salvation Army with the hope that someone, in need of comfort, will experience a small act of kindness just like my Dido did. I realized that fighting this war went well beyond the heroes on the frontlines. I decided to treat the terrible reality of war as a way to pay forward the help my family received when they fled their homeland almost 80 years ago.

Growing up, when I heard the term war effort, I pictured Uncle Sam's "We Want You" poster. My understanding of the war effort was a narrow scope often communicated through Hollywood's lens. Like many lessons from history classes and stories from my grandparents, the war effort felt so far away. I never thought the first years of my 20s would be consumed by it.

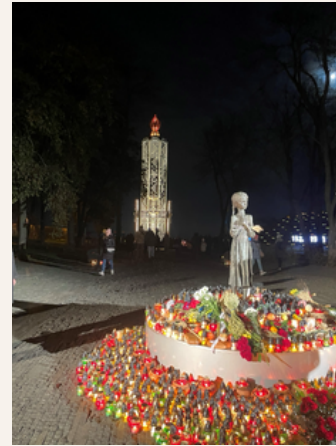
For the last two years, I, along with many of my Ukrainian Canadian friends and family, have immersed myself in the war effort here at home. It began with my Ukrainian club in university, where we handmade and sold bracelets and pins on campus. We organized rallies in our university town and spread the word to local news sources about our efforts. Our club grew as the new school year started, and we welcomed new students who had recently left Ukraine to come to Canada. My desire to pay forward the hospitality that was extended to my Dido kindled my eagerness to make them feel welcome and to help provide some sense of normalcy in their new reality. The desire to do more only grew as the war effort expanded to my life back at home. My family and I collected donations, job-hunted, and acted as tour guides for some refugees in their new homes. I started sharing information and trying to educate those less familiar with the war in Ukraine to keep it atop everyone's minds. I don't think I'll ever stop wanting to do more.

I reflect on these last two years of work not as a sense of personal accomplishment, but as a reminder to myself, and maybe others, that one person, even halfway across the world, can still help in Ukraine's fight. Personally, my small contribution to the global war effort was and still is a way to fight my feelings of guilt and helplessness. But more importantly, it was a way to hopefully help other Ukrainians so we can all continue to stand for and fight with Ukraine. And as the 2nd anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine arrives, I will use such reflections as reminders that any contribution, no matter how big or small, matters. That showing kindness in a time when so many have seen the worst of humanity, matters. I will use that sentiment to energize me for the fight ahead.

Resilience and Renewal: Witnessing Ukraine's Struggle and Spirit Amidst Adversity

Roman Grod

As the President of the World Congress of Ukrainian Students, I was privileged to join the Ukrainian World Congress Delegation in November 2023 to mark the solemn 90th anniversary of the Holodomor



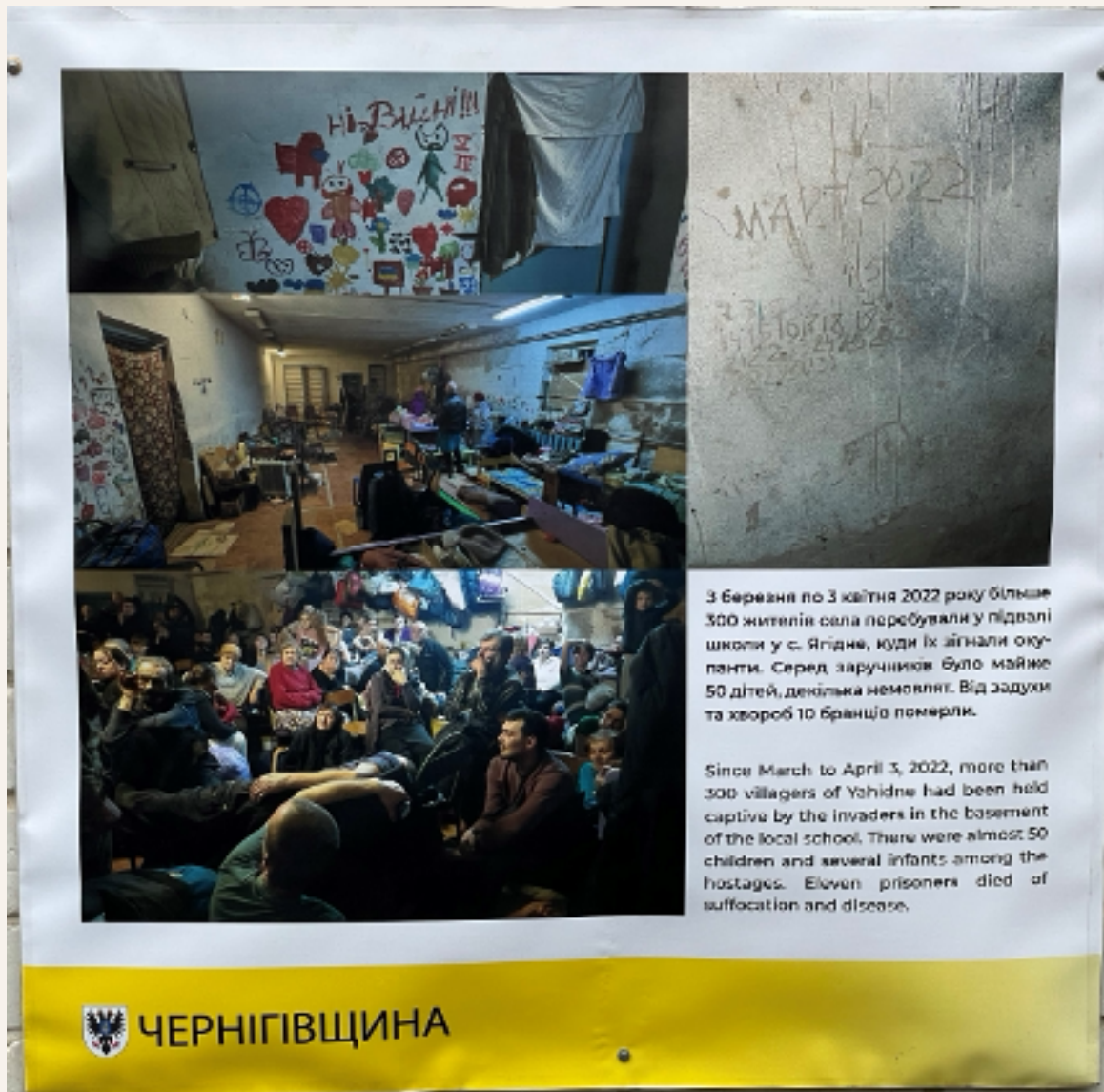
The experience of being in Ukraine was profoundly challenging. Regular news updates are one thing, but witnessing the reality on the ground is quite another. At the St. Michael's Golden-Domed Monastery (Михайлівський золотoverхий монастир), the poignant display of photos captures the essence of sacrifice – the faces of those who, since 2014, have laid down their lives defending Ukraine from the onslaught of Russia's aggression. These streets echo the bravery of thousands, chronicling their ultimate sacrifice for Ukraine's sovereignty. The images of mothers, fathers, grandparents, and youths are a stark reminder of the generations that will never experience the joy of family life – a testament to their unyielding spirit to protect the homeland they so deeply cherished.



A mere 100 kilometers north of Kyiv, in the town of Yahidne (Ягідне), the scars of occupation are all too visible. I bore witness to the harrowing aftermath of Russian occupation – where over 300 individuals, including nearly 50 children and infants, were once forced into the constricted space of a local school's basement. In those oppressive confines, 11 souls perished due to suffocation and illness over a span of 327 days. Desperation and resilience were etched on the doors, where children marked calendars with crosses for days stained by the loss of loved ones and sketched symbols of hope and homeland – suns, hearts, and Ukrainian flags. Although Yahidne's ordeal under occupation lasted only 27 days, one can only imagine the extent of suffering endured in areas in the east that have been under Russian occupations since 2014.



Yet amidst the rubble and grief, the spirit of renewal prevails. In Chernihiv, less than 100 kilometers from the Russian and Belarusian borders, a school once ravaged by six missile strikes in March 2022 stands restored. Now, it not only welcomes back its 1562 students but also serves the school with 54 solar panels, providing a crucial 24.6 kW power supply for six uninterrupted hours, ensuring resilience even during blackouts. It stands as one of many beacons of recovery, there are more examples like School 19 in Chernihiv.



Despite the difficulties, the sentiment across Ukraine is one of hope. As the nation reflects on the second anniversary of the full-scale invasion, it's evident that the Ukrainian people are united in their commitment to securing their nation's future. In this pivotal moment, it is imperative that we all contribute to supporting Ukraine's victory. There is simply no alternative. Ukraine needs our help and Ukraine will win this war.



Works documenting specific experiences, events or emotions related to the war that I would like to share

Mykola Shemchuk

First of all, I want to tell you about the event that happened on the third day of the war (**27.02.2022**) at 5 o'clock in the morning.

There was a hit on the Ukrainian missile unit near Volodymyr, 7 km from me. Waking up from a loud explosion, I did not even get dressed, and immediately ran into the basement dressed in underwear, sat in it for about 2 hours.

Coming out of the basement, my father and I learned the news that Russian terrorists would not be able to advance in a westerly direction due to the difficult terrain (swamps, impassable places, overgrown tundra), as well as our military arranged mines around the borders with Belarus, tanks and infantry could not pass through these obstacles. Then we decided to go and help the company that packed, packed and delivered humanitarian aid to cities such as: Bakhmut, Horlivka, Avdiivka, Bucha, Kharkiv, Mykolaiv, Odesa, Kherson and many others, *which at that time were the epicenter of everything terrible*. Poland, Germany, and many other countries assisted.



My beloved family came to me, to protect themselves from war, to western Ukraine, to take a break from Mykolayiv shelling and anxiety.



Cousin Oleg, Dad Oleksandr, Mykola (I)
(27.04.2022)

The second event that came into my life, this happened already during my studies at Lutsk University, namely **22.10.2022**. My classmates went to study and near them, meters 50, the enemy hit the electrical substation, they said that they had ears...



25.02.2022 - My relatives decided to gather in a country house, not the village center of Mykolaiv to wait out the massive shelling of the city. Two brothers Oleg and Artem in the evening decided to clean the chimney of the house, because it was dirty. When they left, they decided to stand and talk on the landing. After a few minutes over their heads flew two enemy aircraft, from them to the aircraft was a distance of no more than 20 meters. After flying they fired at the gas station and there was a loud explosion, here are the consequences:



Kherson Highway Street:



While the air alarm continues,
netting during pairs to somehow help our military ZSU, and territorial
defence forces (**10.02.2024**)



Information kindly provided by the Shemchuk family
Thank you for your attention!
Glory to Ukraine!



Mykola Shemchuk

**Thank you for reading
our digital
commemorative album!**

For requests to add your own
submission, please email info@susk.ca