



# SCARS YOU CAN NOT SEE

Stories from the Road

Testimonies of 10 Ukrainian women  
on their journey to a safe home in Poland.



*We are constantly working on new ways and areas of assistance.  
We are seeking reliable opportunities to help them  
develop perspectives for the future.*

**Father Marek Machała, PhD**  
President  
PASTORAL FAMILY CARE FOUNDATION

## Tetiana Valova

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Everything has taken on another price:  
life, silence, moment, death...  
From many notions, the foam's blown twice,  
yet still life's whirl goes on instead.

And you – a grain of sand, a tiny part –  
greet yet another newborn spring,  
where wailing sirens and birds' songs start  
to merge into a single ring.

*20 March 2024*



A resident of the community center relaxes on the flower-filled terrace.  
Przemysl, 2025. Photo by Renata Stefanowska-Drewniak.

## FOREWORD

*(Father M. Machała)*

On Saturday, February 26, 2022, for the first time since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, I went to the train station in Przemyśl. It was evening—only the third since the beginning of this terrible aggression. There were a few people in the waiting room of the historic building. I had a strange feeling of tension, like the calm before the storm.

One of the Polish officers told me that many trains were waiting at the railway station in Lviv, filled with people trying to flee a country plunged into the chaos of war. A family I knew had been on one of those trains for six hours. Before that, they had stood in line for another six to enter the extremely overcrowded carriage. Even earlier, they had spent the entire night trying, unsuccessfully, to leave Ukraine by car. Four people. Three generations. A woman with her children and her mother.

To cover less than 100 kilometers between the two cities, they had to spend almost 24 hours. Two cities—and at the same time two worlds. One hundred kilometers—and for them, the distance between fear and a sense of security.

The next morning, I returned to the station. This time, I found a crowd. Some had come from different parts of Poland, and even from abroad, to help the refugees. Others were leaving the terminal after passport control. I stood in the midst of the people waiting and watched... listened... observed... prayed.

It was then that it occurred to me: it was Jesus himself who was coming. He was present in their frightened hearts, standing in those colossal queues, freezing at the border. Later, I wrote a short article about it on the Internet.

...And that's how it all began. Benefactors began to appear (to whom we express our constant gratitude!). At first, we tried to help in Przemyśl, in our free time, alongside many other volunteers and organizations. Later, our program—briefly described as “Reception and Resettlement”—was launched. It aimed to welcome people, surround them with care, and provide humane conditions so they could rest after the dramatic and exhausting experiences of their journey. From there, we wanted to help them begin an independent life in new circumstances.

Initially, we did this in our free time, but our main benefactor, Andrew Duncan, used to say, “Volunteering is good for two to three weeks. If we

want to help for longer, we need to build structures.” So, we set out to establish our Pastoral Care for Families Foundation.

Quite early on, many people encouraged me to write a book to record what was happening. It was a very good idea, but at the time, it seemed unrealistic. All my free time was devoted to action. Still, the thought of sharing the stories of the people God allowed me to meet in these unique circumstances never left me.

Now I am glad the time has come to share with you these ten testimonies—chosen from among thousands. May they become a small stone in the mosaic that forms one great inscription, an appeal:

**STOP THE WAR!**

May God bring an end to this senseless cruelty. May He heal the wounds of human bodies and souls. The scars will remain... but may we learn to live with them. And may they stand as both a warning and an appeal:

**NO MORE WAR!**



Discussion with the residents of the community center,  
Przemyśl, July 2025, photo by Renata Stefanowska-Drewniak

*\*To protect the privacy of residents, all names in the publication  
have been changed.*

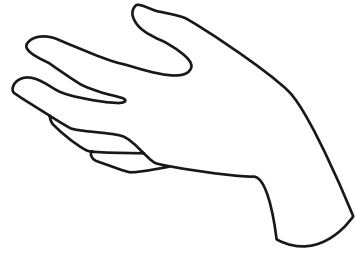
**Yana,  
67 years old,  
Kharkiv**

*I am very grateful to everyone—both Ukrainian volunteers and Polish benefactors—who helped us every step of the way.*

**My Student Years and the War**

I spent my student years in Luhansk, so most of my classmates are from the Luhansk region. Every five years, we would meet as a group, but when the DPR<sup>1</sup> and LPR<sup>2</sup> were created, even though our class leader promised to organize the next meeting without any problems, I refused. I could not accept the existence of these so-called “republics,” let alone visit them.

When my former classmates fled from occupied Pervomaisk to Kharkiv, I helped them with clothes,



food, and anything I could provide.

My nephew joined the ATO<sup>3</sup> and served in the Luhansk region. When a helicopter carrying the wounded landed at a Kharkiv hospital, he told me to bake pies, buy bacon, treats, and homemade wine—and send everything to his unit on the same helicopter.

How surprised I was when, less than two hours later, he called to thank me, and in the background, I heard the voices of the soldiers: “Glory to Ukraine! Glory to the heroes!”

The great war of 2022 began for me like this:

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<sup>1</sup> Donetsk People’s Republic, DPR (Russian: Донецкая Народная Республика, ДНР) – an unrecognized state established on May 12, 2014, by pro-Russian separatists on the territory of Ukraine. Annexed by Russia on September 30, 2022.

<sup>2</sup> LPR is an abbreviation for the Luhansk People’s Republic (Russian: Луганская Народная Республика, ЛНР). It is an unrecognized state created by pro-Russian separatists on the territory of Ukraine, in the Luhansk Oblast. On September 30, 2022, the LPR was annexed by the Russian Federation.

<sup>3</sup> “ATO” is an abbreviation of the Ukrainian term “Антитерористична операція” (Anti-Terrorist Operation), which refers to the military operation conducted by Ukraine in Donbas between 2014 and 2018. It has now been replaced by the Joint Forces Operation (JFO), which has a different designation for the conflict area.

I was very ill. The day before, I had taken a COVID-19 test, and in the morning, my friend from Dnipro called to tell me that the war had begun. Almost at that same moment, I heard an explosion in Saltivka and saw black smoke rising over the city.

Kharkiv came under shelling from the first day. People began to leave, but my son said firmly: – We are not going anywhere!

At the very beginning, a sabotage group even entered the city and fired grenade launchers at the former dormitory of the Hovorov Military Academy, but our defenders quickly repelled them.

Our house had a real bomb shelter with all the necessary equipment, but it had not been used for a long time and had fallen into disrepair.

When I was sick—very sick—and there was nowhere to buy medicine because all the pharmacies were closed, I didn't go down to the shelter. But after one incident that truly frightened me, I decided to go.

The shelter was full of people, almost every seat taken. Many foreign students who had been studying in Kharkiv and renting rooms in our houses were there, sitting on garbage bags—cold, half-starved—because all the shops were closed.

I went back upstairs, boiled the last few eggs I had, and gave one to each of the boys.

Later, the ATB supermarket opened. I overcame my fear and went there, but the shelves were almost empty. I needed food too! I saw mustard, a small bottle of fermented milk, and packages of bran. I bought them all and at home made myself a plate of mustard.

The road to the pharmacy, which was open only for a few hours, was dangerous and unpredictable.

At first, I slept in my outdoor clothes, sitting in the basement on a chair, holding my dog, together with many others who clung to their pets. Later, there was space on the floor, covered with cardboard and a blanket, so I lay down and managed to sleep for a while.

The conditions were terrible: dampness, mold, no electricity, almost no food, nothing working. Only later did volunteers bring us some provisions.

In early March, my son took me and my daughter-in-law to a friend's summer house near Kharkiv. As we drove through the bombed-out streets, past destroyed homes and burned-out cars, the sight was horrifying—like a film set.

There, we began helping my son's friends as volunteers. My daughter-in-law baked bread, muffins, and made pastilles from frozen fruit, which we delivered to hospitals. Nearby was a spring with medicinal water—we filled 25-liter bottles and delivered them to places where people needed them.

In April, we heard of a possible second rashist<sup>4</sup> offensive on Kharkiv, so my son put me on a train to the Vinnytsia region to stay with relatives. I lived there for some time, and then at a certain point decided to go abroad.

Invited by a friend, I left in February 2023—without knowing exactly where I was going. I ended up in Poland, near Jarosław. I stayed there for a while, planning to return to Kharkiv, but my son told me he would feel safer knowing I was safe.

Looking for help—because where I was living, there was no support for Ukrainians, and I could rely only

on my Ukrainian pension—I went to Radymno. There, psychologist Ms. Yulia Shevchenko connected me with Natalia, a member of the Przemysł branch of a foundation, who agreed to take me in.

Mr. Vasyl first drove me to “Dom Jasia,”<sup>5</sup> and from there I was sent to Zatwarnica<sup>6</sup>, where, thanks to the efforts and care of the staff, I lived in complete comfort and peace for eight months.

It was there that I met Father Marek. From the very first days of the war, he had created the Pastoral Care for the Family Foundation and looked after us, renting that hotel for Ukrainian refugees. He often came to visit, noticed new faces, sat down to talk, asked what help was needed, and invited us to the Divine Liturgy.

When the rental contract expired, he set up a center in Przemysł at 1 Chopina Street<sup>7</sup>, where, together with Aneta, Natalia, and Vasyl, they created safe and comfortable living

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<sup>4</sup> The term “rashism” is an artificial combination of the English word ‘Russia’ and the international word “fascism,” meaning Russian fascism. Rashism is a type of totalitarian, fascist ideology and social practice of the Russian regime of the late 20th and early 21st centuries, a symbiosis of the basic principles of fascism and Stalinism. It is the basis of Russia’s barbaric geopolitics, aimed at the occupation and annexation of other countries, often marked by the seal of “gathering Russian lands,” and is based on local collaboration and support from the Russian fifth column.

<sup>5</sup> One of the facilities of the Pastoral Care for Families Foundation

<sup>6</sup> One of the foundation’s facilities active in 2022-2023, located in the picturesque Bieszczady Mountains.

<sup>7</sup> The current collective accommodation center managed by the Pastoral Care for Families Foundation. The center is equipped to accommodate 80 people. In August 2025, the center received over 60 refugees from Ukraine, most of whom belonged to vulnerable groups: the elderly, the sick (including cancer patients), people with disabilities, and mothers with small children.

conditions for Ukrainian refugees.

How can we not be grateful to these people who care for us? I am glad to have the opportunity to stay at our center. I have a roof over my head, three meals a day, and medical care. I also have the chance to help our indomitable defenders in their fight for victory by working in the workshop, weaving military camouflage nets.

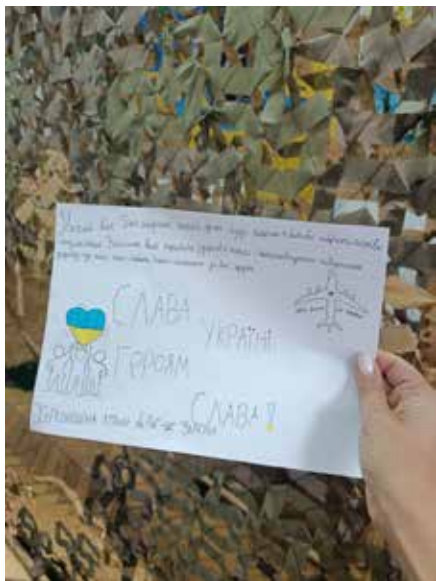
But my heart and soul remain in Ukraine, where the most precious person in the world is—my son. From

the very first days of the war, he did not hide or flee abroad. On the contrary, he firmly refused to leave Ukraine, because someone has to defend it.

From the first days of the war, my son has been a volunteer and a war correspondent. In 2025, he volunteered for the Armed Forces of Ukraine and is now fulfilling his civic and constitutional duty to his homeland and people on one of the hottest sectors of the front.



Yana's journey from Kharkiv to Przemyśl.



Private archive  
Ms. Yana and her female friends made and sent 65 camouflage nets to soldiers on various front lines.

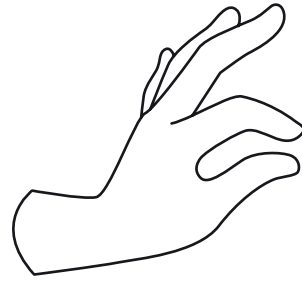


Ms. Yana's son is in a protective net made by his mother. Private archive.



Evacuation from Kharkiv, February 2022. Private archive.

**Oksana, 46 years old.**  
**Pokrovske,**  
**Dnipropetrovsk region**



**How This Terrible War Began for Me**

On February 24, 2022, we learned from television and the Internet that Ukraine had been treacherously attacked by Russia that morning. For almost a year and a half, I lived with my son Valentyn in constant fear, listening to the wail of sirens and the thunder of rocket attacks. Even now, I instinctively grab my icons and pray whenever I hear something approaching. Active fighting was – and still is – taking place just 30 km from our village. Almost every other day, rockets struck our town, neighboring villages, or nearby fields.

In early August 2023, I decided to leave.

I packed our belongings and, together with my son, traveled to Lviv. From there, we took a minibus to the Polish border at Shehyni<sup>1</sup>. There,

we met Ukrainian volunteers who assured us we would receive shelter and assistance. In Przemyśl, at the train station, like many other Ukrainians, we met Natalia and Vasył.

First, we were taken to a reception center, where we were given accommodation, shelter, and help in obtaining a PESEL UKR number<sup>2</sup>. IOM staff also assisted us. We stayed there for almost a month, with accommodation and meals provided free of charge.

Later, Father Marek arrived at the center and gave us tremendous support – both financial and spiritual.

Not long after, nearly 50 Ukrainian refugees, including us, were trans-

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<sup>1</sup> The Medyka-Szeginie border crossing is a Polish Ukrainian road border crossing located in the Podkarpacie Province, in the Przemyśl County, in the municipality of Medyka, in the town of Medyka. It is located 12 km east of Przemyśl. After Russia's invasion of Ukraine began, the vast majority of refugees fleeing Ukraine crossed the border at this crossing.

<sup>2</sup> PESEL "UKR" is a designation linked to the PESEL number in Poland (Polish identification number, a unique 11-digit code assigned to individuals for identification purposes), intended primarily for Ukrainian citizens who have come to Poland in connection with the armed conflict. It means that the person has been granted temporary protection status and is entitled to certain rights and benefits, including access to healthcare, social assistance, and the possibility of legal employment. The "UKR" status is automatically granted when a Ukrainian citizen receives a PESEL number upon arrival in Poland and is essential for accessing these support systems.

ported to Zatwarnica. Thanks to Father Marek's help, we received accommodation, food, and every possible form of assistance.

I can only say good things about Father Marek: he is a sensitive, kind, honest, and fair man who has done – and continues to do – so much for those of us forced to leave our homes. Together with Ms. Aneta, Ms. Natalia, and Mr. Wasyl, he established a foundation at 1 Fryderyka Chopina Street, ensuring that none of us would be left without a roof over our heads.

The nuns living there offered Father Marek a comfortable and spacious house, which we all moved into in the fall of 2024.

Part of my family – my mother, sister, and brother – remained in Ukraine. They did not want to, or could not, leave due to health reasons.

I am deeply grateful to everyone – both Ukrainian volunteers and Polish benefactors – who have helped us every step of the way.

My son Valentyn attended a Polish school, where he studied Polish, English, and German. He graduated from high school and is now applying to a technical college.

Everyone who wished to have the chance to learn Polish, and Natalia kept us informed about all available courses. Thanks to Caritas, I was able to attend training and earn qualifications as a pastry chef, cook, and sushi master.

All of this has been – and continues to be – given to us by the people of friendly Poland, for which we are immensely grateful.



Oksana's journey from Pokrovska village to Przemyśl.

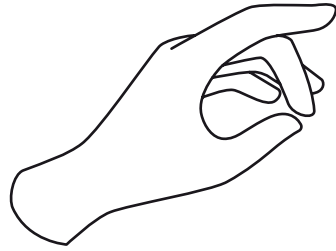
## Yuliya, 56 years old, Kramatorsk

*We don't feel like refugees here, but like guests. We work with Poles, have found a common language, and have made friends with them.*

The war began for me in 2014, when the Russian Federation occupied my city, Kramatorsk, in the Donetsk region. I spent three months under occupation and witnessed firsthand how the Russians and their mercenary army behaved. Sadly, the full-scale invasion did not come as a surprise to me.

On February 24, 2022, I woke up to explosions and realized that this aggression would be far worse than the first. For the next few weeks, I stayed at home, listening to constant sirens and shelling, living in the basement. When a school and a kindergarten near my house were shelled, I decided it was time to leave.

On March 16, we left Kramatorsk on an evacuation train to Lviv. We stayed there for three days with my friend, librarian Natalia Biluta, before deciding to move on into the unknown. That evening, we arrived at the station in Przemyśl, not knowing where to go or how to get there. Fortunately, volunteers came to our aid. They took us to the station and



offered accommodation at a shelter organized by the Pastoral Care for Families Foundation.

Before Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, this Polish charity had operated locally, supporting families in the region. But in March 2022, as thousands of Ukrainian refugees began arriving in Poland, the foundation expanded its mission: it provided temporary shelter, helped with paperwork, and organized transport to other European countries.

When we arrived, we were told we could rest, think about our situation, and recover. At first, there were about 20 of us, but the numbers quickly grew, and eventually around a hundred people were living there. Everyone was confused and frightened by the war. We are deeply grateful to the Polish people for their kindness and for providing us with dignified living conditions.

Father Marek Machała leads the foundation from Przemyśl, initiated the project and involved many benefactors from different countries. Among them is English director

Duncan Jones<sup>1</sup>. For his work supporting refugees, Father Machała received the “Personality of the Year 2022” award<sup>2</sup>. “The main goal is for people not to feel like refugees, but like normal people,” he emphasizes.

To ensure decent conditions, the foundation uses donations to rent hotels and resorts and to provide meals. Volunteers also help Ukrainians obtain Polish documents, financial support, and jobs. For those not planning to stay in Poland, the foundation organizes relocation to other European countries.

At first, we didn’t know Polish and spoke only Ukrainian, but thanks to the similarities between the languages, we were able to communicate. Within a year, we learned Polish and are now proud to be part of the team. In the beginning, we simply organized ourselves, cleaning, cooking, and helping newcomers. Later, we were offered the chance to stay and work for the foundation.

The organization also runs numerous workshops and welcomes volunteers from France, Italy, the United States, and Canada. Children are enrolled in schools, while psychologists and language instructors support

refugees in their integration.

We don’t feel like refugees here, but like guests. We work alongside Poles, have found a common language, and have built friendships. The Polish people support Ukrainians wholeheartedly, but they are also concerned that the war must not reach their own land. They tell us: “We will help you as much as necessary, but we will not let it come to us.”

The history of our nations is full of contradictions, but today, Poland has acted wisely in supporting Ukraine. Now, we face a common enemy together.



Yuliya’s journey from Kramatorsk to Przemysł.

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<sup>1</sup> Philanthropist, founder of the R.T. Weatherman Foundation. See: The Weatherman Foundation

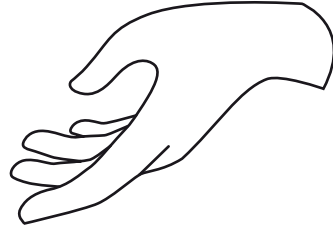
<sup>2</sup> Father Marek Machała received the 2022 Personality of the Year award from the Nowiny24 portal. Father Marek was nominated for actively organizing aid for Ukrainian citizens in various centers throughout the archdiocese, as well as for raising funds and recruiting volunteers in the US and other countries.

## Lyudmyla, 40 years old, Kharkiv

*At first, we had concerns—what kind of place was this, what kind of people lived here, and were they strangers? However, Father M Lyudmyla, arek reassured us: “You will live here, rest, and if you don’t like it, you can move out.”*

On the morning of February 24, 2022, we were awakened by distant explosions, and I realized that the most terrible thing had begun – the war. I had suspected that this might happen and had even imagined such a scenario. I immediately suggested to my husband that we go to western Ukraine, but we didn’t dare to leave right away. We spent the night, like many other citizens, in the subway—sitting on the stairs in our outer clothes, with a small child in our arms. In the morning, we returned home.

When another explosion sounded nearby, my son asked, “Mom, is that an explosion?”— and then fell silent, stopped talking. We quickly packed our bedding and mattresses, loaded them into the car, and went back to the subway to take shelter there for a while. The heavy shelling continued. At that time, my sister, who lived near the aircraft factory—a heavily shelled area—called and asked her husband to take her and her family away. At great risk to



his life, her husband managed to get them out of the shelling.

So we all lived underground, among many people. Our child remained silent the whole time and vomited—this was his reaction to the situation. People slept everywhere: in carriages, in passageways. Due to the unsanitary conditions, many began to have health problems. At the subway station, when one exit was opened, a food stand would arrive so people could eat something.

The conditions were terrible, and the five of us decided to leave. We walked along the tracks for five subway stations and emerged at the train station. There was a sea of people—it was impossible to get on a train! My sister managed to squeeze into one of the overcrowded carriages, but we couldn’t. So we decided to go by car, but in the end we had to leave it behind. My husband was not allowed to pass through the train station, even though he is disabled. Only at one of the checkpoints, after showing his military ID, which noted his inability to serve, was he allowed to pass.

We finally managed to get on the train. We traveled in a compartment for ten people, which was relatively comfortable. When we arrived in Lviv, volunteers immediately helped—placing people on buses and transporting them further. We stood at the border for 12 hours until we were finally directed to Hrushev. From there, we were transported to refugee centers in Poland. However, the conditions there were unbearable.

We decided not to stay and went to Warsaw. There were many beds in a huge hangar, and we were given sandwiches. My husband and I tried to distract our son and keep him entertained so he could cope with the difficult conditions more easily.

In Warsaw, we had difficulty obtaining a PESEL UKR number, so we moved to another Polish city. There, we lived in a hotel free of charge for a month and a half—the accommo-

modation was provided by the Polish authorities as part of the 40 Plus program<sup>1</sup>.

When the free rental period ended, we were moved to another city, to a transit center. A week later, we had the opportunity to move to Przemyśl. Along the way, we stayed at other places—Dom Jasia, Polana, Zatwarnica. In Zatwarnica, I found a job at a foundation, which was very good. In Polana, we received toothpaste, detergents, hygiene products, and essential household items for the first time—this was extremely important to me. My husband also got a job as a driver.

When the lease expired, we were moved to 1 Chopina Street. When we met Father Marek, he suggested that we move here. At first, we had concerns—what kind of place was this, what kind of people lived here, were they strangers? However, Father Marek reassured us: “You will

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<sup>1</sup> A form of financial support for private individuals hosting refugees in their homes in Poland. It is estimated that since the outbreak of war in Ukraine in 2022, at least several hundred thousand Ukrainians have found shelter in private homes in Poland. Not a single refugee camp has been set up in Poland. Any entity, in particular a natural person running a household, who provided accommodation and meals to Ukrainian citizens staying in the territory of the Republic of Poland since February 24, 2022, in connection with the war in Ukraine, could apply for a cash benefit for this purpose for a period of no more than 60 days.

The amount of the benefit was PLN 40 per person per day. The legal basis was Article 13 of the Act of March 12, 2022, on assistance to Ukrainian citizens in connection with the armed conflict in the territory of that country (Journal of Laws, item 583). Since February 2022, the so-called Special Act has been amended several times, resulting in changes to the areas and amounts of financial assistance. As of July 1, 2024, the so-called “40+” accommodation option ceased to apply, and the only form of assistance was the possibility of accommodation in Collective Accommodation Facilities (OZZ), such as the center of the Pastoral Care for the Family Foundation in Przemyśl. OZZs are financially supported by the Polish government.

live here, rest, and if you don't like it, you can move out.”

We were very tired from frequent, long journeys and just wanted to stop somewhere, take a breath, and find at least some mental balance—especially since our loved ones remained in Ukraine, whom we missed with all our hearts.

It was the foundation created by Father Marek, supporting Ukrainian refugees, that gave us a roof over our heads and provided the conditions

for a peaceful and comfortable life. We received medical care, assistance with obtaining a PESEL UKR number for those who didn't know Polish, and transport to Krakow to obtain foreign passports. We were provided with the necessary clothing. We are extremely grateful to the organizers and employees of the foundation for all of this!



Lyudmyla's journey from Kharkiv to Przemyśl.



Kharkiv, subway, February 28, 2022.  
Kharkiv, subway, February 28, 2022. Private archive.



Refugee accommodation center near  
Warsaw, March 2022. Private archive.

## Tatyana Valovaya

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Life, from alarm to alarm —  
The rhythm of a maddened war.  
The words have scattered into syllables,  
And what are they needed for?

No way to voice the pain, the sorrow —  
No words. The words have all run dry.  
Yet still the heart beats on and follows:  
“You are. You will be. You’re alive.”

And straight to someone’s heart it’s speaking,  
It’s long been keeping its own way.  
A soul with an open doorway reaching  
Toward another, grown faint, soul’s sway...

And wordless arms in their embracing  
Mean more, make clearer than speech can,  
And sharpen thought, understanding  
Of what is good, what is evil.

Life has pressed into the narrow space:  
Alarm dismissed, again - alarm...  
And it persists with rare defiance,  
Beneath God’s everlasting calm.



Residence of the community center in Przemyśl. Poland, 2025,  
photo by Renata Stefanowska-Drewniak.

## Sofija, 42 years old, Kherson Oblast

*The journey to Poland took us ten days. We were heading to Warsaw, although in reality, we were traveling into the unknown.*

I lived with my son and mother in the Kakhovka district of the Kherson region, in a private house. I worked as a teacher. Every year, during the holidays, my son and I would go to the seaside to greet the sea.

Everything changed on February 24, 2022. I woke up at four in the morning to unfamiliar and incomprehensible sounds. I checked the Internet—at first, I couldn't find anything, but then information came flooding in: Russia had started a war against Ukraine, and my neighborhood was occupied in the first hours of the attack.

We didn't know what to do. In the morning, the explosions stopped, but there was a disturbing noise—heavy military equipment moving day and night. We ran to the almost empty shops to stock up on food. We packed the essentials: documents, a first aid kit, and water.

In March, I started talking about the need to leave, but my mother disagreed, saying I could go with my son. Feeling responsible for my students and wanting to finish the school year, I stayed.



Summer passed, and in September, I realized that I definitely had to leave—the occupiers were planning to launch their own education system and could put pressure on me as a teacher, possibly blackmailing me through my family. However, my mother did not want to leave the country.

I started looking for transporters who could take me and my son to Europe via Crimea. I almost found one, but life took a different turn, and we left together with volunteers via Vasylivka in the Zaporizhzhia region, in territory controlled by Ukraine.

The journey was not easy—the driver forgot to pick us up the next day, and we had to join another group. The Russians did not want to let the bus leave, and we were stuck there for several days. I had to make an urgent, difficult decision on how to get to territory controlled by Ukraine another way, because the driver could not cross the checkpoint.

My son and I took our belongings from the bus, and the next day we

were already in Zaporizhzhia, and two days later—in Poland. Our journey to Poland took a total of ten days! We were going to Warsaw, but in reality, we were going nowhere. However, God probably wanted us to stay in Przemyśl, at a refugee center run by Father Marek.

During our first days in the city, my son and I looked carefully under our feet so as not to step on anything explosive.

After some time, Father Marek offered me a job as a cleaner, which gave me a chance to get back on my feet financially. After the contract ended, I planned to work in another Polish city, but fate tested me again—I was diagnosed with cancer and had to start another fight, this time for my own survival.

I am very grateful to Father Marek for lifting me up and not letting me fall in this situation. He and Aneta helped me find a hospital and arrange transportation. Marek, Aneta, Wasyl, and Natalia were there for me during these difficult times, providing all kinds of support and helping me communicate with Polish doctors. This support has been ongoing for a year and a half now.

Ukraine is my homeland; it gave me citizenship, education, and work. But Poland has also given me so much over the past two years: it provided me with shelter and literally saved my life!

Thank you to everyone who lent a helping hand—it will remain in my heart and memory forever!



Sofia's journey from Kherson to Przemyśl.

## Hanna, 83 years old, Donetsk

*Because of the war, I had to move many times and often lived in extremely difficult conditions. But here, in the center created by Father Marek and Aneta, I found peace, care, and a home.*

The war began for me in 2014, when my city was shelled. After the establishment of the so-called Donetsk People's Republic, I stopped receiving my pension. I then went to Morshyn in the Lviv region to re-register and be able to receive benefits from Ukraine. Later, I moved to Pokrovsk in the Donetsk region, where I lived in a dormitory. I spent six years there.

In 2022, the shelling started again—almost every night. In March, on my birthday, one of the worst attacks took place. My daughter, a mother of several children, lost her home—her apartment building was destroyed. She was forced to leave for Poland.

At the beginning of April, I decided to leave as well. I remember going to the store, and the saleswoman said, “Why are you standing there? Buy quickly, there will be heavy shelling soon. I'm closing.” I packed my things into a small suitcase and went to the station. There were no crowds yet. Guards with guns put me on a train to Lviv, and from there I end-



ed up in Przemyśl. There were already many people there, and I was completely alone.

I also shared that I have been singing since I was a child, studied vocal music, gave concerts, and performed in a band. I have been living in this center for a year and a half. When donors from abroad visit us, Father Marek always introduces me as a singer. I had the opportunity to sing an Elvis Presley song with one of the guests. I also performed with Father Marek on Children's Day. When we returned to Zatwarnica, he asked me to sing Schubert's “Ave Maria.” I was very nervous, but everything went well—the women listened and cried. At his invitation, I also sang many times in the chapel during services.

Father Marek is a person full of warmth, kindness, and commitment. He cares deeply for Ukrainian refugees and their daily needs. Thanks to his support, we have a peaceful life, the things we need, and decent living conditions. Natalia, Ania, and Vasyl also helped me greatly and continue to support me in various matters.

I am extremely grateful to Poland for making this center at 1 Chopina Street a real home for me and many others. We live here like one family.



Journey from Donetsk to Przemyśl.

# Tatyana Valovaya

## An Interrupted Text

We haven't seen each other in two hundred days,  
No, now it's been much, much longer...  
Here we have—a brief rest, a long fight...

And you, I know, are somewhere in southern Poland.  
I miss so much our rare meetings.  
Your smile, your warm hands and your gaze...

You tell me I must take care of  
Myself, so that we'll be together again...  
Yes, my dear! In my heart I keep  
And cherish memories of home, of family, of you...  
We strike back hard at the rashist enemy,  
For you, for Ukraine, for the guys.  
I believe: we will see each other again...  
Damn, the bastards... aiming closer, closer...  
Kisses. The smoke break is over... battle...  
Wait...  
I promise: I'll survive! ...  
I'll surv...



Subway in Kyiv, 2.10.2025.



Bucza, 2.10.2025.



Odessa, 2.10.2025.



Balakliia, Kharkiv region, 2.10.2025.

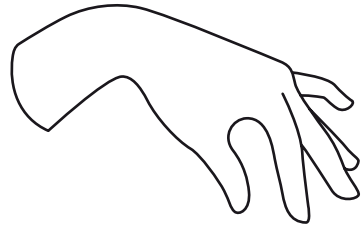
## Halyna, 64 years old, Odessa

*We did not expect such an attitude toward us and, to be honest, we were a little scared. Sensing our fear, the priest said, “Calm down, we are not bandits.”*

I was forced to leave with my son and sister for Poland in April 2022. My sister later returned to Ukraine, but my son and I stayed. The district of Odessa, where we lived, was bombed from the very first day of the war. After some time, a rocket fell near our house, and one of its fragments flew straight into our apartment. The windows and doors were shattered, and it was only by a miracle that we were saved from the fire.

After several such attacks, we decided to leave the country. In Przemyśl, at the train station, volunteers met us and provided food, but I still did not know what to do next. Initially, I planned to go to Germany to treat my son, who is disabled and suffers from epilepsy.

At the station, I approached a stranger with a question—it turned out to be Father Marek. He bought us tickets to Germany, but the train was not leaving for another three days. The priest offered that we stay at his center for Ukrainian refugees during that time.



We did not expect such an approach and, to be honest, were a little afraid. Sensing our fears, Father Marek reassured us, saying, “Don’t worry, we are not bandits.” We were fed and then taken to Terebówka, about 120 kilometers from Przemyśl. In this way, we came under Father Marek’s care—and we gave up on going to Germany, which we never regretted.

We lived successively in Terebówka, Kresowe Hrebenie (Lutowisko), Berezka, Zatwarnica, and finally arrived in Przemyśl, at the center on 1 F. Chopina Street.

Throughout this time, the foundation established by Father Marek, under the management of Ms. Aneta, Ms. Natalia, and Mr. Wasyl, provided us with free accommodation, meals, and recreational activities. Any difficulties that arose were quickly resolved by the center’s staff.

Personally, I received tremendous support—both for myself and my son. They helped us obtain a Polish disability certificate, drove us to doctors in Rzeszów multiple times, helped enroll my son in school, and

were always with us during the most difficult moments.

I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to all of these people. I cannot imagine what would have happened to my family if we had not met Father Marek. We bow low for what he has done and continues to do for us—for his good heart and for the holy work he does for Ukrainians affected by the war.



My apartment, Odessa, Nabesna Sotnya 10, m 5, 75) hit by rocket shrapnel. Private archive.

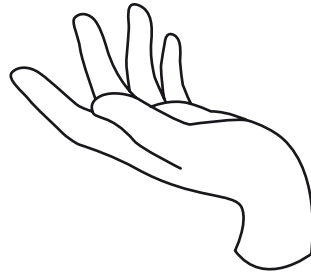
## Larysa, 66 years old, Mariupol

*We cooked our food on bonfires. Russian soldiers ordered us to leave the basement—but where were we supposed to go? We had women, children, and sick elderly people with us.*

For me, the war began in 2014, when the outskirts of Mariupol were shelled, killing 30 people. On May 9, when the first military incidents with the so-called DNR and LNR began, I was returning from work. An SUV with strange-looking men approached me. I saw them demanding that soldiers from a nearby military unit surrender their weapons. A man close to me, who had served as a volunteer in the territorial defense and later in the Armed Forces of Ukraine, told me bluntly: “There will be war.”

On February 24, 2022, the shelling of our city began. I followed the news online and knew that it had started. My daughter and her child—whose windows had been blown out—slept in the pantry. The shelling continued without interruption. Two windows in my apartment were blown out, which I tried to seal temporarily. My daughter moved in with me with my 7-year-old grandson.

One day, there was particularly heavy shelling—the glass literally “splashed” inside. We went down to



the basement, where many neighbors were already taking shelter, including children. The second strike came during the day, and our house caught fire. We all ran out and took shelter in my daughter’s basement. While our house was burning, I ran around looking for leftover food and warm clothes. March was very cold. Elderly people were dying in the basement—their bodies lay right next to us. Fighting in the city raged in the streets. On one side were Russian soldiers, on the other Ukrainian defenders. Eventually, the entire city came under the control of the invaders.

We cooked food on bonfires. Russian soldiers ordered us to leave the basement—but where were we supposed to go? There were women, children, and sick elderly people with us. They threatened to throw grenades into the basement because they were “afraid of Azov.” In the end, they left us alone.

People began leaving to get humanitarian aid. I also ventured out once and managed to bring back some food and cleaning supplies. I went

to look for my sister and saw people cooking food at a barbecue in the yard. My daughter, grandson, and I moved to her house. We began hearing that residents were trying to leave the city by bus or car, but then we learned that one of the evacuation convoys had been fired upon. We were scared and didn't dare take that step.

I met a woman who had signed up to leave for Ukraine, but we were still afraid of provocation. Eventually, we decided to join a trip to Taganrog. We got on the bus and waited a long time, placed in a large sports complex, bed by bed. We spent three days there before deciding to continue to Kaluga. I also heard about volunteers helping people reach safer areas. I was given the number of a religious organization, but there were no more places available on the transport. We were told to go to Rostov, and from there we could get a ticket to St. Petersburg and onward. Finally, a volunteer helped us reach the Estonian border.

We were allowed into Estonia and placed in a hostel in Narva. Later, we took a bus to Riga. A volunteer from Latvia rented a hotel room for us for one night, showed us the city, and guided us to the next bus. My daughter received messages with instructions on where to get off. We arrived in Warsaw, where a relative met us.

At first, we stayed in Tarnobrzeg, in

a hostel. My daughter stayed there with her child and began a family with a Ukrainian man. When the rent subsidies ran out, we had to look for other places to stay. We moved to Rzeszów, and then Ropczyce. A Ukrainian volunteer from Cherkasy suggested contacting the center near Przemyśl, at 1 Chopina Street. Volunteers called back, obtained permission to accept us, and helped us move

Here, I finally found a safe haven. We were provided with accommodation, food, comfort, and care—all thanks to the efforts of Father Marek. Without his help, that of Ms. Aneta, and the employees of the Pastoral Care for Families Foundation, I do not know what would have happened to us. In Ukraine, I lost my home and had nowhere to return to. We were later told that our burned-down house had been completely demolished.



Residents of the community center sharing a meal in the communal kitchen. Przemyśl, 2025, photo by Renata Stefanowska -Drewniak.

## Viktoriya, 70 years old, Dnipro

*I immediately packed my “emergency backpack,” which had been waiting in the hallway for years, and whose contents I regularly replaced – winter clothes for summer clothes and vice versa. For the first nine months, I practically lived in the hallway.*

The war known as ATO began for me, as it did for many Ukrainians, in 2014. Although it did not affect me directly, I still cannot forget the sounds of ambulances constantly bringing the wounded from Donbas to Dnipro – the center of medical care.

At that time, the city was actively helping soldiers and the wounded – I also took T-shirts and socks to collection points. I remember reading my poems to the wounded in the hospital – I will never forget their eyes!

The Great War began for me with a morning phone call from my son in Kyiv: “Mom, it’s started!” I was not at all ready for this terrible news, although Putin’s announcement of the “voluntary” annexation of the DPR and LPR to Russia was already a harbinger of disaster.

Then the missile attacks on our airport and landing strip began. I immediately packed my “emergency



backpack,” which had been waiting in the hallway for years, and whose contents I regularly replaced – winter clothes for summer clothes and vice versa. For the first nine months, I practically lived in the hallway.

Metal “hedgehogs” appeared on the streets, and shop windows were secured with sandbags. Sirens wailed long and often – only later were the alarms shortened to mere warnings.

I helped my friends as much as I could – for a while, I hosted friends from Kharkiv, then from Bakhmut, who had been driven from their homes by the war.

I also had two Russian friends with whom I went camping. We were friends and corresponded for almost 40 years. One of them lived in Kharkiv for a long time, was a professor at Karazin University, and then moved to the Belgorod region. I sent them photos of the German bombing of Kharkiv in 1942 and the Russian missile attacks of 2022 – they didn’t believe me. I tried to reach their hearts and minds, but the reaction was always the same. As

they say, I lost that friendship.

And my city persevered – it took in the wounded and refugees and sent aid to the front. It continues to this day. Both the Dnipro Polytechnic and my library continued to operate. In the early years, every time the alarm sounded, we would go down to the book storage rooms in the basement. Especially after the manager and accountant of one of the city's car companies were killed when they stayed on the top floor of the office. The rest of us fled to the basement.

Then there were hits on multi-story residential buildings, completely destroyed stairwells, strikes on hospitals, schools, shopping malls, cultural centers – day after day, night after night, incessantly.

Mobile concrete shelters appeared at bus stops in Dnipro. I used one once when an alert caught me off guard. Another time, I heard explosions at a tram stop, and then on the tram – I saw black smoke over the city...

I remember one night this year when there were “shahraye” circling our yard. I sat in the hallway and tried to calm the panic. And in the morning, I had to go to work. If there was a real threat of a missile attack, I would move to the hallway for the night, where I would make a “bed” out of two stools and a chair.

In the end, I decided to leave. I bought

a ticket for the lowest level in the carriage – or so I thought – but it turned out that I had been given the top bunk. I couldn't change seats, and twice when I climbed down, I almost fell. In the end, I slept at the feet of the woman who occupied the lower bunk.

I was traveling with no particular destination in mind, but I had a glimmer of hope—I happened to find Natalia's phone number online. She agreed to take me in. This gentle, kind woman picked me up from the station, carried my belongings to the foundation's building, helped me apply for a one-time allowance, and took care of other organizational matters.

I am extremely grateful to her and the entire team: Ms. Anna and Mr. Wasyl – for what they are doing for us, Ukrainians who have left their homes.

Every day, I follow the news from my hometown – the shelling continues, with 20 explosions recorded on July 18 alone.

I have been living here for almost a month now, and every day I thank Father Marek in my thoughts – the main organizer of this place, whom I have not yet met, but about whom I have heard many warm words. This man, together with Aneta and the whole team, puts so much effort into warming our hearts.



Viktoriya's journey from Dnipro to Przemyśl.



Viktoriya's hiding place during the shelling of the Dnieper River.  
Private archive.



January 14, 2023 Strike on a multi-story building in the Peremoha massif.

ДСНС  
ДНІПРОПЕТРОВЩИНИ



Shelling of the Dnieper River by drones in April 2025.

## Iryna, 67 years old, Irpin

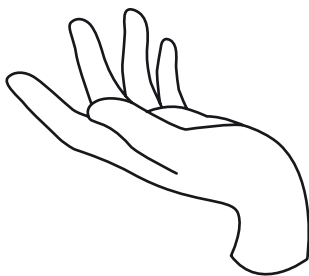
*Today, after nearly 50 years of working as a teacher, at an advanced age, suffering from cancer, without a job or a home, I find myself in a foreign country...*

Each of us Ukrainians who have truly suffered as a result of the war has our own painful story. Sometimes, however, this terrible war catches up with you when you least expect it – for example, in a hospital bed, right after surgery. That was the case for me.

On February 21, 2022, I underwent surgery to remove lung cancer in Kyiv. As if sensing something, the doctors ordered all patients to be discharged home. My family picked me up directly from the intensive care unit and took me to Irpin.

And so, on February 24, the day the full-scale invasion began, I found myself in the midst of war – weak, fresh from surgery, in my beloved, once peaceful Irpin, which was soon to become one of the key points of defense for Kyiv. From the very first hours, we felt what war was like – explosions, shelling, the sounds of tanks. It was terrifying.

Forced to hide in our home, we slept



and ate on the floor—standing up was too dangerous. We decided to evacuate because we had children and grandchildren at home. My condition was very serious – just five days after surgery, without access to the necessary medications, which were impossible to obtain due to the war situation. Fortunately, we managed to leave via a bridge that was soon named the “bridge of life.”

In April, after repelling the occupying forces, we returned to Irpin. However, we found our house destroyed and uninhabitable – without water or gas. The windows and doors of the apartment had been smashed, the whole house had been looted... The attacks continued, civilians were dying, and more residential buildings were being destroyed.

We evacuated to Bila Tserkva. It took us ten hours to cover less than 100 kilometers.

In May, I suffered another tragedy – a metastasis was detected in my left adrenal gland. I underwent another difficult operation, this time to remove it. Histopathology revealed

a cell mutation. An MRI scan showed the presence of a tumor in my brain. I was prescribed the only effective drug in such cases – Tagrisso – which is extremely expensive, costing around 205,000 hryvnia per month. We only had enough for one month of treatment.

In July, I went to Przemyśl hoping to get medical help. Our family cannot afford further treatment, and this medicine is prescribed for life.

Today, after nearly 50 years of working as a teacher, at an advanced age, suffering from cancer, without a job or a home, I find myself in a foreign country... But I am not losing hope – for treatment, for help from Polish doctors, for life!

I would like to express my immense gratitude to the Pastoral Care for the Family Foundation for providing me with shelter, for creating conditions for me to live a relatively peaceful life, and for their care and support. This place gives me a little bit of security and comfort.

However, my heart still remains in Ukraine – that is where my family, my home, and my homeland are.

## Tatyana Valovaya

Autumnal

And yet, the beauty hasn't gone away,  
Though death still walks beside our daily speech.  
Somewhere, a miracle is born today,  
As time slips past—a quarter-century breached.

And pressing forehead to the window pane,  
The war is staring at us with its pain.



Residence of the community center in Przemyśl. Poland, 2025.  
photo by Renata Stefanowska-Drewniak.

## OUR HISTORY

February 2022 – “I was hungry, I was naked, I was a stranger...”

First steps at the Przemyśl train station to help people fleeing the war in Ukraine

On February 24, when Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, countless people fled the tragedy of war. All border crossings quickly filled with those in desperate need of help. That same day, many volunteers came to the Przemyśl train station—among them, with prayer and a thermos of tea, was Fr. Marek Machała, then director of the Family Ministry Department of the Archdiocese of Przemyśl and vice-rector of the Higher Theological Seminary in Przemyśl. Later, he would become president of the Pastoral Care for Families Foundation and Diocesan Chaplain for Migrants. The enormity of human need and suffering drew him back to the station every free moment he had. With each passing hour, the number of people crossing the border in Przemyśl, Medyka, and Korczowa grew. A “TESCO” aid point was established in Przemyśl, where Fr. Marek, together with other volunteers, assisted those fleeing the war.

March 2022 – “An angel from heaven...”

The first donor and the first refugee centers

Andrew Duncan, an American philanthropist and founder of the Weatherman Foundation, contacted Fr. Marek and donated the first funds to improve conditions for Ukrainian families. He insisted that each family must have a separate room, access to a bathroom, and adequate food. “We cannot help everyone,” he said, “but what we do, we must do well.”

On the night of March 20–21, the first families arrived at the Archdiocesan Retreat House of St. John Paul II in Ustrzyki Górne. Soon, additional centers were rented and filled:

- St. John Bosco Youth Center in Polana
- Ewa and Wiesław Tylka Agritourism Farm in Lutowska
- PTTK Mountain Hotel in Ustrzyki Górne
- Terebowiec Hotel in Ustrzyki Górne
- “Bieszczadzkie Anioły” in Tarnawa Niżna
- “Domki na Dolinie” in Średnia Wieś

- “Dom Jasia” Charity Center in Przemyśl
- “Chreptiów” Hotel in Lutowiska
- “Karino” Inn in Berezka
- Pilgrim House on Benedyktynska Street in Jarosław (Abbey)
- Private apartments in Berezka (Piotr Dryja) and in Przemyśl and Przeworsk

April 2022 – “Bringing help to those in need...”  
Expanding activities and welcoming volunteers

From the very beginning, we offered not only shelter and safety but also pastoral, psychological, and psychiatric support. To professionalize assistance, we employed staff—including Ukrainians themselves. Polish language classes were organized. Children and young people were engaged in creative activities. Thanks to cooperation with doctors from Poland, Canada, and the United States, residents received regular medical care. Volunteers from France and the United States joined in, with American groups visiting twice a year. For many families, the Foundation arranged safe trips for work to France, Sweden, Spain, and within Poland. Others continued westward on their own, in search of new lives.

August 2022 – “The war continues...”  
Searching for broader and long-term solutions

Work began to formally establish the Pastoral Care for Families Foundation. At the same time, efforts were underway to create a long-term reception center. In Zatwarnica, a picturesque village in the Bieszczady Mountains, we leased a former hotel able to accommodate 100 people. The facility was ready immediately, and new families soon arrived. In August, Fr. Marek traveled to Detroit at the invitation of Fr. Andrzej Kowalczyk, parish priest of St. Clare of Montefalco Parish and a longtime benefactor. There, he met with parishioners, appeared on Channel 7, Ave Maria Radio (EWTN), and in Detroit Catholic Magazine, and celebrated Masses in several parishes—speaking about the ongoing war and the continuing need to support Ukrainian refugees.

November 2022 – “The Foundation will be established...”  
Supporting families, spiritual care, and Christian values

On November 21, 2022, the district court in Rzeszów officially registered the Pastoral Care for Families Foundation.

Board: Fr. Marek Machała (President), Aneta Hudycz (Member)

Founders: Katarzyna Cieśla, Rafał Hudycz, Robert Rajze

Council: Fr. Marek Pieńkowski, Fr. Jan Szelaż, Fr. Łukasz Haduch, Patrycja Bembenek

The Foundation expanded its activities daily, ensuring dignified living conditions, meals, help with formalities, and professional activation. When asked, “How long can I stay here?” Fr. Marek always replied: “As long as you need.”

Cooperation developed with public institutions, international agencies, and NGOs. With donor support, food, blankets, cleaning supplies, and clothing were delivered deep into Ukraine, even in remote areas.

Recognition soon followed: in June 2023, the Foundation was honored with the Distinguished Service Award by the American Academy of Disaster Medicine for outstanding humanitarian care.

September 2023 – “Our new home...”

The mission continues

On September 1, 2023, the Foundation moved into its new center—the former girls’ dormitory run by the Congregation of the Servants of Jesus at 1 F. Chopina Street in Przemyśl. All families were gradually transferred here, and the building also became the Foundation’s headquarters.

The Refugee Assistance Center was visited by Szymon Czyszek, representative of the Supreme Council of the Knights of Columbus and coordinator of aid for Ukraine. On this occasion, Fr. Marek was awarded the commemorative medal of St. Michael the Archangel.

On February 27, 2025, representatives of the Foundation took part in the FOR FREEDOM exhibition at the National Museum of Ukrainian History

in Kyiv, organized by Andrew Duncan and the R.T. Weatherman Foundation. The exhibition honored warriors from nearly 60 countries who stood up for freedom.

September 2025 – “Give one day of hope...”

Continuing despite challenges

The war in Ukraine continues. While many organizations in Poland have ended their aid activities, the Foundation is committed to growing. At present, 75 Ukrainian refugees live at the Chopina Street center, most of them from vulnerable groups: the elderly, disabled, sick, and mothers with small children. Funds are urgently needed for daily operations and for modernization of the building.

One of our friends and volunteers, American doctor Brian Lisse, described our work in these words:

“The Foundation has gone from non-existence to becoming a comprehensive provider of humanitarian aid in an incredibly short period of time, despite limited funding and resources, and no sense of how many refugees it could help or how long the war might last. The flexibility shown with verve by the Foundation’s president and staff in the face of new challenges and the transition from acute to chronic conditions is truly inspiring. I have seen them grapple with the most complex problems and always find a solution. Their dedication to Ukrainian refugees, their determination to help in every way possible, and their acceptance that this is a long-term problem requiring long-term solutions make them the best providers of humanitarian aid. The Ukrainian refugees I met while volunteering at the Foundation clearly benefited from the love and compassion they received. I believe that their lives have become as close to normal as the terrible circumstances of war and displacement allow, thanks to the thoughtful kindness of the president, Father Marek, and the Foundation’s staff.”

# HISTORY AND THE PRESENT DAY IN PHOTOGRAPHS

(2022-2025)



Polana, 2022.



PFCF Founders, March 2022.



Registration of the newcomers. Zatwarnica, 2022.



Volunteers in action. Polana, 2022.



Volunteers. Zatwarnica, 2022.



Stronger together. Przemyśl, 2023.



Zatwarnica, 2023.



Volunteers from France. Dom Jasia, 2023.



Dom Jasia, Przemysł, 2023.



Volunteers. Dom Jasia, Przemysł, 2023.



Activities for children. Polana, 2022.



Polana, 2022.



Sharing a meal in the community center in Przemyśl.  
Fot. Renata Stefanowska-Drewniak.



Community center in Przemyśl, 2023.



Saint Nicolas Day, Przemyśl 2024.



Anima Fond from France. Przemyśl 2024.



Anima Fond. Przemysł 2024.



Dr. Brian Lisse in action.



Dream Team together. Przemyśl 2025.



Hope for Ukraine. Przemyśl 2025.



Meeting with the residents, Przemyśl 2025.



Weekly art therapy session with IOM, Przemyśl 2025.



Residents of the center are spending time together on the terrace. Przemyśl,  
July 2025, Fot. Renata Stefanowska-Drewniak.



Kitchen responsibilities. Przemysł 2025, photo by Renata Stefanowska-Drewniak.



Resident of the community center in Przemyśl, 2925,  
Fot. Renata Stefanowska-Drewniak.



A family – residents of the community center in Przemyśl, 2025,  
photo by Renata Stefanowska-Drewniak.



Art therapy session, Przemyśl, 2025.



Kitchen responsibilities, Przemyśl 2025, photo by Renata Stefanowska-Drewniak.





Activities with the residents. Przemyśl, 2025.



Children's room. Przemyśl, 2025, Fot. Renata Stefanowska-Drewniak.

## FROM THE EDITOR

I am grateful and happy that my first task as a new employee of the Pastoral Family Foundation was to work on this book. Talking with residents and the team, collecting stories, selecting material, editing texts, and translating were all opportunities for me to get to know my new environment, the mission of the foundation, and the unique journeys of those entrusted to its care.

Working on the book confirmed my belief that real, tangible help cannot exist without direct contact and time spent with the people we support. Only by giving them our attention and presence can we truly understand the nature of their needs and set the right direction for action. In humanitarian work, we call this “frontline work.” Today, I know that without personal interaction and an understanding of people’s real situations, developing aid strategies is not only incomplete but often misguided.

Ms. Tatiana, a resident of the center, was an enormous help in collecting the ten testimonies. Thanks to her dedication and skills, we were able to reach people who were willing to share such difficult and painful parts of their lives, and to gather the material efficiently.

From the beginning, authenticity was most important to me. That is why Ms. Tatiana and I agreed not to prepare scripts or ask fixed questions during the interviews.

The result is a collection of ten stories—testimonies of journeys, perseverance, emerging hope, and immense gratitude. I am glad that we were able to complete this project, to show you a glimpse of the reality of our residents, and to give you an insight into the nature of our work.

*‘Hoping for the best, preparing for the worst’*

Agnieszka

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We want to thank Ms. Tatiana, a resident of our center and a poet, for the many hours she spent talking with our residents, listening with care, and writing down their stories. We are also grateful for the love she put into translating her own poetry, which weaves gently between these personal testimonies.

To our residents — thank you for your openness and your courage in sharing such painful and personal parts of your journeys. By trusting us with your stories, you make it possible to speak honestly about the reality of living through war and displacement, and together we can help others understand.

We are also deeply grateful to Natalia Lipska, poet and translator, for the time and heart she gave to bringing Tatiana’s poetry into English, and to Bogdan Horwat for his thoughtful consultation on both the Polish and English versions. Many thanks as well to [name] for the care taken with the technical editing and proofreading of this book.

And finally, to everyone who chooses to read and support this book: thank you. By taking the time to learn about the lives and journeys of our residents, you become part of this story too. Your support keeps our work alive, and we carry your kindness with us every day.

Warmest Regards,

PFCF Team

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## CONTACT

The headquarters of the Pastoral Care for Families Foundation is located in the accommodation center at 1 Fryderyka Chopina Street in Przemyśl, in the Podkarpackie Province, Poland.

Please contact us at: [biuro\(at\)pfcf.pl](mailto:biuro(at)pfcf.pl)

Visit our website: [www.pfcf.pl](http://www.pfcf.pl)

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Thank you!





## PASTORAL FAMILY CARE FOUNDATION

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