

*How did the war start for me?*

*What was my attitude to the conflict?*

*Why did my family decide to resettle?*

*What influenced the choice of the new place of residence?*

## **Chapter 2. Life starting from scratch: life of a forced resettler**

*What ideas of local inhabitants did you have?*

*Were your apprehensions justified?*

*What were relations with your peers at school?*

*What moments turned out to be the most memorable?*

*What are your plans for the future?*

## **Do not recall!**

Oksana Komiakova  
Stakhanov (Luhansk region)

Recall the shabby door of your house. Thousands of coloured announcements stuck one over another in many layers. You looked at them attentively, knowing that they had no sense for you. Do you remember?

Recall the friendly faces of old ladies who were permanently sitting near your nine-storeyed building and discussing the acute social and political topics. You greeted them automatically, and they smiled to you warmly.

Recall the annoying sounds of a lawn-mower. It was summer and you planned to sleep until midday, but the sounds outside: “Drrrin, drrrin...”

But you were for some reason even grateful to that tiresome worker, having gone outside and feeling the smell of the freshly mown juicy grass.

Have you recalled it? Think: those things that were your own and dear and, maybe, usual in the past, now are absolutely foreign, maybe even hostile.

You let it go long ago. But for some reason, you are permanently recalling them.

Understand it and realize.

Have you realized? And now forget it. Don't recall!

March 2017.

Earlier I heard of the “children of war” only from TV. Unfamiliar grandpas and grannies told about the horrors of war, I listened to it and could not even assume that such things will fall to my lot.

Earlier everything was different. Earlier I was also different ...

Already for the third year our country is washed with dirty, bloody downpour, that is called war. For the third year mothers are crying for their sons, for the third year this abominable rain is drowning a great number of lives, for the third year in my native town the “Russian world” has been ruling. And it is painful for me to understand that Stakhanov, where I was born, will never again be mine. I will never be able to get accustomed to its greyness. And to its grey and angry inhabitants. They are angry with the whole world, not only with themselves.

I feel sad because people whom I was used to seeing every day are now hundreds of kilometers from me; all my peers can go to their granny at the weekend, and I might be killed on the way to her if I suddenly decide to visit her.

Earlier I adored salutes and fireworks, constantly ran to the window in order to see them better. And now I hate them. When I hear sounds of salutes

or crackers, my heart starts beating fast and I, like a small helpless child, run to my parents with the question: “Is it definitely safe?”

I’m very scared that the things which I experienced three years ago can be repeated. I’m very scared of hearing the sounds of explosions. I’m afraid of getting ready for moving not knowing where, fastening to the car an inscription “There are children inside”, so that no one would shoot at us. I’m afraid of seeing the check points and angry faces of the rebels.

I’m tired of living in constant fear. All the same I automatically enumerate my actions in my mind, in case bombardment starts suddenly: “Don’t panic... Be closer to adults.. Find a cellar... Wait... Only don’t panic!”

Sometimes I remember how three years ago I was going home from school (I was finishing the 5<sup>th</sup> grade) and was listening to the birds singing high above the trees. Then I dreamt of flying together with them. I imagined how wonderful it should be – to look from high above at my small Motherland and to sing something to oneself. Now I cannot even look at it from close distance. I cannot come to my dacha, cannot switch on the light in my own home, cannot look in the eyes of my first teacher. Earlier it all was my own. And now it is very unusual, as if it is not mine at all. And until the three-coloured flags will be hanging on the main square of the town, it will not become mine. It is mine only in my dreams, my light childish dreams...

But I’m catching myself oftener and oftener not on experiencing clear emotions, but on thoughts. For example: the life was destroyed, but gradually it begins to run on new rails. The life has found a new direction. And it is – beautiful!

## Life “before” and “after”

Anastacia Machus'ka  
Kyiv

On the June 7, 2014 my life abruptly turned aside. My home became almost unattainable for me: 12 hours by the train “Kyiv-Volnovakha” – check point Novotroyitske – the zero Ukrainian check point – check point Yelenivka – Donetsk – Makiyivka. Besides, I have to stand waiting in the queue of similar to me people, who like me, want to reach their home. Everyone has his or her own history and I'm not an exception.

“They say, paper can bear everything. Only paper will not lie, will not pretend to understand one or sympathize with one. No one can share with me the pain of separation from one's own home, except for those who experienced such a distress. It seems to me that I can feel every person who was forced to leave home. We are all connected by the war.

My thoughts are still 800 kms away from here, they live their own life there and cannot be united with my two identities – of the past and present.

The first year of parting from home I endured very hard and I did not believe in reality. I had not heard yet the roar of cannons personally and talking by Skype with mother, I asked her: “Is it thunder, mum?” and she answered: “No, these are howitzers, daughter”.

Is it all reality or only a dream? Nobody knew that such a horror could so quietly and suddenly happen to our people. Is it a real war? I simply cannot believe it.

It is incredibly terrible to understand that Donetsk has become almost dead: it is not waiting for me with lively buzz of voices and cars, the blooming alleys, the atmosphere of life and constant movement. When my mum calls me and after my whimpering in the receiver says: “Please, understand that our house is empty and dead, there is nothing here, even your things have been moved away”. In such moments tears automatically flow from my eyes caused by offense, anger and despair.

I will never be able to let go of my past. I can remember everything: the sound when the door is opening, the touch of the chair, the texture of curtains, absolutely all the details. I hear my mother returning from work and the parrot peacefully speaking through sleep. On the day when I visit my home again, I will cry from happiness. Every evening I imagine this moment in all details.

But, in spite of everything, I am strong. Although there are moments when I feel weaker and I hope without hope that all this pain and calamity will fade away. I will be at home with my mum and with peaceful sky over my head”, – it is an extract from my personal diary, where I poured my pain and despair.

A whole year of studies in an unfamiliar school. I was so far away from my real classmates, but, frankly speaking, I got accustomed to it in time. The 11<sup>th</sup> grade and I was a part of it. Other people and new acquaintances. At school, in the street, with friends I was a cheerful girl, but after crossing the threshold, thoughts again came to my mind. I closed my eyes – and saw my house and the coalmine waste heaps on the horizon outside. Why do I always strive to get there so much? There is death and blood, shots and fear, but why do I want into that vortex of events?

4 years ago I did not know what would happen. When I went to my granny to spend the summer holidays, I thought it would be like always – 3 months and then back home. But no, in a few days before the September, 1 I had to go to the neighbouring school, I believed my mother's words: "You will be here a month and then we will go away". I studied, and my mum was torn between the East and Centre of Ukraine. In that year I had my first birthday without her. Three months have passed and I still was at my granny's. Mum convinced me that after the New year there will be possibility to leave. But again no. As if to make matters worse, the shelling on the border became aggravated. Spring was the most difficult period when every evening I cried. Disregarding everything, I found inside me strength and prepared for the External Independent Testing, thought about the future, distracting from the thoughts of the past. Having passed the testing successfully, I became a student of Kyiv B.Hrinchenko University.

In summer 2016 I went home for two weeks. It was the most important date for me, for which I had been waiting for two years. It was all as if in a dream: I was approaching my house door, entered again 2014 year, as if I was returning from school. The parrot did not greet me with his loud voice, because he had died either from old age or from fear of the roar of cannons. My flat is like a doll house where there is furniture, but no family warmth. The same coalmine waste heaps, which will be standing there, maybe, for the next one hundred years. But it is all. It is a broken and unfinished past. The shops had changed their names: the so familiar "ATB" is now "The First Republican", "Epicenter" has changed into "Galaxy", only "Fox" is left of "Foxtrot". Roubles have seized the financial space and everywhere one looks – the flags of Donetsk People's Republic are hanging.

If it were not for the war, I still would dream of studying in the capital, as there are more opportunities and numerous events for the youth in Kyiv, I would move away from my family gradually, becoming more mature and independent.

Life is like a towel on which one is embroidering with coloured threads and war is the scissors that are cutting everything you have done, all the memories and moments of happiness. That is why it is so difficult to find strength to begin everything anew again, to live from scratch, to look at the world in different way.

“Only when you lose something, you begin appreciating it”, - I understood it at 16 and remembered forever. But, however bitter and painful I felt, whatever happened, I repeat time after time: “Things that do not kill us, make us stronger”, and go ahead.

During the years of war I became as if 10 years older, stronger and steadier. I would never have thought that life could teach me such a lesson. Now I really appreciate every moment, hour, second of my existence and take care of what I have.

There is a question: “What for is this war? For whom is it advantageous?” Of course, for the government. Yes, we collect money for the Anti-Terrorist Operation, almost on every stop in the underground I see the people who are busy with charitable actions and collect costs for the treatment and help to the soldiers. But are all of them honest? Do all of these thousands or, maybe, millions go for assistance? I hope that at least the bigger part of it is not pocketed by the government representatives and various cheats who are making profit on it.

The most topical issue, in my opinion, is the attitude of Ukrainians to the resettlers. I know many cases, when people from the East were not accepted for work, because they were different. I personally was called “vatnik” (*a person with Soviet values*) as a joke, but it was not funny for me.

My mother, who had been working for 27 years as an economist in a bank, which became a second home for me, is now forced to look for a job of a receptionist in a hostel or an office-cleaner. Is it fair?

The war has been continuing for the fourth year already, but I know that this dark period cannot last eternally, that justice and good will definitely find their way and conquer the world – one should only believe in it until it comes true!

## **Why is it important not to be a “burden”?**

Olha Milishkevych  
Lysychansk (Luhansk region)

“History of my life  
is a part of my Motherland’s history”.  
Taras Shevchenko

I am a resettler, a citizen of Ukraine! Lysychansk is my new home, which has become a great part of me, my Ukraine!

The events in our country have connected me to the city where I now live, where everything has become special, my own and dear. Maybe for someone everything here seems usual and commonplace, but my heart is now given to him – Lysychansk.

Until the beginning of the war I lived in a small miner town of Kirovsk in Luhansk region. At that time I studied in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade, also did gymnastics and danced. My mother worked as a primary school teacher, and father as a rescue worker in a firefighting brigade. It became restless in our town already in early spring of 2014. I did not understand what was happening, but my parents started collecting things already. I remember when I heard the explosions of shells for the first time and we were taken to the shelter from school, and then parents in panic took their children home. All inhabitants were terrified, stocked up food, bought everything from the shops. Foreigners in military uniforms carrying weapons appeared in the town.

During the summer we lived in fear and dreamt of the peace renewal in our town. But we could not go at once to the unoccupied territory, because here stayed our relatives who were ill and old. September came, but we still did not go to school. We did not go in October either: the parents did not allow us because of constant shellings. The planes floated in the sky, the town was shot at by cannons, people were hiding in the wet cellars and brought there warm clothes. I can remember how the shell dropped near our house – many innocent people were killed.

Even at that time in Kirovsk the atmosphere was very tense, people had different political views and they quarreled. I happened to meet town inhabitants who had a negative attitude to Ukraine. Looking back, I understand that my family had done such an uneasy, but the right choice, deciding to go to the peaceful land.

Since that time my family started living from scratch. We did not imagine what was awaiting us in the unfamiliar town, where we would live and what will do later. The winter was approaching and we had very few clothes: my mum had snatched only the most important things when we were running to the bus.

Can I forgive those people who forced me to leave my small Motherland? We had lost everything we had, but in our hearts love for Ukraine, hope for the peace, faith in the future were left. Will I be able to return to the place where I was born, lived and spent my childhood? Earlier I constantly dreamt how I would return home, thought that it was possible, but with every day the hope faded.

We, resettlers, - are not a “burden” for the country, because among us there are many strong, enthusiastic, creative people who go on struggling for their right to have a Motherland, who do not give up. Life has issued me a challenge by changing the usual way of life – will I manage the difficulties, overcome obstacles, not be defeated? It was very difficult for me in the first months: an unfamiliar school, shelling in my own town where my relatives and friends were left. But my life did not become grey, dry, uninteresting: thanks to the support of parents, teachers, classmates and friends I have strength to participate actively in the life of the school and the city. In the situation, in which I have found myself, I can see also positive things – new friendly teachers, new acquaintances. The school and people with whom I had to meet became really close and special for me. I started loving Lysychansk with whole my soul: from the high-rise buildings and mighty chestnut-trees on the central square to the narrow streets in the outskirts. Everyone has his own Motherland, but the feeling of pride, love and patriotism is common for everybody.

Life is moving ahead unceasingly, and destiny of every person depends on the way of his or her Motherland. I am sure that I will not stop and will go to reach my aim. I dream of acquiring higher education in peaceful Ukraine in order to become a part of the process of our state’s upbuilding. I see my future in the happy, mighty and flourishing country which is confidently moving in the direction of the European family.

My victory is to start life from scratch and continue living it in a full, exciting and creative way.



## **I have home no more...**

Nedostup Danyil  
Starobilsk (Luhansk region)

I was a student of the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, when those terrible events in Luhansk started. The Crimea was proclaimed to be Russian, the “boarding” of the state security committee took place, the “attack” of the borderline military units in the city block Myrnyi – all of those things were not understandable and arose worry in us, students of the secondary school № 5 in Luhansk. Our teachers calmed us down as much as they could by saying that those events had “peaceful character” and very quickly “political forces will reach a logical and correct consensus”. We did not try to argue with the school experienced “authorities” and therefore, trustingly, but also with anxiety were waiting for the closing up of the conflict.

Everything changed then, on the June 2, 2014. It was a summer, warm, even a little hot day. At half past two our neighbor Vika called on us – she was cheerful, loud and joyful. She was getting ready for an important meeting and needed a hairdresser in order to dry her soft, thick, red hair. And half an hour later Toma from the neighbouring house called us and informed that there was an explosion near the oblast administration building, maybe a bomb was dropped from the plane, and Vika is badly wounded, in the intensive care unit.

Later I found in the Internet the video of this terrible event. I saw Vika on it. I could hardly recognize her: she was lying unconscious on the ground, and her face, chest, arms and legs were covered with bright red liquid...

After that Russia started with Ukraine a real “chess game”, and it was much more horrible than in the Harry Potter film.

Now every day, several times a day, the sirens were blaring and the Ukrainian planes were flying over our buildings very lowly, roaring frightfully, almost touching the many-storeyed buildings and the lines of electrical networks.

And in response to that the Russian “Grads” started “answering”, which brought to Luhansk land the destruction and death.

I can remember the wet shelter, with the astringent smell of mould, where for several hours, and even for whole night children were whimpering, old ladies firmly pressed to themselves their terrified cats, and confusion and lack of understanding could be read in people’s eyes.

Of course, people started fleeing from the dangerous city. They fled where trust and hope led them: whole “echelons” of buses rode in the direction of Rostov region. But we, like the majority of the citizens, had chosen another way: the endless, like a sea, crowd on the bus station, a very great number of bags and parcels, weak indignation of those people, who could not receive a

seat in a mini-bus. And then the disguised “Cossacks” on the so-called “check points”, biased checking of all the documents and things, long questioning of passengers, in which the “rebels” found out what we did not like in the newly-born republic of “Novorosiya”. And the same exceeding heat, whimpering of children, emptiness in the eyes and hearts...

Among the crowd, which arrived in Starobilsk (Luhansk region), we were the happiest. Because granny, my mother’s mum, lived in this town. She greeted us gladly. The boys from the street were also extremely glad that I came, because every summer we spent together: climbed the trees, played football, rode bicycles. But this summer all the fun was destroyed by the enormous anxiety for my home, my city, my country...

Every evening I was waiting for the news on TV. I knew the names of all the commanders and of all battalions. I drew a map where I marked “the frontline” with small red flags. I was waiting for “consensus” which people around me promised.

And I wished very much to return HOME!

And then a neighbour who lived in the flat opposite us made a call...

She said that our home in Luhansk does not exist any more... That after the usual shelling a phosphoric shell hit the house and the two-storeyed buildings burnt, like a paper house. The fire brigade came only the next day, because there have not been either mobile communications, or electricity, or water in the city...

It was on the August 9, 2014.

I do not know which loss is more terrible...

I do not have a home any more. The new acquaintance of my mother, Svitlana, does not have a mother – she was killed during the shelling in Stanychno-Luhansk district. Another acquaintance – Mykola from Georgiyivka, does not have a leg – it is also the consequence of the shelling. I also have a good friend Danyil who already studies in the medical college. He has a shell-shock of the head because of being hit by the fractions of a shell, when they were running to the shelter with his mother.

But I know that I will have a new home. My mother works in two places and we gradually save for the new home. I know that soon I will enter my new house and I will have my own room, even better one than that one I had..

And the mother of Svitlana cannot be brought back. Mykola’s leg cannot grow again. And all the horrors of war – shellings, destructions and fires – will appear before Danyil’s mind for a long time.

Do you know what I am amazed at? No one of them becomes despondent. No one has even a hint at depression or even melancholy.

Svitlana started her own business in Starobilsk – she has her own premises, where she grows decorative plants. Mykola has become a volunteer – he helps the soldiers of Anti-Terrorist Operation. My friend Danyil dreams of becoming a doctor.

I also dream of passing successfully the External Independent Testing, of entering a university and studying to be an experienced programmer.

And if the situation in the country will not reach the promised “consensus”, I will gladly go to defend my country, because otherwise I cannot feel a real man, a Person full of dignity.