



WE ARE STRONGER TOGETHER: PHYSICALLY OR THOUGHTS

We were ready and not ready.

Ready, because we kept a full tank in the car, collected children's things. We were not ready because we did not believe that such a situation, such arrogance, impunity and madness were possible in the 21st century.

We've got servicemen in our family, so on the evening of February 22nd there was a certain alarm signal, an unplanned shift for them. Since this was not the first time, I hoped it didn't mean anything, but I didn't seem to believe it myself: there were too many warnings, including those from foreign partners. I used to share warnings with all my relatives and friends, but I didn't do it that morning because of the shock state and focus on one thing alone.

At about 5 AM on February 24, I was awakened by a call: "The war has started, you have to leave right now, you have 15 minutes for that." At 5 AM I usually can't

function properly, my actions are automatic and unconscious. Fortunately, some things were already collected, so we had time to deal with the documents that needed to be taken, to pick up my mother from another part of the city and leave in an hour. I wanted to pick up my friend, but couldn't, because there were only two available seats left for the 5 of them including animals. They couldn't make a decision quickly, and it was impossible to wait... This was the first moment when I regretted later that I haven't convinced them. After all, I was able to protect my child from the fears of war (he never sat in the basement), but was not able to take my friend with her child with me...

It took us 7 hours to get to the place where we were supposed to be in 3 hours. We were in the downtown of Vasytkiv, when it had already been bombed and unscrupulous drivers blocked the road, creating a chaotic queue at the gas station.

We drove in circles on unknown roads, stood in traffic jams, watched drivers drive in the oncoming lane, thinking their lives were more important than others. In fact, war time was not the first time I have seen such behavior of our drivers, mostly men, so it was not that shocking.

We got lucky: our family has a home in the center of Ukraine, a family that received and helped us. We are in good relations, and we are able to coexist peacefully, have acceptable living conditions (albeit without hot water in the house), support each other. Many times I regretted that I do not have my own property that would allow me to help people when they need it. This once again showed how important it is to be an owner, not just a relative of the owners.

LIVING IN A SMALL TOWN
REMINDED ME OF **HOW
STRONG THE GENDER
STEREOTYPES STILL ARE
AMONG COMMON MEN.**
THEY STILL BELIEVE
WOMEN HAVE TO COOK
AND CLEAN, AND MEN
USUALLY DON'T EVEN
WASH DISHES.

Yes, men have other "house work", but it takes much less time. When it was necessary to clean the territory, I did not see any men among people with brooms next to the kindergarten, where the settlers were placed, although there were definitely men. Well, whether you like it or not, you hear these stereotypes from rela-

tives, especially older ones: "the men work, so they don't go to the store", so you as a woman go to the store although you also work, but it is assumed your work is not as important. And how these men without women at household to serve them are "poor things", and that it's "the fault of two people" when the man is an abuser...

My work is mainly remote, and our project very quickly adapted and took care of the needs of the country helping with humanitarian aid. From the first days our top managers supported us employees and helped those in need. For me, this was, among other things, an indication that the organization really respects people, and not just pretends that human rights are a priority. Unfortunately, there were also sad stories of colleagues from other organizations. All my colleagues showed their best side: supported each other, treated everyone with understanding, never panicked. So here I was lucky again, and I can imagine how much more difficult it was for many others.

I have two jobs (full time and part time), studies, I am also involved in civic activism (feminism, Rezistanta groups, Femmarch, Femtravels, NordicModelUA page, Equality Model website) and lately, volunteering. Together with like-minded people, we began to gather information and create useful materials for refugees, especially on the topic of combating human trafficking. As a volunteer group, we were the first in Ukraine to publish a handbook on trafficking for migrants, made a list of organizations which are safe for refugees to refer to. We held dozens of thematic meetings and

seminars as a part of women's organizations work group, which established contacts between experts, gave a better view of the picture, coordinated aid and helped to develop strategy and tactics.

Our NGO was not the most effective in helping the Army: all our requests to the foundations brought zero results. Then my family and I fundraised hundreds of thousands of hryvnias for the equipment requested by the professional military, found the necessary equipment, bought it and delivered it to its destination. With the help of caring Ukrainian women, we helped with transferring donations from Europe to the military units that needed help.

As feminists, my colleagues and I supported each other, continued our educational work, missed each other, and dreamed of meeting someday. We did not have any differences in the position on Russia's war against Ukraine: since 2014 we have managed to leave only those who had the same position in our communication circle. The women around me were unequivocally patriotic, supportive, and none refused to help, none criticized any choices. Of course, we were not able to go out together on March 8 as we planned and y wanted, to attract attention to women rights. Nevertheless, in our online groups we continued our informational work, conducted polls, worked on the Femcalendar, in spite of everything, without missing a single week. This was possible due to our cooperation and unity, and I hope it will last.

I had the opportunity to leave Ukraine from the very beginning, but for 2 months I did not agree. Then I asked myself: for whom am I doing this and who is better off? And I realized that no one benefits. I had the opportunity for my child to communicate with relatives, to get new experiences, sense of safety y (alarms in our place of residence continued to sound several times a day), to give my kid an opportunity to be a child. And we flew to another continent. This trip was made possible with the support of my friends (feminists) and relatives. And I keep telling my child that it's a vacation.

This is not a success story; this is a story of struggle that continues. I plan to continue working to combat violence and exploitation of women, both as my full time job and as volunteering. My family and I will talk about Ukraine, raise funds for Ukraine, search, find and deliver what is impossible to find. We are not going to grieve and panic because it will not help anyone. And perhaps we will soon return to our country and see the collapse of Russia — a country of despots, a country of anomalies, which should not have existed for a long time, which has no place in the modern world.

Olena Zaitseva,
social activist,
Kyiv – Vinnitskiy region — Brazilia