

LIFE
GOES ON



My husband and I usually wake up early, around four in the morning. While my husband is making freshly ground coffee, I make or adjust my plan for the day. Then we watch the news, have breakfast, and start working, each in different place... I like to come to school around seven. I like to admire the yard, neat rooms. I like to go to a sleepy school when the technicians are finishing up and the canteen workers are starting to cook.

So it was on February 24, 2022. But that morning I did not want to make any plans. I knew that on Saturday, February 26 we planned to have school reunion in the evening. This is a tradition in Ukraine: to gather former classmates on the last weekend in February. These days, for some reason, I always sum up my life. I was born in Kharkiv, studied at school #25 in Kharkiv, then - at the Polytechnic Institute, worked at the Department of Plastics at the same Institute. My family built a spacious house. After forty years, I «got» to school. And life changed rapidly. I was a history teacher first and became a principal later. I received second degree in Pedagogy. I know beekeeping, write poetry, got recently published in an almanac. My first love was the only one of my life. My husband and I are together for 37 years. I have a handsome son, a teacher, a superprofessional. Grandson, Leo, is year and two months old. One thing I worry about is that son's personal life is not settled. He is currently a single father. Six months ago he returned home with a child in his arms. But it's really nothing, everything will be OK. He will find his happiness.

While my husband was making coffee, I visited an online store looking for new things. I really liked a beautiful dress and stylish stiletto shoes on a British website. Here is my coffee: delicious, fragrant, inspiring, invigorating. What was I thinking at the time? I thought how good it was that 80's clothes (the years of my youth) were back in fashion. I thought that now I would get a purse for the

chosen clothes. Which one should I choose: a small or a large one? I'd better go for a small leather one in the color of shoes. Suddenly I realized I needed perfume for this outfit to complement the image. I approached my collection of fragrances and saw that nothing fit. The aroma should remind of spring, be full of life, energy and freshness. Then I recalled a scent of youth "Eden" by Cacharel. That's it, that's what I was going to buy.

Suddenly I heard a rumble. We live between Kharkiv and Chuhuiv, and the roar of planes and helicopters is quite common. But it was an ominous rumble, one that gripped everything inside. Then terrible explosions started. A glow broke into the window. Far away, in Kharkiv, my dear Saltivka, where my youth was spent, shuddered in pain. Then another terrible explosion happened. I ran to the eastern window. A pillar of black smoke appeared above Chuhuiv. What was it??? My heart told me: WAR !!! The mind refused to comprehend... Before my eyes, my grandmother's stories about the war that ended 77 years ago came to life. Her expecting a letter from her husband, funeral instead, life in the occupation, meeting with Erich Koch, after which she miraculously survived, and joy of Victory.

And the commotion began. Someone called, asked silly questions, I answered something, mostly gave stupid answers. I was especially annoyed by the question from the teachers saying the parents were inquiring whether their kids had to go to school. I replied they do not let children go to school in the heavy rain, and it was a bit surprising they were asking now. How ashamed I am of that anger and cruelty now.

Then the whole family «got stuck» to the TV. We caught every word of the speakers. It was clear that the fragile world had fallen apart, and a terrible ordeal awaited my dear homeland.

The day passed in a half-sleep. Night was approaching, covering everyone with sticky embraces, carrying fear and uncertainty.

I went to my room. There was a cup of unfinished coffee on the desk, and a small leather purse on the computer monitor. It was all in the past life...

Then we hid in the basement of the house, listening to every loud sound. The days and nights became the same. I worked because I had to keep the school alive, but without a calendar I couldn't remember the date or the day of the week. I counted only the days since the beginning of the war. Wars are cruel, senseless.

A few days later, families began to leave the village. People were leaving everything, leaving behind the weeping eyes/windows of houses. In my family, the question of being evacuated did not even arise. Behind each member of my family are the fates of many people. We're home! We are on our land! We must be useful right here! WE STAY!

I did the right thing. Of all the school staff, 40 people, only two evacuated. Everyone else has worked and continued to work, each in their own place.

I started each day by greeting my teachers in our Viber group. It was quite difficult for me to write words of support, because I thought it was just words. I thought it was so hard for people. About a month after the war began, I was distracted with my problems and forgot to greet my colleagues. At 9 AM a colleague called me: «Valentyna Hryhorievna, are you all right? Why aren't writing us? We are worried!" I ran to the computer, greeted everyone and cried for the first time since the beginning of the war. I thanked God for everything that happened to me. And especially for the people around me who support, protect and inspire: husband, son, grandson.

Today is Friday, May 13, 79th day of the war, 133rd day of the year. We are alive. We have learned to adapt to new conditions. We have learned to work in new conditions.

I can bake delicious homemade bread, I can distinguish an outgoing shelling from incoming. I learned to «hunt» for baby food for my grandson, which we can't buy in our village now. I never tire of thanking people who bring goods for children, risking their lives. I learned how to fall asleep at night like Scarlet O'Hara, rejecting all thoughts.

The school ends soon. All children have the opportunity to study, albeit remotely. Our school has taken in 28 refugee children. I plan to work for the next school year. An educational program and curriculum have been drawn up, and preliminary tariffs for teachers are being prepared. The school yard is put in order after the winter, even flowers have been planted.

I realize one can bring a peaceful life closer by doing one's job diligently! And yet, I ordered my fragrance "Eden" by Cacharel...

Life goes on!

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