**Olga’s Ukraine Chronicles: We support each other, that's what gives us power**.

*Olga talks to Marie Gillespie at the Covid Chronicles project and updates us on the situation in Ivano-Frankivsk, in western Ukraine, where Olga runs a shelter for Internally Displaced Ukrainian People. The shelter is in urgent need of funds to help buy an oil-fired generator to heat the rooms and provide hot water for washing and cooking. Olga’s dream is, she says, everyone’s dream – to end the war!*

Marie: So good to hear your voice. How have you been?

Olga: Good to hear yours too Marie. Life is quite difficult now because we don’t have electricity for 8-10 hours a day. That's why it's so hard to work and do usual things. It’s even sometimes difficult to wash yourself and your clothes. We can’t heat our homes adequately as we have long periods without electricity. And, especially, we can’t heat the shelter enough, so my people are freezing.

Marie: That’s very tough, Olga. How many people do you have in the shelter now?

Olga: We currently have 18 people in the shelter who we are supporting – all mothers and children. The mothers and children in the shelter are from all over Ukraine, not only from the Occupied Territories. Most of them are from the territories where there is the war.

Marie: How are they coping?

Olga: Well, the mums are of course always worried about their husbands who are at war. They can’t be happy. They can’t settle. They are always afraid of bad news arriving. This war is a permanent crisis for them and for all of us, but we try to stay positive. We had some good news this week because at the shelter, a baby boy was born – so we have a Christmas baby.

Marie: Aww that’s wonderful! And how are you Olga, and your family, and the farm?

Olga: As for us, we are OK at home. We have oil, wood and gas so we don’t freeze. But in the shelter, everything is on electricity. That's why it's really difficult. My people in the shelter need to heat themselves, to cook, to boil water, so that's why we're trying to buy a generator right now. But also we need money to buy the oil and a special tank for storing oil.

Marie: I see. We’ll do our best to raise some funds for the shelter.

Olga: Thank you. I wish I could tell you that everything is OK, but I can't. No, it isn’t. But we try to continue our lives as normal as much as possible. We support each other. That's what gives us power. The mothers feel worried and down hearted, but the children are able to access education and to study. They go to school in the village. That’s good for them. They play and we try to keep them busy.

Marie: And you Olga? How are you?

Olga: Well now I’m tired, very, very tired, yeah. There are always some issues to deal with and I'm tired because I always try to solve all these problems but it’s difficult. You know, I’m always trying to find opportunities to buy gas or oil and figure out how to manage the shelter. It’s hard cos you don’t want to let people down. The mums in the shelter are traumatised and they come to depend on you – they become like your children, and you feel you have to provide for them.

Marie: I can imagine how they must look to you, Olga, for help and support. And it must be so tough in this freezing cold weather to manage the shelter. What’s the temperature now in the village in Ivano-Frankivsk?

Olga: It’s minus 2 right now outside. But indoors, when we have electricity, it can reach about 14 degrees at best. It's so cold here and we don't know how it will be next week – it will get colder and colder. Our electricity is intermittent. For 4 hours we have electricity then no electricity for like 10 hours. But the shelter is much much colder.

Marie: Is it also much more expensive this year?

Olga: Yes, it is much more expensive this year than last year, and so we are constantly thinking about how to share heating or cooking as it’s so expensive. But sometimes you don't think about money, you just need heat. It’s much more difficult to think how to solve all these problems with electricity.

Marie: You do such amazing volunteering work Olga – honestly, you are an inspiration to many.

Olga: I always have a hard time calling myself a volunteer. I always feel like I don’t “volunteer” enough. There's always doubt if I'm doing my best. But I know for sure that I’m doing it because it’s my passion, my lifestyle. I like to help. I'm not looking for a benefit in it. I'm not looking for a reward. I don't ask for appreciation. Actually, I think it's normal and human. This is how it should be, especially nowadays. Those who can do.

Marie: I realise you are about to drive to get oil, so I don't want to delay you, and I can hear your son is with you. How is he?

Olga: He’s Ok. He’s 4 now. He’s great. Look what he did – he put and hand torch inside his toy plastic dragon egg and made his own light – it made us all laugh

**PLACE IMAGE HERE**

Caption: Timko Makes Light

Photo by Olga

Marie: That’s wonderful Olga – what a clever wee lad! I love that photo. I know it’s a tough question, but maybe we can end by you telling us, what are your wishes for Christmas and the 2023?

Olga: Oh, the children want to have a big Christmas tree with bright shining lights, and my dream is everyone’s dream: to finish the war, yes and to have electricity, yes and to be happy and to be happy yeah! That’s enough maybe for Ukrainians: just to finish the war and just live our lives you know without worrying about another country like Russia doing harm. Yeah, just live our usual life!

Marie: Olga, thank you. I’ll be in touch again very soon.

Olga: Thank you to those who are near and who are far! All together, together, we are a great power!

Happy holidays people ❤️

Interview by Marie Gillespie

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