

## Trip to Lviv

### Day 1 Arrival (Berlin, Munich, Krakow, Przemysl, Lviv)

Getting there was a bit of a hassle because there was a strike and the flight was rebooked for later. From Krakow to Przemysl it took another three hours because the train was delayed. Around 22:30 I was there and should still wait for Nataliya. She picked me up from the station by car. As usual, it took a long time at the border. She arrived in Poland only after about an hour. The station in Przemysl is an old beautiful station with a big waiting room, which was full that night. Probably many of those waiting wanted to continue on to Poland or Ukraine.

I was glad when Nataliya finally showed up. Then we went straight back. The border is actually very close there. During the night we made the crossing in about an hour and a half. The border is a glistening bright place in the dark landscape; on the Polish side, everything is new and neat. When we had this control behind us came the deepest potholes over which we could drive only very slowly and carefully. Ukraine needs renovation! Shortly behind the border, on parallel roads, darkened vehicles, partly with camouflage-colored tarpaulins covered giant transporters. Whether these were the German Leopard tanks? It was all too dark and shadowy to tell.

Nataliya pulled into a rest stop to get something to eat. And so, on the night of March 23-24, 2023, I ate my first instant borscht from a plastic cup. It tasted surprisingly good. After that I went on to Lviv, which is about 80 km away from the border.

At the edge of the city center, a checkpoint. Piled up earth, iron rails to cross as tank barriers, wooden pallets, all sorts of things. Nataliya shows, as she did at the border, friendly and confident papers and we are waved on. Nataliya is a doctor and is therefore allowed to be on the road during curfew hours.

Arrival in the beautiful city center of Lviv at 2:30 a.m. We drive along beautiful old buildings from the 19th century, including much Art Nouveau, to the Hotel Atlas. After a bit of searching and knocking, the door is opened for us. The porter fetches the receptionist from her sleep. Short introduction by Nataliya and I am already taken to my room. No passport, no ID, only a signature.

### Day 2

City Hall

Military hospital

Lviv

Truskavets - health resort and rehabilitation center for wounded soldiers

AE and military cemetery

Shortly before 10 am Nataliya picks me up and we drive to the city hall. There meeting with Natalia Bunda who is very pregnant. She is the head of the development department. She is pregnant and probably only a few days left to work. She tells us about exemplary facilities for refugees and a hospital where soldiers are cared for. Nothing actually comes of the conversation. Nataliya politely declines to visit any of the facilities mentioned. She wants to go with me to a "real" military hospital afterward.

It is a relatively large hospital where she herself also works. She is an ophthalmologist and operates on soldiers who are injured in the face. On seven floors, the soldiers lie there in rooms with about six beds each, so narrow that there is hardly room for a shelf and personal

belongings. How many might be lying here? A hundred on each floor? Perhaps seven hundred, then?

Except for the doctors and nurses, all are in uniform, even some in their beds. In the rooms they lie in silence, their eyes averted, each to himself. Their blankets are folded back, their sex covered with a cloth. They are missing a leg, a lower leg, an arm, a hand, sometimes both. Crutches lean against the wall, some have visitors from their families, parents, wives, children.

The ward physician and surgeon shows me pictures of soldiers without eyes, with splinter injuries face. One is also missing his nose. Phosphorus bombs, Nataliya says.

In the elevator, a father pushes his son in a wheelchair. A cloth covers his head. No reactions, dead eyes. His wife with their daughter, about two years old, is in her arms behind.

A soldier in uniform with a down vest over his arm comes in. As with all soldiers, his blood type is embroidered in large letters on his jacket. Still, no guarantee of survival.

Little hope is here. The smell? No disinfectant, no stench of blood, flesh, or decay, no testosterone either; only cigarette smoke is everywhere. The soldier's drug.

Nataliya wanted to show me this hospital because she often operates here. It is not a showcase hospital, it is the truth, as she says.

At noon we drive to Truskavez, a health resort at the foot of the Carpathians. Here Nataliya studied in a hospital and here she still has a consultation once a week.

Wounded soldiers come to Truskavez for rehabilitation. Socialist building style, little luxury and few old buildings. "Nataliya's hospital is very simply equipped. She shows me the small room in which she operates. Outdated instruments, but still good. A white display case with a hodgepodge of medicine and equipment reminds me of the one I last saw in Tirgu Mures in 1990 in a Romanian children's home.

Tuskavet is about 80 km from Lviv. For this distance we need one and a half hours.

In the evening we meet with the Zonta friends from Lviv and Uzhhorod in a typical Ukrainian restaurant. Great joy of reunion, many toasts in everyone's honor, vodka, wine and emotions.

But the evening is not over yet. After dinner we drive with a small group in three cars to a military cemetery in the middle of Lviv. Graves upon graves lit up in the darkness by two spotlights and the many grave lights. Ukrainian flags on all graves, some with flower arrangements in yellow and blue, all with a photo of the person who left his life. We place yellow roses on the graves, the Zonta Rose.

It is not far from the military hospital to the military cemetery. What was before that, sometimes the pictures from the news show us.

Every Zontian here has a relative who has fallen, some who are fighting. A cruel and sad reality. That day I got an idea of it.

Day 3

City tour

What does a city look like in war? Actually pretty good, if it is located as far west as Lviv. A city guide shows our group of Ukrainian Zontians and me the sights in Ukrainian. Lviv, the sixth largest city in Ukraine, population about 717,000 before the war, Eastern Galicia. Formerly Old Russian, formerly Austrian, formerly Polish, home to many peoples and

religions. Unesco World Heritage Site with Renaissance, Baroque, Classicist and Art Nouveau buildings. Since the beginning of the war, temporarily the seat of many international organizations and embassies. Named after Leo the First of Galicia. Each ethnic group gave its own translation to the lion. Polish and Russian Lvov, Yiddish and German: Lemberg, French Leopol, Italian Leopoli.

The city center, after more than a year of war, is not as protected as it was a few months ago, when there were plenty of bombings in the area. Many statues have been removed and can only be seen as posters saying, "Soon, after the war you will see me again. The city library is protected with sandbags in the basement windows. Other sculptures and ornaments on the houses are wrapped in protective material, still others stand exposed. Soldiers are everywhere. The city is also well protected on the inside. Not only attacks from outside are feared, but also spies and saboteurs.

Nataliya has booked the "love tour" for us and so I learn all sorts of things about the political child marriages of past royal houses, which today are dressed up romantically.

Marianna, Olena/Helen, and Katherina take turns translating for me.

A short coffee break and our meeting begins.

In the basement of the hotel, the heating is turned up first. The technology works and Area Director Olena Kovalchuk welcomes us. I have received a beautiful leather-bound notebook as a gift and take notes.

ZC Uzhhorod

President Natalia Mytrovtsii, a doctor, head of neurology at a hospital in Uzhhorod reports from her club.

Uzhhorod has almost doubled its population (from about 120,000) due to refugees from eastern Ukraine. The members of ZC Uzhhorod have helped from the first moment to take care of the refugees. For this purpose, they also cooperate with other organizations, such as the Red Cross.

They support a canteen for refugees with our donations, among other things.

After the destruction of the infrastructure in the winter of 2022/2023, they were able to purchase electric generators for their members and a warming house with our donations.

The warming room was open until 1.4. Here residents and refugees could warm up, rest and eat without heating. There were artistic workshops for children and adults.

Important projects of the club were also the promotion of a theater and film group. Mental health care is becoming more and more important. A planned "Invincibility Center" is probably part of that. In April, there will be a new project for women who have experienced sexualized violence. Here the ZC Brooklyn/New York and the ZC Corvalis/Oregon are involved.

Dr. Ambereen Sleemy from NY and Pete Bober from Corvalis/Oregon will travel to Uzhhorod in April. The goal is probably to raise awareness and train physicians for women with this trauma.

ZC Uzhhorod financially supports women of fallen soldiers.

Club member Myroslava Kalamanyuk's textile factory "Parada" already employs many refugee women. The factory has expanded its production to clothing and supplies for military after well-known Western European brands withdrew their orders. Apparently, with the beginning of the war, the situation became too unsafe for them.

### ZC Lviv

The president is Nataliya Preys, an ophthalmologist and head of ophthalmology at a hospital in Lviv.

The members of Lviv also received electric generators from our donations.

They support an orphanage for disabled and non-disabled children. The donations were food, bedding, furnishings, lamps, tablet computers for some of the children.

Further, they supported soldiers with power banks and electrical generators and medical first aid equipment.

One soldier, 21 years old, attended our meeting and thanked us for the help. He was in combat with three comrades. They were attacked, only he survived with a serious injury to his shoulder. Thanks to our medicine donations, he was able to be taken care of.

Soon he will probably go back to the front.

Thanks to the donations of District 27 we were able to pay Nataliya Prey's ophthalmological instruments for eye surgeries. She has been able to help many soldiers and civilians with surgery.

### ZC Lviv Zamok

President Luba Maksymovych reports. Luba has long been involved in an organization that helps women in need. With the start of the war, she opened her existing women's shelter to refugees. As early as possible, in addition to providing school supplies for children, food, clothing and bedding, she offered psychological help and raised awareness about the dangers of forced prostitution.

With the help of her shelter, entire groups of sick people have also been evacuated from war zones.

Currently, together with other organizations, she is supporting 80 families in various refugee shelters. In an industrial area on the outskirts of Morschyn, a health resort, she is currently building a shelter that will accommodate about 10 families.

At the end of the meeting, we exchange gifts. I brought about 1 kg of Belgian chocolates, which I now distribute. To the Area-Director, the Presidents and others I distribute the Twillys from ZC Bielefeld that I have left. They are very happy about it.

And of course, I also receive gifts, including a typical Ukrainian embroidered blouse and a certificate from the city of Lviv in recognition of our support.

Photos are taken and then we leave for the opera.

I miss the tour there because we still have a switch with the French Zonta Clubs, which are meeting at the same time in Béziers. The technology works to some extent and I can at least report a bit about what I see and experience here. Some Ukrainian women understand French and thank me for this mini-lecture.

The State Opera of Lviv was built at the beginning of the last century on the model of the Vienna State Opera and forms the beginning (or end) of a large long square. Gold, marble, statues and frescoes, multi-armed candelabra, all impressive.

Puccini's "Madame Butterfly" will be performed on 3/25/2023. Because of the curfew, the performance will start at 5 p.m. and with a note: if there is an air alarm, the audience will be

asked to go to the basement of the building. If the alarm lasts longer than an hour, the performance will be cancelled.

The national anthem follows, sung along by many with their hands on their hearts. The orchestra plays loudly.

The production does without great effects, but the voices and orchestra are a nice distraction (even if the plot is about an unhappy child marriage - the Zontians are also uncompromising here).

After the opera, the "Avenue of Liberty" in front of it is as busy as it probably is on any Saturday in peacetime. Maybe even a bit more. Right in front of the opera, three young people perform a wild rhythmic dance.

At the end of this day, we, Zonta friends from Uzhhorod and Lviv, sit together in a restaurant on Peace Square. Plates of Ukrainian varenyky, salo and many other things go around and one by one we stand up, say our toasts and toast with vodka, water and wine. They are happy, thoughtful and sad toasts.

In the end, we have to hurry to get to the hotel or home before curfew.

I learned that all my Zonta friends here have soldiers in their relatives. Quite a few are mourning a cousin, uncle or friend.

The reality is, they are all very brave and determined. It helps you a lot to be active and do your part to win. Of course, they are realists. They know what is needed and they know that it will take a long time and the end is uncertain. Each one is a heroine in her own right and it makes me very proud of Zonta that we are backing them with our support, not only financially. We are there for them during this very difficult time. Perhaps it is only now that they really feel that with Zonta they have arrived and are accepted in Europe and in the Western world.

#### Day 4

Sunday begins with a last meeting of all those who have arrived and many from Lviv. We meet in a coffee next to the hotel.

Yes, coffee in Ukraine is a special chapter: I have not had bad coffee anywhere in the western part of Ukraine that I know. Neither in Kiev, nor in Odessa, nor in Uzhhorod, and certainly not in Lviv. The Austrian influence? Maybe. However, the coffee culture is more oriented to the Italian one. In the city center, there are small coffee shops on many corners and, of course, there are many cafés like the one this morning, which can easily compete with our cafés. Cupcakes, cakes, chocolates, everything is there.

I say goodbye to the Zonta friends from Uzhhorod and today I accompany Luba Maksymovych from ZC Lviv Zamok to Morshyn, a health resort, 80 km south of Lviv at the foot of the Carpathians.

Luba organized everything perfectly. With an interpreter and her assistant, we are driven by a chauffeur.

In Morshyn we first visit a shelter for refugees, which is equipped with the help of Luba's organization and also our donations. The house is quite isolated in an industrial area and is almost finished. Everything looks clean and modern. The kitchens lack furnishings and the shared bathrooms lack partitions. A large balcony goes across one narrow side of the house, and the attic is still to be developed. It is to be play area for the children and seminar room for trainings.

On the ground floor is a meeting and treatment room for physiotherapy and psychotherapy.

About 8 to 10 families can be accommodated here. Each in a room where the furnishings are still missing. Double bunk beds are planned. There is little privacy and unfortunately the garden is not finished yet either. Our donations are needed here to finish the house.

The second stop on Sunday is a former summer camp for children. Since the beginning of the war, it has become a shelter for refugees from the East.

The canteen is a wood-paneled room, plastic tablecloths, everything rather practical and simple. The people who are waiting for me here have all lost everything. They come from Donetsk or Dnipro, Zaporizhzhya, Bakhmut, Kramatorsk and the villages in the region. On their cell phones the photos of their completely destroyed houses. Just like they are in almost every report about the war. Sure. But it is different to see the faces of the victims and to talk to them.

The younger women with children and the older ones, couples and single women, hardly any of them have jobs.

Luba gives a "motivational speech." She tries to encourage those present and give them advice on how to find work.

Luba tells that a Norwegian fund finances the rent for a regular apartment for some refugees. The others continue to be housed in the summer camp.

Two women work in the kitchen of the canteen. Others have been less fortunate.

E.g. Irina, ca 65, she has been here for over a year, has cancer, a tumor was removed from her. She cannot work.

Claudia from Vuhledar, ca 65 was head of the cultural club in her town. She is also here alone and has no work.

Irina, about 40, who is here with her mother Antonia and daughters Liza, 16 and Polina, 7. Polina needs special food. She is much too small for her age. Liza, dreamy and already very grown up, would like to study art, but how is she supposed to finance it? She shows me her drawings on her cell phone. Polina, cheeky and cheerful, has painted a heart for me in the Ukrainian colors of yellow and blue.

Vira, 38, very sad and despondent, fled here from near Vuhledar with daughter Maria, 8, and son Ivan, 15. Her husband stayed in the zone now occupied by Russians. He could not leave his mother alone. Vira tells that they had a farm with dairy farming. Now they have only one cow. She does not know if she will see her husband again. She cries.

Liubov and Alex, 72 and 67 years old. Both have worked all their lives, got all dressed up for the interview. They have been here for a year. How do they spend the day? Walking, eating, sleeping. Sometimes the son comes with family. He works in Lviv.

Viktoria, 33, divorced with her son Alex, 9. They lived in an apartment in Bakhmut. After the Russians invaded, she moved in with her parents in Dnipro. The house was built by her father. When the Russians came, they stole everything that was in the house. Even the toilet bowl. She doesn't know if the house is still standing. They had to flee in December. She has a

job. Part-time and online for a government agency. Besides, she is training as a hairdresser in the city of Morshyn. Alex goes to class online, with his old class spread all over.

Viktoria still tells that she was lucky: she was at the train station in Kramatorsk just before the Russians bombed it and 58 people died.

Together with some children she hands me a letter of thanks and a big picture in Ukrainian colors and peace dove.

I wonder what more the people could tell if I had had more time.

One thing is clear: all of them have lost their existence. Not everyone will manage to build something new. And as long as the war continues, they wait.

On the way back from Morshyn, we drive past the electricity plant that was badly damaged in the November 2022 attacks on the infrastructure. Today there is nothing left. The electricity is flowing again.

We pass a large shopping center (Auchan, Metro, Zara and others). It is very busy. Sunday is shopping day, also in the city we return to.

Later we have an appointment with four young women who are interested in Zonta. They all have several, partly different educations. All of them are politically and socially engaged. They are around thirty and I hope that this will work out with Luba and the ZC Lviv Zamok. Luba has already worked with all four of them on various projects. Two were probably also involved in psychological support in the projects.

My impression: the Zonta Clubs in Ukraine are on a good way, even if Luba goes her own way with her club. She is networked with the national women's organizations and also internationally. For example, she received an award from the US organization 'Vital Voices' in November for her commitment.

The war has brought the clubs closer to Europe and the global West and increased understanding of Zonta's goals.

A new generation of women has moved into positions of responsibility. They know Zonta much better than they did a few years ago, and they also understand our goals. For example, ZC Uzhhorod has already donated a total of nearly \$200 since the convention. That is very generous compared to Ukrainian incomes.

The solidarity of Zontians around the world is very important to them. The moral support as well as the financial support.

I am very happy about that, even if the cause is just cruel.

Day 5

Return journey

There will be a strike in Germany this Monday (3/27/2023), so I will spend another night in Krakow. My return flight is not until Tuesday. This has the advantage that we don't have to leave at 3am to have enough time to wait at the border.

Nataliya brings me back, accompanied by the other Natalia from ZC Lviv. It takes us 3 hours to cross the border and then we have a farewell meal at MacDonalDs across the border. The rest of my return journey is normal. Przemysl-Krakow, hotel at the airport, return flight.