

we

world stories



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UKRAINE
KYIV/LVIV

Simone Proietti Marcellini

Professional photographer based in Rome, class of 1991. At the age of eighteen, he receives his first camera and becomes passionate about photography.

In 2012, after realizing his first project around sustainability and after taking it to exhibitions in Rome and the Marche region, he understands the great communicative power of social and reportage photography. In 2020, he begins a training course on reportage at the WSP Photography school. In 2022, he founds the GAZE collective together with Antonio Romano, Filippo Mancini, Eleonora Pannunzi and Martina Picciallo.

Antonio Romano

Born in 1985, he grows up in San Polo dei Cavalieri in the province of Rome. His encounter with photography occurs on his 30th birthday, without any clear reason. He immediately feels the vocation for the street, the thousands of faces and stories, from which the urgent need to tell those stories arises. After graduating from the "Ettore Rolli" school of photography in Rome, he achieves various refinements in the field of reportage at the WSP Photography school in Rome, where he later attends the Masterclass in Reportage and Photojournalism. Member and founder of the photographic collective GAZE, together with Simone Proietti Marcellini, Filippo Mancini, Eleonora Pannunzi and Martina Picciallo.



Ukraine, Irpin (Kyiv Oblast)

On February 24 2022 at 4 am in the morning, Russia launched a 'special military operation'. That morning, a war began in the heart of Europe in the XXI century. The Ukrainian capital was the first to come under attack, followed by Odessa, Mariupol and Lviv. The war in Ukraine has forced millions of families to leave their homes in search of safe places, protection and support. Since the beginning of the conflict, there are an estimated 17 million people in need of humanitarian assistance and protection across Ukraine. Civilian infrastructures have been severely impacted, buildings have been de-

stroyed in urban centres and thousands of homes have been damaged or demolished across the country.

According to UNHCR data, 8 million refugees from Ukraine have been registered across Europe. Most have fled to neighbouring countries such as Moldova, Poland, Romania, Hungary and Slovakia. In addition, more than 5 million Ukrainians are internally displaced: most of them are women, children and elderly people who, seeking for a safe place to live, have reached the western parts of the country. And then, there are those who stayed behind, witnessing the devastation that a war brings along.

In February 2023, Antonio Romano and Simone Proietti - two photographers from the GAZE collective - went to Ukraine together with WeWorld. They gathered testimonies from the inhabitants of Irpin.



POPULATION **41 MLN**
 CAPITAL **KYIV**
 INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE **5,3 MLN**
 PEOPLE IN NEED OF HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE **17,7 MLN**
 PEOPLE REGISTERED AS REFUGEES **8,2 MLN**

The muffled atmosphere of winter envelops Irpin and its inhabitants. A blanket of snow covers both the roofs and the rubble, while hiding at first sight the evidence of the war. Squeaking noises of sheet metal and clankings, high-pitched hisses of the wind piercing through broken windows, these are the sounds that break up the densely suspended and slowed-down atmosphere. This is what Irpinski looks like, the district battered by artillery shells and bombings. Torn buildings and smashed windows, like giants of flesh and bone, from which emerge the guts wounds of a soul struck in its depths. Sometimes, amidst the streets of buildings or sitting on the benches of a small garden, it's not unusual to bump into some of the inhabitants who, with the ghost of their destroyed lives in the background, try to stick together and comfort each other. Concealed at times by a glance and a smile, the traumas they have just experienced are still vivid. In the months following the liberation, since April 2022, those who could repaired the material damage to their homes. The luckiest ones have been able to return to live in buildings that were only partially damaged, by replacing windows and repairing other parts. On the other hand, other families have readjusted their lives in a

“In this continuing scenario of war, a new spring is blossoming, carrying along a hope of rebirth.”

garage, or in the only room accessible after the bombing. But many have lost everything and the wait for reconstruction has an unspecified date that translates into victory. The promise of reconstruction, that will coincide with the victory of the Ukrainian army over the Russian occupying force, makes the future of the residents of Irpin, as well as the one of the entire population, very uncertain. Currently, the south-east front is more than 10 hours away from Irpin and although the city has been liberated for more than a year, there are still thousands of internally displaced persons forced to live in reception centres. In this continuing scenario of war, a new spring is blossoming and with it a hope of rebirth. Irpin shines in the sun, and with it the resplendent forest and the parks are tinged with bright green among blooming daffodils and tulips. The laughter of playful children is an antidote and a new lifeblood for the soil and the souls who inhabit it, chasing away war and all its weights. The wish is that this year a wind of peace may blow strongly over Ukraine, sweeping away the spiral of death and violence; and that women and children still refugees abroad will be able to safely return, and that the thousands of families still divided can finally be reunited and return to life.



The residential complex of Irpinsky Lipki.
This area of Irpin was one of the most hit by the bombings and the conflict.
(Irpin, 2023).



Tatyana Vasilievna and Oleksandr Mykolaevich have returned to live in Irpin, in an annex built with their own hands in their garden, between August and December 2022. Their children moved out of the city, leaving them alone. When the war broke out, Tatyana and Oleksandr remained in their home, watching from their second-floor window the horrors of the bombings and fires that raged around them. Only after a grenade hit their garden, Tatyana decided to leave Irpin and get to Kyiv. At first, Oleksandr stayed behind to look after their dog Kashtanka, but shortly after he left as well. They would never see their home again: ruins are all that is left of it, together with memories that the different generations who have lived there will keep forever. Oleksandr thinks of his terrace every now and then: a meeting point for friends and relatives who came to visit

Tatyana Vasilievna and Oleksandr Mykolaevich

them and would stop there to admire the garden and enjoy a good cup of coffee in company.

For Tatyana, the destruction of their home has made the future so uncertain. Waiting for them in the ruins, there was the faithful

Kashtanka.

Once they went back to Irpin, they found themselves without a roof over their heads. They settled for months in their neighbour's garage, sharing the space with an old car to be scrapped. While all the other buildings around collapsed, Oleksandr devoted himself to repairing the car in order to stay busy, and he was able to bring it back to life. For the couple, the only reason why the garage where they found shelter was not harmed was the discovery of an old family icon: that icon now hangs in the annex's wall, in their new home, and it is covered by a rushnyk, according to the tradition.

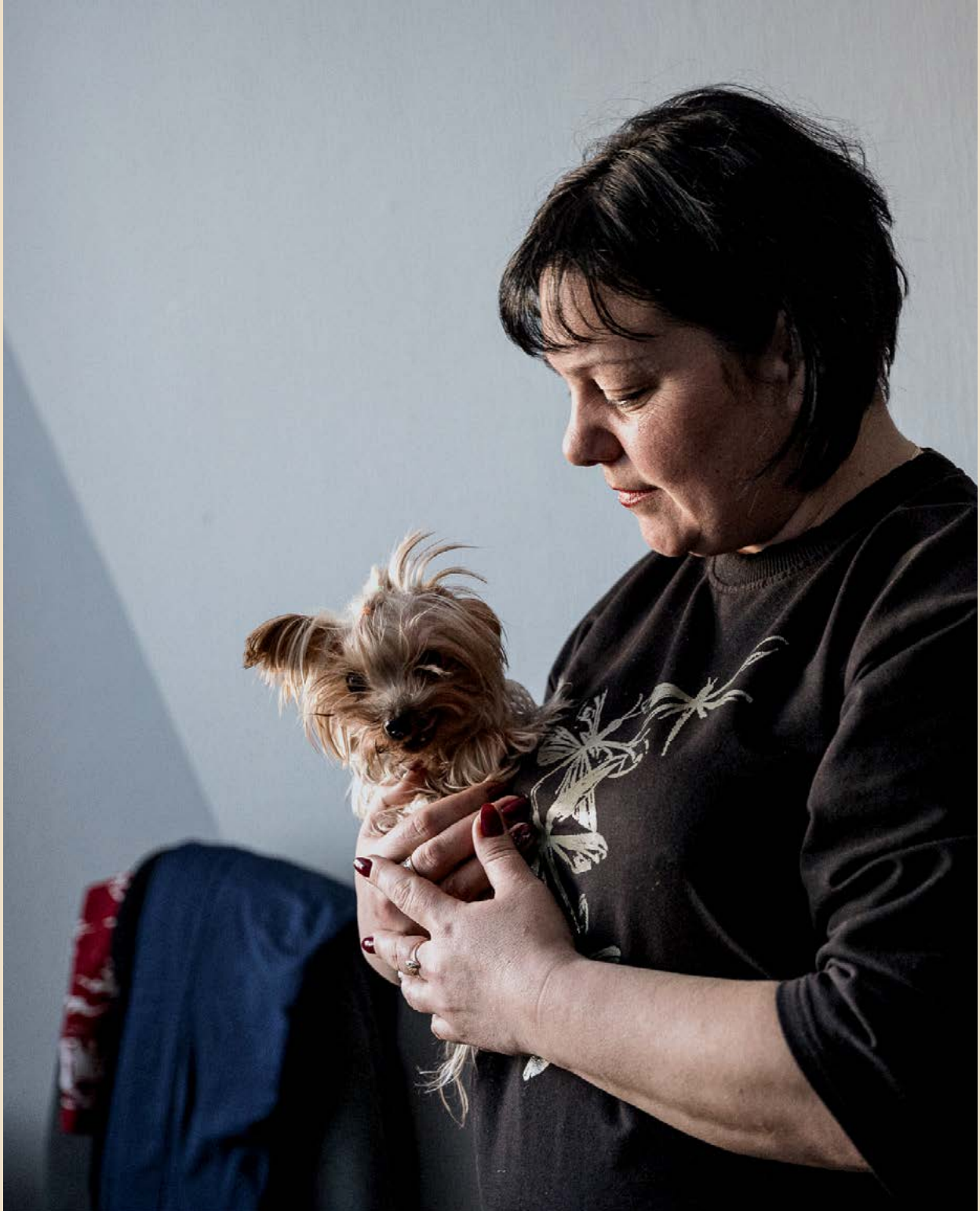




Natalia worked in an ambulance as a paramedic. When the Russians started the invasion, she quickly packed her bags: the barest necessities and a first aid kit for her husband, who suffers from asthma. After that, she drove him and their 16-year-old daughter Lisa out of Irpin, in the Chernihiv region. She decided to go back home to Irpin, in order to help with her job. Shortly afterwards, however, when a grenade hit their house and left it in rubble, Natalia is evacuated, ending up in Bucha. There she found refuge in different centres and was forced to move frequently. She thought that her job would have prepared her to bear the weight of the fierce scenes of a war, but what she actually saw on the streets and in the shelters marked her much more than she could have ever imagined: blood where it did not belong, medical operations carried out under impro-

Natalia Zhmurko

vised conditions. As soon as they allowed it, Natalia went back to her city and got back to work. When she goes around the city, she makes herself recognizable: she always wears her paramedic uniform, even when she goes shopping, so that she is sure that people in need can stop her. Since many of her colleagues have left Irpin, there are few doctors and paramedics still in the town and she tries to work as hard as she can: on the medical front, she never gives up. Before the war, her daughter Lisa played volleyball professionally. In order to continue playing and escape the war, she and her team were offered the opportunity to go to Italy. However, Lisa decided to leave the team and her sports career because she also wanted to help somehow, just like her mother: that is why a few months ago she started studying to become a paramedic in the city of Uman.





УТЕПЛЕНИЕ
096 96 55
КВАРТИР





Inna has been working in a nursing home for 14 years and in her spare time she looks after her elderly father. She has two children: shortly before the invasion, Dasha moved to Poland to attend university and her son was called to the front on the same morning of February 24th, 2022. Shortly before the war, Inna lost her husband to a brain tumor. With the war breaking out, Inna immediately took refuge with her father in the nursing home, together with the 80 residents of the centre. To distract themselves, they organized games and film evenings: everyone seemed relaxed. On March 1st, 2022, they announced to Inna that she had to leave her job and the retirement home was left without gas and electricity. Instead of leaving immediately, she and a colleague stayed and prepared meals for

everyone, keeping the centre running.

When the situation became unbearable and they began to run out of food, Inna decided to leave with her father and all the other people of the centre who were able to move around independently: she got in touch with

their families so they could be soon reunited. Some of her colleagues stayed there, at the retirement house, to take care of the residents who were not able to leave. Inna and her father returned to Irpin in May. Dasha joined them from Poland: she had to

leave her studies because her family could no longer support her financially. Currently, the nursing home is still closed as it will need major renovations, Meanwhile, Inna is looking forward to being able to go back to work there.

Inna Bogachova

On February 24th, 2022, Myroslava rushed out of the house and hid with her family in the school across the street. For the first few days, they left her mother behind, since she was elderly and unable to move independently. After only two weeks, the whole family decided to leave Irpin in order to be all together. Half an hour to gather their belongings: the two eldest children took their computer with them; Sophia, the youngest, filled her bag with sweets. A two-day journey was awaiting them, during which they passed through the towns of Stoyanka and Uman, to finally arrive at Myroslava's mother's house in Manzhelia, in the Poltava region. They remained there until the end of summer, and Myroslava dedicated herself to tending the garden and in that way make the time pass. In autumn,

Myroslava Bilous and Anton

only the parents returned to Irpin since they considered that the children would be safer at their grandmother's house. There, thanks to the computer they brought along, they can attend online courses. Meanwhile, Anton, the eldest son, graduated from high school in the middle of the war. Soon after, he enrolled at KPI University in Kyiv. The beginning of this new path takes place in a completely different context from what he had imagined just a few months before: moving to Kyiv and starting an exciting new experience have been replaced by remote courses from the village of Manzhelia, waiting endlessly for the bombs to stop. Shortly before the war, Anton underwent surgery after fracturing his hand: for months now, he has been waiting to be able to remove the titanium plate implanted inside of it.





Although part of it is in ruins and exposed to the cold, Oksana Fedorivna still lives in her home in Irpin with her two grandchildren. They both manage to attend school online, despite the family's financial difficulties. In recent months, Oksana rescued four cats and brought them to her home. She does not like to ask for help and as her daily life demonstrates, she always manages on her own. When the war broke out, Oksana took all the documents and things she considered most important and put them in an 'emergency' briefcase that she always keeps in hand in case she is suddenly forced to flee again. The last time she had to do so was when a grenade hit her house, right above her grandchildren's room, which soon disappeared under the rubble. Together with her family, she was taken to Kyiv, where they stayed for about a month. One of her daughters had moved to the capital just before the occupation, so they were able to stay at her place. In April 2022, Oksana

left alone to go back to Irpin, to make sure the conditions were acceptable, and her family joined her right after.

Meanwhile, the husband of one of her daughters left to fight on the war front. In December, they didn't hear from him for a while and the whole family went through a very difficult time, which was made worse by the recurring runs to the basement to find shelter from the bombing.

At the end of every school day, when the online lectures end, the grandchildren find

many ways to amuse themselves at home: they play with Lego, they draw, build different kinds of objects and read. In almost every photo there are them at home, they pose with the yellow-blue flag, as a firm proof of the strong patriotism present in the country, among all generations. Today, Oksana and her grandchildren live in expectation: they are waiting for the war to end, and for the Ukrainian lands to be set free.

Oksana Fedorivna Dudnyk



Oksana Fedorivna and her two grandchildren posing in front of the house that was hit by the Russian bombings.
FOLLOWING PAGE / The consequences of the bombings inside Oksana's house (Irpın, 2023).



Lyudmila, of Polish origin, worked in a hotel in Irpin and lived with her husband and her orchids in an apartment they owned. The couple had two children and five grandchildren. At the beginning of the war, their sons Igor and Yurii were immediately called to the front. The parents stayed at home and Lyudmila lost her job, as the hotel where she was employed stopped functioning. In the war-affected areas, an atmosphere of solidarity soon spread among the population. In the district of SMU, where Lyudmila and her husband lived, some people prepared meals for everyone in the streets and others gave tulips to every woman on March 8th. These small gestures were crucial for a lot of people: it is in this sense of solidarity that they found the strength to go on. However, a few days after the tulips, the real nightmare began. On March 12th, Irpin woke up under the bombing, which left many damage and injured people, including Lyudmila, who was transferred to a hospital in a nearby village to undergo facial surgery after being wounded. Her apartment collapsed under the rubble and on March 20th it was the last time she and

Lyudmila Krotkih

her husband spoke to their son Igor. Lyudmila remembers vividly how she had a hard time falling asleep that night: terrible, premonitory thoughts about the fate of her son troubled her. In the morning, she received the news of his death. Igor's body was buried on the Avenue of Glory in Irpin in a grave that - back in March 2022 - was only the third one on the entire path. Today, that same Avenue is covered by thousands of gravestones. The youngest son, Yurii, was seriously injured and had to undergo four operations. A few weeks later, she also lost track of her husband and since then she has been desperately searching for him, without ever receiving any news. Her family try to reassure her by saying that he will soon be back and that they will finally be able to celebrate their golden wedding. It is thanks to hope and faith that Lyudmila goes on, always holding tight in her hands her prayer book. Currently, she lives in the apartment of a niece of hers who has left for Turkey. She is waiting to move into a new apartment provided by the government: she can't wait to fill it with orchids, thus returning to some sense of normality, although inevitably different.



ХРИСТИЯНСКИ
МОЛИТОВНИК



L yudmila taught in a primary school in Irpin for 30 years. On 24 February 2022, as soon as the Russian occupation began, she left for the Zhytomyr region near Chernobyl, leaving her husband in Irpin. She stayed there for over a month, until she was forced to move several times for security reasons, from Malyn, to Zhytomyr, Berdichev, Lviv, Chervonograd and finally Yastrubychi. Between cities, she could barely communicate with her husband. He stayed in Irpin and was almost always locked in the house, sheltered from the bombing. He would usually go out only to run essential errands. One day, running out across the street to recharge his phone so he could

Lyudmila Kostiuchenko

communicate with his loved ones, he was fatally hit by a missile splinters.

Lyudmila only returned to Irpin in May. Apart from her husband, she did not even find her home or the school where she worked: both of which collapsed under the rubble. Lost, without any more references, and with the war still on, she was brave enough to decide to start again. To begin with, she rented an apartment and asked her daughter, together with her son-in-law and her two 12-year-old granddaughters, to move in with her. After they were settled, Lyudmila started teaching again in September, albeit through online lectures, which were something totally new for her.











Svitlana and her husband Viktor moved into their new home in Irpin in December 2021, together with their two children aged 13 and 15, their dog Sheru and their cat Nyasha.

They decided to move next to Sviltana's mother. Only a few months later, the Russians invaded Ukraine. The family initially took refuge in a garage and then decided to leave the city and temporarily stay in Gubin, near Khmelnistky, with Svitlana's aunt. The family had not seen her for over 20 years. They thought they would be back home in a few days, but it took over two months. In fact, they never really came back home, since their home was no longer there. Their jobs were also gone, Svitlana worked as a pastry chef and Viktor as a construction

worker, along with their farmyard and the school that their children attended. After their departure and throughout the first month of war, the couple's house and the one of Svitlana's mother were used as a shelter by more than 100 soldiers of

Ukrainian troops. Upon their return, Svitlana and Viktor found only their mother's house, with heavy damage to the roof and façade, where their cat Nyasha had taken refuge for all the months they were gone. For the first month, the family stayed with friends outside the

city and every day they would commute to Irpin to rebuild what became their new home, piece by piece. Every now and then they receive visits from the soldiers who took refuge in their home, who come by to thank them.

Svitlana Raychuk



Bullets left by the Ukrainian soldiers.
FACING PAGE / Portrait of Svitlana Raychuk's mother.
FOLLOWING PAGE / Svitlana and Viktor's sons
portrayed in their room
(Irpın, 2023).





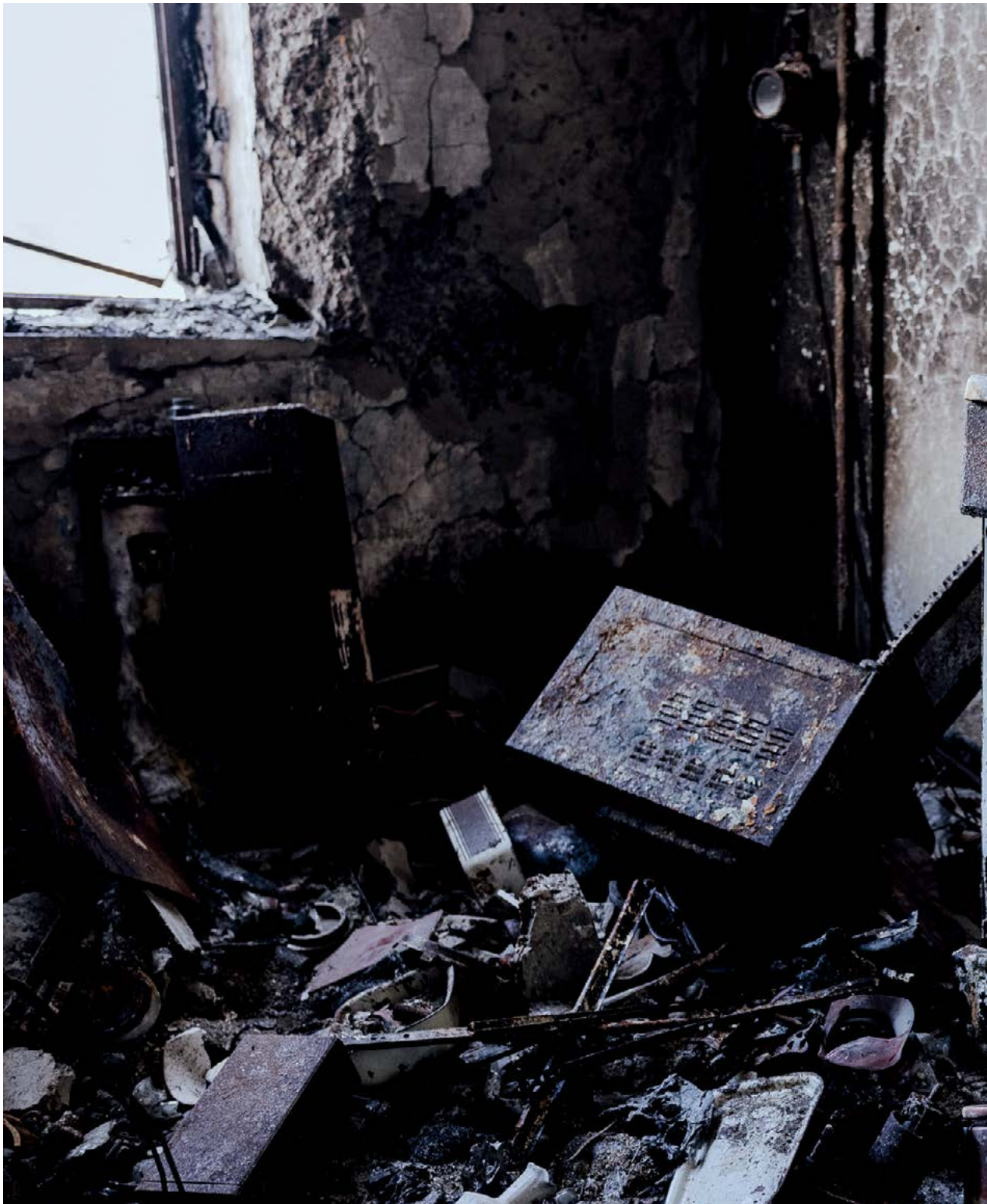


For over 30 years, Svitlana lived in the Irpinsky Lipki neighbourhood in Irpin, with her husband and her daughter Masha. Every morning she went to the Lyceum No. 3, where she was employed as the librarian. In December 2021, the family had just finished renovating their apartment. Only two months later, that new house suddenly ceased to be a safe place: the family was quickly forced to flee. Irpinsky Lipi was the most affected neighbourhood since the beginning of the invasion. On the morning of March 6th, after having stayed mostly at home, they tried to cross one of the few access points to the city with the help of their neighbour: the Stoyanka Bridge. As they were driving further and further away

Svitlana Podgornova

from the few roads they had seen in those days, they saw many dead civilians lying in the streets and those images terrified them. Suddenly, a group of invaders started shooting at their car. Their fright was interrupted luckily within a very short time, when the Ukrainian defense forces arrived to save them. And that is how the family's first attempt to leave Irpin failed. However, only two days later they attempt to leave the city by crossing a river lock and after a 5 km walk, they find their daughter's fiancé and together they headed for their niece's house in the Khmelnytsky region. After a few months, the family returned home, a house partly collapsed under the bombs, which they now have to renovate again.









Before the Russian invasion, Tetiana Belikova had been a physical education teacher at the Irpin Lyceum No. 3 for a very long time.

Today, only rubble remains of Lyceum No. 3 and of her home. On the morning of February 24th, together with her daughter Olena and her grandson Vania, they took refuge in the basement of their house, where they heard for days the racket of the horror that was happening outside. In the meantime, Olena had no way of communicating with her husband and her other daughter, Maria, who was away from Irpin to finish her final year of her bachelor's degree.

All she could think about was how and where they were and so the days in the basement seemed eternal. It took less than a week to find a way to leave the city. Like

everyone else, Tetiana, Olena and Vania thought they would be back after a few days, just long enough for that ugly nightmare to come to an end. Instead, it took months before they were able to return home, or at least to the place where their

home used to be. Faced with the rubble of her life, Tetiana took a decision: she and her family had to start over somehow.

To begin with, she rented an apartment and they all moved in together. Gradually, she found a way and, above all, the strength to start working again, having to deal with

the modality of online teaching. Today, she lectures her pupils in front of the computer, waiting for the war to end and for the Lyceum No. 3 to be rebuilt, so that she can return in part to normality, that kind of normality that all Ukrainians lost on February 24th, 2022.

Tetiana Belikova and Olena Grishchenko



Tetiana looks at the room where her personal belongings are,
in the house that will soon be demolished.
FOLLOWING PAGE / Vania, Olena's son, in the garden of the
house destroyed by the bombings.
(Irpın, 2023).





Iryna worked in her own grocery shop. On March 5th, 2022, she was forced to leave Irpin together with her husband, son, daughter-in-law and grandchildren. At first, they headed for Lviv and after a few days they arrived to Borislav, where they were welcomed and hosted by one of the local parishes. Iryna's in-laws, aged 81 and 82, were unable to travel with the others and stayed behind. In order to stay safe, they spent most of their time indoors. And it was in the backyard of their own home that he was badly hit by splinters. He died a few hours later. His wife, not having enough money to pay for the funeral and the burial expenses, decided to bury him where

Iryna Sedych

she could see him every day from her bedroom's window: in the same backyard where he was injured to death.

During the months that Iryna's family was looking for refuge outside the city, their house was hit by a missile and collapsed. When they returned, they temporarily lived in a building under construction.

The expenses to demolish the rubble and rebuild their home are too high. To start saving something, Iryna reopened her grocery shop.

At the beginning, she had difficulty obtaining products and filling the shelves, but today they are full again and business has resumed: not as before, but it still resumed.



The wall of the sports' field behind
the culture center of Irpin.
FOLLOWING PAGE / The ruins of Iryna's home
(Irpin, 2023).



Lilia and her husband lived with their two children aged six and nine in an apartment complex in the Irpinski Lyпки neighbourhood in Irpin. On the first day of the Russian invasion, their house was hit and collapsed under rubble. Without shelter, the entire family was forced to flee and joined Lilia's sister in Nemishaevo, in the Kyiv region. After a year, they are still removing the rubble from the complex they lived in. Not knowing how long it would take to return to a safe house, Lilia and her husband decided to return to the city on their own. They have gone back to their jobs while they figure out how to settle their family. In the meanwhile, they enrolled their children in school in Nemishaevo and left them with their aunt.

Lilia Shcherbak

Separation was a very difficult decision to take but bringing the children back to Irpin in those conditions seemed even worse. The youngest one is terrified of sirens, a sound he rarely heard before, but which has now become part of the everyday life in Ukraine. Whenever he hears one, of any kind, he starts running until he finds a place to hide and take shelter. The city authorities of Irpin have started a fundraising campaign for the reconstruction of Irpinski Lypski. Lilia and her husband are waiting, in the meantime they have found the strength to keep going and to resist in that sense of solidarity shown by their family and their town's authorities. Peace and to be reunited with their children go hand in hand and they are their source of hope.





WeWorld and AICS in Ukraine

WeWorld intervened immediately in March 2022 to help displaced people from the eastern part of the country, in order to help cope with the emergency by activating partners on the ground from the early hours of the invasion and establishing a stable emergency response presence.

WeWorld's operational offices in the country are currently in Lviv, Kyiv, Kharkiv and Izmail (Odessa region). We work alongside those who, despite the conflict, have decided to stay, those who have come back after abandoning their homes under the attacks, and those who, fleeing from the east of the country, are still displaced. In the province of Kyiv, the municipality of Irpin is one of the areas most affected by the conflict. Around 30% of the buildings are damaged and 13% of the schools are either destroyed or severely damaged. WeWorld has intervened in Irpin to support 2,400 pe-

ople among residents, returnees (people evacuated during the early stages of the conflict and recently returned to Irpin) and IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons).

WeWorld's intervention together with its local partner Yellow-Blue Wings, and thanks to the support of the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation in the municipality of Irpin, aims to help the most vulnerable people affected by the conflict to meet their immediate basic needs, using resources in a way that best suits their needs through economic support activities - Multi-Purpose Cash Assistance - and by strengthening their ability to cope with their new daily routine through the distribution of family kits.

The stories you have read and the pictures you have seen portray the people of Irpin supported by WeWorld and AICS. The photographs were taken in February 2023, just days before the first anniversary of the invasion.



WeWorld is an independent organization working in development cooperation and humanitarian aid for over 50 years, active today in 27 countries.

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