

# ANYWAY



Issue 2

## My Life As

# A Ukrainian Refugee

By Olya, 13

**It's crazy how much can change in one year. In February 2022, I was living in Kyiv, Ukraine, a city of about 3 million people. I never imagined that a year later I would be living 5,000 miles away in North Carolina. But that's the thing about war. It can change your entire life.**

Kyiv is a really beautiful city. What I loved about living there was that I could walk to lots of little shops, restaurants, and even a playground, which was where I liked to hang out with my friends. But that was only when I had time: I had dance class almost every day of the week—including weekends. I took classical dance, jazz, and acrobatic dance. Even when I wasn't in dance class, I was still dancing alone in my room to K-pop.

On February 24, 2022, I woke up and saw that my mom was crying. She told me, "Don't be scared, but you need to go to the storage room," which was a room in our apartment with no windows. This was the first day Russia invaded Ukraine.

My mom Yuliia, my dad Vadim, my 4-year-old sister Uliana (who is now 6), my dog, and I stayed in the storage room all day and all night while the bombing happened just miles away. The bombing was very loud and scary. I was texting my friends to make sure they were safe, and fortunately they all were. They were hiding with their families just like I was.

It wasn't safe for us to stay in Kyiv. In the morning, we threw random clothes and shoes into suitcases and drove 28 hours to another city, Sambir. We stayed in a hotel for two weeks and then moved into the house of a friend of a friend, who lived right in Sambir, where we were. We all shared a room for three months—including our dog.

One day, my mom saw on Facebook that a family in the U.S. was offering to help Ukrainians by sponsoring them. This meant that they would help file our paperwork to become refugees and give us a place to stay until we could find our own home. My mom sent them a message and they offered to help us move to the U.S. They even bought our plane



tickets for us. Unfortunately, at this time, only women and children were approved for refugee status, so my dad had to stay behind. My friends were shocked to hear I was moving, and I was sad to leave them. I didn't want to go. But I knew I had to.

Now, my mom, sister, and I have been living in North Carolina since June 2022. My dad has not been able to join us yet. My dog was too old to travel, so he's still in Ukraine too, living with my aunt. I was super nervous to start at a new school, but actually, everything has been OK. Everyone has been really friendly to me. Most importantly, we are all safe.

I've learned that when your world is turned upside down, it's important to find joy in the small things. For me, that's dancing around in my room and listening to music. The war has changed a lot, but not who I am.

**REFUGEE:** A person forced to leave their country in order to escape war, natural disaster, or danger because of their ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, or political beliefs.

### HOW TO HELP

**Educate yourself:** Read news sources like Timeforkids.com to stay updated about the war so you have the facts.

**Donate:** Hold fundraisers or save part of your allowance to donate to organizations like Ukrainian Red Cross.