

My name is Alexander. I am 39 years old and I live in Kyiv

Around 6:00 in the morning our neighbour woke us up. He told us that the war had started. We live on the 16th floor of an apartment building, and our windows face the direction of Hostomel, where the first insurgent group of russians had landed. We saw the explosions and bombings, fire and smoke. It was horrible.

A couple of hours later we decided it would be logical to go to Irpin. It sounds crazy because Irpin was closer to the battlefield.

But I have an aunt that lives in a house with a basement there. We figured it would be safer than staying on the 16th floor.

So we got out in our car, my wife and me and our two children.

There were many cars on the road, but they were all going the opposite direction. We were certain this was only going to last for a day. No one understood anything.

We got there and went down this small basement at my aunt's place. Outside, missiles were hitting ground. It was even louder than the first day. We didn't know what to do.

I was paralyzed. I didn't feel a thing. I just sat and read the news. I couldn't do anything else. I felt as if I had been tied up with duct tape.

In the first days, these uncensored videos were posted on news channels, showing russians doing evil things to people. They did all the most scary things, you can ever imagine. It was very stressful to sit in that cellar knowing what was going on outside. Pure horror.

On the second evening my wife remembered a dream she had years ago.

In her dream, we are sitting in this basement and some Chechen people come in and do something horrible to all of us. The girl in the dream is covered in blood.

I was sitting in the basement when my wife told me about the dream. My wife recognized our daughter as the girl from the dream. I understood that this was the sign that we needed. We had to get out of there.

Our relatives were trying to stop us, saying *no no, just don't go*

On the third morning we packed our things in the car outside the house. We heard shooting on the street. But finally we left.

All the bridges in Kyiv were destroyed by our army to protect the city from the invading forces. There was only one road left to get out. And we had to use it. By some miracle the road was free at the time and nothing happened to us. Just a couple of hours later this road was taken by russian soldiers. They even shot at civilian cars with families in them. A few days later Irpin and Butcha was fully occupied.

Well, we were on our way, just driving in a western direction without knowing where to go. We had to get gasoline, because we couldn't make it far with the half empty tank that we had. The road was packed with cars, and everybody needed gasoline.

But on the way, we were just lucky to fill up our car. Meanwhile, we called all of our friends to find a place to sleep. Our friends found us a place to stay overnight outside Kyiv, and the next day we went in the direction of Lviv. At this time it was so hard to find an apartment in the western part of Ukraine because millions of people went there.

In Lviv we had contact with a friend that we did not know so well. But she said:

*Come to me, just come. I have a flat for you.*

We were totally exhausted, when we arrived there.

Our friend welcomed us. She refused to take money for the apartment. She had already stuffed the fridge with all the food she could get in there.

It was so overwhelming. We almost cried.

The first and second month after the invasion was very hard for my wife and I. We were exhausted, as if we had been working physically hard every day and night, without any rest. Our faces changed. Like we aged five years in a few months.