

Vinnytsia! This will be my home here in Ukraine for the next 5 weeks.

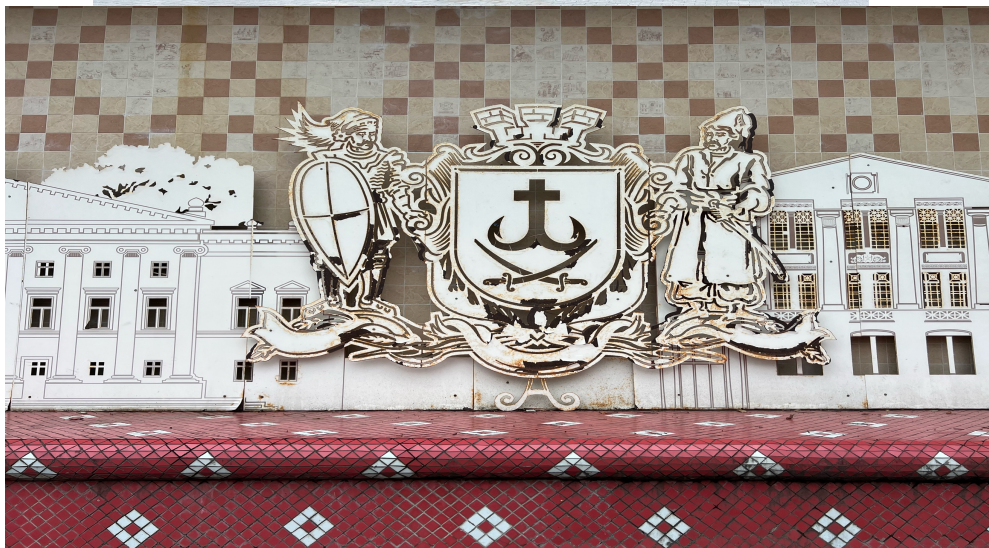
## Vinnytsia, Ukraine - ВІННИЦЯ, УКРАЇНА

I am writing this blog for my friends. Everybody on this distribution list is somebody I know... their name, their face, their work, their families/friends... and it's fine if you want to share this link with your friends - but please only people you know - ... friends you would hug if you saw them.

What I am sharing is intimate for me, but especially so for the people I write about. I am trying my best to let the world know about the situation in Ukraine, and it's impossible to describe what has touched me without exposing and being exposed.

I am also trying my best to follow strict ethical guidelines about sharing, and legal guidelines as well. I have thought about all this carefully, and a lot. I was a professional photographer for 3 years in my early college days, and have photographed much since then. I know what it means to lift a camera to a face or a place. I am grateful for people's willingness to share themselves with me, and you. When asking Ukrainians for permissions - they don't seem to have the same 'HIPPA lens' - they emphatically want all of America, and the world, to know what is happening here. They ask me to go back and please tell. They know that they cannot win this war alone. I hope this blog supports that request.

Thank you for helping hold all this close.



Vinnytsia is Boulder's new Sister City in Ukraine (as of April) - an effort spearheaded by Douglas Gardner - an impressive fellow who worked for the UN for over 30 years with development programs around the world, including 4 years in Ukraine before the war, as the UN Resident Coordinator for Ukraine! He is now the Acting Director for Boulder's Highland Institute for the Advancement of Humanity. And yes, making the bridge from Boulder to Vinnytsia is yet another one of his significant contributions. It means a lot to Vinnytsia, and to all Ukrainians, that they are not isolated in this war - as they are fighting this war for all of us, for all of Europe, and all of NATO.

I came to Kyiv last year for 6 weeks, and worked providing Manual Therapy in a Psychiatric Military Hospital. I worked with over 140 individual Defenders who were hospitalized with PTSD and injuries from bomb-blasts (the damage to the brain and internal organs from the pressure wave of a bomb).

This year, because we have a Sister City, I wanted to come to Vinnystia instead, and help make more of a bridge between Colorado and Ukraine. Today was my first day here.

Andy Lenec, another SunFlower Seeds Volunteer - teaches on-line English classes to Vinnytsian University Students from Boulder via Zoom, - and he connected me with Yuliia Kashpruk, Юлія Кашпрук, a member of the City Council, a representative of the Vinnytsia team for the Vinnytsia-Boulder Sistership, and an Expert of International Communication.

I met Yuliia at the government City Council Building at 8:50 this morning. Her building is the one in front. I got there early, and while sitting on a rounded brick bench, and



wandering among the flower beds in front, I watch a security guard 'wand' each of the cars in the parking lot. Yuliia finds me, to my delight, and takes me inside the immense building and then through a mini TSA-like security. On the ground floor of this central government building, there are high ceilings filled with many flags, and for the workers, a large childcare center with "transparent walls".

She walks me up the stairs to a meeting room, and I am greeted by Halyna Yakubovych, Галина Якубович, the Deputy Mayor for Social and Humanitarian issues, Natalia Rojok, Наталія Рожок, the Deputy Head of Healthcare, Valentyna Voitkova, Валентина Войткова, the Director of the Department of Social Policy, Mariia Dovzhuk, ма́рія довжик,



the Director of the Municipal Veterans Hub "Pobratym", побратим, and Mykola Bilik, Микола Білік the Head of the Division for Veteran Policy, and Yuliia and me. We all go to sit down but we pause, and stay standing - as it is 9am - and it's the daily Minute of Silence for the fallen Defenders. I saw this in Kyiv too - 9 am - people stop, even get out of their cars - to stand for the minute of silence. I also get a banner notification on my phone... every day, at least one minute to remember our humanity...

We then can sit, around a very fine large wooden table inlaid with a mirror, and a row of orchids with their flowers towering above our heads. In the mirror I can see the faces of my new Ukrainian friends. These are a People that always look at you, and see you, (once you have been introduced)... and now I can see them in double with the mirror.

They have already prepared for the meeting. On each of their stacks of papers sits copies of my Resume/CV in Ukrainian that they peruse while we talk. Their questions are precise and insightful - I am not surprised. Not only are Ukrainians typically very well educated, and quite modernized, they are culturally refined, and they seem to understand my work and my motivations. They just want me to succeed, and I just want to support them. (Yuliia is on the left, then Valentyna, Natalia, me, Halyna, and Mykola)



Yuliia does a formidable job translating and we talk for an hour. And happily, I will start work tomorrow.

This will be my main clinic, побратим:



Tomorrow I get to go inside. I will meet Maria and Oleksandr.

I had met them both on Zoom a couple of weeks ago. The Zoom call was facilitated by Ivan Vekirchuk, Іван Векірчикб, the co-founder of KNESS Energy which develops and implements renewable energy projects in Ukraine. He was introduced to me by Michael Brady, a founding member of the Vinnytsia Boulder Sister City connection, and the founder of his company Generosity Wealth. Michael is a

renowned philanthropist as well as a wealth advisor in Boulder, and he has traveled to Ukraine several times working to support vulnerable and orphaned children. He came to Vinnytsia last year and may come again later this year.

Having seen Ivan, Maria, Oleksandr, Mikola and Michael on Zoom a few weeks ago was like a dream that became lucid, and meeting Maria today and Oleksandr tomorrow makes the dream so much more real. And, I will get to start work tomorrow ... very palpable.

But, back to the City government building... as Yuliia has arranged another meeting for me, with the Deputy Mayor Vladyslav Skalskyu, владислав скальський. She opens the door to his office suite, and into the office of the Mayor's assistant, whose desk has plants up the the ceiling and curving over his head. He hardly has room to stand up, but he does, and ushers us into the Deputy Mayor's office.

I am greeted by a beaming smile, from a tall man with an outstretched hand and a wide face to fit his smile. He speaks perfect English and tells me he has been to Colorado, and says he was impressed with the Ukrainian support he saw from Colorado, and will hopefully come again soon. I tell him about SunFlower Seeds Ukraine, and he knows about us, and the solar panel project, and Andy's Zoom classes. He shows me a picture of himself on the wall - He is racing his motorcycle, wearing all black, with a black and red helmet. You can tell he is going fast (a hard picture to get!). I like this guy.

Vladyslav tells me about his friends, civilians - who are now in the military, and have not been properly home for 5 years. He tells me about the Internally Displaced People, the 44,000 of them that Vinnytsia has received with open arms. He tells me about his beautiful city, that has faced the challenges of the pandemic, and the full-scale invasion... black swans he calls them... and the latest black swan - Trump. Ukraine's best friend has



always been the US - but now, they have lost their friend, and they feel it. I try to fill that hole, though I feel so small. Yet I will stand tall for the picture.



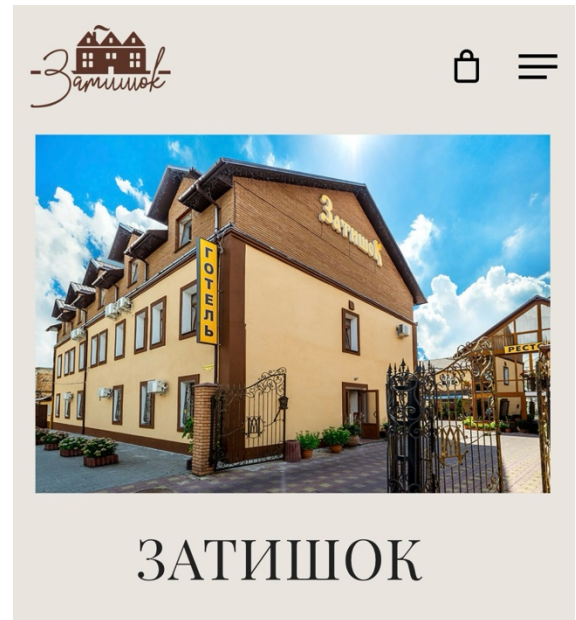
Later, on the street, I run into Vladyslav, just walking, and I get a big hug. I could not have had a better first day.

After the meeting, Yuliia takes me to her office, and we talk over tea and pretzels. I sip my tea, and she shows me the view from her office on the 6th floor, and she also helps me with my Ukrainian, quizzing me from my language notebook. We can already talk like friends. She then arranges a walking tour for me from one of the guides at the tourism office. Another delightful Ukrainian named Solomiya, соломья, I think I have it right. This is an incredibly beautiful city... I will share more. Ukraine is incredible.

So, because everybody asks... it took me, all told, 35 hours to get here - straight through: plane to Istanbul to plane to Chisinau, Moldova, then bus into Ukraine and taxi to my hotel. (Last year it took me 51 hours going through Warsaw to Kyiv - 2 planes and 4 trains). If there wasn't the war I could have flown right into Kyiv.

And also because everybody asks... this is my hotel. My window is on the ground floor. There is a mini-split in my room, and a refrigerator and hot shower and well... all very comfortable.

Ukrainians, maybe because of all the suffering they have been through over the centuries, really value comfort, and cleanliness, and good food, and certainly hospitality. Incredible hospitality for a country that has been invaded so much.



Last night in Kyiv, was the funeral of Oleksii Yukov, who headed "Platsdarm" плацдарм. He and his Volunteer team go into areas at the front and gently recover the dead bodies (sometimes just remains) of war victims. They try to find the families and return what they can - both to Russia, and to Ukraine. The volunteers say that they try to 'feel' for where the bodies are as they walk through areas destroyed by battle, and that they are "collecting souls". They explain that recovering the bodies is their way or restoring humanity - their own, as well as ours. I can understand this. Oleksiy Yukov died a few days ago after stepping on a mine. I think of his comrades now having to return Oleksii's body to his family.



Vinnytsia has new trams. Donated from Switzerland - Zurich specifically, and includes spare parts and equipment for maintenance. Two have arrived already out of a total of 23 coming! They are blue - which is a signature color for Vinnytsian transport. And they run on narrow European tracks. And they have low floors. The low floors are important as Vinnytsia insists on accessibility and they are even increasing the space for more wheelchairs.





The parks are incredible. They are still building beautifully crafted cobbled sidewalks by hand. And the flowers in the market are prolific.

