An AI-generated artwork depicting a group of people, possibly refugees, standing in a field of tall yellow grass and large sunflowers. In the background, a plume of white smoke rises into a pale, overcast sky. The figures are dressed in traditional or rustic clothing, with some carrying items on their heads. The overall style is painterly and somber, reflecting the theme of the section.

### Editor's note

The choice was made to illustrate these pages using artificial intelligence (AI), which we believe can stand as a metaphor for the Russo-Ukrainian War. Ukraine has fought back against Russian misinformation using advanced technology combined with skilled communication — elements that help create AI art. The designer must carefully input prompts to cause the technology to produce what they imagine, and the results are often unexpected. The prompts used to create each image for this section have been provided.

## COURAGE AND SACRIFICE

### A special tribute to the people of Ukraine

Alberta is home to more than 345,000 people with Ukrainian heritage, which is why Russia's February invasion of the country has affected so many of the province's people on a personal level. There are now more than 4,000 Ukrainian nationals in Alberta seeking safety while the war continues.

This section of *Summit* is dedicated to stories of Ukraine: how the war was fueled by propaganda, how family members living far away are coping, how an alumnus experienced the war first-hand and how Canada is working to help.





ESCAPE FROM UKRAINE. PEOPLE CROSSING A FIELD OF SUNFLOWERS. PROPAGANDA. ILLUSTRATION. SOVIET ERA

# DOORS OPEN

Ukrainians have been welcomed  
by the MRU community.

Words by Michelle Bodnar

The generosity and compassion of Canadians has been on display as tens of thousands have opened their doors to Ukrainians seeking refuge from the invading Russians in their country. The Mount Royal community has played a part as well. The University has been housing Ukrainians on campus in Residence since the summer.

One of the guests has been Oleksandr Mastiukh, a 3D artist with a master's in international economics who came from Kharkiv, a large city close to Ukraine's eastern border that has been targeted by the Russians since the beginning of the war. He said he was grateful to be at MRU.

"After two months of hearing bombing and shelling, it's really relaxing to be here."

Mount Royal aviation alumnus Jason Arthur, safety manager for MRU's Aviation Diploma and an experienced helicopter pilot with STARS Air Ambulance, has also taken the opportunity to house a displaced Ukrainian. He spotted a post on the Facebook group CANADA — Host Ukrainians / Hébergeons les Ukrainiens where Vladyslav Vitske was looking for a Canadian host. Arthur responded.

It turned out that Vitske had been close to starting his aviation training in Ukraine when the war broke out. His flight school was destroyed.

"It just happened that he had similar dreams to follow the same career path and become a pilot. So, I definitely wanted to help him out and let him be able to achieve the dreams that everyone should be able to," Arthur says.

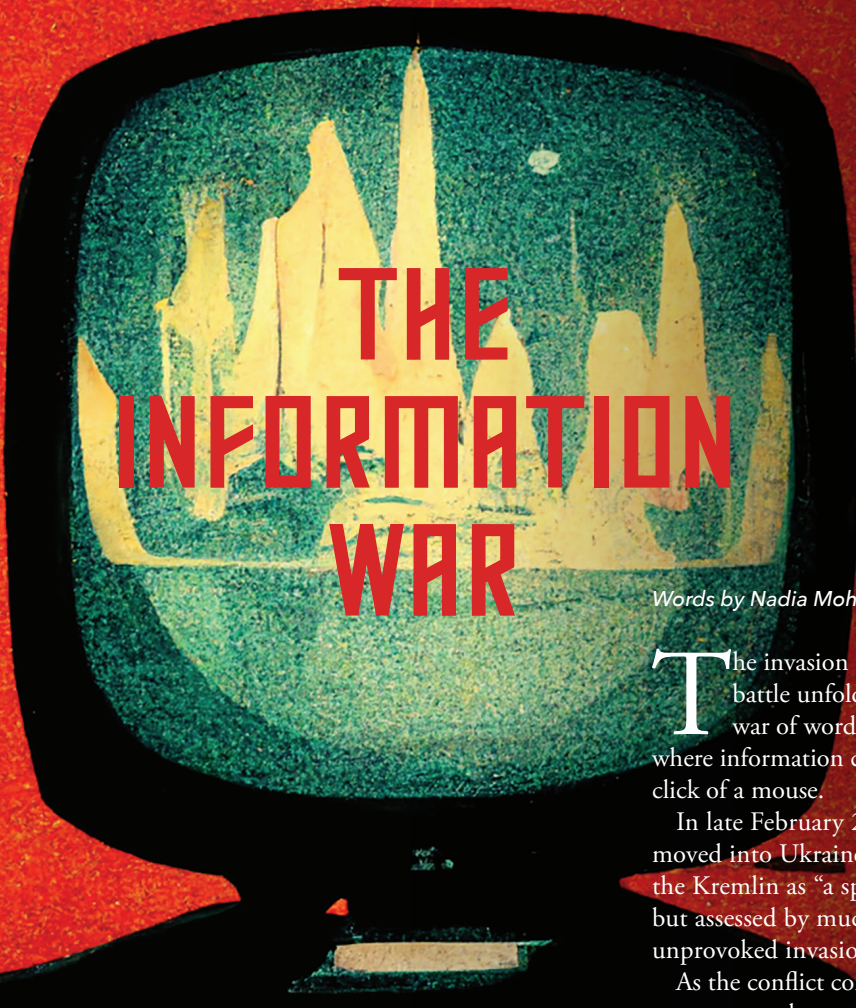
Vitske, who had been taking refuge in various parts of Europe, applied for the proper visas and Arthur purchased him a flight to Canada. All in all, it took close to three months to bring Vitske to Calgary, where he has been staying with Arthur and his family. Vitske's dad and brother are both fighting in the military, with his brother hospitalized twice because of rocket attacks. His mother, younger brother and grandparents remain in Kiev.

"It's definitely a difficult time for him, because although he's in Canada, a lot of what's going on in his mind is still caught up in being in a war and where his family is."

Arthur has taken Vitske on tours of the STARS and MRU hangars, treated him to a flight in an MRU aircraft, provided Vitske with study materials, and began a GoFundMe to help Vitske pay for his Canadian education. With the goal of living in Canada, Vitske must first work for 12 months to gain permanent residency status. He found a great position as a flight supporter with AirSprint Private Aviation and began flight training courses this fall.

"It's a big commitment, but, you know, it worked out really well in our situation," Arthur says. "People need to move beyond their comfort zone and maybe do a bit more than just what they think would be needed of them."





# THE INFORMATION WAR

Words by Nadia Moharib

The invasion of Ukraine sees an ongoing battle unfolding on the frontlines as a war of words is waged across a world where information can move as quickly as the click of a mouse.

In late February 2022, Russian troops moved into Ukraine in what is being sold by the Kremlin as “a special military operation,” but assessed by much of the West as an unprovoked invasion.

As the conflict continues, one thing is clear — propaganda masterminds working the narrative for the Russian side are delivering non-stop misinformation and disinformation in a bid to justify what has been dubbed (President Vladimir) Putin’s War.

Communication is a powerful weapon in the conflict, where wins and losses happen on the ground, but traction sees allies recruited online. Even before Russia’s attack, media platforms were greased with creative content stoking its support.

It’s old, Soviet-style propaganda meets new-world communication channels like Twitter and TikTok, says Dr. Kari Roberts, PhD, associate professor and chair of Mount Royal University’s Department of Economics, Justice and Policy Studies.

She says there was a time, not long ago, when “professional gatekeepers” ensured information

Although there is much conflict on the ground, the war in Ukraine is also being fought over the internet, with words acting as an effective weapon for both sides.



## **Propaganda**

(pro.pa.gan.da) n  
— the spreading of  
ideas, information,  
or rumor for the  
purpose of helping  
or injuring an  
institution, a  
cause, or a person:  
ideas, facts, or  
allegations spread  
deliberately to  
further one's cause  
or to damage an  
opposing cause

— Merriam-Webster

people received had the facts right compared with today when “Aunt Deb’s post on Facebook offers vaccine research.

“Everyone can have an opinion and everyone can have a wide audience,” she says.

And that can be dangerous.

“I think of propaganda as state-sponsored information,” says Dr. Brad Clark, DComm, an MRU broadcast media studies professor. “It doesn’t necessarily contain elements that are factual or the truth and that doesn’t really matter. What matters are the aims of the state in forwarding its position that supports its goals and needs. Whether we are talking about casualty figures during the Vietnam War, news releases by the U.S. government or Russian campaigns to portray people in Ukraine and their leadership as Nazis ... the goal is to present a point of view consistent with the aims and direction of the government, the people in power.”

Technology allows individuals and governments to control the discourse and narrative. The facts are optional.

“Now, you don’t, as a government, have to assemble reporters in a debriefing room at the White House or 10 Downing Street or on Parliament Hill in Ottawa. You can get messaging out through social media either officially or through people who support your aims,” Clark says.

Suggestions by Russians claiming they are “deNazifying” Ukraine are absurd as are accusations Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky (who is Jewish) is a Nazi.

Yet, they win support at home and sow doubt abroad.

The ensuing chaos and confusion drowns out dissent, forcing discerning types to dig deeper for the truth as others buy into carefully-crafted narratives, which leaves many suspicious of historically reliable sources.

Misinformation is so fast, furious and unrelenting it’s been dubbed the “firehose of falsehood” — a propaganda model characterized by a “high number of channels and messages and shameless willingness to disseminate partial truths or outright fictions,” says the RAND Corporation, a public policy research organization, on its website [rand.org](http://rand.org).

“Russians are not inhumane, horrible people, but being fed through a firehose of misinformation where all you receive is this besieged Russia narrative and need to protect Russia and battle against the so-called Nazis and Ukraine,” Roberts says.

## **A WORLD AWAY FROM THE CONFLICT, ISN’T IT ALL JUST INNOCUOUS BANTER?**

Whether you are talking about the Russia — Ukraine conflict, climate crisis or vaccines, the problem is that some people start to buy into the more powerful disinformation, Clark says.

The narrative around the 2020 U.S. election, for instance, led to countless investigations into voting practices and administration of elections, even in pro-Trump states. And despite a lack of evidence, many Republicans still feel the election was stolen.

“The problem with that? That’s not reality. That’s not the truth. You start to see a backlash against that which is real and that has a really significant impact on peaceful social living,” he says.

“It is all kind of the same broader discourse that challenges the authority of truth, the people who speak truth, whether it is doctors or the reality-based media or university professors. It’s that same overarching view of the world, that you can’t trust experts ... part of the same malaise that society faces right now.”



## SHAKING OFF CONSTRAINTS OF OBJECTIVITY TO FOCUS ON THE PURSUIT OF TRUTH

Combatting propaganda means dispatching journalists who focus on the truth rather than being slaves to the pursuit of objectivity, says Brad Clark, an MRU broadcast media studies professor.

“Journalists can’t just be stenographers anymore. We can’t just report what people say. I think in this day and age, we have a duty, maybe more than ever, to report the truth,” he says. “I think for a long time, objectivity was the principle journalistic ethic that newsrooms pursued.”

That pursuit of balance à la, “it doesn’t matter what you think, just get people to talk and say what they are saying,” is shifting to more of a focus on truth, he says.

“There is more space for personal storytelling in it as well,” Clark adds.

The “truth sandwich” is one way to counter propaganda by acknowledging disinformation yet rebutting it with verifiable facts.

Lead with what’s true, report the propaganda (it’s out there, anyhow) and back up your intro with evidence.

MRU Bachelor of Communication — Broadcast Media Studies graduate Jo Horwood knows the need to adhere to the facts.

But in case any journalist needed a reminder, she works at a time when plenty of people are more than happy to aggressively offer one.

Putting out a newscast while working at a downtown news station, Horwood recalls how COVID-19 protestors would show up outside shouting accusations that reporters were “making things up or pedaling propaganda in terms of COVID.”

Horwood suspects part of the extra scrutiny, whether it is extreme or more mild-mannered, is news consumers being more discerning but, for sure, a lot relates to a pervasive distrust of media.

“I think when you do deal with people who have distrust, for the most part, it comes from a confrontational place,” Horwood says, who works with CBC.

She says she realizes that even when she knows a story is bullet-proof, in her line of work she might attract harassment or be accused of lying.

“It makes me more anxious than I expected and I just hope I don’t get targeted,” she says. “It doesn’t stop us from doing our jobs, it just adds a different layer for me.”

## FROM RUSSIA WITH LIES

In Russia, where there are repercussions for daring to offer factual discourse to detract from the official state narrative and where use of the wrong terminology or describing the conflict as war or invasion can put you in jail — it’s all quite effective.

“With that kind of heavy state censorship, the Russian government has certainly been able to control the narrative, at least within Russia,” Clark says.

Journalists captured photos of an injured pregnant woman fleeing a maternity ward bombed by Russian troops in Mariupol in March, a disturbing image quickly co-opted by propagandists creating their own cutline claiming she was an actress, not a casualty of war.

The Russian Embassy account tweeted, “She has some very realistic make-up,” and at least 1,600 tweets, replies and retweets quickly spread the false assertion it was staged.

The woman later told BBC News she was a pawn used to spread lies about the war.

Fact or fiction, themes stemming from nefarious Russian spin doctors are picked up by far-right websites and news media, reaching a segment of the population that might believe, well, anything.

“It comes at you so fast from everywhere and overwhelms and confuses and entertains us. It checks all the boxes,” Roberts says. “It seeps into our consciousness and has effects we don’t realize or appreciate. This is where the success of Russian propaganda lies.”

In video, print or social media, stories being spread by trolls are not all lies, either. Often content contains a kernel of truth, which only muddies the waters in a bid to sway people to buy in as bots get on board to propagate information far and wide.

Roberts, who is MRU’s Russian foreign policy expert, says Putin’s devastating invasion seems to fit with his agenda to reassert Russia’s status as a great global power.

“I would call it historical revisionism. There is a desire to rewrite Russia’s recent history to restore its imperial past,” she says.

The stories to justify the unjustifiable are outlandish, yet at times effective.

“If you have enough of a propaganda machine to believe there are Nazis in Ukraine, it’s really hard to argue against that,” Roberts says. “Who’s for Nazis?”



“ IF YOU HAVE ENOUGH OF A PROPAGANDA MACHINE TO BELIEVE THERE ARE NAZIS IN UKRAINE, IT’S REALLY HARD TO ARGUE AGAINST. ”

— HARI ROBERTS, PhD  
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF POLICY STUDIES

So what is Putin’s objective now?

“I can’t help but think the goal now looks a bit different from what he thought in February. There were a lot of things Putin might have underestimated, notably Ukraine’s resolve. Attacking civilians he claims are Russia’s brothers ignited Ukrainian nationalism,” Roberts says. “To the last man, they will fight this invasion. This is really quite remarkable.”

It appears Putin was blindsided by the extent of the West’s support for Ukraine, with the U.S. sending weapons to the beleaguered nation and Canada joining nations levying sanctions against Russia.

“Maybe his initial goal was to take some territory in Ukraine. Now, I don’t have a good answer,” she says, nor can she predict when it will end. Sanctions are not taking enough toll to prompt Putin to call it quits — yet, with the

country even holding sham referendums voting to “join” Russia in illegally occupied territories in September.

While some might label Putin a madman, Roberts says it gives him an out he doesn’t deserve.

“He is strategic and calculating and unmoved by death and destruction and comfortable with the atrocious war crimes we are seeing, all done with an understanding that this is what is necessary for Russian greatness to be restored,” she says, describing the invasion as an attack on post-Second World War order.

“When a sovereign state invades the legal borders of a sovereign state and starts indiscriminately killing its innocent citizens, of course, the international community has to respond. It goes to that core question of ‘What kind of world do we want to live in?’ ”



# SEPARATION HARD ON THE HEART AND MIND

Her family's plight in Ukraine weighed on an MRU student-athlete as she worked to persevere.

Words by Peter Glenn

As the MRU Cougars women's volleyball team competed during the 2021/22 season, Nataliia Klimenova was focused on school, her teammates, coaches and the competition, but her heart was with her family in war-torn Ukraine.

Her story is one that many international students can relate to: earning a degree in a different country, persevering through adversity without family here to lean on, all the while worrying about the health and safety of loved ones at home.

Klimenova grew up in Severodonetsk, an industrial town in Eastern Ukraine that in the spring and summer of 2022 was subject to intense bombing. After days of heavy combat and street fighting, the city was eventually captured in June. The region had been attacked before, during the Battles of Severodonetsk in 2014, causing a large segment of the population to leave. It then rebounded when many other Ukrainians moved there from Ukraine's further eastern territories when they were occupied by Russia, but that progress has since been undone.

## FROM UKRAINE, TO WESTERN EUROPE, TO CALGARY

With a mother who played volleyball for the Soviet Union, Klimenova came by her athletic prowess naturally. Severodonetsk was a volleyball hotbed with a large hockey arena serving as the site for Ukrainian Volleyball Super League games and tournaments. Local residents packed the stands and kids snagged balls hit out of bounds.

"We would sit there dreaming that one day we would play there," she recalls.

While not blessed with great height by volleyball standards at 5-6, Klimenova inherited her mother's drive and court sense and worked relentlessly to improve her skills. Her parents encouraged her to not count on volleyball as a career, stressing education, but she excelled, playing at the collegiate level in Ukraine and eventually gravitating to beach volleyball, competing professionally in a number of European countries



including Turkey, Italy and Switzerland. She also played indoor for the super league team in Zaporizhzhya, eventually making it back to compete on her home court in Severodonetsk, fulfilling her childhood aspirations.

It was lifelong friend Iuliia Pakhomenko, a star player for Thompson Rivers University from 2014 to 2017, who encouraged Klimenova to continue her volleyball career and education in Canada. After considering a number of offers, she says she chose MRU, arriving in the fall of 2017, because the school, volleyball program, city and proximity to the Rockies appealed to her.

What followed were a few ups and downs.



I WILL NOT SAY THAT I'M A HOMESICK KID BECAUSE I'VE TRAVELLED A LOT AND LIVED ON MY OWN. BUT AT THE SAME TIME, YOU DON'T HAVE YOUR BEST FRIENDS, SO YOU CAN'T COME AND CRY ON THEIR SHOULDERS.



— NATALIYA KLIMENOVA  
BACHELOR OF HEALTH AND PHYSICAL  
EDUCATION — SPORT AND  
RECREATION MANAGEMENT, 2022

Improving her English was her first challenge, and Klimenova admits that early on she had trouble connecting with younger teammates not used to the very direct style of communicating that came naturally to someone raised in an Eastern European sports environment. She worked, including a job in Recreation at MRU, but money was tight and the demands on her time enormous. As a result, she feels she missed out on the social life that might have made integration to a new country and team easier.

Then came the pandemic, which put much of life, including university athletics, on pause. But as the 2021/22 season surged forward, the Cougars were gelling and winning. Klimenova, a veteran libero (defensive specialist), was key to the team's success.

"That's why I think this year was super successful, because we trusted each other so much that it was not just a team working to win. We were enjoying ourselves and there was bonding between the players," Klimenova says. "We were ready to fight for each other. It was a super cool experience. By the end, for sure, we were like a family."

## A UNITED FRONT

The season was progressing nicely, however, tensions were mounting between Russia and Ukraine. When Russia invaded, Klimenova's focus was split between school, work, the Cougars and the far more pressing life-and-death worries about her family at home.

"It was hard because you don't want to talk about it a lot," she says. "But at the same time, when you are not asked about it, you kind of feel that people don't care. Then you open your social media, and all your friends, everyone, is showing dead bodies and bombing."

Coping with news and images of the devastating attacks on her home country while focusing on volleyball was emotionally exhausting and at times she felt she had a split personality. Klimenova's parents tried to reassure her that all would be OK. That optimism disappeared after their house was bombed, destroying everything they had.

Klimenova's grandmother's house was hit as well, and her mother took care of her while they hid in the bomb shelter at the chemical plant where she worked. During this time, her father would seek out humanitarian aid to get whatever food he could for the family, which eventually relocated to an apartment building in another part of the city.

It all became too much for Klimenova during a weekend of games at the University of Saskatchewan in early March, when she learned that the apartment building, too, had been hit by artillery, blowing out the windows. Her parents resorted to sitting in the hallway or the bathtub seeking shelter. They told her they had no electricity or running water but were happy she was safe.

To then hit the court for volleyball games in a hostile gym was tough, but she pressed on.

"Where we were raised, we never heard about mental health. So, for me it was something like: 'Oh, suck it up. You have to be tough. You have to do this.' So I could not complain, I couldn't do anything," she recalls.



"I will not say that I'm a homesick kid because I've travelled a lot and lived on my own. But at the same time, you don't have your best friends, so you can't come and cry on their shoulders."

After taking bronze in the Canada West finals, MRU prevailed against the Ontario-champion Brock Badgers, and then the University of Alberta Pandas, sweeping both matches on their way to the U-Sports final held at the University of Calgary in late March against the Trinity Western University Spartans. In front of a loud and proud crowd of supporters, the Cougars gave it their all, but Trinity Western prevailed to win the championship in four sets.

Klimenova crossed the Convocation stage in early June with a degree in sports management and recreation (she already has degrees in veterinary medicine and organizational management from the Kharkiv State Zooveterinary Academy), and worked for Hockey Canada in hockey operations for the summer. In Severodonetsk, continued bombing destroyed the city's water pumping and electricity stations, finally forcing her family to evacuate to Central Ukraine. At this point she has not seen them in person for more than five years and is raising money using GoFundMe to try to keep them safe.

"I am creating this fundraiser in hopes of providing my parents with the means to escape the war-torn area and flee to the western part of Ukraine, where it is safer," Klimenova wrote in the GoFundMe introduction. "I am not able to supply the funds to help them escape on my own. I will immediately use the funds raised to pay for transportation, accommodations and food while they are taking refuge."

Klimenova's impact at MRU was enormous as she set an example of strength and fortitude. All who came in contact with her were irrevocably changed.

## INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS FACE CHALLENGES BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

While they are excited about the opportunity to live and study in another country, international students face many challenges. Those are compounded if coming from regions suffering from war, oppression or natural disasters.

"An international student may face language barriers, financial issues, new cultural norms, anxiety, homesickness and feelings of helplessness," says Tessa Kostashuk, international student co-ordinator with International Education at MRU.

"Students who are coming from an area where there is conflict have added stressors. Can they send money home to help? Can family even access funds? Is their family safe? What will be left if or when the conflict ends? It is our job to provide support for students to have a safe and inclusive educational experience."

Mount Royal has many resources for international students, including the International Student Support Centre, which offers community-building opportunities for all students, and Wellness Services to support mental, physical and sexual health.

"Part of what we do in International Education is help students get situated prior to and upon arrival to campus," Kostashuk explains. "We assist students in navigating the processes for their study permits, co-op and work permits. Our team members are continually seeking out best practices in these areas."

Many international students wish to stay in Canada to work, study or eventually become permanent residents and citizens. In general, and subject to changes by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, a student needs to have some sort of "status" to stay in the country.

"In our case, most students need study permits. This allows individuals to stay in Canada for an extended period of time to study," Kostashuk says.

If a student completes their degree at a designated learning institution they may qualify for a Post-Graduation Work Permit (PGWP), a one-time permit that allows graduates to work in Canada. A PGWP presents an opportunity for students to gain Canadian work experience and start their pathway to permanent residency.

*Inquiries can be sent to [immigration@mtroyal.ca](mailto:immigration@mtroyal.ca)*



A stylized illustration of a nuclear explosion. A large, billowing cloud of orange and yellow smoke rises from a dark, silhouetted pedestal. On top of the pedestal sits a small silhouette of a person sitting cross-legged. The background is a mix of dark blue and red, suggesting a night sky or a battlefield. The title 'BEING MINDFUL OF THE EFFECTS OF WAR' is written in large, white, sans-serif capital letters across the middle of the image.

# BEING MINDFUL OF THE EFFECTS OF WAR

Scenes of war are fascinating, terrifying, difficult to watch, but yet all-consuming. Photos, videos and descriptions of conflict can infringe on our mental well-being when we are constantly bombarded, says Dr. Dan Devoe, PhD, an assistant professor of psychology at Mount Royal University, “especially with these real-time war images that can be quite horrific.

“We’re not just being exposed to a horror movie where we know it’s not a fantasy. This is something that’s quite concrete and very real.”

The result can be an increase in feelings of anger and sadness, helplessness, even shame and guilt as we wonder, “Why them and not us?”

“People can become emotionally involved with the situation in Ukraine, so they’re getting pulled into what is happening and that is really draining.”

Psychologists speak of this as vicarious trauma — experiencing trauma in an empathetic sense with the survivors of a traumatic incident. The Russian invasion and the escalating tension with the West have also raised the spectre of nuclear war, a possibility that seems less remote than ever.

“We see people who have gone through war, people who have gone through torture, and you’re bringing their trauma into your sphere,” Devoe says. “From an evolutionary perspective, we want to have that empathy built in, but then all of a sudden we’re experiencing trauma through someone else’s unfortunate events.”

Staying informed, however, is also a way to cope with uncertainty and threat, and even to be part of the solution. In an address to Canadian post-secondary students in June, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky urged viewers not to ignore the war, but to help spread the word about the invasion through social media, stressing that this is as important as weapons in combatting the invaders.

“Knowing what’s going on, understanding current events, conceptualizing them in a proper way is part of our social norms and part of being involved in a social culture,” Devoe says.

Striking a balance between being informed and being overwhelmed is important. Limiting exposure is a step towards better mental health. That could include taking news apps off phones and only reading about the war during certain times, such as after dinner or while on a lunch break. Self care is also important, for example, taking part in relaxing and soothing activities like a walk, a bath, exercise and maintaining a work-life balance.

“These are things that we hear all the time, but they’re actually very important when it comes to maintaining our mental health.”





# ESCAPE FROM UKRAINE



*Alumnus Jonathan Stewart (Bachelor of Applied Communications — Journalism, 2010) had been teaching English in hard-hit Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city, for five years when Russia attacked. Here he recounts his experience amid conflict, how he managed to escape the country and witness both the best and worst of humanity at the same time.*

Words by Jonathan D. Stewart

**I**t started at 5 a.m. the day after my birthday, Thursday, Feb. 24. I woke to use the washroom and returned to bed, but before falling asleep I heard the bombs in the distance. I was not surprised, but I was not processing the full significance of the moment. I put in earplugs and went back to sleep, knowing I wouldn't get called into work that day.

Deciding I would be safe enough at home, I stayed for the whole first week. Luckily, I had a full fridge and freezer, but I was running low on water, which normally would have been delivered. I filled a six-litre plastic bottle at a natural spring, checking to see what things were like in the city. Very few people were outside, only soldiers guarding areas and buildings. I went back a couple days later and the roads and highways were blocked, so I couldn't get far.

I walked down the main street to see if any shops or kiosks were open and passed a

building full of soldiers. I heard a guy yelling, but didn't understand what he was saying. Then I heard louder shouting using profanities and understood, but didn't think it was being directed at me. A shot rang out very close by, and I ran. I asked a friend in the Ukraine army why they had shot at me and he said it was a warning. I wasn't supposed to be there and the next shot would have been in my back.

Everyone else left my building. Some people went to villages and others went to a nearby bunker. I watched the news and TV and spoke with friends about what they were doing, hiding in the washroom during shelling. Everyone went home to their families.

Friendship means nothing in war. Only family matters.

The worst was when I covered all my windows with blankets and paper and the darkness started to affect me after just a few days. I can't imagine how people stayed underground for months. I would have gone mad.

At the end of the week I looked out my window while cooking breakfast to see three military trucks driving by. At that moment I thought they were our guys because they had a “V” painted on the side, not a “Z.” I discovered later that they were Russian naval forces, likely captured or killed not long after I saw them.

I realized I needed to get the hell out of Ukraine. I had friends who operated an orphanage in a village south of the city, and I contacted them to ask if I could be escorted there. The next day, a van came to pick me up. I packed some bags, locked my house and left, not knowing when or if I would be back.

The city was being shelled while I walked to the van. Hearing jets fly overhead, shooting missiles and dropping bombs that shake your bones, is an experience I don't want to repeat. War is hell on earth. It's the worst experience I have ever had. There is a sinister terror that is hard to explain ... understanding that people are being murdered all around you is very strange. In war, everything can kill you. The sky, the trees, the ground. It opened my mind to the reality of the world, to a very dark side of humanity we all have in us.

I stayed a few days at the orphanage and was very comfortable with my own room and bed. I was fed three warm meals a day.

After three days it was arranged for me to be driven to the western border with a family that was trying to get to Germany. Dima and his wife and children had obtained a small old red Russian Lada that broke down an hour into our trip and needed to be towed by another car into our first city for the night. We didn't get into Poltava until 10 or 11 p.m., which was quite nerve-racking because there was a 3 p.m. curfew and we were told that we could be shot if we were out after that time. The soldiers may have considered us a threat. When we finally made it, we stayed with Dima's friends in a church basement.

After four days we made it to the Romanian border. Dima was eligible for conscription and they would not let him through. We went to the Moldovan border, but he had the same problem there. I gave him a lot of American dollars to bribe the guard and we tried for a while, but eventually I said I had to cross and I left him and his family behind.

## Слава Україні!

Glory to Ukraine!

## Героям слава!

Glory to the heroes!

For weeks and months after, I felt guilt that made me feel sick, but I know now it would have been pointless to stay and attempt to fight with my limited ability with the language and lack of experience in combat. I realized I must do what I can from Canada for now until I can return to Ukraine and help with the rebuilding efforts.

I spent two months in Moldova, Romania, the Czech Republic and, finally, Turkey, before I returned to Canada. Sometimes I wonder if I wasn't killed in Ukraine and now I'm in the afterlife. I can't understand how two insanely different realities can exist so closely to each other.

I have never seen anything like the courage I saw displayed by soldiers, volunteers, charity workers and ordinary people in Ukraine.

Ukraine, as with all countries in the world, should have the right to choose their own future. Ukraine is not a part of Russia. They have a distinct culture and history. They, as other nations, should have the freedom to determine their own path forward. This is a fight the West should stand behind.



# BRINGING UKRAINIANS TO CANADA

**Properly providing a home  
in emergency circumstances  
requires extreme effort  
amongst imperfect systems.**

*Words by Michelle Bodnar*

Ukraine's bravery in the face of what many thought was an unwinnable war has reaffirmed the idea that democracy is worth fighting for. But combat always comes with a price. According to Statista.com, as of September there were close to 12.7 million border crossings recorded from Ukraine to other countries since February, with Poland now hosting the vast majority of displaced people.

In Canada, Ukrainians are arriving under the auspices of the Canada-Ukraine Authorization for Emergency Travel (CUAET), which is described by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada as "a special, accelerated temporary residence pathway for Ukrainians seeking safe haven in Canada while the war in their home country continues." Ukrainians and immediate family members of any nationality are able to stay for up to three years and can apply for an open work permit at the same time as their visa application. The federal government has created a national job bank to link employers to Ukrainians, who can also choose to study if they wish. They may receive a one-time payment of \$3,000 per adult and \$1,500 per child under 17 years old.

CUAET is technically not a refugee program, explains Dr. Leah Hamilton, PhD, a management professor with MRU's Bissett School of Business who researches the social and economic integration of newcomers and refugees in Canada. It is a stopgap program where there is no refugee immigration stream.



A CROWD OF PEOPLE WAVING CANADIAN FLAGS. PROPAGANDA. ILLUSTRATION





“CUAET uses an existing temporary resident visa process to bring as many Ukrainians as possible quickly into Canada,” Hamilton says. As of Oct. 7, 600,551 applications had been received and 290,818 approved, according to the Government of Canada.

“Some immigration experts have mused that this might be a new era of refugee policy in Canada,” Hamilton says.

The benefits of CUAET are that it gets people into Canada fast and they can start working right away. But protections are only temporary.

“They don’t have permanent residency and so they don’t get the same sort of settlement supports that other refugees get,” Hamilton says. When CUAET was launched, Ukrainians didn’t even have access to language programs, which has since been rectified.

Many details are also up to the specific provinces. The Alberta government has announced an additional six months of income support for Ukrainians and six months of funding to cover the cost of licenced child care through the Child Care Subsidy Program. The provincial NDP has called for free translation services for important documentation and fees for knowledge and road tests to be waived.

Resettlement supports require all levels of government to work together, and there is still some figuring out to do, Hamilton says.

### THOSE WHO FALL THROUGH THE CRACKS

There is a glaring gap in the CUAET policy, as it does not address non-Ukrainians and undocumented persons fleeing the country.

“This policy or program is really for Ukrainians; but not everyone who lives in Ukraine is Ukrainian,” Hamilton says.

In truth, refugees from other countries, non-Ukrainians and visible minorities are not receiving the same type of welcome as Ukrainians, particularly in Europe. A February 2022 CBC article quotes Bulgarian prime minister Kiril Petkov, who said, “These are not the refugees we are used to; these people are Europeans. These people are intelligent. They

are educated people ... This is not the refugee wave we have been used to, people we were not sure about their identity, people with unclear pasts, who could have been even terrorists.”

Those comments have been correctly called out as racist and Islamophobic, and serve to describe the barriers certain refugees face in an extremely ugly manner.

Professor of sociology, Dr. Mark Ayyash, PhD, is a specialist in violence, social and political theory, and the history, culture and politics of the Middle East (particularly Palestine-Israel).

“Of course, there’s racism when it comes to the refugee issue, obviously. It is clear as daylight how the difference in which especially the European nations are welcoming Ukrainian refugees, openly talking about Russian aggression and arming the resistance, versus refugees from Afghanistan and Syria,” Ayyash says. Since 2015, 44,620 Syrian refugees have arrived in Canada, and 17,590 Afghans since August 2021.

Countries are protecting their strategic and geopolitical interests, and, “Unfortunately, there is no moral compass that guides international affairs,” Ayyash says.

### THE FUTURE OF UKRAINIANS IN CANADA

It’s possible that even when the Russo-Ukrainian war is over, many Ukrainians will choose not to return home.

“They become settled, the children are in school, they get jobs, people build their social networks, and so time is actually really important when it comes to that choice,” Hamilton says.

“I think what scholars would argue is the faster this conflict is resolved, the more likely it is that people will want to return home right away.”

Canada needs to be prepared to continue to work together to provide resources and various options for all displaced people. As unrest continues around the world, the job is not yet done. ♡