

Olena Riabushenko (Galushko) and husband, Alex Riabushenko.

A DEATH IN UKRAINE

BY DAVID E. DIX

“Happiness is to love silence” ... I have always tried to abide by this principle ... because I was very comfortable and safe with my husband!!!

Now my happiness is gone. I don't want to and I can't believe it, let alone accept this fact!

I was strong and calm because of him ... thanks to the understanding that I have him ... My entire universe is just destroyed by this war right now!!!

Do you know what my 8th grade son is looking for on the Internet — does his soul die after he dies???!?! How scary is this!!!

Sixteen years we built our family and happiness ... now I just don't understand where and how to move next????

My heart is torn out and they say hold on, you can make it?!!!!

I look at people going on with their usual lives and I just don't understand why?? If this is some higher God's plan, I don't understand it at all now!!!

Our children were left without a loving father for whom they were the meaning of life ... he helped them to be born and held them first ... tried all of my free time with them (even when I got tired of doing it, he always wanted them to do something and grow) ...

I have a feeling that he left ... and he must come back ... his smile “stands” in my eyes ... I can't even say “rest in peace” right now! ... I wish this was a dream so I can wake up ... and near was he ... how hard this all is.

—Olena Riabushenko (Galushko)



Olena Riabushenko (Galushko), a high school English teacher, was a scholar with the Fulbright Teaching Excellence and Achievement Program at Kent State University during Spring Semester 2021. Secondary school teachers from Eastern Europe and Central Asia participated in a six-week professional development program focused on media literacy and learned how to help young people in their countries distinguish fake news from verifiable reporting.

Olena would tell us how proud she is of Ukraine, her country, and its economic progress as well as its progress in becoming a functioning democracy. A resident of a community about one hour's drive west of Kyiv, the country's capital, she is a teacher and her husband, Alex, a career officer in the Ukrainian armed forces.

“I don't like it, but that is what he wanted to do,” she said.

It was a time of peace and no one dreamed of the horror that was soon to commence.

The [Gerald H.] Read Center for International and Intercultural Education at Kent State has a “Friendship Family” program through which local families volunteer to show the Fulbright scholars around, mostly on weekends, but occasionally at midweek special events and outings during their stay at the Kent State University Hotel and Conference Center.

As one of several local families who volunteer, Janet and I were assigned to Olena, and what a pleasure it was to spend time with her. She was unselfish, appreciative of whatever we provided, and sweet. She and her friend Tonya, another Ukrainian on the program, came to our home and cooked Ukrainian borscht soup for us. It was tasty!

We provided transportation for them to events that the Read Center staff scheduled. We visited Cleveland: a concert in St. Stanislaus Church, the Cleveland Museum of Art and other places. We took in events on the KSU campus although these were limited by COVID-19 restrictions.

I remember during our visit to the remarkable dinosaur exhibit at Pittsburgh's Carnegie Museum of Natural History Olena snapped a photo of a dinosaur with her phone and sent it to her young son back home. Fascinated by dinosaurs, the boy responded to his mother within minutes, proudly identifying the dinosaur in that photo.

Olena and Tonya (who resides in southern Ukraine near the Black Sea), both started emailing us after Russia invaded Ukraine last month. I felt guilty telling them about normal life in America because of what they are enduring with Putin's totally unprovoked war. Both replied that reading about normal life in America was reassuring. Both asked for America's help.

“People need to see that this war is against all Ukrainians ... against our children and our future ... it's a war for our existence.”

—Olena Riabushenko (Galushko)

Olena, in a recent email, wrote that she was worried sick about her husband, Alex, fighting in eastern Ukraine. She had heard nothing for two days.

On Sunday, this past week, I saw her heartbreaking post on Facebook. This fine lady, a good teacher, a good mother and a loving wife, does not deserve what has happened. Whatever we Americans can do to help Ukraine, I support.

For God's sake, let's stand up to the murderous, deceitful bully in the Kremlin!

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David E. Dix is a former publisher of the Record-Courier and a former trustee of Kent State University. He and his wife, Janet Dix, BS '71, MEd '76, PhD '92, received the 2020 Distinguished Service to EHHS [Education, Health and Human Services] Award. David Dix also serves on the Read Center's Professional Advisory Board.