

Ukraine's underdog fight for independence is one that has resonated widely throughout the world. So it's not unusual to encounter foreign volunteers there. Some are soldiers, relieved to have at last found an unambiguously 'good war'. A few are dilettantes, disaster tourists, voyeurs of violence. But many are just old-fashioned idealists; good people trying to do good things. And they are most effective, maybe only effective, when they make common cause with Ukrainian volunteers, who after all have the most at stake. Here are some of the people I spend time with when I'm in Ukraine. They have my respect and admiration, for many reasons, but mainly because they decided to devote a chunk of their time to something bigger than themselves. In the vernacular, they give a shit. When you get exhausted by the grim, grinding gravitas of this conflict, maybe pause for a moment and take a look at these pictures.

[I was going to number them, but decided it would be more fun for you to figure out who's who.]

- * Mike: retired Californian and ballet aficionado, never to be found without his tiny black Chihuahua "Bug" who lives on KFC chicken. Heads up his own NGO (UAO) delivering prescription medicines to the rural elderly.
- * Sasha: virtuoso musician who looks like she stepped out of a Maxfield Parish painting. This Odesa native is fanatical about feeding every cat and dog in southern Ukraine, and recently launched a mental health charity called "INCLUDE".
- * Maryna: tall blonde Viking/yogini/pole dancer/gourmet cook, who raises money for drones. And you'd damn well better give her some.
- * Abe: former Utah Mormon and current truth-seeker, with the eyes of an Old Testament prophet. He runs his own NGO called Dignity Aid.
- * Maria: French chanteuse gifted with a well-honed sense of sarcasm, a killer voice, and a huge heart. Would sell her soul for avocado toast with an egg on top.
- * Lena: diminutive Russian speaker who delivers supplies to the front lines. Her boundless energy and courage is one way she honors the memory of her son-in-law who stepped on a mine last year.
- * Andrei: built like a bouncer, this gruff chain-smoker grew up in Moldova but his loyalty is entirely to Ukraine. To the consternation of his fiancée, he drives to some very dodgy places to provide support to military units.

Thanks. Chris

www.inthetrenchesukraine.org



