

## **Vera Tytova describes hiding out with her family in a house near the village of Belogorodka, searching for supplies, living with fear and making the decision to keep moving.**

We were outside Belogorodka, and this village it is the neighbouring district of Irpin, but it was the wrong direction actually for us to choose but nobody shared with us the Russian troops plans! We didn't know what was the best, we thought it was safer but... there is a highway road, Zhytomyr Highway, the troops were coming from that part and we were basically on their way, and we didn't know how quick they would advance.

That first days we didn't realise that, and we just decided to get more food and more water supply to be able to spend a few days without going anywhere. So, one day, it was maybe the second to third day, we decided to make an advance, a couple of people should go, we had the car, so somebody had to go for shopping. We were discussing, that is an awful discussion in the kitchen, between the adults, who is going because we didn't know how safe it is or how dangerous it is. We decided that it should be one woman because it would be safer for the man, who would drive, and a man, but from a different family. We thought it would be too risky to have the people from the same family. So, we had to choose who is going. So the woman was me and the man was another Max, not mine, because my Max was insisting, insisting, but we had to split, somebody had to stay.

All the small shops and most of the supermarkets were closed, so we just went and were looking for the one that was open, and we found a big supermarket in the nearby village... I will never forget it, because we just put everything, we did not decide, oh, should I take chicken breasts or maybe chicken thighs, no, we just took whatever was available. It was ten people waiting back and we didn't know for how long. So we were just throwing everything into the trolley and then in the middle of check-out the siren went off, air raid alarm, and the staff of the supermarket started to shout to us to get away, just away from the building. So we did, we left everything behind and we ran away but it is an open space, a parking lot, and we have no idea where to run to. And then we could see the military cars, they are like tanks and because you are a civil person you don't understand who are they. They don't go with flags! Then somebody started to shout *"It's Ours, it's Ukrainians, it's Ukrainians"*, so everybody was happy. We got back and finished the shopping and took everything to the house.

Then a few more days like this and then I started to read the news about Zhytomyr highway but we didn't know back then what was going on, in Irpin or Butcha or Gostomel, we knew about that afterwards, and we knew about people shot in the cars and the cars exploding on fire on the Zhytomyr highway, many people there died. And we knew only that the enemy troops, were approaching, because we were not on the highway but in sight of it, on the way.

The men started to go on guard, like every two hours... They were just going around, checking for any signs of something to worry about and they were connected to Territorial Defence. They did not have any arms, you know, just whatever you have at home, the knife probably... And close to us there were some Air Defence, and so they were shooting every

day... and the whole day you can hear that 'pvoo, pvoo, pvoo' and after a while you do get used but on the other hand in the night we slept fully dressed, we did not get undressed just in case we had to run in the middle of the night. In the morning I had to change most of my clothes because they were wet. What surprised me is that I was experiencing fear, I was fearing a lot, I was scared and then I did not stop being scared even when I was asleep. So, I sweat. And on the 5<sup>th</sup> day I did understand that I cannot go on like this because it's psychological pressure and because I do not understand what to do. And I cannot just sit still I had to do something...

I don't know, maybe somebody is stronger or, you know, more brave, but I'm not the type, so I did many things but it starts getting on you when you hear it on a daily basis, not like every hour, every couple of hours. There is no schedule, you just wait for it any minute...

When we decided to go, Max, myself and Denis, my son, between the two of us we decided to go because Denis has got learning disabilities, so I just had to make decisions for him. And at the moment when he realised that we are going he had the panic, he said, "*I don't want to go, I'm afraid that while we will be on the road, there will be explosions. I'm afraid of enemy troops*". We had a cat and she was with us, she was 12 years old, and most of Denis' life she is with us, and Denis was holding her, and in the car he was just trying to calm her down, and that's what helped him to stay calm, taking care of her. And I was taking care of him, that's why I could make it.