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## Ukrainian Classmates Continue Processing War

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## **Ukrainian Classmates Continue Processing War**

**CEDARVILLE, OHIO** -- For many college students, holidays are an opportunity to travel home and spend time with loved ones. For some, it may be an opportunity to revisit the warm and inviting sights, sounds and places that have been with them since childhood.

Like many college students, Abigail Rist went home over the holidays. Like some, she traveled down the familiar streets and passed by the memorable sights of her longtime home. Four months later, Rist's hometown is under attack, as Russian forces attempt to conquer the Ukrainian capital of Kyiv as part of their invasion of Ukraine.

In recent months, the people and places of Ukraine have featured prominently in American media. For many Americans, the locations shown and described may have seemed distant and unfamiliar. But for a pair of Cedarville University students, Ukraine is not just a distant land – it's their home.

Rist is a junior [international studies](#) student at Cedarville. Her dad was the director of the pastoral leadership program at Kyiv Theological Seminary. Her family, now safe in the Detroit suburb of Farmington Hills, Michigan, had lived in Kyiv from a few months after her birth until after she went to college.

"The invasion has turned everybody's lives upside down," Rist said. "Kyiv is getting hit hard."

Freshman [social work](#) student Jessica Wiebe, whose family furloughs in Burns, Kansas, also grew up in Kyiv from first grade on, where her family helped mobilize missionaries in central Asia. Her immediate family is currently safe in Krakow, Poland, where they are working with missionary partners and refugees. She has relatives left in Ukraine, and she said that while they fear a potential attack, their area of the country has been able to continue with regular day-to-day activities.

Both students said that many of their friends have been able to evacuate the capital, though some have stayed behind to protect their homes. Families have been separated as women and children flee while men, as required by an emergency order, stay behind to fight. Those who have stayed behind have had to take shelter from attacks, in some cases making makeshift bomb shelters. The family of one of Wiebe's friends used a drained indoor pool as a shelter.

Even those who escape bear psychological scars.

"I know of several friends who have gone elsewhere in Europe and are safe, they're absolutely safe, but they're so lonely," Rist said. "You live through the horrors of bombings, and you see soldiers dying on the streets, and then you go to another country and it's beautiful. It's a very harsh reality."

Both Rist and Wiebe were shocked when the war broke out. Both students said that though many Ukrainians knew war with Russia was a possibility and were prepared, they didn't believe it would

happen. They had lived with the threat of Russian invasion for eight years, after Russia took the Crimean Peninsula in 2014 and covertly supported separatist groups in the eastern Donetsk and Luhansk regions. While Russia periodically massed troops on the border and launched cyberattacks, it had not moved for a full-scale invasion until this year.

“In 2014, we all got a taste of war,” Rist said. “After that, we realized how precious life is, and that makes your drive for education, for ministry, so much greater.”

Both Rist and Wiebe learned about the war just after it started late on February 23, 2022, which was early morning in Kyiv on February 24. Rist said that she was about to fall asleep when her mom texted her. Wiebe received phone calls from family and friends. They were up all night praying, contacting family and friends and trying to get an idea of what was happening.

“Ukraine is my home and having grown up Ukrainian, being Ukrainian, I’m heartbroken for what the people are going through and for my relatives who are still there and the fact that they have to walk through this,” she said.

Rist said that she’s been blessed by the concern her friends on campus have shown, stopping to see how she’s doing, and she encouraged Americans to check in on the Ukrainians in their communities. Wiebe mentioned the support she’s had from residence hall unit mates who have prayed with her and helped her process the invasion. She also said that awareness of the invasion on campus and the number of students who showed up for a Cedarville prayer night for Ukraine have further encouraged her.

Both students encouraged people to pray for peace, for refugees and those serving them, for the people of Ukraine, for Ukrainian and Russian churches, for those who offer financial support and for wisdom for Ukrainian and global leaders. They also encouraged Americans to consider donating to organizations such as SEND International (the organization with whom the Wiebes partnered) or traveling to help those fleeing the country.

Located in southwest Ohio, Cedarville University is an accredited, Christ-centered, Baptist institution with an enrollment of 4,715 undergraduate, graduate and online students in more than 150 areas of study. Founded in 1887, Cedarville is one of the largest private universities in Ohio, recognized nationally for its authentic Christian community, rigorous academic programs, strong graduation and retention rates, accredited professional and health science offerings and high student engagement ranking. For more information about the University, visit [cedarville.edu](http://cedarville.edu).

Written by Bryson Durst.

Photo Cutlines:

Caption (A): Abigail Rist, a junior international studies student at Cedarville University, grew up in Kyiv, Ukraine.

Caption (B): Jessica Wiebe, a freshman social work student at Cedarville University, grew up in Kyiv, Ukraine.