



Written by [Rebecca Terrell](#) on April 27, 2022

Ukrainian-American Reaches Out to Help a Family of Refugees

Three young Ukrainian children are mourning their mother's death as they recover from war atrocities in their hometown outside Kyiv. Maryna Naumets, age 33, is among hundreds of civilians who have died in [Bucha](#) since mid-March.

Her six-year-old son, Vlad, captured hearts around the world when [AP](#) photographer Rodrigo Abd snapped a picture of the child at his mother's hastily dug grave in the courtyard of their home. Vlad and his siblings, 10-year-old Vova and Sofia, age 13, had been placing food on the grave because, according to Abd, Maryna died of starvation.



Igor Kyrylenko
Ivan Drahun with sons Vlad and Vova

The picture caught the attention of Ukrainian-American Igor Kyrylenko, who now lives in the Washington, D.C., area. Born in Odessa, Ukraine, Kyrylenko is naturally drawn to stories of his homeland and the people suffering there. He reached out to Abd for more details.

Abd said that he and some friends are trying to help the family flee the war-torn area for a safe haven they have established for them in southwestern Europe. Abd also revealed that the family's last name had been changed to Tanyuk in press reports for privacy purposes. He put Kyrylenko directly in touch with Maryna's widower, Ivan Drahun, and that is how Kyrylenko obtained the full story.

Ivan told Kyrylenko that his family had to hide in a cold, dank basement area of their apartment house for four weeks to escape Russian bombardment. During that time food was scarce, and it was a combination of poor nutrition, complications related to his wife's heart and lung issues, and the stress of the experience that brought about her untimely death. At one point during their confinement, Ivan approached Maryna to tell her he was going to look around outside. When he touched her lifeless shoulder, he realized she was gone. With the help of neighbors, he had to hastily bury her just outside in a shallow courtyard grave.

The young father is considering fleeing to Portugal but has run into obstacles since Ukraine mandates autopsies on individuals who do not die of natural causes. He had to have Maryna's body exhumed; her proper funeral and cemetery burial took place last Wednesday. Ivan needs her death certificate before he can obtain passports for the three children and, on top of all that, he faces huge travel expenses if Portugal is to become a reality.

In the meantime, Ivan and Kyrylenko have become close friends, talking with each other every day. Kyrylenko posts updates about the family's saga at the GoFundMe [campaign](#) he started to help cover their expenses. The Drahuns were without power and running water for more than two months. Ivan's pictures show a demolished neighborhood and children playing amid rubble and abandoned artillery. Kyrylenko says he has raised more than \$5,000 of the \$7,000 necessary to cover their expenses, and that all funds are going directly to the family.



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Ivan is grateful and provides Kyrylenko with first-hand accounts of what is happening as Bucha begins its slow recovery. He disputes charges that Ukrainian forces staged the atrocities in order to blame their adversaries. He witnessed Russian troops on the streets of his city. “I was outside standing on the corner” when a Russian soldier shot someone nearby, he related to Kyrylenko. “I saw it happen.”

Regardless of who caused the devastation, Kyrylenko is eager to do all he can to alleviate the suffering in his native country. “I can’t help every Ukrainian family,” he told *The New American*, “but I can help this one — a father and his three children.”



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