

# UKRAINE DIARY



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# PART ONE

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July 24–August 14, 1993



**Rotterdam—Saturday, July 24, 1993**

Today I have decided to start a Ukrainian diary. On August 1 I will go to Ukraine for an eleven-day visit. Although my departure is still eight days away I am aware that this diary needs a substantial introduction, so that this rather short trip may be something more than an interesting or eye-opening excursion. I really want it to be an occasion for some form of conversion.

This may sound pretentious, but as the date of my departure approaches, I feel an increasing inner tension. Some voice within me says, “You have to make a choice. This can be just one more educational experience or it can be a chance to be touched in a vital, new way. But it is your choice.” This inner voice finally drew me to the library in Rotterdam, where I am currently spending time with my brother and his family. I needed to find a quiet corner and ask myself, *What am I hoping for?*

I know very little about Ukraine and would never have chosen to go there were it not for two close friends living there: Zenia Kushpeta and Borys Gudziak. Zenia is a member of the L'Arche Daybreak community in Toronto, where I have been living these last seven years, and Borys is a graduate in Slavic studies, whom I came to know during my years at Harvard Divinity School. I am really going because of them. Otherwise, Ukraine seems so full of tension and conflict that it evokes more fear in me than attraction. But Zenia and Borys kept pleading, "You must come!" Their "musts" conveyed a genuine urgency—almost like a "spiritual must"—that made me feel I truly *must* go, because there, where I least expect it, something may be waiting to touch me deeply and lead me to a completely new place.

But there is more to say about the reason for this journey. Zenia's and Borys's "musts" emerge from their own stories, and I have to tell these stories first so as to be able to write my own. Borys and I met when I was teaching pastoral theology at Harvard Divinity School, and he was finishing his doctoral work in Slavic studies. We often had occasion to get together, at first as professor and student, then as priest and penitent, then as counselor and seeker for directions, and finally as friends. (Now the roles are often reversed, though today we are first and foremost friends.)

Borys gives the impression of a very quiet and deliberate person. I would often try to fire him up, to show excitement about what he was doing, to inspire him to new and greater things. But as the years went by, I discovered that he had

no lack of passion, especially when it came to giving his life to others, his deep determination to complete the tasks he had begun, his stubbornness, and—yes, beneath his quiet demeanor—a true charismatic fervor and commitment to faithful friendship.

I still remember the moment—more than eight years ago—when we sat across from each other at the large table in my study. Borys wanted to speak about his vocation: “What does God want of me?” he asked. “I was in Rome at the Ukrainian Seminary. I came to Harvard for Slavic studies. I desire to be close to God . . . but still . . . am I called to become a priest, to work in Ukraine, to teach, to get married, to have a family?”

With a conviction that took me by surprise, I said to him, “I know that God has a very special role for you. Stay close to God’s heart and let God guide you. You will know what you are called to do when you have to know it.”

In the years that followed, Borys visited Ukraine regularly. After Ukrainian independence, he was one of the main organizers of a large youth rally of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. Meanwhile, he finished his dissertation and moved to Ukraine to collect the oral history of the underground Greco-Catholic Church since its suppression in 1946 and to explore further his own vocation. After I had moved from the Harvard Divinity School in Cambridge, Massachusetts, to the L’Arche Daybreak community in Toronto—where I now share my life with people with mental handicaps—Borys came often to visit me there. During these visits he began to urge me to come to Ukraine.

Still, I kept hesitating. Yes, I wanted to go, but there were so many other things to do! Finally, it wasn't Borys but Zenia who compelled me to step over my excuses and made me pin down dates: August 1–11, 1993.

I met Zenia soon after coming to L'Arche Daybreak in August 1986. Zenia had lived at Daybreak for a year, 1984–1985. During my first year there, she continued to visit the community every week. She is one of the most energetic, spirited people I have ever met. She speaks as if everyone and everything is full of light, beauty, and truth. I remember the time she explained why she always came to our house on Wednesday evenings. "Henri, I can't cook," she said. "I can only make spaghetti and meatballs. That is why I come here on Wednesday night when spaghetti and meatballs are on the menu and I can cook!" Then she added with a smile, "but I obviously come for Rosie too."

Rosie, one of the most handicapped people in our community, was Zenia's favorite person. For Zenia, Rosie was a princess, deserving of every honor: nice clothes, good food, and plenty of attention. Zenia gave it all. One day she even flew with Rosie to New York City to go shopping at Bloomingdale's!

Zenia's special gift is music. She is an accomplished concert pianist, and she would often practice for six hours a day while preparing for recitals and concerts. But something profound happened to her. Her heart was captured by handicapped people. When this became clear, she didn't hesitate to leave her musical career and join Daybreak, no longer as a regular visitor but as a permanent member.

But then Ukraine became independent. For Zenia, that was a watershed experience. Born to parents who had emigrated from Ukraine, and raised with a deep national consciousness, she began to wonder if she shouldn't go to her own country and visit there the many handicapped people who received nothing of the love and care that Rosie received. First it was just an idea, then it became a vision, and finally it grew into a clear decision.

Daybreak advised her first to make a short two-week visit to Ukraine to determine whether a longer stay would be realistic. Many of us thought that the hard and complex situation in her homeland would dampen her excitement a little. But the opposite happened. I still remember the evening when Zenia spoke to the whole community about her two-week visit. The pictures she showed of the handicapped children whom she had met in the orphanage in Lviv were so moving that everyone wanted to support her desire to return and look for ways to offer these children care, affection, and possibly a home.

Zenia had the determination and vision to do something for the forgotten people of Ukraine. But it would be far from easy. The needs were enormous, the facilities very poor, and the bureaucracy in state and church very frustrating.

Zenia soon realized that, unless she could receive solid support from her community in Canada, she would drown in the sea of needs. She needed to be sent by her community—to know that her going to Ukraine was a mission. She needed to know and feel that she could be in Ukraine in the name of Rosie and the other handicapped people she loved so much. In sending many

members of Daybreak to Honduras, Mexico, India, and other places, it has become clear to us how important such a mission is. Life far from home can be hard, but when lived as a mission many difficulties can be lived as graces!

During her last visit to Canada her “must” to me was clearer than ever. “You must come and see where I work and live. You must speak to my friends, visit the homes I visit and most of all share the vision of L’Arche with my people. There is such a need, not just a material need, but also, and most of all, a spiritual need. The young people are often so discouraged. They need to know about prayer, community, and care for the poor. They need to get good teaching, especially good inspiration. You *must* come.” My protests were loud and clear. “I have never been there; I don’t know anything about the people’s lives and struggles; I don’t speak a word of Ukrainian, and with my deep roots in the Latin Catholic Church, I wonder how welcome I will be in the Catholic Church of the Eastern Rite. On top of it all: what will I be able to do for the handicapped people there?”

But Zenia pushed all my anxieties away: “Just come, just see, just speak, just be yourself. Don’t worry about these things. You must come and you know . . . Borys will also be there!”

And so it all came together. Borys and Zenia would both show me their country, their people, their work, and I would let them guide me even where I rather would not go.

Happily, I am not going alone to Ukraine. Nathan Ball, the director of the Daybreak community, will join me. Nathan also knows Zenia very well and has discussed at length her Ukrainian plans. He is deeply committed to strengthening

the bond between the Daybreak community and Zenia's work with the mentally handicapped people in Lviv. Nathan became convinced, not only that it was good for Zenia to have the community's support, but that it was also good for the community to be directly connected with her. The many stories Zenia told made him aware of the privileged positions of mentally handicapped people in Canada when compared with their counterparts in the countries of the former Soviet Union. He has offered her his personal support and the support of the community.

It is a special joy for me that Nathan and I can experience Ukraine together. As director and pastor of the Daybreak community, we can make this visit much more than a visit to give personal support to Zenia and Borys. It is also a mission. We are sent to Ukraine to visit Zenia in the name of the community and to return with ideas and suggestions for the future.

Nathan is a Canadian who just celebrated his fortieth birthday. We met in the L'Arche community in Trosly, France, and came together to Daybreak in August 1986. It would be an understatement to say that we lived a lot together during the last seven years. Our friendship has gone through many hills and valleys. Our work together in the community has been filled with moments of great satisfaction and painful disagreements. We have much in common: love for the gospel of Jesus, love for L'Arche, love for theology, and love for community and ministry. We also are very different, not only in age, but also in character and disposition. But after seven years in the same community, our friendship has grown stronger and



deeper, not only despite, but also because of the great pains we have experienced in our relationship. It is the first time we have undertaken a long trip together. I am full of trust that this trip will not simply give each of us much to think about but will also bring our friendship into a new place. With Zenia and Borys as our guides, we will be able to see, hear, and feel things that we would never be able to see, hear, or feel on our own.

It is going to be an adventure in many ways: an adventure in a new world of people, ideas, and aspirations and also an adventure in a new world of inner experiences of faith, trust, and friendship. I have no idea what I will be writing in the days to come, but I am committed to write directly, honestly, and very concretely about these two types of adventures.



**Rotterdam—Sunday, July 25, 1993**

Yesterday, Borys called from his parents' home in Syracuse, New York. For the last few weeks he had been in the Ukrainian Catholic Monastery of the Transfiguration, north of San Francisco, to pray and to teach. Each summer he is part of a small faculty—connected with the University of St. Paul in Ottawa—that introduces students to the spirituality of the Christian East through contemplation and study. This year he had come especially from Ukraine to teach this unique “summer course.”

But, as he told me on the telephone, he is eager to go back