



# A Voluntary Charity working in Ukraine and Moldova

with roots going back to 1990



## Voices from Ukraine - A helpful Stranger

As I mentioned in the introduction, my Ukrainian friends showed remarkable generosity lending me a car. When Andriy needed his car back before my trip east, he made sure I wasn't stranded by speaking with Yuliia, who kindly lent me hers for the seven-hour drive to visit Viktor in Mykolaiv and friends in Kryvyi Rih.

Everywhere I went, I was welcomed with open arms, sharing moving and sometimes difficult moments with families and communities near the conflict zone. This made saying goodbye even harder. I thanked Aleksandra for her translation help and her warm companionship, then set off on the long road back to Andriy, grateful for such extraordinary kindness.

I was very grateful for the use of the car, but I hadn't realised that the fuel gauge was about as reliable as a weathervane in a hurricane. The engine suddenly coughed and spluttered to a halt—turns out, I had run out of petrol. Classic oversight, really. My wife's golden rule: "Don't let the tank get low. Lucky she was not with me otherwise I would need fuel *and* be getting the "I told you so" lecture!

Fortunately, there was somewhere I could stop relatively safely. It was getting dark now, well after dusk. There was little traffic on the road, mainly lorries rushing past trying to reach their destination before curfew.

In the distance, I spotted a faint light—a car on a side road heading my way. Heart pounding a little, I hurried to the junction, hoping this stranger might be able to help.

Luck was on my side: the old Lada pulled up, and the driver, a gentleman in well-worn clothes that suggested he wasn't exactly rolling in riches, wound down his window. He had a kind face, the kind that makes you think he'd give you the shirt off his back if you asked.

Using my limited Ukrainian, I managed to say I needed help and asked him to wait while I phoned my friend Andriy. I quickly explained my plight and handed the phone over. The gentleman took it, looked a bit puzzled, and they seemed to talk for what felt like an eternity. I was confused—surely, I just needed a lift to the nearest petrol station and maybe a can of petrol? But they kept talking, and I stood there, feeling more like a spectator than a participant.

Finally, the phone was handed back. Andriy explained he'd be happy to help but it would take about half an hour to fetch petrol and another half-hour to return. He'd taken the number, just in case something changed, and could cancel if earlier help became available.

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As I waited in the car, the night deepened, and the occasional rain shower made the raindrops sparkle like tiny diamonds against the dark sky, illuminated by passing headlights. Time slipped by quickly, and about an hour and a half later, the kind gentleman returned—this time not with a small can, but with twenty litres of petrol, more than enough to get me to the next town.

He carefully siphoned the petrol into my tank, slow and deliberate, like a master artist pouring paint onto a canvas. When the last drops were in, I thanked him profusely. He insisted I try to start the car, and to my relief, it roared back to life immediately. I stepped out to thank him again, feeling a warmth in my chest for his kindness.

With the engine running I got out of the car to thank him again for all his help and kindness. In the darkness I again thanked him and asked what I owed him, after all he had now spent two hours helping me and driven for 30 minutes there and the same back; I asked what I owed him, but he simply smiled and shook his head—no charge, no nothing. I pressed him a little more, offering to pay for the petrol, but he was firm. No, he said, helping was enough. I gave him a hug, and with a final wave, I left him standing there in the dark, a true gentleman in a humble Lada.

I called Andriy to tell him about Volodymyr—the kind man who'd gone out of his way to help a stranger. Andriy managed to speak with him, and when he did, Volodymyr's reply was simple but profound: "Not everything is measured in money." What a lovely man. His modest clothes and old car might have suggested modest means, but his big heart shone through brighter than any luxury. His actions and big heart exposed his true value.

**The streets, rightly empty after curfew, felt hauntingly still, making the sight of my night's refuge all the more comforting.**

**The unexpected kindness of the stranger who came to my rescue settled gently in my heart, turning a lonely night into something quietly beautiful.**

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