

Maryna Rebenko, 43 years, Kyiv region

...We packed all the things in such a way that at any moment you can just leave everything excessive behind and rush out. Among the necessary things, there were undoubtedly documents, medicine and money. But besides that, I took some jewellery with me. It was neither gold nor silver. It was a handmade poppy brooch. This brooch followed me as a symbol of future victory. I was hoping to wear it very soon and wear it all the time. But unfortunately, the victory did not come so quickly. However, the thought that I already have such a significant symbol of our freedom in my drawer warms my soul. And although I, like the whole world, have been waiting for peace/for the happy day of victory for so long, this feeling does not break me but only hardens me. Because when I find it too hard to endure, I take out my brooch and imagine how happiness will overflow my soul when we win!

Kseniia Tkachova, 20 years, Kyiv

...I fled with a friend because being together wasn't that scary. At that time, we had known each other for only six months, having lived in the same room in the dormitory. I felt so much concerned about my family, especially about my 9-year-old sister, because I could not take her with me. Therefore, what I took was closely related to my sister - my hoop with a frog. She liked it very much, and she sometimes called me "frog" because I used to have green hair. Also, it could be used as an identification in the crowd during evacuation or in case of an accident, so that I could be recognized somehow.

Tetiana Tulup, 44 years, Donezk-Odesa

...I had to flee from the war for the first time in 2014 from Donetsk. The second time - in 2022 – I fled from the Odesa region. I understood that I could only take a minimum of things with me because I had a child in one hand and a small suitcase in the other. But, when my eyes fell on the icon of St. George, I decided to take it with me. It belonged to my father, and when he was gone, my mother had a dream in which my father bequeathed this icon to his grandson, my son. It is a family heirloom, a talisman, a part of the parental home and a link between generations. It is a symbol of indomitable spirit, a reminder that Good always conquers evil.

Nadiia Chechel, 19 years, Kharkiv

...When the alarming news started to appear, my mother told me to pack a bug-out bag. In addition to essential things - clothes and documents, I wanted to take something special with me. I collect things related to different periods of my life. I wanted to take everything, but it was impossible. Then I chose these rings. The most important of them is grey because it belongs to a pair of rings. I gave the same jewellery to my friends from university. Now we are far from each other, but I feel a connection between us. This is important to me. Other rings are associated with my period of carelessness, the period before the full-scale invasion.

Veronika Kovalenko, 34 years, Kyiv region

...We did not prepare for evacuation. But in a few days, enemy tanks already appeared in the neighbouring village and fierce battles were raging all around. We were right on the dividing line. We all drove through the fields: my husband, four children, my grandmother, a dog, a cat and I. Each of us had a bug-out bag, in which, in addition to everything necessary, there were also family photos. On the back sides were written all our names, children's birth dates and our phone numbers. We did this because we were afraid that we would be separated. The wedding towel was later sent to us. y. This is a homemade towel with the symbols of our family tree. It is a family amulet. We want to preserve it and pass it on to our children.

Tetiana Fedotova, 36 years, Kolomyia

...It was almost impossible to leave the city, but fortunately our relatives could help us. We had three hours to pack ourselves. We took almost nothing, because we only had small backpacks. We took medicine, a phone, and a charger. And also a family heirloom - a small watch that is passed down the female line in our family. My great-grandmother started this tradition. This watch is almost a hundred years old and now it is to be passed on to my daughter. My mother only wanted to take us to Poland and kept thinking of going back, because her husband and son remained in Ukraine. She took home-made keychains with her - a small reminder of her granddaughter. But now she is with us in Germany.

Alina Shcherbyna, 55 years, Kherson region

...On the very first day of the war, we managed to take our daughter to Western Ukraine. Together with her distant relatives, she was able to reach Poland and finally end up in safety. I managed to leave at the third attempt by the time the Kherson region had been already occupied. I sorted out my suitcase twice, but I took this watch right away because it is important to our family. Even before the start of the war, children at school were told about what should be in a bug-out bag: warm things, documents and family heirlooms. It is our relic, a symbol of the link between generations. The watch belonged to my grandmother, it was a gift from my parents for her 50th birthday. It reminds me of home, my childhood and our entire family.

Daria Yatsenko, 20 years, Kherson region

...Since 2014 I heard how at night our military equipment went to the east of Ukraine. Since that time I had all of my documents and medicines packed because I understood that at any moment I could be forced to save my life. This bear was always with me. When I was 18 years old, I successfully passed my driver's license exam. My friend gave me this teddy bear which was supposed to become a travel companion. So from the Kherson region, he went with me to Kharkiv to study, then ended up in evacuation in western Ukraine. Now he is here in Germany. In general, after the start of the war, I realized how little I needed for happiness: a few things, the ability to call my relatives and a piece of home with me.

Wasilisa Neduhova, 25 years, Kharkiv region

...I decided to leave on the 10th day of the war and my only thought at that time was that I wanted to live! Before the war, everyone said that it was necessary to pack a bug-out bag, but I did not listen to them. And when the time came, I took everything that was at hand. I also took my favourite book, which had once helped me to find myself, and I desperately wanted to keep it. It was a promise to myself that I will return someday. I also took a sketchbook - I am an artist and I knew that I would like to draw. In such moments, when you are experiencing such extreme stress, you want to be anywhere, but not just in the place where you are now. And drawing is one of those things that allows you a little to enter another world, where it is better and calmer. But if I had had a choice, I would not have fled but would have stayed at home.

Valentyna Chepelchuk, 64 years, Odesa

...I wavered to the last and did not want to leave my home. But my friend persuaded me, and besides, I did not feel safe in my apartment any more. When the time came to evacuate, I had almost everything prepared. In addition to the necessary things, there was this cat in the suitcase. My father gave it to me when I was 4 years old. He travelled a lot on business trips and always brought me gifts. This cat was with me all my life, we travelled together through the Soviet Union, and now it is with me in Nuremberg. It is interesting that for so many years, I had never given him a name. Now I feel terribly unsafe and have no plans for the future. There is only today and that's it. But I am glad that my cat, my most precious gift, is with me..

Ludmila Nykonenko, 42 years, Chernihiv

...We lived in Chernihiv near the forest. When the war began, we saw how enemy troops entered, how planes flew and buildings were shelled before our eyes. I didn't want to go, I didn't want to leave my husband and my sick mother, but I had to save my two children. Our house was damaged. During one of the bombings, the roof collapsed and my eldest son pulled us out of the rubble. But this toy car remained at home, and it was my youngest son's favourite toy. So I had to go back and find it because nothing seemed to be more important than my child's peace of mind. And the hardest thing was not leaving behind my belongings, the hardest thing was leaving my relatives.

Viktoriia Zinchenko, 42 years, Kyiv

...Even my husband, a military, communications officer and engineer, who has been working and serving in Ukraine for 30 years, did not believe that the war would start. We weren't going to leave, but my husband would be more at peace if the family was safe and so we dared to take this step. We thought we were only leaving for two or three weeks, so we took little with us, mainly medicines and children's things. We also took this cup, because my son loves it very much. You can't buy such a cup in a store, because it's a gift cup from my husband, that has the Ukrainian symbols on it. My husband received it together with one of the orders for Ukraine Defender's Day. He is now in Ukraine and helping our country in its struggle, and the cup is here with us as a small reminder of him.

Rymma Sirazh, 56 years, Dnipro

... On February 23, 2022, I was visiting friends and when I returned home, I had a strange feeling that I should now be with my relatives. I have photos of all the people that are important for me in my chest of drawers. After taking them out, I spread the photos around me and remembered the most important and happiest moments of my life. Then I put the most precious photos on display in a prominent place. And in the morning the war started... I don't remember how I was going; I only remember that I took these photos under the heavy hum of military jets. I remember a terrible thought in my head: I don't know when I will be able to return home. With the war came the realization that I, such a fragile woman and a small person in this big world, could do nothing to stop this horror. I hope, believe and pray for peace every day! God save us!