

## “What any mother would do for her child”

“Early on February 24 we heard the news that Putin had invaded Ukraine. I spoke with Vova, my foster son, and heard these words on the other end that made me tremble: ‘Mother, I don’t want to die.’” Thus María José begins her story, from Seville.

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The shelling every ten seconds makes him fear for his life. Vova lives in the city of Irpin, a few kilometers from Kiev. I try by every means possible to convince the daughter of Vova's legal guardians to agree to leave the city and accompany Vova and two other teenagers – Andrei and Nadia – to the border where we will arrange to pick them up.

We began to make arrangements for a flight from Seville to Poland. A couple I knew called me when they found out I was planning to travel to Poland and said they would like to join my trip in order to look for Nadia, who had spent a summer with them a few years ago in a foster program, and who had come with Vova in the same group. So the three of us left for Warsaw on Sunday February 27th.

**“Mom, I’m very close to you but I still can’t hug you”**

I prepared a backpack with a few essential items and added a prayer card to Saint Josemaria and a rosary. I had heard people talk about a “communion of saints” and “abandonment in God’s hands,” but at that moment as I began praying I experienced it in a new and deeper way.

When we got to Warsaw we took a taxi. When the driver found out why we were there he didn’t want to charge us for the trip. This and other similar gestures of generosity really moved us.

Vova, Andrei and Nadia, when they reached the border, spent more than two days in a line that stretched for 11 kilometers. Thousands of people suddenly had to abandon their homeland. It was very cold and those in line ate raw sausages and hardly slept.

When they were drawing close to the border, Vova sent me an audio saying: “Mom, I’m very close to you but I still can’t hug you.” When we finally came face to face we couldn’t hold back the tears. Vova had the additional sorrow of having to say goodbye to his 20-year-old brother who has been recruited to defend his country.

I have four children; seven years ago my husband and I decided through an NGO to take in Vova when he was only 9 years old. He had been orphaned at a young age and lived near Chernobyl. He has spent vacation periods – Christmas and summer— with us in recent years, and he is now part of our family. Our decision to take on an extra child came from our great gratitude to God for our family: “How can I give back to you something of what you have given to me?” God put Vova in our path and he has been a true gift to

our entire family. One of my sons is the same age and somewhat similar looking. When walking along the street with all five children, people sometimes asked me: "Are they twins?" And one of my young children answered: "One came from Mom the other was brought by God."

## **Two buses for 100 refugees**

Thanks to the assistance of many other concerned friends back in Spain, we were able to organize two buses with 50 people each, one of which would travel to Seville and the other to Algeciras. All of these refugees already had a family waiting to welcome them when they arrived.

By praying for peace we can already do a lot to help solve this painful situation and contribute our grain of sand to alleviating the pain of so many people, who could be any one of us some day.

Some people have told me “you are a real hero.” But I think I have simply done what any mother would do for her child.

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