

## Flowers for those who have died in Kiev, an interview of Anna Katherina Bauer

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Her garden is alive with any flower that will grow in it. Mother of two teenagers and co-owning an organic turkey farm with her husband, Unificationist Anna Katherina Bauer is formidable in her petite frame. Just a few weeks after the massacre in Kiev in 2014, she travelled to the homeland of her parents and grandparents to connect and be a conduit for generosity.

They told me that as a nation they were a train heading for a cliff. I asked them, “And we stopped this train?” And they said, “Yes.”

*Question: What was it about this time that you felt so strongly about going to the Ukraine?*

It was about homeland. I was actually scared to go there because I wasn't born there. I grew up in Poland, but we always spoke Ukrainian at home.

*Question: And now you live in Austria?*

Yes. I've become an Austrian citizen, and it is where my husband is from, where our children were born and where we created a loving home for them. And I am a Ukrainian in my heart. Even though I have always considered myself to be Ukrainian, I had never been there. I'm not a citizen. Before this trip I had an illusion of a home country. This place, somewhere in the world was a welcoming homeland. What if? What if I was disappointed? What if by going there I would find out that I am as Ukrainian in Ukraine as I am an Austrian in Austria: everywhere a stranger, always a foreigner?

I speak Ukrainian, but is that the Ukrainian that they speak? Would my accent betray my hope for connection?

*Question: How did you feel when you went?*

I will tell you a story. I went to register for the WFPW conference, and I noticed those at the registration table smiling at me so brightly. I said, “I'm not a VIP, just a normal sister.” As I walked away, though, one of them and the organizer of the conference caught up with me. “We knew you were one of us from the moment we saw you.” In Ukrainian the expression is “you are ours.”



*Question: Did you go there for the conference?*

Yes, also. As soon as I heard about the situation there, I felt called to go. Practically, though, when and how could I? I had to do something. Online I read that the activists needed basic supplies. I asked everyone I knew there to let me know who I could send things to so we could be sure that they really got what was sent. I sent them toothpaste, toothbrushes, soap and socks. As I shopped for these things, I was challenged with the thought that I should just send money. We did that too, we sent as much as we could for medical expenses. Somehow, I felt so strongly that buying these socks was very important. I felt connected to the Ukrainian people, through these socks. I heard about refugees that had left Crimea with absolutely nothing. My family shopped for clothes for their children to wear. I asked everyone I knew until I was given addresses for the refugees. We sent the clothes directly to them.

Our church community got involved, too, sending money to pay for medical expenses for those injured in Maidan. I was so moved by their donation. The money they donated was spent on their treatment and therapy. It was important to me that I keep clear accounts of how it was spent because I was so grateful to them for getting involved. I felt the support of the Upper Austrian church community for me as a Ukrainian and for the Ukrainian people. In my heart I brought my church community with me.

*Question: Before you went into farming, you studied languages. Did that help you now?*

Yes, I never thought I would be so happy to be able to communicate in Ukrainian and Russian. It was the first time in my life when I fully appreciated being able to speak so many languages. I could connect to so many people. I could see what they went through. When I was in Kiev, the brothers and sisters there showed me a cathedral that they brought people to for medical treatment—for surgery. They couldn't go to the hospital because the hospitals had been locked. They couldn't go there if they wanted to, because they, and whoever brought them there, would be kidnapped, interrogated, tortured and then killed. Videos of this were posted online. So, the activists were operated on in the cathedral.

When I walked through Maidan, there were so many pictures of the people who were killed. They had angelic faces, so full of hope and life. Flowers are everywhere in their memory. Even on what is left of the barricades. I had seen those places on the news and then I was standing there. My eyes wept incessantly for people I had never met, had never known, mourning for my lost family.

A large building at the edge of the square is now black with smoke. They will not clean it because it is a memorial for the people who were burned in it. I met people who had escaped from there. War is ugly. It is happening now. I have to do everything I can for peace.

Maya was going to the conference, but she didn't want to go alone. Amazingly, she remembered that I can speak Ukrainian, Russian, English and German, and asked me to come with her for the Women's Federation conference in Kiev.

The answer came so strongly, "Go now."



*Question: Did you have many experiences like that?*

Yes. The hospitality of the people is amazing. They are so open to people from abroad. When I opened my mouth, they heard my accent and began speaking in Russian. I told them that I am Ukrainian, "I can speak Ukrainian if you want." Then I watched them melt and open up to me. In that moment we were friends.

In Maidan there is a banner, it is the largest one hanging in Independence Square. It reads, "Russians, we love you. Putin, we see through your politics."

The activists stayed there until the election. In the tents, you can hear Ukrainian, but also Bulgarian and Russian. There were representatives from Donetsk, Charkow, Lugansk and others regions remaining to make sure that the changes would be made.

*Question: What else impressed you about Kiev?*

In Kiev, there is a monastery and church that is built around caves. Over 1000 years ago, monks were shown these mystical caves with healing water. Their bodies remain there, still intact, even after all of this time. I wanted to experience that and pray with the saints and sages. I bought a candle and went down into the cave. It was a very holy experience. As western nations, we all belong to the culture of Christianity. It connects us. I felt connected to those saints who lived 1000 years ago.

*Question: What would you like our readers to know about the people of Kiev?*

At the conference, there was this woman in her 80's, she was a politician and now she's still politically active. When the choir was singing, she got up to dance in front of the stage, then we all got up to dance. It is alive there.

Another night in Kiev, Maya and I lost our way, we took the wrong train, and it was very late, almost midnight. Even so, we felt safe. There was a woman in the park and we asked her for directions. She told us, and then she began to cry as spoke about her sister. Her sister leaves in Kcharkiv, in eastern Ukraine, which is extremely dangerous because of the civil war there. Her sister cannot even leave her home because she speaks Ukraine and she could be beaten by the pro-Russian separatists there. And even

though we had just met this woman, we found ourselves crying with her and embracing her. The woman said, "Please don't leave us now."

I feel alive again. I saw what a few hundred young people could change. It seems like the whole world has changed. It's new. Everywhere it's changing. It all starts with a peaceful demonstration. Change makes sense to people. Changes without weapons.

And Kiev! Flowers everywhere, as if the city is saying, "There's war, there's pieces of street missing, but we have our flowers! There is always time and money and energy for our flowers." The chestnut trees in Maidan, blooming all at the same time. Flowers for those who have died. Flowers everywhere to show Kiev is very much alive.