

**MILITARY DIARIES**

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**RISE AFTER A FALL**

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*I am deeply grateful to the Ukrainian people, President of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko, people's deputy Iryna Herashchenko, press secretary of the President of Ukraine Svyatoslav Tsegolko, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine Pavlo Klimkin. You gave me an opportunity to live and create on my Motherland.*

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Author

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## Identity

I was born in one of the most beautiful places on Earth — in the Crimea, the peninsula, famous for its wild and riotous nature. It happened at the time when Ukraine duly gained its long-awaited independence from Moscow centennial occupation. The independence obtained through challenges, tears, seas of blood and millions of lost lives. That was the advent of an absolutely new period for the whole Ukrainian nation. The time of the generation, free from Soviet propaganda, having no memories of the party, pioneers, queues and the leader. I was lucky. On the streets of my town it was easy to pick an apple or a peach from the tree. Plums, cherries, walnuts and grapes grew everywhere. In the summer the sea wind brought freshness, saving us from the hot southern heat, and in the winter the sun drove cold away so that there was no problem to go for a barbecue at Christmas. My windows faced high hills, and there, on forest tops there was plenty of wildlife like hares, foxes, wild bores and red deer.

In the sky one could often see a soaring falcon or a hovering eagle. The wonderful Black Sea brought joy to millions of tourists from all parts of my rebellious motherland.

When I still was a little child, our family moved to Odessa, a miraculous city of a Jewish-Ukrainian mixed culture. I was lucky to grow up in the very heart of it, on the legendary area called Moldavanka. But every holiday we would all go back to the Crimea. That was like a magnet, the irresistible attraction you get once you breathe in the Crimean air, and which you feel all your life.

Because of the Soviet occupation Odessa was mainly a Russian-speaking city, at least, I remember it to be so. However, teaching was only in the native Ukrainian language. Under the conditions of this cultural fight, the effects, naturally, reflected primarily on children. My family was Russian speaking, and at home I always heard Russian, while in the kindergarten, school and various educational clubs I was taught and spoke in Ukrainian only. Therefore, kids developed their unique and funny pidgin, or surzhik, which was due to the interference of the two languages and the Jewish accent. I was a bright representative of the youth, because outside our nice coastal city few people could understand my speech very well. The only pleasant thing was that in the Crimea people would be friendly and responsive to this accent.

I went to a special boarding school nicknamed Odessa Oxford by the local students. Since the school was united with residences and children would live there for months, it was necessary to keep them busy. Every week students made performances based on the stories by Ukrainian writers, and after rehearsals they acted on the stage in front of their parents and other students in the audience. We would put on authentic Ukrainian clothes and sing folk songs. The overwhelming majority of these performances were devoted to the mothers and our native land. Thus, from the very childhood I have loved Ukrainian culture and traditions. I will always remember our teachers' crying when holding a Ukrainian embroidered towel with a loaf of bread in their hands and singing a song about the Holodomor, the genocide, organized by Bolsheviks in Ukraine in 1932.

These performances revealed another passion of mine — a puppet show. Aged seven, I became an actor, showing fairy animals, from a brother bear to a grey hare. Our young company managed to get several awards and victories. Once we even got a prize in Odessa regional talent competition. As a result all these events found their place in my heart.

Life changed, my parents divorced. I stayed with Mum. It was hard for her alone to cope with all the troubles and routines. She had a few jobs: a deputy headmistress at school, a teacher in the

kindergarten and also music tutor giving individual lessons. Clearly, it could not last long this way, and we decided to return to the Crimea, to the place, where I was born and where my granny was looking forward to seeing me.

It was hard to find a school for me on the peninsula. In Odessa all education was in Ukrainian, while in the Crimea it was somehow an optional subject. Being twelve, I did not understand and know the terms in Russian, and I actually did not need to. We were lucky. My new school was one of the biggest in Simferopol, for about four thousand pupils. And only one class was Ukrainian, it was designed for sixteen students, whereas Russian speaking classes were overcrowded — by some forty persons per class. At that time I did not think about the topic. And, in fact, what could I know? I was a child. So I went to the class marked «U», located aside, like an outlaw. But nobody felt like that, even vice versa, we were proud of our identity.

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## Seeds of Doubt

**M**y deceased granddad was a military judge. During the Soviet times he belonged to those people who did not take bribes and took to heart everything. This helped him to pass fair judgments. Granddad would always imagine himself being in victims' and criminals' shoes. People from all corners of the vast Bolshevik country called and asked his advice. Probably, all these experiences and loyalty eventually worsened his cancer, which killed him. In any case, being inspired by this role model, I decided to follow in grandfather' footsteps and entered the Law faculty. Unfortunately, very soon I got disappointed in the whole law-enforcement and judicial systems. To become a man who restores justice, prevents crimes and brings punishment seemed decent future to me. However, at a certain moment understanding of the surrounding processes brought me to the conclusion that in the times of the criminal regime of the pro-Russian president, to act by rights was impossible in the law-enforcement or judicial system. Clear hierarchy and slavish top-down power vertical. What is said by a superior by rank or title must be performed by an inferior unconditionally, regardless of whether it is correct or not. The kingdom of corruption and bribery. Fish begins to stink from the head. Thus, still being a student, I realized that I was not to be a prosecutor, an investigator or a judge

I decided to change everything and, having received an invitation to work in the USA, I bought a plane ticket and flew away for six months into the unknown where I was heading for everyday laboring. With no holiday, no rest or sleep, everything

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