

My Choice to See the Light

Tetiana Khokhlova

BEFORE YOU READ: Share what you know about the war in Ukraine.

Russia Invaded My Country

When I left my homeland in November 2021, it was a peaceful and happy place to live. At that time, I didn't know what challenges my country would face in the future. I knew that the life of an immigrant is quite hard and you need to study and work hard, but I was ready for this. My life in the U.S. began as an exciting journey. I felt like a small child who discovers a new world and gets knowledge from everywhere.

Then everything changed on February 24, 2022. On that day, Russia invaded my home country, Ukraine.

A Hole in My Heart

Since that time, I have had a hole in my heart. I know I can handle many challenges, but I could not handle the death and destruction of the war.

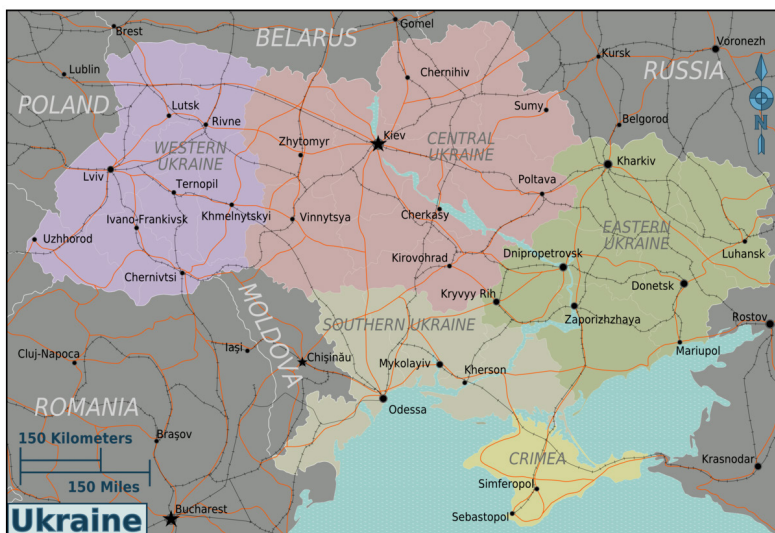


Refugees from Ukraine fleeing to neighboring Moldova. Photo from <https://www.flickr.com/photos/unwomen/51970890085/>

What could I do? I had no answer. I have felt so much pain for my country, for every destroyed life, for cities that were wiped off the map, for children who will never hug their parents and parents who will never hug their children, for all the unborn children, for families who will never return to their homes – because all this was destroyed by Russian troops.

Courage in the Worst of Times

Luckily, I came across the book “The Choice” by Edith Eva Eger, which is a book about having courage in the worst of times. This book helped me accept what I cannot change, and it gave me the strength to keep fighting for the best future. She writes, “We cannot change the past, but we can pay more attention to what we still have.” Her words opened my eyes and changed me forever. “Freedom begins when



Map of Ukraine, 2009 from [wikimedia.org](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ukraine_2009.jpg) CC 4.0. Look at this animated map showing the fight for control of territory from February 24, 2022, to July 3, 2023. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QsUPczETOqM>

we learn to accept what has happened. Freedom means that we get the courage to disassemble our prison brick by brick.”

In the first month of the war, my life stopped. I stopped smiling, feeling happiness, and dreaming about future opportunities. How could I do these things if my country and my people were suffering and dying? I felt guilty for being in safety.

After reading this book, I started to see the light even in the darkness. I started to feel less paralyzed. I am now volunteering at a charitable organization in Massachusetts that supports Ukraine. In this role, I can see and feel my contribution to the struggle for Ukraine’s freedom. Helping others, I’m also helping myself. I have found a way to help my homeland even though I am far away. Every day, we are getting closer to our victory. I’m sure with such great support from the whole world, we will win the war and justice will be served.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. What happened that helped Tetiana shift from despair to feeling “less paralyzed”?
2. Has a book ever changed your life? Describe.
3. Read about Edith Eva Eger in the box on the right and do your own research about her. See if you can check her book out of the library.
4. Write about a time you felt paralyzed but found a way to move.

Tetiana Khokhlova is from Lviv, Ukraine. She graduated from Lviv University in 2009. She worked in sales for 12 years before coming to the United States in 2021. Now she is a student at the Ludlow Area Adult Learning Center in Ludlow, MA. Her hobbies are running and reading, and she believes, “Books open the world of knowledge. Without knowledge we cannot grow up.”



The Choice by Edith Eva Eger

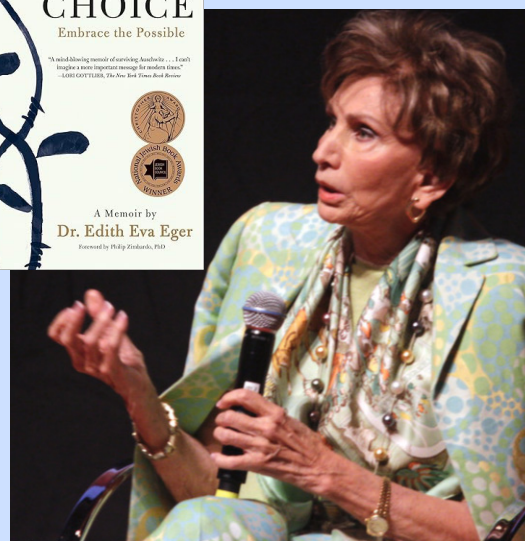
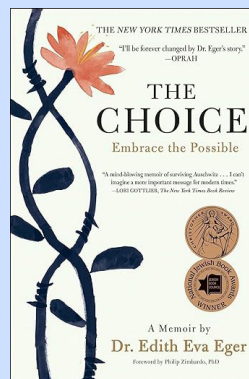


Photo by Sean Dreilinger durak.org. Creative Commons 2.0.

Edith Eva Eger is a Holocaust survivor. She and her family and millions of other Jews were sent to concentration camps during World War 2. Six million Jews (and others) died in these camps. When Edith was rescued from the camp, she weighed only 70 pounds and had typhoid fever and pneumonia. Miraculously, she recovered from her injuries and then came to the U.S. She tried to keep her past behind her, but she suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder and survivor guilt. In 1990, she decided to face her past. She visited one of the camps, Auschwitz, and by doing that, she started a healing process. Now she writes and speaks about how no matter what we have suffered, we can make the choice to heal. Learn more at <https://dreditheger.com/>.