

"That day I was awakened at 4 A.M. by a phone call from a friend warning us that the war had begun: our town, Kherson, which is close to Crimea, was occupied from the first days of the conflict by the Russian army and became a place of transit for troops and military vehicles. The Russian soldiers raped women and children, beat men, looted houses and museums, burned down shopping centers and factories.

Living in the city became frightening, my parents lost their jobs; we survived on the food we had left, without humanitarian aid from the Russian occupiers. We heard explosions every day: there was an abandoned factory near my house where the Russian army had its headquarter, from there they fired rockets against the city of Nikolaev, the explosions were so loud that our house shook, electricity and water were missing.

Over time, my parents managed to rent a store so they could earn some money: they made bread, I helped them, I worked because there was no more school.

One day, while my mother was at work, I was in my room, heard screams, ran outside to see what was going on in the yard and saw men in military uniforms; they came into the house where my grandmother and I were, said we should sit on the couch and not move; they ransacked and ravaged the house and killed our dog before our eyes.

Then they took my father with them, tortured him for six days with electricity, they beat him with an iron pipe and a rubber mallet.

Over time, my parents increasingly wanted me to leave, as it became more and more dangerous to live in Kherson. On the day I left, I cried a lot together with my sister; I love my parents very much and did not want to leave them, I was afraid of losing them.

So we came to Italy, I was welcomed at school by Gonzaga Campus, my sister went to work; we liked living in Palermo from the very beginning, even though we were always very worried about our family.

In November the Russians withdrew from Kherson but the city began to be targeted by their missiles. In December my parents were targeted again, their car was hit by a grenade and the bakery was damaged, Dad was wounded in the back, they drove home without tires, to hide.

So they decided to move to another town for their safety, taking only our dogs and cats with them. I am extremely glad they left, because they are more or less safe now, even though we lost everything.

I don't wish anyone to have the feelings I had, and I continue to have, like that day when Russian soldiers stopped us and pointed the trigger at my head...."

Dasha, 16 years old

Dasha is originally from Kherson (southern Ukraine). She fled with her sister because of the war and arrived in Palermo in September 2022.

She attends the Middle School of Gonzaga International School Palermo. She will turn 17 in a few days and, together with her sister, they are looking for "home".

If anyone at Easter would like to turn this wound into a "hole of light" and make themselves available to host, please send an email to:

direttore@gonzagapalermo.it