

A letter carrier's courage— and humanity



**Philip
Dine**

When the suffering of the Ukrainian people became abundantly clear to the world, a Syracuse, NY, letter carrier named Sergii Vasylevskyi faced a wrenching decision.

He could remain, safely, in the adopted country he has grown to love, with the family he loves, doing the job he loves. Or he could risk everything, by going to help the homeland he loves, assisting its people in their struggle for freedom—a concept he also loves, and one he has learned to appreciate more than ever since becoming an American.

In the end, though, as he watched the devastation in Ukraine, he knew he had no choice.

“There was no peace in my heart,” says Sergii, a carrier and Branch 134 member since 2016, and a Ukrainian refugee himself in 2005.

So, he had to go, despite trepidation about the unknown—and unknowable—nature of the risks involved.

For logistical reasons, for safety, and to maximize the contributions he could make, Sergii did substantial planning before departing. Among the tasks was to bring a large drone for the Ukrainian military forces, as a former Ukrainian high school classmate had requested in a phone call. Sergii was given the drone by employees of a U.S. information technology company.

In late March, Sergii and a Ukrainian friend from Syracuse flew to Warsaw, where the classmate met them at the airport and drove them—and their bags containing the drone, medical supplies, and gear donated by a military base near Syracuse—to a Polish city bordering Ukraine. The two took a train to Lviv, where they gave the drone to the Ukrainian army. They then bought train tickets for Kyiv, an all-night trip that Sergii said was the most harrowing part of the three-week journey—with their thoughts on their lack of military experience, beyond limited Ukrainian high school training.

His brother-in-law, stationed at a Virginia naval base, “gave me good soldier-to-soldier advice,” Sergii says. “He wrote me a text while I was traveling to Kyiv: Deal with the situations, only what’s in front of me. Deal with today. Don’t think about the past. Don’t think about the future. That helped me to put the feelings aside and do my job.”

Once in Kyiv, Sergii says, “It was rock and roll”—the anxious anticipation replaced by a focus on the task at hand. “Once you enter the zone, it’s kind of—you’re on.” While he can’t disclose much about the pair’s actions in that zone, he says

in general, “I’ve seen things that upset me. I’ve experienced a lot of things that I can’t talk about.”

After Kyiv, they went to Sergii’s hometown of Ternopil near the Polish border, where he dispersed donations (from friends in Syracuse) to acquaintances who were aiding orphans and widows.

He returned to Syracuse on April 16.

“I wanted to stay and fight, with those guys in the Kyiv region, who I’m telling you are brave guys, fearless, who are fighting for freedom,” Sergii says. “I didn’t want to leave. But I had to—I have my family and my job.”

The support from those he encountered on his travels still resonates with Sergii. For example, the economy ticket he’d purchased didn’t allow for luggage, yet throughout, he was allowed to bring all his bags at no additional charge. What also resonates is the indomitable spirit he witnessed among Ukrainians fighting for their freedom.

Growing up, Sergii never expected to live in the United States. In his fourth year as a university student studying international business; speaking Ukrainian, Russian, German and English; and loving cars, he planned to work at a BMW factory in Germany. But his parents were granted refugee status by the U.S. Embassy, based on religious persecution, and he found himself in Syracuse at age 20. He married a woman from Ukraine, to whom he was introduced in 2009 by the friend who accompanied him on the recent journey, and they have two young daughters.

Being a letter carrier, he says, is his “dream job”—figuratively and literally.

“Three times I had a dream that I am approaching the mailbox where I grew up,” he recalls. “I would open it up, find pieces of mail. Nothing important, just random pieces of mail. At that time, I didn’t know what it was supposed to mean.”

Six months later, he began work as a city carrier assistant and quickly “realized that’s what I was meant to do.” He made career on March 31, 2018.

“After I got the job, I realized this was God telling me I was going to do this job and love it—and it’s true,” he says. “I really like to be a mailman. I enjoy being outside—the sun, the rain, the snow. This job is awesome.”

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The Postal Record (ISSN 0032-5376) is published monthly by the National Association of Letter Carriers. Periodicals postage paid at Washington, DC, and at additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Membership Department, NALC, 100 Indiana Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20001-2144.

Subscription included in membership dues. First-class subscription available for \$20 per year (contact Membership Department).

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Circulation: 287,000. Union-printed using soy-based inks.

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