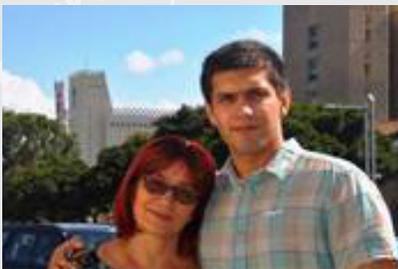


OUR IMPACT

Overseas Stories:

From Fear in Ukraine to a New Home in Israel



Olga Balaban, 56, had just 10 months to go until she could retire from her job as a librarian at the medical school in her hometown of Gorlovka, in Eastern Ukraine, where she had lived her entire life with her husband and son. Other than the fact that her husband suffers from a disability that complicates his daily life, things were good: she was surrounded by books, her son Andrei, 25, was working successfully as a computer programmer.

But then battles began in Eastern Ukraine between separatist Russian forces and Ukraine, and the region became an increasingly dangerous place to live. "The violence came up right to our door," Andrei said. "One by one, whole families were leaving Gorlovka."

Finally, the day came when the library where Olga was working was shelled, pulling down parts of the building from the roof to the ground floor. "I saw a little girl ask her mother, as the building was falling around us and we feared for our lives, 'Mommy, when this war is over can I go back to kindergarten?' It's all so terribly tragic," Olga remembered with tears in her eyes, as Andrei puts his arms around her to comfort his mother.

"We hope that life will be good for us here in Haifa, and in Israel"

The Balabans fled for their lives, leaving behind everything they own, and with the help of The Jewish Agency, made Aliyah almost immediately to Haifa where, somewhat in shock at the turn their lives have taken so quickly, Olga is studying Hebrew at The Jewish Agency's Aba Hushi ulpan while also caring for her husband; Andrei is looking for a job.

Olga says she looks forward to new beginnings. "We hope that life will be good for us here in Haifa, and in Israel," Olga said.