

PARTING Thoughts

BY WINNIE SANDLER GRINSPOON

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It was only three years ago that PJ Library launched a program in Ukraine, bringing high-quality Jewish children's books to more than 3,200 children. Many Jews share history in that region — the former Pale of Settlement, a swath of territory with ever-changing boundaries across eastern Europe. That part of the world has long had fast-changing geopolitics, and that has never been truer than it is now.

It is difficult to hear about how this war has affected so many people. I personally find it comforting to know that within the chaos, some things remain constant. One of those things is the PJ Library community. I have watched it unite all around the world and put Jewish values into action. I am inspired to see how PJ Library connects families to Jewish communities, no matter where they live — and to see how powerful and deep those connections truly are. These are just a few stories from around the world that have moved me, and I wanted to share them with you.

As PJ Library Ukraine director Yevgeniya Ponomarenko and her family, including three young children, fled to Denmark in February, they needed a place to stay along the way. Our PJ Library team in Germany placed them with a Russian-speaking family in Hamburg for a couple of nights. As of press time, our other two colleagues in Ukraine, Olga Tsygorukha and Olga Bard, have found safety as well in Israel and Ukraine, respectively.

Fifteen-year-old Trevor Ostfeld, a former PJ Library subscriber who descends from Ukrainian Jews, and his dad, Scott, spent spring break in Poland and Ukraine with members of their synagogue from Closter, New Jersey. As a group, they delivered more than 9,000 pounds



The start of PJ Library in Ukraine in 2019. From left: Yevgeniya Ponomarenko, Tamar Remz, Olga Bard, Alex Zablotsky, and Winnie Sandler Grinspoon.

COURTESY OF ALEX ZABLOTSKY

of humanitarian supplies to refugees.

Olena Kushnir, a PJ Library parent connector in Brooklyn, New York, galvanized her local community to find ways to help Ukrainians relocate — including her mom and brother, who are now safe. The tight-knit group also supported one another and collected medical supplies for hospitals in Ukraine.

When holidays were interrupted, Elena Boguslavsky, a PJ Library coordinator in Montreal, and the Federation CJA organized a virtual Purim program for children in Ukraine. The Jewish Agency for Israel — one of our partners — and Israel's Ministry of Aliyah and Integration hosted Passover seders in Israel for refugees, and families received the PJ Library Haggadah. JAFI also provided Haggadahs for refugees in Poland, Romania, and Hungary.

There is a long road ahead for the Jewish community and many others in that region, but continuing to come together — just like the acts of kindness above — spreads hope and unites us in our shared desire for peace. For our part, we will continue to seek out ways to support Jewish families from Ukraine as they navigate an uncertain future. After all, we're connected in many ways.

Thank you to the PJ Library community for showing up and helping those affected by the human tragedy in Ukraine. Every effort, big or small, makes a difference to someone. ■

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