

# Eastern Ukraine: Stolen Childhood in Donbass and a Dream about Peace

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*Seven-year-old Maxim is my neighbour. He had to take refuge in a basement together with his family in the village of Vergulyovka, near Debaltsevo, where they were living last summer when the Ukrainian Army came and took the town. I have known Maxim's mother since I was a child—her name is Olga too. We grew up in the same neighbourhood.*

*She told me that the windows and the roof of their house in Vergulyovka had been damaged. They are currently living at their grandmother's place in their home town near Perevalsk. Olga is pregnant now, she is expecting in April. I visited them at her mother's place and brought two bags of humanitarian aid as well, including baby food and nappies—all of which had been bought with the money sent by people from different countries. She was not expecting it and was quite surprised.*



Maxim showed me his favourite toys: among them were two plastic tanks, and he also he bragged about pieces of shrapnel and an empty ammunition box which he had found. He

said that he would like to become a soldier in the future—children seem to believe that the shelling will last forever. Nevertheless, when I asked Maxim to tell me about war, his mood suddenly changed. One of his strongest flashbacks was about fences shot full of holes. When questioned what he dreamt of, he answered: *“About peace.”*

The other day, I met a family from Chernukhino, LPR, who were living at their friends’ place in Perevalsk. They had been forced to stay in a basement during more than three weeks of the artillery shelling by the UAF. Eventually, their house was destroyed. The mother—Lilia Lavrova—said that they would like to rebuild their house.



Last time we visited this family twice, and we brought some food and clothes for them. Two amazingly cheerful children met us in the corridor:

Children in Donbass are special—after they have experienced heavy artillery bombardment, and spent weeks in the basements. They are children of war, who have been deprived of their childhood since almost a year. This is in fact the deliberate policy of the Ukrainian government towards the residents of this region.

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