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Bearing Witness to 2022 as Educators, Learners, and Humans

Robin Neustaeter

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EDITORIAL

Robin Neustaeter

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BEARING WITNESS TO 2022 AS EDUCATORS, LEARNERS, AND HUMANS

Robin Neustaeter

St. Francis Xavier University, Coady Institute

Spring is about change—seasonal changes, changes in the natural world. This year, 2022, we witness the ongoing changes and adaptations in our lives, families, communities, learning spaces, workplaces, and countries in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change and crisis, social movements, wars, and more. Change is a significant learning experience and opportunity. This issue marks a change in editorship of the journal, as it is the first issue edited by Adam Perry and me, co-editors-in-chief of the *Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education*. When Adam and I took on this new role in July 2021, we decided to alternate writing the editorials for the general issues of the journal during our editorship. Circumstances presented me with the first editorial opportunity in this issue.

War, violence, and humanitarian crisis are disorienting, challenging, complex, diverse, emotional, heartbreaking, and rich learning moments—for individuals, groups, communities, institutions, and nations. On February 24, 2022, the Russian military invaded Ukraine, a sovereign country, and thus began violence and destruction of catastrophic proportions and effects. As a Canadian of Ukrainian ancestry and an adult education and peace and conflict educator and scholar, I turned to reflective practice to make sense of what was happening in Ukraine set within the reality of wars, violence, and humanitarian crisis alongside the caring of family, neighbours, and strangers around the world. Reflective practice and learning can be acts of witnessing, witnessing the internal to self and external beyond self. My reflective practice evolved into a poem that I spoke at the Ukrainian Flag-Raising Ceremony at St. Francis Xavier University on March 4, 2022. I have updated the poem as reflection on the ongoing violence in Ukraine. As of May 10, 2022, the date I am writing, this war and humanitarian crisis rage on. And so do thousands of acts of care.

To Bear Witness

Robin Neustaeter | Робін Нойстатер.

Добрий день. мене звати Робін Нойстатер.

Good day. My name is Robin Neustaeter.

I am third-generation Ukrainian Canadian.

I want to begin with a moment of silence. To hold close:

People whose lives have been turned upside down by violence and war

People who fled and are fleeing

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Staying home
Sheltering in bomb shelters, and safer spaces—for days, weeks, months
The caregivers, the soldiers, and the civil resisters
The newborns, children, youth, and elders
The raped and wounded
And those who have died

This silence...for most of us, is not disrupted with
Air sirens,
Bomb explosions,
Rapid artillery fire,
Missile strikes,
Crackling flames,
Tanks rumbling down the street, closer, louder, closer and louder.
Screams of anguish, frustration

Pain, sorrow
This silence, for most of us is not
Reeking with anxiety and worry
Is my family safe?
Are my neighbours safe?
Is my home standing?
Is my neighbourhood still there?
Am *I* safe?

We are not wondering: How long will this silence last?
When will there be silence again?
For most of us, this silence is
Silent

Once we saw through a single intact pane of glass, now it is through a kaleidoscope

We see you
Ukraine
The beautiful mountains, hills, lakes, rivers, shorelines, forests, steppes, islands, fields,
Meadows, wildlife.
Towns, villages, cities.
A country with a rich, dynamic, and complex history,
As all countries have,
Vibrant with languages, cultures, arts,
And democracy.

Ukraine
People full of life and dreams and passions, determined and resilient.
Again.

We see you
The people who remain in Ukraine, and those who have fled Ukraine
Living war

So fresh, so real, so shocking,

And violence so bold
And so very, very
Old.

We see the countless media stories pulling our attention in and out.

We know there is more, much more happening. Every hour, every day.

Far away we eat, study, work, sleep, play—while you...do what needs to be done

We see

The extraordinary and ordinary, the brutality and compassion of humanity

We see

Women fleeing with children, elders, diversely abled, and pets,
Taking them in their arms, at their sides
While carrying their hopes, cares, and dreams
Women searching for food, scarce food, to feed loved ones,
Hugging the scared and crying—as they cry too.
Women writing the names and contact information on their children's backs when fleeing
Women taking in their arms guns to fight, to fight for their home, their identity, their Freedom; for today and tomorrow's Ukraine
Women raped, abused, yet surviving
Women's bodies on the ground, their heartbeats silent
Women at borders, violated and manipulated into sex trafficking and prostitution
Women organizing humanitarian response—in Ukraine and collaborating with Regional and international networks.
Women organizing parallel peace actions and talks
To complement the negotiations at borders and tables with the typical actors

We see

Men staying to give care to women, children, elders, neighbours,
Staying to fight, staying to survive another day in this life, this life now,
Men driving humanitarian aid vehicles to save one more child, elder, adult
Men staying for lives tomorrow.

We see

Gender, age, race, ability and disability, the realities and complexities of survival.
How the colour of one's skin determines one's journey in and out of the war.
How the ability to hear air sirens determines if one makes it to safer spaces in time.

We see

The thinkers, doers, learners, educators, activists, advocates, healers, feminists,

The LGBTQIA+

We see

Global political leaders, almost all male, speaking international political strategic jargon,
to stop a Vladimir Putin

Who is once again destroying the lives of people

Remember Grozny, Aleppo,

Imperialism is so close, lingering, bubbling, brewing, erupting

It is real and present, its effects felt strongly for many around the world

Right. Now.

Patriarchy, Militarization, Discrimination, Racism,

Domination, Colonization, Genocide,

We remember the precarity of the peace and democracy as we know it

Syria, Afghanistan, Chechnya

Yemen, Ethiopia, Nigeria

Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ukraine

And more.

We are shocked, saddened, disoriented as eight years of violent conflict become a catastrophic
war

Not since the Second World War has one European nation invaded and waged war on
another

sovereign European nation. Not since...

February 24th 2022

And tomorrow...? What will tomorrow bring?

My ancestors fled the imperial regimes and troubles in what is now Ukraine

To build new lives on the prairies of Manitoba, Canada

Ukrainians have made their homes in countries and communities around the globe,

Becoming family, friends, colleagues, neighbours, and citizens.

Together we stand,

Together we see

We all look up at the sky and see the same sun, moon, stars.

We all take another breath

Дякую

Thank you.