



Telling Our Stories, Finding Our Roots in Devon

Interview with Nataliya Vanstone (NV)

Interviewer: Louise Rands Silva (LRS)

Sail Room, Pannier Pantry at the Custom House, Bideford, Saturday 26 September 2020

00:00:00 LRS: We're doing an interview with Nataliya Vanstone and Louise Rands Silva and we're in Bideford at the Custom House on Saturday, 26 September 2020. Thanks Nataliya for your time to give us this interview, that we've been waiting about six months to actually do! To start off, would you like to just give a little summary - tell me about yourself.

00:00:53 NV: Yes, absolutely. My name is Nataliya Vanstone. I'm 40 years old, coming up to 41. I was born, which currently is no longer there, in the USSR, in one of the republics at the time, which was Ukraine. So, in 1991, Ukraine became an independent country. And actually, I got my first passport as a Ukrainian national. But I was born in the USSR.

00:01:36 LRS: Ah, how old were you in 1991, when the USSR collapsed?

00:01:42 NV: I was 12. And lots of things have changed, because of the collapse. At the time, we lived up in the North of Russia. We lived in the polar circle, so to say. We lived for six years in Cape Schmidt, I think it's called. And of course, after the collapse, we came back to Ukraine, so where the family was.

00:02:27 LRS: Why did you live up in the North of Russia,

00:02:31 Well, it was the decision of my parents. That's where they went to work. Again, that was just by chance. My grandfather met somebody while he was having a spa break in Truskavets, which I will tell you all about later. And he met somebody who somehow had the connections and was able to arrange the ... we didn't have to have visas, but it was very difficult to get the job and opportunity to go up to the North. Because the salaries there, at the time, were three times the normal salary of any sort of USSR standard salary. So my parents, I guess they were driven by the prospect of maybe having a bit more money, and maybe they just wanted to have an adventure. And so they went there. And the reason why the salaries were so high was because of the harsh environmental conditions. So you could go there for a short period of time. But my parents ended up living there. My Dad did about nine years. My Mum was about eight, and me and my sister, we spent six years there.

00:04:17 LRS: Thank you, that's a really interesting start. What job were your parents doing?

Second audio file.

00:00:05 LRS Now, Nataliya, what jobs were your parents doing?

00:00:11 NV: Well, my Mum was a teacher. She took Russian language and literature. And my

Dad was an economist. So they had jobs and then they brought us there to live with them. We stayed some time without our parents when they first went, with our grandparents. We lived there six years. And then of course, everything started happening, it was very unpredictable. Nobody knew it would happen - the collapse, I mean, and my parents decided to return. Dad had lived there for nine years, it was a long time. So we were thinking about the next step. But actually, maybe things were not the way they turned out. Who knows how life would have been, very different, if we had stayed there. I think everybody had economic hardship, and it was very frightening to stay there. Because of the supplies not coming. And of course, if you are isolated, if the only way to get there is by air, and there is a 12-hour time difference.

00:01:44 LRS: So were you in Siberia, somewhere like that?

00:01:52 NV: Well, Siberia actually is more environmentally friendly, so to say, for humans! Because at least Siberia has got some vegetation, trees and animals and things like that. Where we were, it's just on the edge of the Ludovic Ocean [now the Chukchi Sea]. There's nothing there, no trees, maybe a little bit of moss growing for the reindeer to eat. It is tundra, snow and ice and polar bears. The polar bears were another reason to look out!

00:02:47 LRS: OMG!

00:02:49 NV: Polar nights and things like that. It was dark for a lot of the time. Every summer holidays we would go back to Ukraine. So actually myself and my sister kept close links with Ukraine, because we were going on holidays every year, by plane. We had to fly through Moscow. We had relatives there, so we stayed in Moscow. And it was, I still remember as a child, this amazing experience. When you leave on the plane, everything is so cold, and snow everywhere. And then you fly and just before the plane comes you see greenery, you see the trees. And then you come out and as a child I remember thinking 'Oh, these beautiful flowers!'. You know, the dandelions, that nobody likes in the UK. Everybody thinks they're a weed. To me, dandelions are beautiful, just because we felt a bit deprived of that, vegetation. And to be honest, I don't know the names of many flowers and trees, because as a child when I was growing up, I wasn't exposed to that, due to where I was. So that was a bit different.

00:04:21 LRS: It is! And what about going to school? What are your memories of going to school in Cape Schmidt?

00:04:30 NV: Oh yes, I do have a photograph.

00:04:32 LRS: Great! What was the name of the place?

00:04:35 NV: In Russian it would be Mys Schmidt, but I think it's called Cape Schmidt.

00:04:46 LRS: I'll look it up on the map

00:04:50 NV: It's very high up, not far from Alaska. That's where I went to school. That's me. I was quite tall girl when I started when I started, but then I became the shortest in the line. So that's me and that writing, saying Cape Schmidt, and a representation of snow and bears, I'm not sure.

00:05:27 LRS: How sweet, you've all got little white aprons on.

00:05:30 NV: That was the uniform of the USSR. So because it was a celebratory day at the school, we all had the white aprons. On a normal day, it would be a black apron and a brown dress. We all had them. The cuffs were white and lacey, and on your collar as well. A lacey collar. So that had to be changed, every week you stitched on the new one. The girls wore their hair like that.

00:06:25 LRS: Was it girls and boys in the school?

00:06:28 NV: Yes, girls and boys. The boys had a brown jacket and trousers. And of course, on the celebratory day, they would have to wear a white shirt. I can't remember what they were wearing on normal days. A sort of shirt.

00:06:46 LRS: So what year was that, do you think?

00:06:48 NV: That's the first ... here in the UK for instance, children start school at four. In Ukraine or in the USSR, you would start at seven.

00:07:06 LRS: So that was your first day at school?

00:07:07 NV: Yes. And because I'm an October child, I was starting slightly later. So I was nearly eight. So that's why I was first in line, because I was so tall!

00:07:26 LRS: I'm interested in what you did before you were eight? Did you just stay at home all the time? Did you have a playgroup?

00:07:38 NV: So when my parents went, we stayed, with my sister, with the grandparents, and went to the kindergarten in Ukraine. I've got some childhood photographs here. So that's me and my sister. We were a little bit younger, so that's the clothing they used to wear back then. That's quite a traditional way to take a picture of the kids, by the fountain.

00:08:22 LRS: I love your outfit! Very fashionable!

00:08:24 NV: Thank you! Yeah, it was all those knitted dresses and cardigans, so that must have been in the 1980s. And then I went to school. What was the question, sorry?

00:08:54 LRS: I was wondering, as you didn't really start school till you were nearly 8, you went to kindergarten?

00:09:01 NV: Yeah. We went to kindergarten in Ukraine. But up in the North, we didn't. There were no places in kindergarten. So, we just stayed at home for a year or two. Just looked after ourselves. Managed to start cooking, fried eggs, I remember that. And we had a little dog and yes, that's what we did.

00:09:32 LRS: Great. You learnt life skills. You played, and had time to be a child.

00:09:42 NV: The way we lived, it wasn't, because of the severe conditions outside ... The buildings were not like just houses. It was like a barrack style. And everybody in that barrack would have a room. And shared toilet facilities. It was one family in one room. I guess this was the reason why my parents were okay to leave us, because there were many other families, and other parents who were staying at home looking after younger children, so there was always this sort of communal atmosphere, because you were not living by yourself in your house or something like that.

00:10:41 LRS: Were the other families from Ukraine, or from different places in the USSR?

00:10:4 NV: Yes, they were. Some of them were from Ukraine, some were not. It was a mixture. But at that time you didn't have to worry about your identity so much. I don't know, as a child, I can't remember worrying about that. Whether you were from Ukraine, or from another place.

00:11:13 LRS: What did you call yourself? I'm a Russian?

00:11:18 NV: No, we didn't know that we were Ukrainian. We were born in Ukraine, but it was a republic. So it was like in America, you know, they all have their states. So they are Americans, but they all have their own state. It's the same principle. We were Soviet nationals, more than Russian.

00:11:57 LRS: I'm interested to know, when you were older, and you were learning history at school. Do you remember? Do you have any observations, about what you were taught about the history of the USSR? And the history of Ukraine? Are you warm enough?

00:12:26 NV: Yes, thank you. . . It all depended, of course, on the school programme. Up to 1991, the programme was... because the North belonged more to Russia, rather than Ukraine, so there was more bias towards Russian history. We learned about Russia more. The history of Ukraine was more in Ukrainian schools. And they also learned the Ukrainian language. So, when I went to school, I didn't learn the Ukrainian language. It was just Russian, and Russian history. A lot about Lenin, Komsomol [the Soviet youth organization] and all that, what needed to be learnt, a lot of ideology.

00:13:34 LRS: Would you say 'indoctrination'? That this was the best system? Did you call it the 'communist system'?

00:13:48 NV: Oh yes, absolutely! So, of course it was. As a child, you don't know. You just live your life and you watch television. And to be honest, my Mum always reminds me of that. When they used to go to work, and we'd have to stay at home. We would watch television, and there would be like Parliament here. All the talk and everything. So, a similar thing was happening there. So, the Soviets had their daily briefings.

00:14:26 LRS: Who was the Soviet president at the time?

00:14:30 NV: At the time, before the collapse, it was Gorbachev.

00:14:33 LRS: You remember seeing Gorbachev on television? And before, Brezhnev?

00:14:42 NV: Yes. We've seen them all on television, but I can't remember exactly who it was at the time when I was growing up as a child, but Gorbachev was the last president.

00:15:02 LRS: Was it called 'Glasnost'?

00:15:07 NV: Not sure. So, Gorbachev. Sergei I think? My Mum remembers that, when they were at work, I would sit there with my pen and paper and write, record what the propaganda was! So, I was doing my recordings and of course, a lot of influence. I was interested in politics, so to say, because of my family. I guess, as well, my father was very much against the Communist state. And that got him into a lot of trouble with his relatives and his Dad, because my grandfather was into all that, so to say. So, he had a bit of a higher position. My Grandfather, in the USSR system, in politics, because he went to the communist school, so he had a position of power, he had a bit of influence there. So, he was an official. Like a First Secretary or something. I don't know the translation, if there is an equivalent to the political system in the UK. I don't think so. So, he was up there. It was higher than being a Town Mayor. And in fact, when he was in power, being responsible for whatever political things were happening, he actually had a phone call from Stalin himself! My Granddad used to tell us how frightened he was when he had a phone call from Stalin. If he had said something wrong. That could have been a lot of trouble.

00:17:41 LRS: Did he say what Stalin wanted to talk about?

00:17:46 NV: Oh, he was just doing the usual check-ups, how things are, is everything okay? So, he would just ring personally to the leaders in every town.

00:17:59 LRS: And where was your Grandfather living then, in Boryslav?

00:18:03 NV: Yes. He was in charge of the political system.

00:18:13 LRS: Like he was perhaps Leader of the County Council?

00:18:18 NV: Yes, something like that. So, there was a Mayor, and there was somebody who was in charge, overseeing everything happening in the town. He had that position on top. He was also a director of the Plant, the gas.

00:18:50 LRS: So, tell me about Boryslav and the important industry there? And what is your Russian surname?

00:19:04 NV: Dmytruk, that's my maiden name, and was my Grandfather's name. So just to finish off that, because of my Grandfather and Grandma's position in town... My father was seen a little bit like a rebel, because he didn't want to be a part of Komsomol and the communist system machinery. So, he went to live in the North and then eventually he entered the Party. So, we always had a laugh and a joke that he was the last communist of the USSR! He entered the Party, got his 'ticket' [card], and then it collapsed! So that's what happened. Then we came back to Ukraine and things went differently. It was Ukraine, and that was another big identity

shake up, because when we came back, and not being able to speak the Ukrainian language properly, and my mother, she taught Russian at school, so she couldn't get a job in Ukraine. Because there was no demand for Russian teachers anymore. So, when the USSR collapsed, everybody went to the national roots. My parents came back and found it very difficult. You weren't supposed to speak Russian. Everything was Ukrainian. From the beginning, as children, children usually are quite resilient, it wasn't affecting me that much because like I say, we used to travel there every summer and stay with the grandparents. And so, there was always a connection there. But I think if we hadn't travelled there, it would have been very difficult for us. But we soon made friends. And later on, I went to the Medical School, and it was all taught in the Ukrainian language. So, I learned the Ukrainian language, so that helped out, that period from the initial period, from when I was 12 and 13, when this collapse happened. Lots of people started to return to Ukraine from various places across the USSR. And so, this was like a transitional period, and everybody changed the colours. All the communist merchandise had to be hidden away! And changed into the Ukrainian merchandise. And that's when the revival started happening. And that's where we started to learn about Ukrainian history. And finding out ... at school we started to learn about Ukrainian history and language and being channelled into a different direction and finding out.

00:22:55 LRS: Yeah, like rebuilding your nation.

00:22:59 NV: And starting from children. So, the children had to be brought to the traditions, because a lot of it, like cultural heritage, Ukrainian heritage, was hidden. Now I see it as indeed, there was a lot of oppression. Because like you asked me earlier, what did we learn in history? It was all very much like Soviet propaganda and then suddenly, you have to forget about all that, and that's all wrong. The monuments were vandalised. There was a lot of unrest, the town names and street names had to be changed. There was economic collapse and my parents lost lots of money, so all that work was for nothing. When we came back, it was just starting to rebuild, starting to learn these things, returning back to the traditions. But then traditions had to be revived. And it was weird. It was almost like the change had happened overnight, and then you're expected to be this Ukrainian person who knows everything. And the other thing, which I think now is quite important, because during that USSR reign, and communist reign, there was no ... you couldn't be religious. Religion was a taboo, so it was prohibited. You couldn't celebrate any religious holidays. People did it sort of, but it was seen as kind of undercover. So, there were no Christmases, no Christmas celebration, no Easter celebration. This was just ... people did celebrate it, but it was not as popular as, let's say, here in the UK. And so, we knew about these celebrations, but praying or doing things was not allowed. And, of course when Ukraine started to be a country, all these religious things started to come up and then we got christened and we had to celebrate. And then we had lessons in religion, that was all just kind of, came down as 'a ton of bricks'!

00:25:47 LRS: Yes! A ton of bricks, at a time for you, you were about 13 years old? So, it's also, not necessarily difficult, but a time of transition in your life, as a teenager, suddenly.

00:26:05 NV: Yeah, it was a big transition. Relocation, change of the political, ideological system. You are finding out new things, which is good. I don't regret finding out all these new things. But I guess that imprint is still there. So that's why, I'm not a religious person, I can't say that. To me, it's just a part of culture. It's like a thing that you do, I could go to the church, I could

look around the art, I could maybe participate in whatever ritual, but I see it more like a literal ritual, like an artistic expression, rather than a belief, so to say. And there's so many different beliefs and everything. But anyway, Ukraine had the revival back then, in the 1990s.

00:27:02 LRS: What do you call the church in Ukraine? What's the name of the religion, the state religion?

00:27:08 NV: Well, it's Orthodox. But there is a division. So, there is Greek Orthodox, and there is Roman Orthodox. And of course, because we live so close to Poland, there's another, the Catholic influence. So that's slightly different. So, there is not one united belief. And of course, there is also Russian, the patriarchal religion. And then there is the Ukrainian from Kiev. And so, the priests themselves don't have an agreement. There are different churches, it's all orthodox, but there is a division. But to be honest, like I say, I'm not a particularly religious person. So, I wouldn't know exactly all the nitty gritty of that. But we were christened, and we had to learn about the traditions and celebrations, slightly different to the UK celebrations because of the delay. So here you celebrate Christmas on 25th of December, whereas our Christmas is the 7th of January. But the principle is the same. It's all about the birth of Jesus. It's the resurrection, the same principles. But there's also a delay, about two weeks' delay. So that's religion and politics.

00:29:11 LRS: Thank you. Perhaps before we move on to something different, what's your understanding of the war that's going on in the East of the Ukraine at the moment? Do you know much about it? Do you follow the news about it?

00:29:25 NV: Well, I follow the news. As far as I know it's the result of the Crimea annexation that happened. It is quite a complex issue as well. Because in the eyes of Ukrainians, Crimea was always part of Ukraine. But I guess during the USSR, the Russian sea fleet was there, so I don't know whether it's something to do with that, so in Sevastopol they have got the fleet and that's why they wanted to have it back. Strategic. But what's happening is just basically to do with the division of the territory. And it's difficult because Russia and Ukraine have got such a long history of brotherhood. Nobody really wants to be stamped on their feet. So it is difficult. I don't know exactly. I went there a few years ago, back to Ukraine. I couldn't go this year because of the Coronavirus. But when I went, I knew the war is happening, but you don't really feel it like that, as a civilian. You know, this is happening, but it's not like bombs are flying.

00:31:18 LRS: I read that there has been a ceasefire this summer. But it's been going on seven years.

00:31:27 NV: Yes, it's going on, and I'm not sure which way and how it's going to end. Because obviously, the people who are there, in those regions, Donetsk, that are trying to be independent, they still have all the supplies, Ukrainian supplies, the water, the food, everything comes from Ukraine. They want to be Russians, or I don't know what they want to be, an independent country, in the middle of the country? So geographically where they are positioned, it's hard to gain independence. I haven't really explored it properly. All I know is that it's a very sad situation. Nobody really wants to have a war. It's affecting people psychologically, economically, socially. It's very difficult, of course, the loss of life.

00:32:39 LRS: Yes, a big loss of life that we don't hear about on the news.

00:32:44 NV: So that's something that obviously I hope will soon be sorted out. It is difficult for me to know exactly how it started and what went on, because like you say, we don't hear about it on the news. And when I'm trying to find out it's like, what side do you listen to? Yes, I don't even know whether the people themselves understand what they are going through.

00:33:17 LRS: Thank you Nataliya, really interesting. I tell you what, let's hear about Boryslav, and you show me your objects that you've brought, and any photos you can show me.

00:33:28 NV: Yes, the objects. So, I've got a couple of pens. I've explained about one of the pens. On the end of it is a mace, which is the symbol of power. And the struggle to have independence from all the different kinds [of invaders] from the whole of Ukrainian history, the attempt to be independently in charge of things, represented on that pen. And the pen itself has the name 'Truskavets' written on it. Truskavets is another town that is neighbouring my hometown, Boryslav, four miles away. And it's the international spa. So, lots of people from all over the world, and it's opened up to everyone, many people know about this location. They go from all over Ukraine and during the USSR times, Truskavets was the place to go, to improve your health and to have a relaxing time. And it has got lots of hotels, some hotels specifically reserved only for the ruling leaders, like presidents.

00:34:56 LRS: Like Putin? Does Putin come there? No, because it's Ukraine!

00:35:02 NV: I don't think so! He might have in the past been there. So Ukrainian leaders, lots of hotels.

00:35:18 LRS: Quite exclusive?

00:35:20 NV: Yes. I haven't stayed in that one! Truskavets has had a lot of rebuilding and it relies a lot on tourism. The special water that they have, different kinds of water, for all sorts, even for beautification. There is a special one called 'Maria', Mary water. So, if you wash with that water, you are beautiful! I don't know if it's true! And I also have this little book written by Ivan Franko. So, it's just one of the poems that he has written. And it's called in Ukrainian 'Vichnyi Revoliutsioner', 'Forever Revolutionary'. It has got it in English as well. Let me just find the English version, page 70. You probably need to have a magnifying glass to read it. Yeah, so it's 'The Hymn of Eternal Spirit of Revolt'.

00:36:51 LRS: Would you read me a verse in Ukrainian?

00:36:55 NV: It's too small! It's written in many different languages, and Ivan Franko is the Ukrainian poet and writer. In 1881, at the end of the 19th century, he has written a novel about Boryslav, and put Boryslav on the literature map, so to say. It's called 'Boryslav Laughs', 'Boryslav Smiyet'sya'. It's about the struggle of the working class, they need to unite against the oppression of capitalism, and things like that. I was thinking about it, when you asked me to bring the objects, I thought, I have this little book, which I have with me, because it's like a little tradition. When my father used to travel somewhere, like when he went to the North, he always brought with him one book by ... 'Kobza', that's another. We've got Shevchenko, another writer, so he would have it with him. But I have this one with me, because he wrote about Boryslav

specifically. This particular poem is about revolution. And so, I guess, during the Soviet Union times, Ukraine didn't really have an opportunity to express itself. I guess an author like Franko was allowed, because it corresponded to the messages that the communists used to send out: to stand against the oppression of capitalism and things like that, and Western capitalism in particular. I don't know, really, but that's just my thought, how he was allowed to be present, so that we know of his name and of his work.

00:39:36 LRS: Because he's a national, very important historical figure.

00:39:41 NV: But then again, there were not many in comparison to Russian literature. There were not so many writers, and you think, why? Clearly there's plenty of opportunity and people can do that. But I guess that was because they were not singing along the songs that the Russians wanted them to. So, if you wanted to express yourself, your national identity, you would be repressed and suppressed. Only those who fitted with the themes of the ruling party were allowed to be published. It may be the reason.

00:40:35 LRS: Yes, it's like censorship.

00:41:11 NV: Yes, exactly. So, because he did his work, his writing at the end of the 19th century, before the Revolution happened, that was the 20th century, the beginning of it, I guess he was allowed because the messages he was sending were similar to the messages that the communists were sending. So, this is just something I've thought, and I understand how he was allowed to be known. He comes from the area.

00:41:17 LRS: I went to Ivano Frankovich.

00:41:19 NV: Yeah. That's in his name.

00:41:24 LRS: Before it was called something different. Was it?

00:41:28 NV: Because he was born in that town. So, you are familiar with that town?

00:41:33 LRS: I've been to that town

00:41:35 NV: So, that's where Ivan Franko was born and he has written about Boryslav. So that's what he was writing about.

00:41:42 LRS: That's a great link. Lovely. And have you got any pictures of Boryslav, and tell us what the industry is.

00:41:57 NV: Oh, there's lots of industry. And like I said, even Ivan Franko was writing about the gas and oil industry that was there. So, at the end of the 19th century, there was that. You can see the pump that pumps the oil. They are all over the town, everywhere, in parks, just randomly located throughout. These are some postcards.

00:42:33 LRS: I read that a long time ago, 5% of the total oil production came from the Boryslav region, globally, after the USSR and America.

00:42:49 NV: Yes. So, in the 19th century, Boryslav was providing quite a lot, and a lot of wealthy oil magnates were living there. At that time, it was still part of Poland, in the 19th century. And then in the 1930s, when the communists came, that's when they annexed that part, and the Polish and Jewish magnates had to flee. When the Bolsheviks came, they were putting people in positions, so people like my grandad and my great-grandad - he was a judge. My grandad comes from the central part of Ukraine. And his Dad was repressed, he was taken away by Stalin's people and shot, so he lost his father. But then he went to political school and training. Originally, he was a teacher, a physics and maths teacher, but then he actually went into politics. And that's how he ended up being in that role in Boryslav.

00:44:48 LRS: Yes, so he is a prominent figure in the city.

00:44:52 NV: Yes. At the time everybody knew him, he was quite well-known in Boryslav. When later, of course, we were growing up, and we were 16 and 17, and going out, we had lots of friends. And he always felt that people were then recognising us more, and saying, 'Oh, these are the granddaughters of that person. So, it became we were the granddaughters of him, not that he was our Granddad. Things changed, tables turned, so to say!

00:45:35 LRS: The new generation.

00:45:38 NV: Yes. Absolutely. Once you retire, things change. You just have to go to the background.

00:45:47 LRS: And how did you come to move when you were a bit older, as an adult? You said that you moved to Germany?

00:45:56 NV: Yes. I went to my Medical School. In Boryslav, we also have, this is another part that Boryslav is famous for, its Medical School, training nurses and paramedics there. We have a slightly different educational system for the professions. So, we've got professional colleges that train us there. That's me when I joined, I was about 15.

00:46:33 LRS: Wow, very young.

00:46:36 NV: So, we have a different system. And I did three years of training to be a nurse. And after I finished the training, I moved to Melitopol, which how I know about the Cossacks and Zaporizhzhia, because that's where the more Southern parts of Ukraine are. The Asov Sea, not far from the Black Sea. So that is the region where I went to university, pedagogical university, to train as a teacher. Because during my training as a nurse, I just realised that I also wanted to know about psychology and other things. And I went to pedagogical university to study psychology and English, after medical school, that's my university times. As I was learning English and psychology, I also picked up German. When you train to be a teacher, you need to be a good performer. So, we used to do ... I was part of the comedy club and see if you can find me! It's going take a while - I don't think you'll be able to recognize me. Well, that's me.

00:48:20 LRS: Ah! As a man, with a beard!

00:48:23 NV: Yes. Well, it was part of the comedy club and so we had a play and for the three years that I was there, I studied, and we had a good time. Melitopol is another place which was strategic for trade. So, there were a lot of links, and trains used to go to Russia and Crimea. And it's known for its cherries and other fruits, being in a more southern part. In my time at university I joined, you know, as you're young and you want to experience new things, I joined a German class, and I made friends with the German community that were there, to know a little bit more about the culture. So, this was the German community that had German links in the past, but they lived in Ukraine.

00:50:08 LRS: Ah, so maybe their grandparents had emigrated there from Germany?

00:50:15 NV: Or because of the war and everything, I'm not sure. Anyway, they were probably born in Ukraine, but they had some links with Germany, and they were trying to restore their roots and identity, and of course they were doing some German classes. And that's how my sister and me and a friend of ours joined that sort of club and community and started learning German. And with the information that we gained there, we got an opportunity to go and study German in Germany, to go and stay with a family, and be an au pair, and learn German, which we thought would be a brilliant idea.

00:51:11 LRS: How nice, with your sister.

00:51:12 NV: Yes. My sister went. She's called Olenna. I stayed in Brühl, which is next to Köln. Brühl has got a famous adventure park and a castle. So, I lived there for a year. And my family was amazing, that I stayed with. They were great people. And the little ones were lovely that I was looking after. And I learned German. And I was thinking about applying to university and studying in Germany. Because an au pair visa, every time Ukrainians go somewhere, they need to have a visa. It's not straightforward. You can't just travel and live, because Ukraine is not an EU country. So just to buy some more time to apply to university, I went to Austria as well, because that's where my sister went, after Germany. We could speak freely German, understood it all after a year. So, we just extended that period, I went and this time, I was able to be in the same little village in Austria. And that's where I met my husband, who was British. My ex-husband.

00:53:19 LRS: Why was your husband there? What was he doing there?

00:53:20 NV: At the time, he worked as a chef in the resorts, because it's Austria, the Tyrol mountains. And that's how we met.

00:53:42 LRS: What was the Austrian village called?

00:53:48 NV: Was it called Ellmau? Something like that [Not clear]. It's not far from Kitzbuhel. Kitzbuhel is a famous place. That's how we met. The family that I was an au pair with had a bar. And after a day of doing some helping, I went to the bar and met my husband there! It was called the 'Memory Bar'. So, we met and then he went to France. We were writing letters to each other during the summer. And then he came back, and he proposed to me. And being quite young, and I don't know, maybe naive or maybe adventurous or romantic, I just agreed to come to the UK! So, I came here as his fiancée and we got married in Launceston.

00:54:59

LRS: Like you do! Is he from Launceston?

00:55:03 NV: Well, he's from the North, Blackburn, but he had friends in Launceston. And I think before he came to Austria to work, he worked in the White Hart Hotel in Launceston. That's where he had his job; he returned back to his job. Our original plan was to come, get married in Launceston or in the UK, and then go to France, because that's where he wanted to be. We couldn't get married in Austria. He was British, so we thought, we'll do all the paperwork here. But then we overstayed a little bit. And then I got pregnant, and we decided to stay a bit longer. So, we lived in Bradworthy. It's lovely. It's a quiet little village, but then it gets too quiet. And once I was travelling, I think I was going to Barnstaple to do some shopping, and I caught the bus travelling from Bradworthy. And when the bus approached Bideford Quay, it looked so beautiful on that particular day. And I thought, 'Oh, I really I wish I lived in Bideford!' I really liked this place. And we were thinking about it, and we decided that Bideford was a good option and we moved to Bideford, eventually.

00:57:20 LRS: What were your impressions when you came to the UK? When you came to live in Devon?

00:57:28 NV: I remember that we arrived at night, so couldn't see much - no, actually we arrived by day. We arrived in London, and I think I've even got a picture somewhere, where I'm walking through London feeling very happy looking like it's 70s, with Big Ben. So that's me, walking happily on my first day in London, with my umbrella because I thought, 'London weather, got to be prepared!' We had a nice day, but I remember I had such a bad headache. Then we came to Newquay, then the next day when I eventually came out to see Launceston, it was in October, so the weather was lovely. The trees with the colourful leaves, that's very pretty, and I like the architecture. I think I liked it. First impressions were good. What I found very strange for somebody who comes - the strangest things are the little things, the practical things. So, for instance, the taps, having no mixer. That was a big culture shock! And the other thing is the having carpeted floors. 90% of houses have got carpets. I know it's the weather, now we have carpeted flooring everywhere at home and I'm used to it now. But originally, shock, because not only I'm not used to it, because in Ukraine we don't have this, we have wooden floors, tiles, even lino, but especially arriving from Germany, where everything gets cleaned. Even the streets get cleaned. It was a bit of a shock. But other than that, everybody was very friendly. My ex-husband knew lots of people already because he lived and worked in Launceston. So, everybody welcomed him and accepted me straight away. Everybody was really nice. I can't say that I was disappointed. I was quite pleased, and I think things were good.

01:00:30 LRS: How do you find other people, when you interact with people from Devon? Is it a big deal that you're from a different place? Or do they just kind of ignore the fact that they can hear you have an accent? Do they ask where you are from?

01:00:54 NV: It was quite funny at the beginning, because I'm naturally a person who from childhood has travelled a lot. I'm used to travelling and meeting different people. So, it was quite funny when people hadn't seen many travellers around. Their first impression was always 'Are you French?' So almost like, the only people who come here must be from France. They can't

be from anywhere else! So that was funny. And I used to say 'No, but thanks for the compliment!'. I wouldn't mind being French. And it felt like I was the only foreigner around in Bradworthy, until we met another couple. He's British, and she was Bulgarian, and she had a Ukrainian friend. And so, we were introduced to each other. That Ukrainian lady lives in Bude, and we've been friends for all of this time. She came to the UK just a couple of months before me. So, we were in a similar situation, in terms of just getting used to things, although she had a job, and I was married and I was also working helping my husband, because he took a franchise and was working in the Bradworthy Inn, as a chef, and I was a waitress at the time. When we came to Bideford, I went just for the social interaction and everything else. I went to learn English with a class. And in that class, I met other people. So, I even met a French lady as well! That was fun, we're still friends, in Bideford Arts Centre. That's where I met all my other friends who still live in Bideford, from different places. There were some Germans at the time, who lived also in Bideford. We just became friendly. And after my English class, I did some IT lessons and then I went to Petroc, to do a Foundation Degree in psychology.

01:03:58 LRS: I was always so impressed, Nataliya, that you were doing all these studies whilst having young children.

01:04:06 NV: Well, yeah, that's kind of in my nature, I liked learning and it was good for the boys as well, because they then joined the nursery, and they were making progress rather than being at home and just going to the playgroup once a day. I had an opportunity for them to experience the nursery environment, so that was good for their social interaction, and for mine. And of course, when you join a class or any other sort of social environment, I mean education provides that opportunity to be a part of the group. And it's a long course so you are there, young people are around you, you've got so many opportunities to make friends and stay friends. And have even better chances to progress your career, or something like that. I always knew that I would go back to education. So, I did.

01:05:25 LRS: Yeah, that's a great way to be part of the community, isn't it, and not to be isolated at home. And to be doing what you are interested in.

01:05:37 NV: Yeah. And so, I did the course. And on the course, I met lots of friends, as you do, being a student, regardless of your age, you just go partying. And so, I did. And in one of those parties, I met my future, well, present husband. So that's how we met, we met in Bideford. After I finished Petroc, my Foundation degree, I went to Plymouth to do a top up.

01:06:20 LRS: How long have you been teaching at Petroc now?

01:06:22 NV: Seven years.

01:06:31 LRS: Have you got anything that you noticed about joining your husband's family, about you becoming part of a British family?

01:06:40 NV: Um, no, I think they were very welcoming. And they're lovely people. They are not local, they live in Cornwall, rather than Devon. They were fully accepting and I didn't feel any sort of different.

01:07:08 LRS: Do you feel now that as well as being Ukrainian, you feel kind of British as well, because you've been here such a long time? Your identity.

01:07:18 NV: So, in terms of my identity, I don't know. I feel that this is ... I have British citizenship now. It's good, because I can work. I've got this opportunity to travel that allows me to do these things. And I feel secure, being here legally, that allows that security. But I don't know if I've got any sort of core identity, a national identity. I know that I'm partially there. But parts of me are here, like a puzzle, it consists of many different things. So, my children, for instance, they define themselves 50/50, they say they're 50% Ukrainian, 50% British. Where I seem to be a bit of ... 5% Russian, Ukrainian, even some German identity with me, because I speak the language. I don't know, it's hard to ...

01:08:35 LRS: You're a global citizen!

01:08:37 NV: That's how I see myself, yes, more like a cosmopolitan person. But that's the interesting thing, which, from experience, I got to realise, that to feel comfortable and at home, it's not the place, it's not to do with the place, how well you know the place, or whether you were born there, or whether you recognise the surroundings. It's all to do with people. So, for instance, when I go back to Ukraine now and again, I know I was born there, I recognise the street, my place, where my Mum lives, but things have changed, and for the first few days, I don't know how to feel. I don't feel like I belong there, so to speak. But then when I meet my friends, and we talk and we have memories and talk about past shared experiences, or have fun and laugh, then you suddenly realise that 'Yes, I belong'. I do know, you feel then, safe and comfortable.

01:10:01 LRS: Through the shared history with people.

01:10:03 NV: Through, yeah, just that acceptance of people. So, it's okay to know your geography, and being able to navigate because you recognise the places, or where you can speak the language so you can express yourself or understand what's going on. But actually, to feel that 'belonging', you need other people around you to give that sensation of acceptance. And it's the same here. I feel at home, because I'm surrounded by many wonderful people who have accepted me, who recognise that I might be speaking in another accent, but then this is the quiriness. This is like part of their ... you know, everybody's different. A little difference or a little, identity thing. Individuality, so to say. But I feel part of the community.

01:11:07 LRS: Yeah. Because all the other people that you know, they accept everyone's differences. That's what we all enjoy about each other.

01:11:17 NV: Exactly. And it's all about that feeling that you're together with people, doing the same joined thing. Having a joint experience or a joint memory, or doing a task, and that's why I feel very part of my workplace. I don't feel any different whatsoever. Because I'm with my team, with my other professionals in the team. The students see me as their lecturer. Nobody's really paying attention or wonders where a person is from, or their past or things like that, histories. Well, it's lovely to have an opportunity to reminisce, and somebody asks these questions, like this interview, I really enjoy sharing my story. But I feel very accepted. And that kind of gives me

the perception of belonging, regardless of whether I've got a British passport or not. The passport is just the paperwork that allows me to feel legally here.

01:12:47 LRS: It just gives security, doesn't it?

01:12:48 NV: Yeah, for the official use only.

01:12:54 LRS: Yes. But if you didn't have the passport, you may feel very differently. I mean, I'm wondering what is your perception, since Brexit, when there has been ... we hear about people not being made to feel welcome. 'Immigrants', this immigration thing. What's your feeling about, say, those people that may have come from a country like Romania, that may have experienced discrimination because of that? What are your views and feelings about that? Because they've come because they are part of the EU.

01:13:59 NV: Well, personally I have not experienced any hostility towards me. So, I don't know whether it's discrimination. I mean, there are so many reasons to feel discriminated - like being a female for instance. You might feel 'I don't have the opportunities to progress in my career'. So, it's not specifically something to do with where you have come from, your nationality. There are many different factors. It's your economic position, your class. So, from that perspective, the discrimination experience is not limited to immigrants only. Even people in the UK, who are born and bred here, can still experience disadvantage, or feel discriminated against because of the criteria, bureaucracy and other things like that. And I wonder whether a lot of this sort of hostility, or this negativity, is coming from just the media, and how people are portrayed, and maybe some propaganda. Because it's easier to blame somebody else, and try to disguise the situation, so that you have got, you know, 'those immigrants coming in and taking the jobs', for instance, and 'opportunities from the British people'. But in reality there are other things, so you've got to start thinking, 'Okay, but why were these British people not given an opportunity to, let's say, have certain educational experiences, so that they could have better jobs, that the immigrants cannot take?' Because the immigrants really can only take certain jobs. If they don't speak English, they won't be able to take a high-paid position, or be a manager in the company, because they won't be able to communicate, and things like that. So, there is no kind of threat. There shouldn't be any threat. And then again, the numbers of immigrants that come in are not that high ... well I don't know, maybe I'm wrong. I don't know what the situation is like in bigger cities. Maybe there is an influx and lots of people coming in. But I don't know, here in North Devon I don't experience, I don't see very many people from other places.

01:17:00 LRS: It's changed slightly, hasn't it? I think there is more movement than there was when we both came here.

01:17:12 NV: Yes. And I don't know very many people who are in positions of, let's say, power, for instance, who have come from other places. So, most of my friends, they work in good jobs, in shops, they work in factories, so they do have jobs. But I wouldn't say that they have got such great jobs, and by having those jobs they are disadvantaging others, or making others feel less important, disadvantaged.

01:17:53 LRS: And we are very lucky to have people like nurses. The hospital is one of the places where you will find more people that have come from different countries, because we need those people.

01:18:09 NV: Because there is a shortage and where I work, we specifically prepare, on the course that I teach, this access to higher education. So, people who want to become nurses and paramedics have this year's training, doing the qualification to go and start the university course. And the majority of people are British. We have now and again Germans, other nationalities, but that's rare. So, I don't know if that answered the question!

01:18:59 LRS: Yeah! There isn't any particular answer. It's just good to talk about it, isn't it? And in a way, from our conversation anyway, that's not part of your experience. It's just sort of acknowledging that recently, we are concerned about the fact that some people do, as you say, the media does seem to be telling us ...

01:19:35 NV: ... portraying people as more dangerous.

01:19:43 LRS: But we know from your history anyway, of Ukraine, that this is what happens in societies. That we find scapegoats, and we find people who are different from us, especially at a time of economic uncertainty, this tends to happen, and we have to guard against it. We have to recognise when it might be starting to happen.

01:20:18 NV: Yes. And the other thing, which I have also observed from personal experience, is that there shouldn't be any threat, really, to the jobs and things like that. Because in most places, and this is not just here in the UK, it's everywhere I've been, just from personal experience, in the Ukraine it's the same thing: you've got to know people. If you know people, you're going to have those opportunities!

01:20:45 LRS: Yes. You've got to know people, it's who you know!

01:20:49 NV: It's who you know. And if you're a good person, if you've got abilities, and if you've got the skills, then if you're the right person, they will tell you, they will take you, regardless of your nationality.

01:21:11 LRS: Yeah, and your great positivity, it shines out. The way that you put yourself out there, don't you, Nataliya, in a very positive way. And then you get back what you've put in?

01:21:30 NV: Yeah, you've got to be. If you do things for the greater good, then it should happen.

01:21:41 LRS: Yes. Thank you, Nataliya. Before we finish, is there anything else that you wanted to say before we finish the interview? Or any message that you would like to give to the people who, in the future, will be listening to your story?

01:22:08 NV: So, the last, final message would be: 'Go travel, experience!' The more you travel, the more you experience, the more people you meet, the more experiences shared, the better it is for everyone. And there is always a place, somewhere on earth, where you're going to feel at



home, regardless of whether you were born there, or you were not born there. You just will come there and you will feel, 'Yes, that's the place'. And that's how I felt about Bideford. I don't know, it's weird. But yeah, like you were saying earlier, about the Ozokerite paintings, which is like just a form ...

01:23:00 LRS: Yes. You find the same thing here, the mineral from Boryslav. We have a mineral here, called Bideford Black.

01:23:12 NV: So, my hometown starts with a B, and Bideford starts with a B, maybe it's all in the letter! But I feel at home, and when my children were growing up, and now they're teenagers, and they are saying that they want to flee the nest, and they don't want to be in North Devon. They want to go and experience the world ... I just don't understand why they don't like it here!

01:23:36 LRS: But they'll come back! They need to see the world like you did or find a home somewhere else.

01:23:43 NV: Find a home somewhere, and when you find that place, you will feel 'Okay, I can do my roots here'. Have my family, somewhere. And then, if any things change, then you'll be ready to move on. But at this stage, I think I have found my place and I'd be happy to even retire here!

01:24:09 LRS: That's great to hear. Nataliya. Thank you so much talking to us.

01:24:15 NV: Thank you.

End **01:24:17**