

## In a Young Face, the Price of War

Lynsey Addario, a photojournalist, noticed a boy idling in a town near the front line in Ukraine. Then she spent more than a week living with his family.



The photojournalist Lynsey Addario stayed in the home of Yegor, in eastern Ukraine, where his mother worked in a hospital. Andriy Dubchak



By Terence McGinley

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[Times Insider](#) explains who we are and what we do and delivers behind-the-scenes insights into how our journalism comes together.

In her 20 years of working as a photojournalist, Lynsey Addario has covered war and conflict in Afghanistan, Iraq, South Sudan, Congo, Yemen and Libya. To her, the most important moments to document are often away from the fighting — “the nuances that happen in the emptiness and the silence,” she said in a recent interview.

Ms. Addario has been covering the war in Ukraine for The New York Times since it began in February 2022. Last winter, in a town in the Donbas region, she met Yegor, one of the last remaining children in a community hollowed out by Russian artillery fire. Yegor’s mother, Lena, worked at a hospital treating soldiers. Shelling had threatened their ninth-floor apartment, and Lena and Yegor had moved into a small, one-story house with no running water and only sporadic electricity.

Ms. Addario, joined by a security adviser and Andriy Dubchak, a translator and videographer, spent a week with Lena, Yegor and his half sister, Angelina, this past spring. Ms. Addario’s photographs were recently published by The New York Times Magazine. In an interview, Ms. Addario discussed what drew her to Yegor’s story. This conversation has been edited for clarity.

### How did you find Yegor and his mother?

In January and early February, I was working in a town with Michael Schwartz, a Times reporter. We were covering injured soldiers who were going into a front line stabilization point. There was this 11-year-old boy learning how to suture trauma wounds with one of the military

medics. As a mother of an 11-year-old boy, I was gobsmacked. I thought of the parallels and the incredible differences between my son's life and the life of Yegor. I thought it would be fascinating to document the life of an 11-year-old living on the front line.

Had you ever heard an 11-year-old speak about the "pain in his soul" before?

No. I talked to his mother about what he was like before the war. She said he still thinks he's going to return to life before the war. He still thinks he is going to go to their summer home outside of Mariupol, and that he'll be able to swim in the lakes and play in the forest. He doesn't know that those forests are now mined. She said, I can't even tell him that, basically, that part of his childhood is over.



Observing the wartime lives of Lena and Yegor, left, Lynsey Addario could not help but think of her own son who is the same age as Yegor. Left: Lena; Right: Lynsey Addario

**Their family life was already disrupted. Then add in the presence of journalists who, at least in the beginning, were strangers. How were you able to find intimate moments in an unnatural arrangement?**

The first two days were a little awkward. I could sense that Lena was tired. She felt as if she had to provide for us. I wanted to give them a break, so we left.

During the second stint, she let her guard down. I am a very light sleeper, I think because I've covered war for 20 years. She would wake up at 5:30 a.m. and I would get up with her. We were the only people awake in the house. She would make coffee and call her mother. In a sense, it was almost a benefit that I didn't speak Russian because she knew I didn't understand anything. So she was very comfortable, and let me photograph everything.

**Were there moments when you had to put away your camera?**

There was a moment that happened on one of the first days, when I wasn't sure of the boundaries yet. I was in the back room, and she was sitting there, crying on the phone. I thought, Do I shoot, or not shoot? I took a few photographs of her crying, and then I followed her into the kitchen. She started talking to Yegor, and he started crying. I started shooting and he said, no. I think he was ashamed that he was emotional. Andriy explained that a medic they had known had been killed on the front line.

I didn't want to push it too much. I erred on the side of caution.

**How often did you think about your 11-year-old son during this assignment?**

All of the time. Part of what drives me is that I sort of walk around with this immense guilt that I've had the privilege of being born in the United States. I grew up with education, security, water, electricity — all of these things that so many people around the world have to fight for, or don't have. I'm often comparing myself and my family with my subjects.

I have two sons. One is 4 years old and one is 11. On some days, I have to fight to get my 11-year-old out the door to school. Then there's Yegor, who dreams about going to school.

**You've covered war for 20 years on several continents. What draws you to conflict?**

I'm not an adrenaline junkie. As I get older, and the more close calls I have, the more cautious I am. But I think it's important for me to cover war because there are so many injustices. Civilians are often the ones paying the highest price. They're unwittingly drawn into these wars as bystanders. Their lives are uprooted; their homes are destroyed; everything is torn apart.

Policymakers, people in positions of power, don't have access to the intimate moments of war, for security reasons. They can't go to the places we journalists can go. They can't hear the voices of people on the ground. And I think it's important for them to have the most comprehensive picture they can have as they make decisions.