NEWS RELEASE

Meet a Peoples Jewelers Team Member with Her Ukrainian Homeland on Her Mind and Family in Her Heart

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Editor's Note: Part of this interview was conducted in March 2022, at the outset of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. We revisited with Octavia Skots recently, as the war closes in on a full year of combat and overwhelming destruction in her homeland. As the war endures, Signet continues to stand in unity with those in the world calling for a peaceful resolution, and to pray for all those who are suffering and have sought refuge. Images in this story were captured by Octavia.

Octavia Skots is a jewelry consultant for Peoples Jewellers in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. She shares her perspective on the human side of the Russian/Ukrainian war as it escalates toward becoming one of the deadliest conflicts in eastern Europe since WWII.

Octavia was born and raised in the beautiful Ukrainian city of Lviv which is very close to Europe and the Polish border. Until the attack, she would return to her homeland twice a year to visit her family. Now, she emails and calls as often as she can, like thousands of other native Ukrainians watching from afar yet trying to stay close.

"After the second world war, nobody ever imagined that such a bad thing like a war between neighboring countries would happen," she says. "I was talking to my neighbors and friends right away after the war started. I called them right away. I was talking to people that had a possibility to run to Poland, and I was talking to people who were elderly, and they couldn't go anywhere."

Today, Octavia stays in constant contact with family and friends. "Luckily, all my connections are in the western part of Ukraine where the war is not as active. They are safe so far," she said. "But life is not the same anymore. A couple of times a day sirens will go off and electricity is on a four-hour schedule." She says she feels a sense of guilt at times for not being there for loved ones. "I listen to live news almost 24 hours a day to what is happening. In Toronto, there is a big community of Ukrainian refugees. We are always trying to help. Sunday's church is routinely full of newcomers," she said.

As a People-first company, one whose Purpose is to Inspire Love the world over, Signet Jewelers acted quickly to express opposition to the unprovoked invasion, **ceasing business operations with all Russian entities**. But the business decision wasn't enough. Signet put its Purpose into action to offer lifesaving help through a $1 million donation to the Red Cross from the Signet Love Inspires Foundation.

The Lviv National Opera House, Lviv, Ukraine

"I honestly did not expect such a step to help Ukraine," Octavia said about the donation. "[I thought] maybe they would support with words, but not such a great donation. I talked about this to all my friends and relatives because they would not understand."

With the war now entering its second year, the world sees what Octavia always knew existed: the resolve of the Ukrainian people. "I am the daughter of a political prisoner from the Soviet era," she said. "I was raised with love and pride for my country. We are a nation that respects our history and are looking forward to one day being the best European country. The U.S., Canada and Western European countries are helping with aid and supplies as well as opening their borders to millions of Ukrainians running from this war," she said. "These countries understand that Ukrainians are fighting not only for their own freedom, but they are fighting for the rest of Europe."

She added one last thought for peace and love. "What I am trying to tell people: do not hate each other. Are you Ukrainian? Are you Russian? Whoever you are, we are on this earth to be good to each other, to help each other, to love each other," she said. "Sooner or later, peace will be held. But the price of it is very high, unfortunately."

The donation made by the **Signet Love Inspires Foundation** went to the Red Cross, whose volunteers and physicians were at the Polish border to receive civilians, and whose tireless efforts and support for the millions of displaced Ukrainian citizens are not to be forgotten. Their work continues today.

Learn more about the **Signet Love Inspires Foundation** and the efforts of the **Red Cross in Ukraine**.