

Journalist Todd Bennett, on Saying Goodbye To A Friend in Odessa

"An exceptional Ukrainian man just joined their military. He's gay. For him, things look rough."

TEMPE, ARIZONA, UNITED STATES, April 12, 2022 /EINPresswire.com/ -- This piece reflects the experience of the author, journalist and Claw News Publisher, Todd Bennett.

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We met Tim in happier times. I remember asking how he felt about Ukraine's future. He said Ukraine was moving forward. Last night, he said he was joining the military. One other thing, Tim's gay.”

Todd Bennett

"My grandfather explained to me that there comes a time when fear of death fall to the wayside, replaced by a resolute sense of self. Of purpose. Of duty."

Mr. Bennett continues, "As with any situation involving a potential global war, there is much stress and tension in my family, as I am sure is the case with yours. It is not everyday you wake up on a sunny morning only to find out that one of the world's preeminent megalomaniacs has made a show of ordering his nuclear forces to high alert. For our friend Tim, they are very tangible. A native of

[Odessa](#), in the far south of [Ukraine](#), his area has been getting hit and some infrastructure has been destroyed. His access to messaging services is spotty. His family is terrified. He is 29 years old. He is not confident he will see 30."

"We first met Tim in much happier times, years ago when he was working in the cruise industry. We got to know him well on that trip, and learned he is absolutely brilliant, as he is fluent in seven languages. I remember asking him if he was worried about the future of Ukraine and he said he thought it was under control. He said things were much better, and the country was thriving and moving forward. Through the years we talked about his hopes and his dreams. I suggested with his linguistic skills he could, if he wanted to, apply to become a translator for us."

"Over time we spoke online sporadically, always warmly, and he displayed a sense of humanity I rarely saw in American men of his age. Recently, Tim and I spoke online, briefly, and he said he was not going to just sit and wait to be taken over. He was going to rejoin his country's military. One other thing, Tim is gay. And he is not going to turn his back on his country, or who he is. He knows what comes next."

In Donbas, a south-eastern Russian-backed separatist region of Ukraine, the LGBTQ community has already seen what happens if pro-Putin thugs take control. Before the Donbas war, the [gay community](#) was flourishing. But since 2013, Russia-backed separatists brought increased homophobic rhetoric to the region. In many cases, the LGBTQ community faced assault, detention, and violence.

Putin himself has a history of homophobia. While speaking at the annual meeting of the Valdai Discussion Club last year, he said "gender fluidity" is a "crime against humanity." He also signed a "gay propaganda" law in 2013, which pledged to uphold "traditional values."

Putin has since rolled back rights even further in Russia, the wannabe tough guy so concerned with the goings on in Russian bedrooms.

Russia formally banned same-sex marriage in 2021 — even though it hadn't been allowed there anyway — and it passed a law against so-called "gay propaganda" in 2013, which made it illegal to equate same-sex and heterosexual relationships or promote gay rights.

"Ukraine is a European country. We have a 10-year history of Pride marches, and as you know, in Russia, the situation is like opposite," Edward Reese, project assistant for Kyiv Pride, told CBS News. "We have totally different paths ... We see the changes in people's thoughts about human rights, LGBTQ, feminism and so on ... So definitely we don't want anything connected to Russia ... and we won't have them."

Bennett added, "Tim talked to me in a way he never has. He said that two friends had been killed by mortar fire, and that it was inevitable they would come and knock on his door. He is 100 percent confident if they find him and realize he is gay, they will execute him. And yet, he is equally confident that he is not long for this earth as a soldier. He has been an entertainer, a model, an artist, a laborer, brother, son, nephew, even an officer on a cruise ship, but has never faced combat."

Tim does not think he will fare well. Apparently, Ukraine is handing out weapons with bare minimum training, and brave people from all over are walking onto the battlefield. But as Odessa gets slowly eaten away, Tim is not going to wait for his fate.

"So Tim said goodbye, and to tell my lovely wife thank you for her friendship too, and that it had been an honor to know such nice Americans and that we gave him hope. The honor, Tim, is all mine. I too doubt we will speak again. I know the odds. I know the reality."

"So today, Mr. Bennett mused, "if someone aggravated about a line for coffee, or complaining about gas prices, or that their favorite Strawberry Chocolate Banana Caramel Lemon S'mores Oreo cereal is out of stock, talk about about Tim. Say that they are lucky that your biggest complaint is a wait for your coffee. Tell them they are lucky they can buy fuel. Tell them to eat some Corn Flakes. But above all, tell these people that while they are complaining about what

ultimately are privileged first world problems, the worlds of entire families are coming to an end."

"Tim said he is going to learn how to shoot and flank, and take cover. He is 29 years old. He does not think he will see 30. But if that birthday is going to be denied him, it will be on his own terms. He will not wait for a knock on the door. It has been a privilege my friend, to have known you and shared each other's culture, and to have learned from you."

When a resolute sense of self takes hold, the fear of death falls by the wayside.

Purpose takes precedent. Duty becomes an identity.

If he is going to die, then it will be his hand doing the door knocking.

-ROC

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