

I Want to Be a Ukrainian by Margaret Wheatley

When I come of age

When I get over being a teen-ager

When I take my life seriously

When I grow up

I want to be a Ukrainian.

When I come of age

I want to stand happily in the cold

for days beyond number,

no longer numb to what I need.

I want to hear my voice

Rise loud and clear above

The icy fog, claiming myself.

It was day fifteen of the protest, and a woman standing next to her car was being interviewed. Her car had a rooster sitting on top of it. She said, "We've woken up and we're not leaving till this rotten government is out." It is not recorded if the rooster crowed.

When I get over being a teen-ager

When I no longer complain or accuse

When I stop blaming everybody else

When I take responsibility

I will have become a Ukrainian

The Yushchenko supporters carried bright orange banners which they waved vigorously on slim poles. Soon after the protests began, the government sent in thugs hoping to create violence. They also carried banners, but theirs were hung on heavy clubs that could double as weapons.

When I take my life seriously

When I look directly at what's going on

When I know that the future doesn't change itself

That I must act

I will be a Ukrainian

"Protest that endures" Wendell Berry said, "is moved by a hope far more modest than that of public success: namely, the hope of preserving qualities in one's own heart and spirit that would be destroyed by acquiescence."

When I grow up and am known as a Ukrainian

I will move easily onto the streets

Confident, insistent, happy to preserve the qualities

Of my own heart and spirit.

In my maturity I will be glad to teach you

The cost of acquiescence

The price of silence

The peril of retreat

"Hope," said Vaclav Havel, "is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something is worth doing regardless of how it turns out."

I will teach you all that I have learned

The strength of fearlessness

The peace of conviction

The strange source of hope

And I will die well, having been a Ukrainian.

** I wrote this in 2005 to honor the Orange Revolution in Ukraine that began November 22, 2004 after a very fraudulent presidential election (based on independent and local data). Although Yushchenko had a clear majority, the opposition pro-Russian leader Yanukovych was declared winner. Yushchenko then called for massive protests, sit-ins, and strikes. The scale of the protests were unprecedented. On some days, up to a million people took to the streets in freezing weather. In response, the Ukraine Supreme Court invalidated the fraudulent election in early December and called for a run-off on December 26, 2004. This election was free of fraud, and Yushchenko won; the Orange Revolution came to a peaceful conclusion with his inauguration end of January 2005. Yushchenko served as President until 2010 as a pro-European leader, although his term was filled with internal conflicts. In 2010, his opponent Yanukovych won the presidency and instituted pro-Russian policies that resulted in the 2014 Revolution of Dignity that Ukrainians now mark as the beginning of the war with Russia (and the establishment of the separatist regions of Donetsk and Luhansk that Putin claimed as the reason for war now.) Over 18% of Ukrainians took part in the Orange Revolution.