



# Wilton Manors Gay Couple Opens Their Doors to Ukrainians Fleeing the War

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Steve Rothaus

Wilton Manors couple James “Jim” and Robert “Robbie” Moon have long been leaders in the LGBT community, throughout South Florida and around the world.

Jim, a Miami attorney and Navy veteran, serves as co-chair and national board member of A Wider Bridge, a New York-based organization that connects LGBTQ groups in the United States and Israel; chair of the SAVE Foundation and a board member of SAVE. Robbie, his husband of seven years, is an interior designer.

Days after Russia attacked Ukraine in late February, the Moons turned to social media to find ways to help embattled Ukrainians.

“Watching everything that’s happening in Ukraine, it broke our hearts,” said Jim, 54. “We felt we wanted to do something. Even though refugee status hadn’t been given to Ukrainians, I felt maybe there were some who were stuck here and couldn’t go home. Like, they were traveling on a tourist visa and found out their town was invaded and couldn’t go home.

“I joined a Facebook group called North America for Ukraine. That’s what you do these days. You try to find someone who wants to help. I joined the group and made a post: ‘Hey, if anybody needs help, I’m in Wilton Manors.’”

Within hours, the group put the Moons in touch with Dasha Shareiko, 21, and her mother, Vita Dagaeva, 52, who desperately wanted to escape the Ukrainian capital city of Kyiv.

“Dasha, hi! I live in Wilton Manors. I actually commute to Miami for work,” Jim quickly messaged the younger woman. “I have a guest room and may be able to help!”



Immediately, Dasha called Jim, who then FaceTimed her back “so she could see the house” and the Moons’ dog, Boomer.

“Once I talked to her on FaceTime, and we showed her the house, everything clicked. I got a really good feeling and that was it. The rest was history,” said Robbie, 41.

The Moons also disclosed something else to Dasha:

“We told her we were a gay couple, to make sure that wasn’t an issue with her,” Jim said. “That was low on the list of her concerns. When people are bombing you, you have other issues to think about.”

What Dasha didn’t reveal at the time: She’s a lesbian.

A month later, Dasha finds that whole conversation a bit amusing. Back in Kyiv, being queer is no big deal, she said.

“I have an ex-girlfriend. She lives in St. Petersburg. No one had questions about it. Nobody cared. It wasn’t positive, it wasn’t negative, it was just neutral,” said Dasha, who is out to her family and friends back in Ukraine.

“We do have Pride parades,” she said. “Several years ago, there was a lot of drama. There were police involved, not like here. They were not participating in the parade. They were trying to hold back those on the other side of the conflict — those against Pride.”

Dasha said that even though Americans had been told during the winter that Russia was about to attack Ukraine, few in Kyiv really understood war was coming.

“We were talking about this with Jim and he said, ‘You had to know.’ I said, ‘No, no one knew. No one expected.’ I had the most mundane Thursday. The same as Wednesday. The whole week.

“On Thursday, I remember my mom waking me up at 6 a.m. I was mad at my mom because I still had one hour on my alarm. She looked at me in the way mothers usually do, when something wrong has happened. ‘It’s war.’ That’s it. All the words I heard from her.”



Dasha searched social media for “war in Ukraine.”

“I saw reports of bombings near Kyiv. heard the explosions. I saw all the destruction. The bombs. I texted everyone, not ‘Hello’ or ‘Good morning,’ but ‘What do we do?’”

Dasha — still dressed in her pajamas — and Vita took their car for gas and drove 20 minutes looking for an open station. Finally, they found one with a three-hour wait for fuel.

Then, they stopped at a grocery for food. “By that time, I was nearly hysterical. I tried to cry but I didn’t have time for that. I had to hold it in.”

“Several hours after we got home, I sat with my mom and said, ‘OK, what now?’ She said we were going to evaluate our options.”

Before COVID hit two years ago, Dasha and Vita had planned a road trip to Romania. Suddenly, they realized that’s how they’d escape Ukraine: “We already had the route planned and it seemed like a safer place to be,” Dasha said.

They gathered the few belongings they could take: “Two backpacks and a bag. I have a laptop. We also brought some jewelry, some gold. We thought if we have no other way to get money. Which we never did. It’s our B plan,” Dasha said. “We left on the second day of the bombing, Friday, Feb. 25.”

They barely made it out in time: “A couple of hours after we reached the Romanian border, after we had just crossed the bridge, our military blew it up,” Dasha said.

She doesn’t have a driver’s license, so her mom drove them all the way to Istanbul. “We couldn’t leave our car in Turkey, so we drove it back to Bulgaria, some random place, some small village, God knows where. We took a bus back to Istanbul.”

There, they bought two plane tickets from Istanbul to Miami, where 10 days after they fled Kyiv, the Moons would meet them.

“When they flew in, when I got to the airport, there were two news crews there,” Moon recalls — not to greet Dasha and Vita, but to cover the arrival of a [Ukrainian family of 11](#) being met by Miami-Dade Mayor Daniella Levine Cava “and a lot of Orthodox Jews.”



Vita, a professional cook, and Dasha, a writer and casino game designer, are officially in the United States on tourist visas and unable to work. They are helping pay back the Moons by cooking and caring for their three-bedroom home.

Dasha said that since coming to South Florida, she is numb.

“I haven’t felt a thing for a month. I wanted to cry for two weeks straight. I didn’t have time for that. I wanted to call everyone, but I didn’t have the energy or the emotional capacity to do that. After a month, you have nothing left in you.”

Her father and brother are still in Ukraine, serving in the military. Her grandparents and sister-in-law — who gave birth to a baby boy in March — have scrambled to different parts of the country for safety.

“Almost every member of our family is in a different place in Ukraine,” Vita said. “My mother is 80 years old and alone in Kyiv, because we couldn’t take her with us. She screamed and cried and wouldn’t leave because it’s her home.”

Both Dasha and Vita have no idea when they might go back or if they even want to.

“If we return home, there’s going to be nothing there,” Dasha said. “A third of the country has fled. The Ukrainian economy was already in ruin. After everything that has happened, everyone deserves a good life.”

## HOW TO HELP

[Jim and Robbie Moon have set up a GoFundMe](#) to raise money for Dasha Shareiko and Vita Dagaeva’s expenses in America. So far, about \$8,000 has been raised.

Read more at:

<https://southfloridagaynews.com/Feature/wilton-manors-gay-couple-opens-their-doors-to-ukrainians-fleeing-the-war.html>.