

Greetings from an alternate universe: Vancouver Island, stretching 400 kilometers into the Pacific ocean off Canada's west coast. It provides splendid views of cobalt seas and densely forested mountains, and is about as relaxed and pleasant as any place on this planet. People smile and make small talk easily, they apologize for no reason, and seem to harbor no obvious resentment towards me as a brutish American. [Canadian politeness is legendary; literally as I was typing these words, seated outside a cafe, another customer came out and kindly informed me that the coffee I'd ordered was ready.]

Although I was last in Ukraine over six weeks ago, it's never far from my thoughts. I wake each morning to messages from friends there discussing what to buy for the troops, or what havoc the Russian barbarians wreaked in the past 24 hours. There's a Ukrainian restaurant a few miles from here, and now and then I spot a blue and yellow flag or a bumper sticker, although much less frequently than I would in cosmopolitan Washington DC. And periodically I hear some sound which reminds me of an air raid alarm, until a nanosecond later I realize it's an ambulance or a passing car radio.

These days it's considered the profoundest wisdom to "be present", to live one's life in the moment. It's touted as a path to spiritual and emotional growth. Personally I reject that as borderline narcissism. My life ultimately has no meaning except as it relates to other people, near and far, known and unknown. It's what the 16th century English poet John Donne meant when he wrote:

No man is an island,
Entire of itself;
Every man is a piece of the continent,
A part of the main.

Some parts of that archipelago are here in sunny Vancouver, while others are huddled in a dank basement hoping the next Russian mortar isn't the last sound they'll hear.

Thanks for listening to me ramble. Here are photos of some of the things you've funded over the past week: car tires, a StarLink satellite terminal, and communications cabling.

I plan to return to Odesa in September and believe many of you will be with me in spirit. Next time I write, I'll provide a bit of an update on how I think the war is going. Spoiler alert - not badly, but it's complicated.

Slava Ukraini!

