

For how long do you live in our country? Did it take long to get used to Ukrainian ways, traditions, customs, and mentality? What is the most fascinating thing for you here, and what still puzzles you? Can you recall any funny/amusing stories or incidents based on cultural differences between us?

My husband and I arrived in Ukraine a little over 3 years ago. We adapted fairly easily to living in Kyiv, partly because we had spent so many years living in Budapest, Moscow, Vilnius and Tbilisi, and partly because we were warmly welcomed by Ukrainians. The five women who work with me at our beautiful residence in Podil, were particularly helpful in introducing me to the country and to its many traditions and customs. I am constantly amazed at the variety I find in Ukraine. It is a country of enormous regional and cultural differences.

How do you participate in the life/activities of the Embassy? For instance, are you involved in preparations for official receptions?

I try to serve as my husband's partner and participate actively on some of his trips throughout Ukraine. I have been to Kharkiv, Chernivtsi, Zakarpattia, Lviv, Chernobyl, Dnipropetrovsk, Odessa and Crimea with him. Since I am a biostatistician and nurse by training, I have a particular interest in visiting health care facilities, especially those involved in women's and children's health care.

I oversee the functioning of the Ambassador's residence, supervising the work of our residence manager, chef, and other staff, and keep all of our financial records. In addition to being where we live, the residence is the primary setting for the embassy's very busy representational program, which primarily includes buffet receptions and sit-down dinners and lunches. With our keen interest in food, we have collected a library of cookbooks during our 41 years in diplomatic service and try to provide a real variety of dishes to our guests.

Our residence manager, chef, and I plan every official reception that takes place at our residence. This includes choosing the food that is cooked and served at our residence and the style in which it is presented. Almost all of the food that is served at official receptions in our residence is made at the residence. We even make all of the food that is served at our 4th of July reception, which is held in the backyard of our residence. An average of 800 people attend our national day reception each year, making it our largest reception of the year.

Every year we pick a different part of our country as the theme for our 4th of July reception. Last year, for example, we chose the lower Mississippi River, and prepared food from St. Louis, Memphis, and New Orleans. We had a U.S. Navy band play traditional American music from that part of our country and had posters of great Americans who came from there.

Have you taken a job while in Ukraine, or do you take care of your household? Have you acquired any new interests/hobbies in Ukraine (like, say, cooking local dishes, or travel to particular destinations here, or collecting embroidered shirts, etc.)?

Since I do have a graduate degree in Biostatistics, I did take a contract job with USAID for approximately a year to evaluate the efficacy of a USAID-funded health NGO in reducing infant and maternal mortality. Last fall I became a member of the steering committee of ASCK, the Ambassadors' Spouses' Club of Kyiv. As such, I write the monthly newsletters and keep the records for the club.

I have developed a particular appreciation for the beautiful "ruzhniki" which are made in so many parts of this country and which recognize the unique regional traditions of this country. We have a number of these beautiful handmade works, which we use to decorate our tables in the Ambassador's residence. They will always be a part of our lives and grace our home when we return to the US.

We have heard that you had visited Ukraine long before coming here as the Ambassador's spouse – and it was because of some kind of cooperation with Ukrainian NGO's that deal with public health. Do you continue this activity? What, in particular, does it involve?

I first came to Kyiv in 1997, when I worked part-time for an USAID-funded health NGO in Moscow. I came to train doctors and nurses, who were working with this NGO, on how to operate the database application I designed to collect data on the women who received health care at their clinics.

Then in 2007 when I was working as a consultant for another USAID-funded health NGO in Tbilisi, I came to Ukraine again to speak at a conference in Zhytomyr, which brought together doctors and nurses from Georgia, South Ossetia, and Ukraine for training in modern methods of maternal and infant care during childbirth, which had been approved by the WHO.

The above activities were of short duration. I have not had the opportunity to work again in this field.

How do you celebrate winter holidays? Have you learned any of the Ukrainian traditions celebrating Christmas and New Year? Maybe, you will include our Old Style New Year into your family holiday calendar? What about other holidays celebrated in Ukraine – like March 8, Ivana Kupala (St.John's Eve), etc.?

This year we went to Washington to celebrate both Christmas and New Year's holidays with our daughters, son-in-law, and granddaughter. She is two years old and one of the great joys of my life. It was really great fun to make and paint traditional American Christmas sugar cookies with her and to be with her on Christmas Day and share presents.

But before we left, we had a holiday party at our residence for the people who work at our embassy, both Ukrainians and Americans.

Right after we first arrived, I remember attending a typical Ukrainian Christmas-Eve meal with other ambassadors' spouses, hosted by your previous First Lady, which was quite festive. We have participated in a Maslenia celebration, and every Easter our staff makes us the traditional Pascha cakes and eggs, which we enjoy eating.

As we have travelled, we have been introduced to many customs and foods from the different regions of Ukraine. I have learned a lot and have many great memories of the Ukrainian people I have met from one end of the country to the other.