

## My life with Oksana

One of the most persistent myths among men is the notion that somewhere there is a land of perfect women. They told wild fanciful stories about the perfection of Japanese women as GIs started to return with war brides. They spoke about "yellow fever," the incurable affinity men had for Vietnamese women. And, of course, Ukrainian women are the subject of their own set of legends.

I speak from considerable experience in saying that nowhere in the world do there exist women who are without ego, who are totally dedicated to pleasing their men. The best you can hope for is a woman who is smart enough to recognize that there is more happiness to be found within a marriage than outside of it and who is willing to do her part.

Oksana is an exception among women everywhere in that she knows the deal and knows what she wants. She wanted a marriage in which she would be appreciated and taken care of, and she wanted children. She wanted a companion, somebody she could talk to. She wanted love, and wanted to offer love. That's what we have.

We disagree on a number of small issues, questions that come up every day. Does Eddie have to drink water before breakfast? Is Coca-Cola poison? Should we let him dress the way he wants and risk being too cold in winter or sunburned in summer? Somehow we manage to cover the same ground endlessly without coming to agreement but without getting mad at each other.

Oksana's education is in music and early childhood development. We have often conducted music classes in our house, and she has worked for private music schools here in Kyiv. The money is minimal, but she enjoys learning and being with children. For the past two years her passion has been Orff musical pedagogy and Orff instruments.

Oksana has adopted some of my interests. She joined Toastmasters about the time we met, in 2009, and served two years ago as the president of the Russian speaking club. She won the all Ukraine speech contest with a speech about children in music. Since then she has let it slide, spending more time with her instruments. She has learned the violin and attended a number of seminars on music instruction.

The constants in her life have been her dedication to family and her garden. We bought the land on which we built our house in May 2011. She immediately planted a garden, one which entailed my carrying endless numbers of 6 L bottles of water up from the lake to water the cucumbers, tomatoes, squash and other crops. The garden changes its configuration every year, but the fact of the garden is a constant. Last year we tore down the old summerhouse, freeing up some more space. She also had the apple trees pruned. We have far more apples than anybody could ever eat, and the trees were so high we couldn't pick them. That freed up space to plant apricots, peaches, cherries and pears. It also lets through more sunshine for the raspberries, tomatoes, cucumbers, squash, pumpkins, garlic, onions, herbs and so on. There is no economic argument in favor of the garden – everything she grows is abundant, delicious and cheap in the farmers markets. As I write this eggplant, squash, carrots and potatoes all cost about \$0.20 a pound. The deeper argument is that Ukrainians are children of the soil, and Oksana is a genuine Ukrainian.