

Connected

by Story by Karen Pillsworth

“Speak to me of normal things Karen,” said my friend Yulia who runs a Montessori school in Ukraine. I met her during our Montessori training in Kingston, NY and we have been friends ever since. But what does one do for a friend who is so far away? For a friend whose family, students, and community worry every day as the sirens of war fill the air? As a storyteller I did what I do best....tell stories.

Every other Wednesday morning I “Zoomed” at 7 a.m. with my new friends in Ukraine, high school students who are doing their best to find security in “normal things” like going to school and being teenagers. The Ministry of Education asked teachers to return to teaching in whatever way they could so Yulia began teaching on Zoom. Gradually, some of her students returned to the school building.

When we began there was much shyness. The students spoke English with varying degrees of fluency. I found that short tales like The Tortoise and the Hare were easier for them to understand and talk about. I wanted them to see that we, the world, are connected by story so I told them tales from Romania, India, Japan, and North America. They were so appreciative of this small gift of story on Wednesday mornings.

But then the best thing happened! The students began to share THEIR stories with me. Stories of holidays and traditions, history, and lost dogs, stories that connected us across the miles and beyond the war. They stumbled but kept on telling. School is out for the summer. I’m not sure what that means in a world where tomorrow may not come. But for today I hope they have come to know that part of “normal” is knowing you always have a story to share and to keep sharing it wherever you can.