

EXCLUSIVE
By Lord Ashcroft
in Lviv



THE speech is inspirational, powerful and emotional in equal measure. The words would not have been out of place from Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky if he had been addressing the US Congress seeking further aid for his country.

It begins: “Where are your eyes, World? Can you not see? People are dying, people are dying every day! People are getting killed for no reason. Everywhere, at home, shopping centres and at the playgrounds. Just tell me why? Why do Ukrainians have to suffer these terrorist attacks from Russia?”

But these moving words are, in fact, written not by a politician, a diplomat or a senior military officer but by a 15-year-old Ukrainian girl now attending a British school.

The quality of the address, penned by Anastasiia Kapustian in her second language, left teachers astonished.

Now there are moves to try to get it published all over the world to inspire support for her homeland.

Anastasiia’s speech continues: “Have you ever heard the sound of a bomb falling? No? Well, every child in Ukraine knows the difference between the C-300 and OFZAB [bombs]. I hope you never become familiar with these sounds.

“Yet for Ukrainians, each of these bombs are associated with death, each of these bombs stole someone’s life.

“Someone’s mother will never hear the voice of her child, someone’s dad/brother/sister/mum will never come back home and will say how they love each other. And all of this is happening because of the terrorist state, Russia, which no one can stop because of their power.

“For most of the world it’s just a game in which case they just play with people’s lives. Of course no one cares about Ukraine, of course no one heard about Ukraine before the most recent invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

“Unfortunately only Ukrainians know that it started in 2014, again when the terrorist Russia occupied Crimea and Donbas. No one was interested in Ukraine but when [Vladimir] Putin said that he would like to take not only Ukraine, but other countries, everybody started to worry about their lives.

“You might be questioning why I’m so desperate to talk about that? Why am I shouting for help while everybody is helping Ukraine already? You know what, of course I’m thankful for everything people have done and still doing for the Ukrainian and Ukrainian people, but how should I feel when I’m alone in a different country?

“Tell me how I should feel and why I should stop shouting about everything that Russia is doing in my country while my whole family is at risk of getting killed every day! My brother is in the army. Tell me why my brother who was only 22 had to go to the army to protect our country and our family?

EVERY day he risks his life to protect mine! Why can’t I just go for a walk with him without worrying that he has to leave and go to the front line again! And again I’ll have to wait for ages to call him because he is going without any electronic devices. Everyday I’m praying for his life. Just why should I wait for every holiday to go home and see my family? Very simple example: every child in Europe when they miss their family can come to them and give a hug, but it’s not the case with me. I live in the [second] biggest country in



PRAYING FOR HIS SAFETY: Nastya’s brother, Dima, is fighting for Ukraine

Where are your eyes, world? Can you not see? People are dying every day

As the Ukraine conflict drags on, a passionate cris de coeur for our ongoing support for the embattled nation. But is its author a politician or soldier? No, writes Lord Ashcroft, a 15-year-old schoolgirl whose words should inspire us all

Europe and I have to wait, I have to wait and pray that Russians wouldn’t kill my family, for me to see them again.

“However, just imagine how I feel when I read the news about a new terrorist [terrorist act] which killed a lot of people and I try to call my family and instead of hearing their voices I am forced to hear the beeping sound of a call unable to be connected, but for how long? Forever?

“When I hear those beeps my heart stops... and my breath gets slower and slower to suppress the suffering.

“I’m crying for help! Do I ask you to go there and join the army? No. I only ask you to go to the protests. Wanting to draw attention to the genocide of my people! I’m doing that, I’m doing that because I know what it feels like to lose people, people who were fighting to protect us, people who gave their lives just to give us a chance to survive. People are dying, people are dying every day! Shout about Ukraine. Stop Russia from killing people!”

With the consent of her mother, I interviewed Anastasiia, who is better known by the abbreviated name of

Nastya. She told me: “For my English exam, we had to prepare a speech on any topic. I didn’t hesitate for long – I wanted to be heard; I wanted people to remember Ukraine. I wrote my speech in class and handed it in for review. When my teacher read it, she was surprised – shocked even. She sent it to other teachers.”

As well as being impressed, teachers at Alderman White School in Bramcote, Nottinghamshire, were concerned by the pressures that Nastya was under with her family still in war-torn Ukraine.

She was asked to speak to a member of staff responsible for safeguarding staff.

“She asked how I was feeling and if I needed more support at school. But I always go to school with a smile on my face.”

Before the all-out war, which began more than two and a half years ago, Nastya, who has turned 16 since writing the essay, was living in Kharkiv, the second largest city in Ukraine and close to what is now the front-line of the war with Russia.

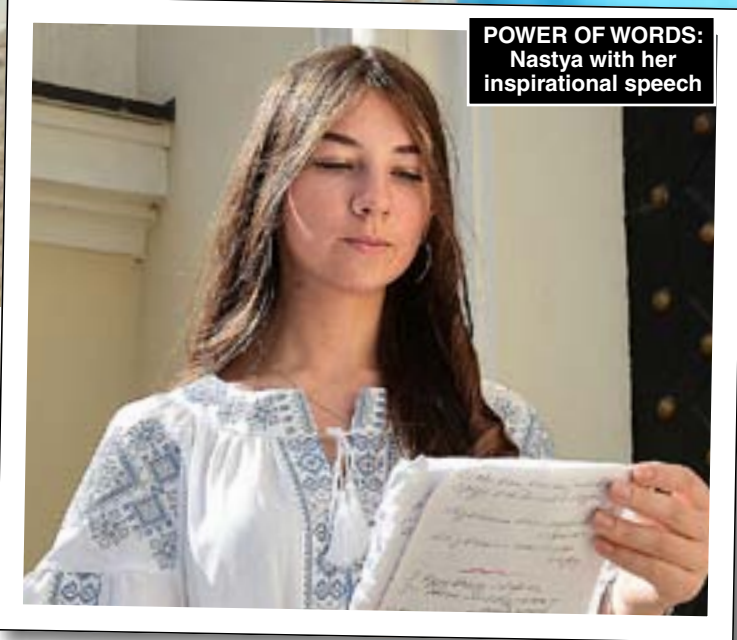
Then aged 13 she lived in a house with her mother, Valentyna, and her brother, Dmytro, affectionately known as “Dima”, who was studying at an agriculture college.

“On February 24, [2022], at about 5am,

we were woken up by explosions,” Nastya recalls. “The city was coming under artillery fire. The explosions were getting closer and closer. The house started to shake. The next day a rocket flew into the yard of the 12-storey building next door to us, cutting off all their communications and shattering their windows and balconies.”

Nastya sheltered with her family as the battle raged for days.

“I stayed with Dima, and my mother told us to turn the cellar in the kitchen, where we kept jars with pickles and jams, into a bomb shelter,” she continues. “We brought down a carpet, mattresses, blankets, water and candles. But it was still very cold and damp,”



POWER OF WORDS: Nastya with her inspirational speech

she said. “On the third day, my mother said, ‘Let’s stop sitting at home, we have to do something.’”

So she and Dima went to the local hospital to donate blood for injured soldiers and civilians from the city. Nastya’s mother also toured the city delivering food to those in need.

Eventually, Nastya and her mother moved to Krakow, Poland, where they had contacts, while Dima stayed in the family house with his maternal grandparents who lived nearby and who did not want to be evacuated. However, in May 2022, Nastya was offered a place at Alderman White School and a temporary home with a sponsor family nearby. Her mother decided to return to Ukraine after her son volunteered to join the army.

Valentyna tried to persuade Dima not to enlist, saying he should finish his studies.

“Dima replied that if every man didn’t stand up to defend our country, there would be no home to return to tomorrow,” says Nastya. “That’s how my life abroad started. I

enjoy school and my friends but I look forward to school holidays so my mother can come, and we go home to Ukraine.”

Two of her brother’s friends have been killed in the war after they volunteered for the army. “When Andrey and then Maxim were killed, something died in me too,” says Nastya. She prays every day for the safety of her family.

NASTYA said of her visits back to Kharkiv in school holidays: “The streets are empty, there are no children playing. But it’s still my city. I am inspired by its energy.”

Her speech was brought to my attention by Marcus Dixon, a co-founder of the Ukraine Freedom Company, a British voluntary group supplying aid to Ukraine.

He was shown it when he met Nastya and her mother to deliver medical aid.

“I was blown away by it,” he says. “Nastya is remarkable: she has these steely blue eyes that are matched by a determination to do as much as she can for her homeland. I want this speech to be published all around the

world.” The Ukraine Freedom Company is now raising funds to replace equipment and supplies for Dima’s military unit, a “special operations force”.

Meanwhile, Nastya has returned to Nottinghamshire to start another school year. “We’re not sure if I’ll be able to stay with my sponsor family and complete my A-levels but I really hope so,” she adds.

“My dream is to go to university in the UK. One day I want to be a journalist, to inform people, to communicate.”

However, there is no doubt ultimately where Nastya’s heart and future lie.

“I’m sincerely grateful to this country, the British family who invited me here and teachers from the school who have supported me. As much as I feel cared for in Britain, I want to go home one day and continue with a normal life in Ukraine.”

● Lord Ashcroft KCMG PC is an international businessman, philanthropist, author and pollster. For more information on his work, visit lordashcroft.com. Follow him on X/Facebook @LordAshcroft. Nastya requests that anyone wanting to donate towards aid for Ukraine should visit ukrainefreedomcompany.org

ON THE WINGS OF HOPE: Nastya Kapustian in Ukraine

‘The streets of Kharkiv are empty, no children are playing, but it’s still my city’