

## **This Canada Day special for Ukraine immigrants; Mother and son who came to Canada in '16 recently became Canadian citizens**

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During Russia's invasion of Crimea in 2014, Mila Wagner realized that it was too dangerous to raise her son in her home country of Ukraine.

For two years, while she lived in Kyiv, she planned her journey to Canada, gathering the appropriate documentation and finding a city to land in under the advisement of her friends who moved overseas in 2002.

"It was quite challenging to move to a different country, there was a language barrier," said Wagner. "I was not familiar with the way things work in Canada. I had no friends and family as a safety net."

Wagner and her three-year-old son Nikita landed in Calgary in October 2016. While there she studied English and worked mainly cleaning jobs to cover rent and living expenses. While she was at work she had to hire a babysitter for her young son as she juggled her studies, as well.

The challenge of starting over was daunting, said Wagner, but she knew it would pay off.

While in Kyiv, Wagner worked in the engineering field for 10 years, but when she came to Canada her credentials did not transfer. Her inability to find a job in her professional field forced her to reconsider what she would be able to do.

"I wasn't able to find a job in the professional field, because my credentials and my experience, that was not full accepted here in Canada," said Wagner.

After meeting her now-husband, Patrick Wagner, she decided to go back to school in 2018 and attended Lethbridge College to become a civil engineering technologist.

When she graduated in 2020, she landed a job as a civil technologist in training at MPE Engineering Ltd. in Lethbridge.

In April of this year, Wagner was presented the CEO award from the Association of Science and Engineering Technology Professionals of Alberta (ASET) for two initiatives that she had worked on: a fee waiver for engineering technologists with refugee status, and a competency-based assessment program that gives other engineering technology professionals from other countries a faster route towards their careers in Alberta.

That same month, Wagner and her son took the oath of Canadian citizenship. This Saturday marks her first Canada Day as a Canadian citizen.

"I had tears in my eyes during this ceremony, and seeing my son become a Canadian citizen meant a lot to me," said Wagner.

While the past seven years have had hardships, Wagner said she is still hoping to bring her parents, who currently live in Kyiv, to Canada.

She said right now her home country is unsafe. Where her parents live in Kyiv, there are threats of missiles that could potentially cause lasting damage to the apartment building they're in. Wagner said she has already gathered the necessary visas for her parents, but her father's poor health condition means he cannot leave until he is better.

Although this Canada Day will be bittersweet for her, she said the minute her parents are in good health she hopes to fly them to Canada.

"It's unpredictable. You don't know if something will happen the next second or the next day. I just pray as much as they can so they will stay safe."