

EPISODE THREE

LET THE BIRDS LOOSE



**AS I
AM**



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EPIISODE THREE - LET THE BIRDS LOOSE

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FILM SUMMARY

Bogdan Senyk, from L'Arche Ukraine, grew up under a government that denied his existence. In this episode, he explains his method of civil resistance: joy. His choices each day, to release his birds from their cages, to joke with friends, to greet strangers on the streets, reveal the undeniable dignity and wisdom of a man who is determined to live a full and fulfilling life in the face of erasure from history.



"THERE ARE NOT MANY WAYS
TO FIGHT A WAR WITHOUT
CARRYING A STONE IN YOUR
SOUL"

-Bogdan Senyk

FILM THEMES

- **Civic participation**

Some scenes early in this episode show Bogdan voting in a local election. Access to a political and civic engagement has been denied to people with intellectual disabilities all around the world. In Ukraine, an article in the Constitution asserts that people deemed "incapable" by the courts shall not have the right to vote. This law permits an exclusion from political processes that contradicts the essence of equality captured in other articles of law on elections in Ukraine. Bogdan's participation in the election and his political views are especially significant in light of the historical and contemporary barriers that impede people with disabilities in exercising their rights.

- **Expectations**

Bogdan has a physical disability that requires him to wear a prosthetic leg. The general expectation might be that someone with a prosthetic leg would comment on the difficulty of walking on steep inclines. In reality, Bogdan says that his feet are "meant for mountains." He experiences his body as especially suited for mountain walking even though he needs support while walking in the Carpathian Mountains.

- **Anger**

Bogdan talks about how he chooses not to be angry because he does not want to “carry stones in his soul.” He explains that anger can make one forget some of the joyful aspects of life. Furthermore, Bogdan believes that unchecked anger can even lead to death. Since our emotions change the way we experience the world, choosing to reject anger is a powerful and controversial method for managing one’s experience.

- **Resistance**

The threats posed by war elicit varied responses. Some rally behind the effort to fight while others protest, some rush to enlist while others are forcibly drafted. Bogdan believes in protecting the sovereignty of his country, especially given the history of foreign occupation. However, Bogdan wants peace. He is primarily concerned with resistance and survival. How can he avoid being a victim of the collateral damage created by war? He chooses to preserve his joyful habits: greeting people, playing tricks, and letting the birds loose.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. From your perspective, what does it mean to “carry a stone” in one’s soul?
2. Some of Bogdan’s ideas and observations are surprising because they challenge general expectations. Think about examples in your life where expectations and reality are out of sync. What are some of your ideas or opinions that others have found surprising?
3. What are some ways that anger could destroy a person? What methods could one adopt to avoid being destroyed by anger? What are some actions or gestures we see Bogdan doing that serve as acts of resistance against anger?
4. Often, the public thinks of people with intellectual disabilities as naive. As you watched the video and read the subtitles, what was your dominant impression of Bogdan?
5. Bogdan mentions the things he cannot enjoy when he carries anger. What kinds of joys fade when you are carrying anger? How could such an emotion impact what you notice about your daily life?

BEHIND THE SCENES

Some might expect that a person with cognitive difficulties would be less capable of developing an informed political opinion. In reality, Bogdan shares his complex and cultivated political perspective with confidence, even when others disagree with him. Unfortunately, some people even cast doubt on whether these ideas are Bogdan’s. They suggest that someone told Bogdan to say these things. The opening credits of the film refer to Bogdan as the writer. This was not a generous gesture. The director, who openly disagreed with Bogdan’s ideas about anger, relied on Bogdan to draft the film script because of his clear positions and his ability to assert them.

IMAGINE THE WORLD DIFFERENTLY

There are any number of wars going on in the world at a given time. Sometimes it is hard to perceive the impact of wars on our daily lives and sometimes it may seem as if the wars have no impact on us if our nations or even our relatives are not directly involved. If this is the case, think about smaller conflicts that you know of or have been involved in and that have the potential to arouse the kind of anger that is like a stone in one’s soul. Spend some time considering the ways conflicts or wars affect your daily life. Name some choices you can make to preserve, find, or create joy for yourself or others affected by conflicts or war?