



## ZAPORIZKA OBLAST LIVING LIBRARIES

"Living Libraries" are events where people of different backgrounds act as books, and students "read" these books in a relaxed and friendly atmosphere. Such events have been shown to be excellent instruments for breaking stereotypes and eliminating prejudices. Last year IOM (International Organization for Immigration), a world-wide NGO, held several such events in western Ukraine. Saturday's Living Library was the first to be held in eastern Ukraine.

Living Libraries provide an opportunity for students to connect personally with people of widely differing nationalities, life histories, traditions and social situations. Everyone participating is able to recognize how much all of us are similar, and to understand each other as people rather than only as statistics or images from the media.

The Living Library at ZIEIT included books from Armenia, Canada, India, Nigeria, Syria, Ukraine and America. Thirty five students and ten books spoke to one another in small groups; each student was able to speak to five or six books during the event. The energy generated by so many interested people freely conversing was inspiring. At the end of the event both students and books were enthused, asking when the next Living Library would be held, and trading contact information.

If you would like to participate in such an event as a book or as a student, please send an email message in English to [larry@raffety.net](mailto:larry@raffety.net).

### **Ellie Raffety had this to say about participating as a book.**

I was pleased to be a book at the first Living Library held in eastern Ukraine. As we were introduced, I looked out over a sea of faces and wondered what questions I would be asked and how I would answer.

I tentatively sat down at a table with three students and introduced myself. The students were friendly and we started talking together immediately. They asked me many questions: Why was I in Ukraine? Why did I join Peace Corps? Did I enjoy teaching Ukrainian children? What was my favorite Ukrainian food? What was my least favorite Ukrainian food? Where did I live in the US? These were easy questions for me to answer and I soon began to relax and enjoy myself.

When ten minutes were up, I went to another table and had another interesting experience. Sometimes the questions were thought provoking: Why does the American government let so few Ukrainians into their country? Sometimes the questions were fun: What is the funniest thing that has happened to you in Ukraine? We talked about holidays, food, traditions, Barack Obama, weather, the character of both Ukrainian and American people, and many other things. I was also able to ask questions myself and I enjoyed learning more about the celebration of New Year and other Ukrainian holidays.

The Living Library was a great experience for me as a book. I felt happy to be there and to be part of such an interesting and informative gathering. I know that I learned a great deal about Ukraine, and I hope that I was able to give the students interesting information about me, Peace Corps and my country as well.