

Dialog List Leonids Story

Subtitle:

„Tschernobyl, at the river Pripyat, 2010“

Leonid:

This big river...

I see this river often in my dreams.

I grew up here.

My father worked on the river,...

...so I was also on the river every day.

One evening my father told me to row to the other side of the river to look after our nets.

Fishing wasn't allowed and there were fewer patrols over there.

There was a bright full moon...

...and the water glittered mysteriously in the darkness.

On the opposite shore, my uncle boarded...

...and we rowed together to where we'd laid our nets the day before.

Carefully, so that no one would see us, we pulled it onboard.

There was something heavy in it, and we pulled with all of our might.

The water bubbled and finally we pulled out a fish as big as a man.

It's eyes were enormous. The moonlight reflected in them.

My uncle hit the fish 3 times until it stopped moving.

Subtitle:

„Southeast Siberia, 15 years later“

I lived with my first husband in Chernyshevsk -
Zabaykalsky, near Lake Baikal, 700 km from Chita.

My husband died very young, from Leukemia,
and I was left alone with Igor, my 3-year-old son.

At the time we were 24 or 25 years-old. I came to Chita as an officer.

It's about 7000km from Moscow in South-East Siberia.

It was an exciting feeling to be so far from home.

But there was something special waiting for me here.

I was a policeman and the work wasn't very challenging.

My wife was a civil servant and we were working together.

That's how we met. It was love at first sight.

Leonid and my son Igor became friends very quickly.

That's how our relationship started. Then we got married.

But Leonid wanted to return to his hometown.

His transfer requests however were denied,
and our desire for a child of our own was also unfulfilled.

Subtitle:
“Rejection of Transfer Request”

Suddenly one day in 1985, we received permission to transfer to Prypiat.

So in the autumn of 1985 we moved to Leonids hometown.

My son began school in Prypiat and we lived in the village of Kopachi, just 5 km away.

Prypiat was a beautiful, young, modern city, with lots of trees and flowers.

Subtitle:
„Church of Chernobyl“

My family has a very close relationship with this Church of Holy Ilya.

My parents and grandparents came here often to worship and to pray.

At the end of the winter of 1986 I came here with my wife to pray for a child of our own.

Afterwards we walked around the church 3 times.

And soon after that my wife did become pregnant.
I believe that it was the influence of this church, and I thank God
and all the holy ones from the bottom of my heart for helping us.

It was a very happy time for us.

In this spring of 1986 it seemed as if all of our dreams had finally come true.

On April 26th I was awakened by the noise of engines.

The usually quiet streets to Prypiat were full of trucks and bulldozers, one after the other.

Something terrible must have happened and I had to report to work immediately.

That same morning, I brought my son Igor to the bus.

“Hurry to the bus, you have to get to school...”

He walked away and even waved at us.

It was so strangely busy all around.

Five minutes later he was back:

“Mama, hurray! We don't have to go to school today,
because the atomic power plant blew up!”

But we didn't know anything.

Leonid was at work and there were no telephones, no cell phones.

We knew nothing!

So I didn't really think much of it when Igor ran out again to his friends.

It was only 3 kilometers across the cemetery to the power plant.

You see, at that moment we just had no way to understand it.

The world had never seen a catastrophe like that.

There was no experience to fall back on.

Of course there were mistakes,
but the evacuation of Prypiat was an incredible accomplishment.

Over the course of one night we prepared the evacuation of 50,000 people
with more than 1,000 buses for the very next morning.

Our police station became the command center.

All the information came together here.

High-ranking officers sat behind us making decisions.

The city was divided into several sectors.

The people were told to pack just the papers and things they needed for the next 3 days.

Then the convoy started and drove through Kopachi, Chernobyl and out of the zone.

We heard rumors, that Prypiat was being evacuated.

We knew many people there.

Grandma said "Let's go out to the street and we can wave to our friends."

Many people from the village were there,
but standing in the radioactive dust we couldn't recognize anyone in the buses.

We were still not aware of the danger we were in.

Already by that afternoon, there were no people left in Prypiat,...

...and the city of hope and new beginnings
had become a dreary tomb of its inhabitants' dreams.

The only exceptions were those like us who still had work to do.

We had to secure the police weapons.

We were the last from our unit to leave this desolate place.

Three days later they took the cattle.

Then it was time for us to prepare to leave.

My mother-in-law set a big tray of feed out for the chickens.

It would be enough for the 3 days they told us we'd be gone.
But we never returned to our little paradise.

The buses were full and rolled along slowly through the night.

We came to Poleskoye and had to get out and shower.

Those who were still radioactive after showering were sent back.

Wet and freezing we continued on to an unknown destination.

Early the next morning the buses stopped in Kachaly in Borodianskyi Region.

We received a paper with the address of our destination.

It was a tiny house where another family was living.

The woman had just given birth to her third child.

After my assignment in the contaminated zone I was examined...

...and received a medical exemption freeing me from working in radiated areas.

It was then decided that my knowledge of the area was indispensable,...

...and I was ordered back into the contaminated zone.

So it was back to the village of Lugoviki in the Poleskoye area.

We had missions in Prypiat and Chernobyl and escorted the payroll deliveries for the thousands of soldiers and crews working at the destroyed power plant...

On the second day after the evacuation they told me that I had to come to the village council, to a commission.

"What kind of commission?" I asked myself.

They asked me in courtesy.

There were two men there.

I don't know what kind of officials they were.

The first question was: "Are you pregnant?"

I said: "yes!"

"Okay, go and wait in the hallway, a car will come to take you to the local hospital."

I was scared, said "okay," and went out into the hallway.

Trying not to raise any suspicions, I walked away slowly.

Then I began to run.

I ran and ran wondering whether they would come after me to take my child away.

After a month in the contaminated zone I began each day with vomiting.

We were visited by a team of doctors from the Leningrad Radiology Institute.

They examined me and forbade me in the strongest terms from staying in the contaminated zone any longer.

I was admitted to the Military Hospital in Kiev where they gave me IV's, pills and shots.

I felt worse and worse until finally they operated on me.

I don't know what was cut out of me.

No one wanted to tell me exactly.

The diagnosis said: "radiation reaction to ionisation."

I was never really healthy again.

Finally, in October we got an apartment just for the 3 of us.

It was right on time since we were about to be 4.

On December 28, 1986 I cleaned up and dusted.

As the night ended, it was time.

At 6 am Leonid brought me to the hospital maternity ward.

They had no choice, they had to admit me.

And on December 29, I brought Aljoscha into this world.

10 lbs 2 ozs! Such a big boy!

Endcharts:

Aljoscha began complaining of strong headaches as a 3-year-old.

His medical records fill a book:

beginning with disturbed blood circulation to the brain,
through to intense pain in his internal organs.

It was only in late 2010

that the connection with the catastrophe at Chernobyl was officially recognized.

Lyudmila and Leonid also have to live with significant health limitations.

As a "Recognized Chernobyl-Liquidator," Leonid receives an extra €30/month added to his pension, which can just cover the cost of his medicine.

Leonid's two colleagues who secured the police weapons with him,
died a few years later.

On May 3, 1986, 1114 inhabitants of the village of Kopachi were evacuated.

Today only about 300 are still alive.