

JORMA TÄHTINEN, Finland



Anna Sieväla interviewed her grandfather who was 44 years old and worked as a technician at the time of the accident. Back then he lived in Western Finland which received the biggest amounts of the radioactive fallout. He wonders if that could be the cause for his cancer.

I interviewed my grandfather Jorma Tähtinen as a time-witness of the Chernobyl accident. The interview took place at my grandfather's home on the 27. November 2010. The interview situation was open and relaxed. I asked my grandfather the questionnaire questions as he sat in his armchair and his answers were mainly describing instead of yes/no answers. There was no one else present during the interview except for me and my grandfather so the situation was also private and allowed the time-witness to answer freely.

1. The familiar background of the time-witness

Jorma Tähtinen was born on 31.7.1941 in the small town of Liperi in Eastern Finland. His father worked as a conductor while his mother stayed home taking care of the home and children. Anyhow, when the financial situation of the family wasn't good, also Jorma's mother went to work to the railways as a cleaner. The social status of the family therefore was rather low but the family never had shortage of anything.

Jorma has one older sister, with whom he still stays in touch regularly. His older brother died at the age of one before Jorma was born.

Jorma describes his childhood and adolescence as fairly normal considering the time and the existing common conditions in Finland especially during his childhood. His early childhood was shadowed by the war with the Soviet Union. The war affected

also his later childhood and adolescence through its financial affects.
Jorma got married in 1962 and his daughters were born in 1962, 1966 and 1968.

Jorma's education consists of elementary school, vocational school and polytechnic school. After finishing his school Jorma worked as a technician until he retired in 1999.

Jorma says he didn't have any specific political attitude during the Cold War but living right next to the Soviet Union made him follow the current situation in different times. He remembers thinking about the situation critically many times but says that he did not feel afraid for his safety although living next to the Soviet Union.

2. The knowledge and the attitude to nuclear energy before the Chernobyl-catastrophe

Jorma remembers thinking about the risks connected to living in a country with nuclear power plants quite frequently already before the Chernobyl-catastrophe. He says that at the age of 15 he started to really think more about the risks as a consequence of reading and hearing more information about the nuclear bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. His attitude towards nuclear energy therefore has been negative already as a youngster but he wasn't active in any movement against nuclear energy.

According to Jorma the general public's view on nuclear energy in Finland before the accident was very clearly and also quite evenly divided into pro and con and that the discussion about the subject was mainly rather black and white.

Through his work Jorma had to take part in education on how to react in case of a nuclear accident. He did believe that such an accident could really happen but says that his attitude towards the education he received wasn't that serious because he considered the practical advice given quite useless if a serious accident was to happen.

3. The Chernobyl-catastrophe and its direct consequences

Jorma heard about the accident first on the news either on the radio or the television. During that time he lived in the Centre/Western Finland which received the biggest amounts of the radioactive fallout. When he heard about the accident he started to think that the nice fishing weather (rainy) 2 days before might not have been so healthy.

The news media told about the accident based on the information given by the Soviet Union. Jorma remembers thinking that there might be more to the case than was publicly told. He doubted the information given by the Soviet Union but didn't trust all the Finnish statistics of the radioactive fallout either.

The accident didn't directly affect Jorma's life but for example fishing and picking

mushrooms, which had both been quite a big part of his own family's life, didn't feel safe for a while. There were general directions given to people on how to react if the situation got worse but Jorma did not find them very useful if there should be extreme problems.

Jorma's attitude towards nuclear energy did not change because of the accident but his negative attitude became stronger. The accident did not have a direct effect on his attitude towards the Soviet Union either, but he remembers starting to doubt also other information given by the Soviet Union more after the Chernobyl-catastrophe.

The ones Jorma blamed for the accident were the people in charge of building, supervising and fixing the nuclear power plant.

4. In which context were Chernobyl and the nuclear energy issue important in the future life of the time-witness

After the accident Jorma's negative attitude towards nuclear energy became even stronger but the accident did not cause any specific long term changes in his life. Later he has started to think whether or not the accident has affected his health. He did eat a lot of fish and mushrooms also after the accident and after suffering from colorectal cancer two years ago he has started to wonder whether or not the possible exposure to radioactive radiation has affected him getting ill somehow.

The accident did not make Jorma feel especially scared afterwards but nowadays he does feel that it's possible that a similar accident could happen again.

5. The importance of Chernobyl today

Today Jorma thinks that the most important thing concerning the Chernobyl accident is that it should not be forgotten. He wants it to be remembered so that also the risks connected to nuclear power will be considered. He feels like the accident has already slipped from the minds of many people and economical motives are discussed more than safety when it comes to making decisions about nuclear energy.

Jorma thinks that the debate on nuclear energy in Finland today hasn't changed much from what it was before Chernobyl. He is still strongly against nuclear power and his opinion has only become stronger during the last few years. When the Finnish government a while ago decided on giving the permission to build more nuclear power plants, Jorma made a commitment to vote in the next parliament election for a candidate who is publicly against nuclear power.

Jorma's view on countries without nuclear energy is that it's good that some countries have already given up the use of nuclear power. He thinks that using nuclear energy is risky and that the countries without it are making an example to others that it is possible to produce energy without nuclear power.