

Alla Khomich, Belarus



Alla Khomich was 19 years old and a university student in a town near Chernobyl when the accident happened. She was young and happy, and she wanted to be a good student, she told her daughter Hanna, who interviewed her. It was only in 2001 that the terrible consequences of Chernobyl became known to Alla when health problems appeared.

I decided to interview my mother who is a bright time-witness of the Soviet time. For some hours we returned to the past and spoke about it as it has being still continued. The result of our interview you can see below.

The familiar background of the time-witness

Alla Khomich (Kozlovskaia) is my mother. She was born 14/11/1967 in Zhodino, an engineering town near Minsk, the capital of Belarus. Her family was composed by her father Gennadij, her mother Alexandra and one younger sister Natalia. Her mother was a commodities expert, seller (now she is retired). Her father worked at one of the biggest engineering plant BelAZ (Belorussian automobile plant in Zhodino) and then as a sailor in far away Sakhalin (Russia) and was at home only twice a year (he died because of cancer). Her younger sister Natalia has three higher educations (teacher of primary school, psychologist and economist - manager), single. My mother's family was famous as a well-educated, exemplary and prosperous family.

My mother went to school at five years old (It was too early for that time and now too. For example, I went to school at seven years old and it's normal and common for nowadays). My

mother studied at three schools because at that time her family changed a flat: school № 4, 5, 6. Then her mother decided that my mother should become an economist and sent her to another town to enter the Accounting and Planning College in Molodechno (Belarus) 1984 – 1986. After the college her mother told her to go to Gomel Cooperative Institute (accounting) 1986 – 1991. My mother was an excellent pupil and student. She hasn't argued with her parents and did everything that she was advised.

All family was orthodox. It is a good tradition from our ancestors. The family followed all traditions, but not officially because of politic question. It was Soviet Union and my mother's father had to be communist. My mother was christened at seven years old secretly. But finally it wasn't a secret for the communist government of town. My mother's father was excluded from membership of the communist party. He has taken a rejection about trip to Japan.

The first job was in Borisov, nice town near Zhodino, as an auditor of product shops. It was a well-paid work, but it was difficult to go there every day by local train.

In August of 1987 my mother married my father Serghei Khomich. They studied in absentia at different universities at that time, but lived at nearby houses. They went to session twice a year: mother to Gomel (Gomel region, near Ukraine) and father to Minsk (Minsk Cultural University). After they got married they lived in Zhodino. My father worked in a building company and my mother was an accountant.

She wasn't pro or contra the Soviet regime. She and her husband weren't interested in political issues.

Nowadays Alla works at on of the biggest plant of the country in Zhodino – BelAZ, that produces big tippers. Their names are belaz. She is an accountant and has a good salary. Divorced, but it's only on the paper, because mother and father live together. My parents have two children: younger brother Dima (a pupil), and elder sister Anna – me (student of last year at main university of Belarus - Belarusian State university, philology faculty). Alla feels happy, but has big problems with her health.

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

My mother told me that she had known nothing about Nuclear Power Plant before the Chernobyl accident. It wasn't interesting for her to tell about atomic energy and power plants at all. She was full of work, studying and family duties.

The censure was very strong in the USSR. Soviet people could read only news from party, different kind of decrees. Seldom they found some information about foreign countries, that were shown compared with Soviet Union. Of course, Soviet politics was everything better.

From the government about Chernobyl Alla with her family knew in May in newspapers. Nobody knew exactly about this disaster. It was like a rumour. It was only bad news, but it wasn't like catastrophe. There was no panic.

She has never seen any documentary about the Chernobyl catastrophe: before and after. She has never heard about evacuation plans at school, at work and anywhere.

3. The Chernobyl – catastrophe and its direct consequences

At the time of the tragedy her future husband Serghei studied at university in Minsk. And during a lecture one teacher told her students that a big disaster had happened at Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant, but about it there is no information in mass media. She advised them to put on not very open clothes, because she told that at that time it was very dangerous sun. Her husband didn't know if he should have believed her, but it was like a sign that something happened and very dangerous.

Alla finished Molodechno college in 1986 and went to Gomel to enter the university. She passed her entrance exams with excellence and in May 1986 she went to Gomel for a long time for studying. At that time she didn't know that in some kilometres there is a dangerous nuclear catastrophe.

Alla entered university and was very happy, she was very young (19 years old) and wanted to study well at university, to be a good specialist. She didn't think about politics and of course nuclear questions in government. Alla and her family with friends didn't try to get additional information about the accident after the official government announcement.

There weren't any precautions advised by the government.

The terrible consequences after Chernobyl my mother has known only in 2001. Alla didn't understand what had happened with her: she felt a strong tiredness, prostration, headache. She visited a doctor, who told her that she needed a fast operation on thyroid scheleze. The doctor insisted on surgery, because other medicine wasn't appropriate. Only surgery!

Now Alla has to take tablet of thyroxine every day, because she hasn't had thyroid scheleze yet. She feels herself the same as before surgery: headache, tiredness, prostration.

Alla hasn't known liquidators, but now she has friend Elena, who with her family resettled from Gomel region (Vetka, that is considered very contaminated) to Minsk region. It was famous for Alla only nowadays, because she has been friend with Elena for 5 years.

Alla is indifferent to people who have decided to stay in the contaminated areas. «Not everybody can be ill. They can have good health and live in their native places. I live at my native place, that is far from the Nuclear Power Plant, but I haven't enough health because of this disaster. I was too young in 1986 and I wanted to study in a good university. In spite of the lack of health I have two children and I am very afraid for them, their future...»

Every year I and my brother pass the examination by an endocrinologist. We can forget about it, but our mother cares about us every time.

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

Nowadays Alla has never remembered about Chernobyl catastrophe and health consequences in hospital. She doesn't like to speak about it. She considers that nothing can be changed in history and human life. Alla isn't afraid of the radiation, because she 'full sipped' radiation and hasn't thyroid.

5. The importance of Chernobyl today

It's better that people don't know about such tragedies. She means society without Nuclear Diseases. People not should, but must be careful with such dangerous source.

Of course, modern students and pupils know more about Chernobyl: they can speak about it at school and see many documentaries on TV. Alla didn't speak about it and didn't watch such documentaries.

My mother considers that it's not correct to build the first Nuclear Power Plant in Belarus. It was enough one!

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