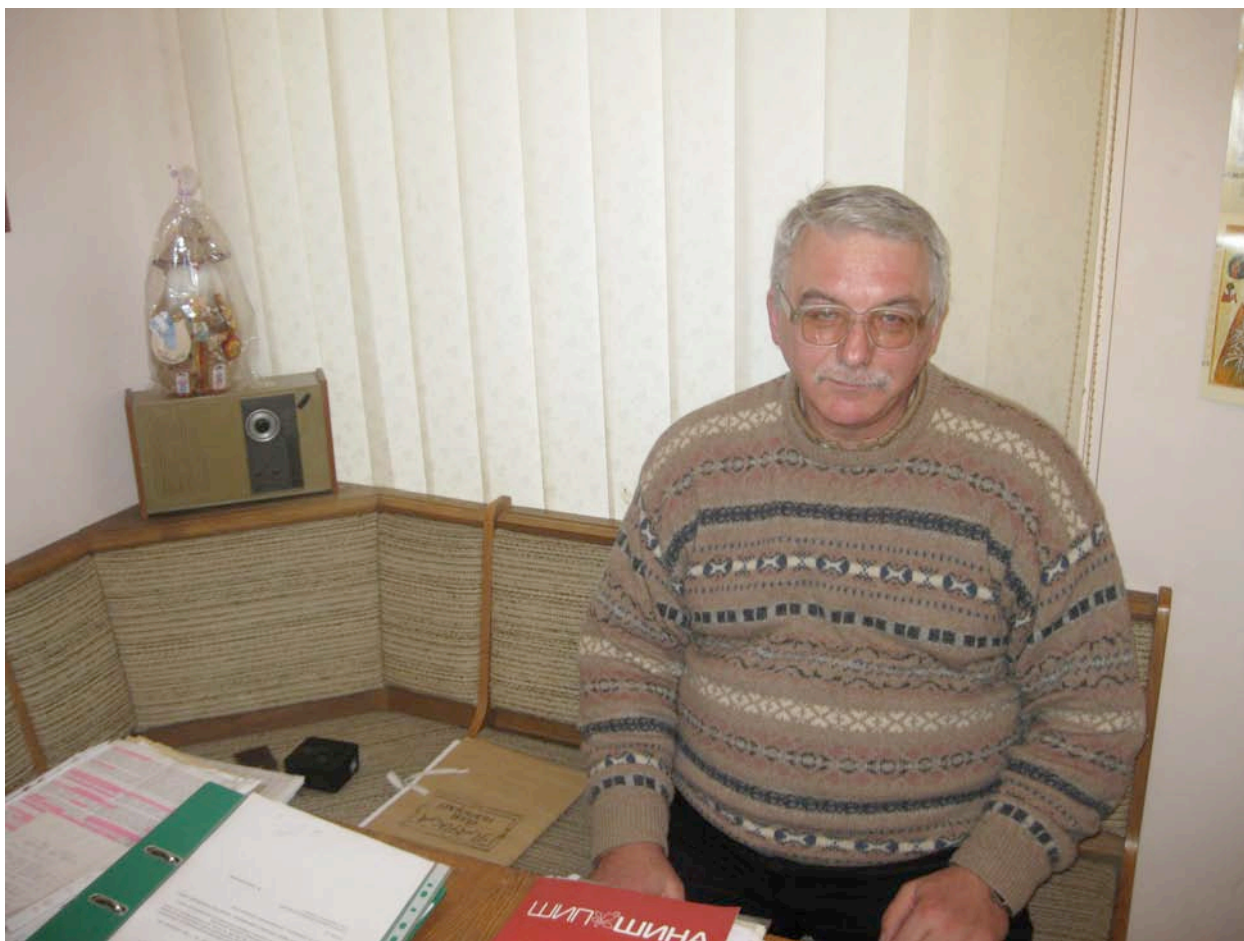


Vsevolod Smerechynskyi, Ukraine



Ivan Kendzor talked to one of the founders of an organization called “Chernobyl Union of Ukraine” which provides social and legal assistance to liquidators. Mr. Vsevolod Smerechynskyi was sent to Chernobyl as a liquidator himself and gave Ivan an interview in his Lviv office.

I interviewed Vsevolod Smerechynskyi at the office of the organization “Chernobyl Union of Ukraine”. The office surprised me with its simplicity and modesty, and I understood that the organization lacks financing. The atmosphere of the interview was quite unobtrusive. I managed to ask Vsevolod all my questions.

Vsevolod Bohdanovych Smerechynskyi was born in 1952 in a small town of Buchach, Ternopil region in a pharmacists’ family. While studying in a secondary school Vsevolod successfully finished music school (his instrument was accordion). Like his parents, he also had a big passion for chemistry. When he was in school he participated in several national school competitions in chemistry. He had only good marks at school.

In 1969 Vsevolod entered Lviv Polytechnic Institute, the department of organic substances technology. He successfully graduated from it with a diploma with honors. From 1974 to 1981 he had been working at a chemical - pharmaceutical factory in Riga as a main technologist. Then from 1981 till 1985 he had been working at another factory in Riga and in 1985 he moved back to Lviv.

It is worth mentioning that Vsevolod was one of the initiators of setting up the Ukrainian Language Society which testifies to the fact that he was against the Soviet power regime.

Vsevolod knew a lot about radiation and how dangerous it was even before the Chernobyl accident. His specialty was a military chemist and he knew perfectly well what the nuclear bomb was. But he was more aware of the nuclear war danger and its possible consequences than of the accident at the nuclear power plant (NPP). At that time the attitude towards nuclear energy was positive due to several reasons: a NPP produces more energy than a thermal or wind power station and nuclear power plants are ecologically cleaner compared to thermal electric power stations.

The 26th of April 1986 was a normal day. On the fifth of May at 8.00 p.m. Vsevolod received a letter from the army. It said that at 10.00 p.m. that day he had to arrive at the meeting place. At 1.00 a.m. he and other 120 people were sent to Sambir (a small town 50 km from Lviv). Nobody knew what was going on. They had been staying outside for 2 days, living in tents. Vsevolod remembered that it was very cold then. Soldiers used anything they could find to make a fire. Then they went to the Chernobyl area in freight carriages. On the ninth of May Vsevolod arrived at the final destination point.

Vsevolod was a lieutenant and commanded a platoon. The task of his group was to wash radiation from the surface of buildings and roads. His task was also to measure the level of radiation and he says the average level was 100 milliroentgen per hour, which is 10,000 times higher than a normal one. He had been working every day for 14 hours - from 8.00 a.m. to 10.00 p.m. He says that during his two months' stay there, they had only one day-off, but even on that day they had to repair cars. Accommodation and food were the same as for other ordinary soldiers. Vsevolod was living in a tent, the food was really plain, mainly porridge. He mentioned that only twice they got some cherries. Sometimes they had raw eggs to eat. They were working without any special protective clothes. Every week they received masks, which became orange after several hours' use.

Vsevolod didn't notice anything strange when he came to the area, except for the two things: firstly, there was no rain, secondly, it was completely silent everywhere. They could hear only the roaring of the engine. An interesting fact was that in some villages his group found old women, who had been abandoned by their relatives. They were hungry and thirsty.

Vsevolod was working in the Chernobyl area till the 6th of July. When he came back home - he was staying two months at home - he was unable to do anything, he was weak and giddy, and later he returned to his work again.

His attitude to the way in which the Soviet power reflected information about the accident was negative. He said that it was a complete lie. The system is guilty in the accident. The NPP staff was encouraged to do the things which went beyond the limits. "They did an experiment in reality, which should have been a simulation", said Vsevolod.

Chernobyl changed his life dramatically. Now he is an invalid of the third group. I asked him if he often recalls those days, and he answered that he often remembers about the liquidators, who turn to the organization "Chernobyl Union of Ukraine" daily to solve their own problems.

“Chernobyl Union of Ukraine” provides social and legal assistance to liquidators, who need it. The organization helps them to win various lawsuits. Nowadays there are 7 employees who work on a regular basis and several volunteers in the organization. The first main problem is the lack of funds, the second is lack of government support. Vsevolod notes that the local authorities provide very little support for the organization. The third problem is that people have passive attitude to the liquidators and their social position is very weak.

Annually on the 26th of April and on the 14th of December (the Day of liquidators in Ukraine) Vsevolod and other liquidators gather together near the monument dedicated to liquidators. But he claims that we shouldn't remember about Chernobyl accident only on the 26th of April, we should remember about it every day.

P.S. There are 7000 liquidators, who live in Lviv region now.