

Ihor Orestovych Franchuk, Ukraine



Ihor was 17 and at school when the catastrophe happened. The vegetables weren't growing that year, the bees were dying, and a lot of people had headaches. These and other memories Ihor shared with his son Orest Franchuk in an interview.

Ihor Franchuk was born in 1968 into a regular middle-class family. He attended a state school. After graduating in 1986, he was called up for the army. Then he entered the university. Ihor chose the mechanical engineering major by himself. On weekends, he and his friends used to go to movies or discos at school. Sometimes during summer breaks Ihor was visiting his relatives who lived in a village. His first (current) job was working at Gas Service.

Ihor Franchuk is Greek Orthodox. He has three children. They were born in 1994 and 1996. His parents are also religious. Mr. Franchuk wasn't against the Soviet regime. At that time he did not realize what the Soviet Union was really about. He says: "We were assured that we lived in the best country". He did feel oppression during holidays, especially on Christmas and Easter. Ihor is still living in Zboriv and working at Gas Services.

The question "What did you know about the Nuclear Power Plant before the Chernobyl accident?" reminds Mr. Franchuk about his physics teacher who came to his school in 1983. The teacher had just finished the University and was thinking in a somewhat liberal way, nevertheless he was communist. The teacher taught the class that nuclear energy is the cheapest and the safest. Today we know about the hazards of the radiation waste but then Ihor's generation learned that it's ecologically clean and safe. In other words nuclear energy was positive from whatever angle you look at it.

At that time, the Cold war was still taking place, so at school teachers spoke to students about the danger of the nuclear bomb or a possible war. During history classes they watched documentaries about the explosion of the A-bomb in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. From those documentaries Ihor could only guess about the after-effects. With respect to the Cold war there were lessons at school where they learned how to protect themselves from chemical contamination. People in school did not even talk about the chance of a nuclear power plant explosion, there were no evacuation plans. Once again this reminds Ihor Franchuk of his physics teacher who was very proud that in the USSR by that time had not been any accident. About a week later when the teacher said that the Chernobyl catastrophe happened.

Ihor knew the atomic energy production was dangerous and invisible. The censure in the USSR was pretty strong. So people secretly listened to the "Voice of America" radio. The news was often belated and also not thorough. Quite a few people were aware of the situation in the country. The interviewee hasn't seen any information about radioactivity in mass media before the Chernobyl occurred. The information was not available for everybody. Only sometimes there were documentaries about radioactivity. In case of a chemical contamination, students were told to do wet cleaning of the classes, close windows. They were also told not to walk on the streets and to wear kerchiefs.

Ihor was at school in the day of the catastrophe. It was a sunny day and the sky was crystal clear. At the time of the accident he was 17 and lived in Zboriv. When the reactor exploded no one was informed of that for about one or two weeks. Of course there were gossips among people about the accident but the censure was very strong. A powerful example of that is a parade on Labor Day on the 1<sup>st</sup> of May. Everyone had

to go and praise the Soviet regime. On that day every single man was outside in the open air taking part in the parade.

There were rumours about the accident before they were told by the government. As mentioned before, people listened to the "Voice of America" which was spreading information on how to protect oneself. Also Ihor's neighbor, Yaroslav Lytvynovych, who was a pharmacist, was giving him iodized water. The Soviet government started talking about the accident only after Europe noticed that something was wrong. Still there was very little information and it wasn't truthful. Official propaganda was limited to a small note in the newspaper "Izvestia" on 30 April under the headline "From the USSR Council of Ministers." It states that at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant a fire occurred, whose consequences are eliminated, and this fact created a government commission.

Only in mid-May 1986 alarm spread over the whole Ukraine. From Kiev, all children under the age of 14 years were evacuated. Several months passed before shocking and frightening articles about the accident at the Chernobyl NPP began to appear in the press, and the consequences that it might cause. Literally six months later in the "Evening Kiev" appeared a report from the construction site of the "Shelter" - young men, the builders were photographed against a background of "sarcophagus" over which was placed the slogan "Setting the parties perform." It seemed - and so the newspapers assured - the danger has passed. Later People were advised to wet the floors, close windows and to wear hats. Also they washed fruits and veggies carefully.

Ihor also remembers that the veggies did not grow well that year plus the bees were dying. There was an excellent weather outside in the day of the accident. What Ihor Franchuk noticed was that almost all people had headaches. The rest was ok. He did not notice any changes in the environment or his health. But later quiet many children had enlarged thyroid and other obvious health problems, not mentioning cancer. Quite many people were coming from the Kiev region so we were asking them.

In 1986, the government started building a new street with houses for 25 resettlers' families. The houses were with all the utilities and amenities. Today only one family stayed and the rest returned. The resettlers were also supplied with jobs and places to work. Many men went to Chernobyl from Ihor's town for liquidating works. Up to date many of them died. Now Ihor knows only one man, V. Kulavyuk, who was a liquidator at the Chernobyl NPP.

Volyn, a north-western part of Ukraine, suffered the most from the radiation. That area was polluted the most because of the winds and the USA was giving away humanitarian aid and financial reimbursement. People were calling that financial reimbursement "tomb" or "hrobovi". Also every town was building its Chernobyl area for families who got hurt from NPP. In 1986 men who had families were taken to work for a week as liquidators at Chernobyl NPP. Drivers, cooks and medical workers were in great need. Since Ihor was only finishing his last year at school, he didn't go. In the fall of 1986 he was called up in the Soviet Army and he remembers soldiers going to Chernobyl. Soldiers were told they're going to work for a max of 10 days but were held for a much longer period. People who worked in Chernobyl were cutting down and digging in pines. The scientist didn't know what to do with radiation at that moment. Later they found out the radioactive waste went into the groundwater. Ihor

remembers there was a lack of building materials in stores, especially cement. Everything was going to Chernobyl to build the shelter.

Ihor Franchuk's attitude towards Chernobyl today is negative. He's afraid of a new accident in general. Also the sarcophagus is ruining. 14<sup>th</sup> of December is the commemorative day of the Liquidators and the 25<sup>th</sup> of April is the anniversary of Chernobyl. It's extremely important to inform people of the accident so they can prevent the hazardous impacts on their health. He thinks the government should inform people of any kind of an accident. Ihor assumes the Green energy is a lot safer than nuclear energy. At least it doesn't have the issue with the nuclear waste. He doesn't think nuclear energy production is safer nowadays mainly because of the insufficient financing. Also he's very concerned of the nuclear waste.