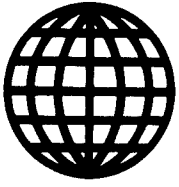


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FICTIONALIZED REPORT ON FIRST ANNIVERSARY
OF CHERNOBYL ACCIDENT

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SOVIET UNION POLITICAL AFFAIRS

FICTIONALIZED REPORT ON FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF CHERNOBYL ACCIDENT

Moscow YUNOST in Russian No 6, 1987 pp 46-66

["Magazine version" of Yuriy Shcherbak's "Chernobyl: A Documentary Story"; Part 1; first paragraph is YUNOST introduction]

[Text]"Again the Zone! And suddenly I feel that chill on my skin... Every time I have that chill, and I still do not know whether it is because this is how the Zone is meeting me, or whether my nerves are playing tricks on me... Intelligence is the ability to use the forces of the surrounding world without destroying that world." A. Strugatskiya, B. Strugatskiya, "Piknik na obochine" [Picnic on the Side of the Road], 1972.

A year has passed since the accident at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant.

Just a year.

But how remote, how idyllically serene that pre-Chernobyl world now seems to us -- a world that was calm, unhurried, and self-sufficient, a world that had existed for years in somnolent, blissful, completely contented placidity.

For everyone who was involved directly or indirectly in the Chernobyl tragedy, it is as though time has been split into two unequal parts: before 26 April 1986 and after. This is exactly how one of the heroines in our story, Aneliya Perkovskaya, puts it: "This is very similar to the war. All of us, including the fellows at the gorkom, still make the distinction: it was before the war or it was after the war. And we even express it that way: 'that happened before the war.'"

The time that has passed since the accident, and especially the first, most difficult months, which seemed to last an entire eternity, can be divided into several eras, stages, periods -- call them what you wish -- with their own special features and attributes, and clearly outlined time frame -- from one with the most astonishing beauty, with the snowy-white blossoming of the orchards and the overflowing of the rivers in the tragic Ukrainian spring of 1986, which from this day on will enter all the history textbooks and all the chronicles and legends of mankind, to the deep, hazy autumn, when a meeting was held in Chernobyl: the operations to erect the sarcophagus -- a structure that sealed off the damaged fourth unit -- had been completed.

A year is a second in the history of mankind. A year is also not a very long period of time in the life of any person. But during this year -- no, not during the year, but during the course of only a few months -- we all have suddenly become more mature, we have aged as though we had lived through an entire era: we have become more rigid and more exacting both toward ourselves and toward those who are making responsible decisions, toward those who hold in their hands human lives and the fates of nature; we have begun to evaluate in a different and sterner way the deeds and actions carried out during those months, and the words that were spoken or printed during that time which was so difficult for our nation.

Because it was a very high price that we have to pay, and will continue to have to pay, for Chernobyl.

The 14 December 1986 communique of the CPSU Central Committee and the USSR Council of Ministers cites the preliminary results of the resolution, within compressed periods of time, of the large-scale tasks of eliminating the consequences of the accident at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Station, and contains certain impressive figures and facts that give an idea of the very complicated operations, which were completely unprecedented in domestic or worldwide practice, to seal off the destroyed power unit and which were carried out under difficult conditions.

The complete interpretation of what occurred (we might recall the Great Patriotic War) is a matter for the future, perhaps the remote future. Not a single writer or journalist, no matter how knowledgeable he may be, is capable of doing that today. The time will come -- and I believe this -- when the Chernobyl epic (I cannot rid myself of the thought that we are dealing with an epic which, by its stupendous scope, affects the fundamental questions of our nation's existence -- life and death, war and peace, past and future) will appear before us in all its tragic completeness, in all its verbal diversity, in the noble biographies of the true heroes and the contemptuous actions of the criminals who were responsible for the accident and its grave consequences -- and they must all be mentioned by name! -- in the meager and accurate figures and facts, in the entire complexity of the everyday circumstances and official machinations, human hopes, and illusions, in the variety of the moral positions occupied by the participants in the epic. I think that, in order to create this epic, it will be necessary to have new approaches, new literary forms that differ, for example, from "War and Peace" or "Quiet Flows the Don." What will they be? I do not know.

But in the meanwhile... In the meanwhile I would like to offer the reader a kind of montage of documents and facts, of eye-witness statements -- because, soon after the accident, I managed to make several visits to the Zone and the areas adjacent to it.

The Chernobyl explosion brought mankind into a new period in the development of civilization, the possibility of which could only be guessed at in a confused, intuitive manner by the writers of science fiction. But most of the scientists and technical pragmatists who could think clearly and who were optimistically oriented were unable, because of the limited nature of their

fantasy and the resultant complacency, to foresee anything like this, and obviously did not want to foresee it. Only individual scientists who were the most far-sighted ones began recently to think carefully about the catastrophic possibilities of the improbable concentration of industrial and scientific capacities. That is attested to by the statements made by Academician V. A. Legasov, which are published on the pages of our story.

In a few days it was as though we had crossed over from one era -- the prenuclear -- to an unexplored era that required a fundamental restructuring of our way of thinking. It was not only our human nature that had to be subjected to stern checking, but also many of our ideas and working methods.

Fate gave us the opportunity to see beyond the edge of night, the night that will come if nuclear warheads begin to explode. The Chernobyl accident has presented mankind with a number of new problems -- not only scientific or technical ones, but also psychological ones. It is very difficult for our consciousness to reconcile itself to the absurd situation when lethal danger does not even have taste, color, or odor, but is measured only by special devices which, at the moment of the accident, incidentally, were not available or, if they were available, were not ready for operation.

The accident showed that mankind, if it wants to survive, will have to develop a new "instrument" way of thinking, supplementing the sensory organs and the already familiar methods of studying the environment (such as microscopy and chemical analyses) with Geiger counters.

The danger in and around Chernobyl spilled over into the fragrant air, into the pink and white blossoming of the apple and apricot trees, into the dust on the roads and streets, into the water in the rural wells, into the milk of the cows, into the fresh green growth in the vegetable gardens, into the entire idyllic springtime nature. But is it really only the springtime nature?

By autumn, when I was in Poleskiy Rayon, in conversations with inhabitants of the villages of Vilcha and Zelenaya Polyana, I became convinced that it is no simple matter for the new requirements of the nuclear age to enter people's consciousness, to enter their everyday life. The old way of life, the peasant way of life that had developed over the centuries, conflicted with the new real-life situations in the post-Chernobyl world: the radiation-monitoring specialists said that the most difficult, almost impossible job was removing the radiation from the thatch roofs of the rural buildings; it was very dangerous to burn leaves -- we ourselves became convinced of that when, in Vilcha, we brought a radiation detector close to a campfire that had been started in the courtyard by careless home-owners: the instrument reacted by giving a considerably increased reading. So much for "even the air of our homeland is sweet and pleasant to us..." For the same reason it was forbidden to use firewood here, since, to use the apt figure of speech provided by one of the doctors, every stove in Poleskiy Rayon would become a small fourth reactor. Coal was brought in for the public to use.

Who could have known a month ago that an increased radiation level would be detected on mushrooms, peatbogs, and currants, or, in settlements, alongside of the homes where rain water ran off the roofs...

Since no one could sense it, the danger intensified in some people the sense of uncertainty and fear, but in others, on the contrary, it caused a kind of reckless disdain: many of those daredevils paid with their health for their "boldness," by ignoring the simplest and, one must say, rather effective protective measures.

It is only an objective knowledge of the real situation, a knowledge that is not distorted by anyone's "optimistic" will, that is not some deeply guarded secret, it is only the observance of effective protective measures and the constant monitoring of the radiation levels that can provide the necessary sense of confidence for those who are located in the endangered zone. That is one of the indisputable lessons of Chernobyl.

When I was in the emergency-situation areas, and when I saw what a tremendous misfortune had come crashing down onto tens of thousands of people, I often recalled our literary discussions on present-day topics, on the present and future of the novel or the novella, about the positive hero and the need to "study" -- yes, study! -- life and other things that seemed to us then to be so important. How scholastic and how remote from that life they seemed to me there in the Zone, when I could see unfolding before my very eyes a completely unprecedented drama, when the essence of humanity -- as had occurred in wartime -- was revealed in the most rapid way: all the camouflage immediately flew off of people like leaves flying off of trees under the effect of defoliants, and smooth talkers who, at meetings, called for "acceleration," for the "activation of the human factor," proved to be ordinary cowards and riffraff, and quiet, undistinguished workers proved to be true heroes.

Take, for example, an old "grandfather" firefighter, Grigoriy Matveyevich Khmel, whose peasant-style, unhurried story is told here: he and two of his sons who are also firefighters had been injured during the accident at the nuclear power plant and were admitted to different hospitals in Moscow and Kiev. Grigoriy's wife was evacuated from a village near Pripyat to Borodyanskiy Rayon, where she continued working -- she cooked food and brought it out onto the fields to the machinery operators... What literary or everyday problems of ours, which frequently are petty and pathetic, could compare with the drama of those people who behaved with high human dignity? As I listened to the story told by the sober-minded Ukrainian Khmel, for some reason I remembered Gogol's "Taras Bulba."

For a time after I got to know Chernobyl and see things there, it seemed to me that I would never again pick up a pen -- all the traditional literary forms, all the refinements of style and all the tricks of composition, everything seemed to be infinitely remote from the truth, seemed to be artificial and unnecessary. A few days before the accident I had finished the novel "Prichiny i posledstviya" [Causes and Effects], that deals with doctors in a laboratory for especially dangerous infections, who are fighting such a lethal illness as hydrophobia; and although certain situations in the novel, as a result of a strange confluence of circumstances, proved to be similar to which

I happened to see (although, of course, there was no way of comparing the scope of what was occurring), the novel for some reason quickly left my consciousness, and receded somewhere back there, into "peacetime."

Chernobyl consumed everything.

Like a giant magnet, it lured me to itself. It stirred up the imagination, forced me to live the strange, distorted life of the Zone, to think only about the accident and its consequences, about those who were fighting death in the clinics, and those who were attempting to bridle the nuclear genie in the direct proximity of the reactor. It seemed to me to be mean and impossible to remain aloof from the events that had inflicted such a calamity on my nation. For long years before April 1986 I was persecuted by a sense of guilt -- guilt because I, a native of Kiev, a writer and a physician, had bypassed the tragedy of my hometown that had occurred in the early 1960's: the wet sand and water that had accumulated in Babi Yar, where the city authorities wanted to create an amusement park -- yes, an amusement park! -- broke through the dike and flooded the Kurenevka, causing much destruction and many human sacrifices. For long years Ukrainian literature (and I was included) remained silent about that catastrophe, and it was only recently that Oles Gonchar, in his story "Chernyy Yar," and Pavlo Zagrebelnyy, in his novel "Yuzhnyy komfort" [Southern Comfort], dealt with the events of that terrible pre-spring dawn... But why had I remained silent? Because I could have collected the facts and statements from eye-witnesses, and I could have found and named the persons who had been guilty of causing the calamity... But I had not done that. Apparently I had not yet grown sufficiently to understand any of the very simple, very important truths. Also, those were different times, when my shout would not have been noticed -- it was thinner than a mosquito's buzzing: the only things that I had behind me at that time were my first items in YUNOST and LITERATURNAYA GAZETA and I was still writing my first story, "How It Was in the War"... I am saying all this not to justify myself, but for the sake of the truth.

I perceived Chernobyl in a completely different way -- not only as my own personal misfortune (in principle, nothing was threatening me), but as the most important event in my nation's life after the Great Patriotic War. I would never have forgiven myself for remaining silent. True, at first, acting as a special correspondent for LITERATURNAYA GAZETA, I saw my task in a rather narrow way: to tell about the physicians who were taking part in the work of eliminating the consequences of the accident. But the course of life itself forced me gradually to broaden the scope of my search, to meet hundreds of the most varied people -- firefighters and academicians, physicians and policemen, teachers and persons engaged in the operation of the nuclear power station, ministers and soldiers, Komsomol workers and metropolitans, an American policeman and Soviet students.

I listened to their stories and tape-recorded their voices, and then, transcribing these recordings at night, I would be repeatedly astonished by the truthfulness and genuineness of their statements, the accuracy of the details, and the aptness of their remarks. Translating those tape recordings into a text, I attempted to preserve everything -- their manner of speech, their peculiarities of terminology or jargon, their intonation -- and resorted

to editing in only the extreme situation. It seemed to me to be very important to preserve the documentary, uncontrived nature of those human confessions.

I wanted to preserve the truth.

I am well aware of the incompleteness of the materials offered to the reader: the eye-witness statements that are quoted here pertain basically to the first, most difficult stage of the accident; and yet there is plenty to mention about the building of the sarcophagus, the actions required to decontaminate the terrain, the search conducted by the scientists and engineers, the building in Kiev Oblast within the shortest periods of time of 52 new villages for the evacuees, about the way in which the government compensated the victims of the disaster for their material losses, and, of course, about the selfless work of the medics in the Zone and outside of it. How many very interesting human stories there were, how many unknown heroes! But I do not consider my work to be completed and I am continuing to collect materials in order to finish this story.

That Bitter Word Chernobyl

Chernobyl.

A small, pretty, provincial Ukrainian town, engulfed in green foliage and in cherry and apple trees. Many people from Kiev, Moscow, and Leningrad used to love to vacation here in the summer. They would come here prepared to stay for the entire summer, with their children and household members, and would rent dachas or rooms in one-story wooden buildings, they would make pickles and jam to last them through the winter, would collect the mushrooms that grew in abundance in the forests here, would get sunburned on the blindingly clean sandy beaches on the Kiev Sea, and would catch fish. And it seemed that there was a surprising and inseparable unity between the beauty of the Polesye countryside and the four concrete-encased units of the nuclear power station that was situated not far away to the north of Chernobyl.

It seemed...

When I arrived in Chernobyl in early May 1986, it was as if I (and am I really to believe that it was only I?) had looked into the strange, improbable world of Alice's Wonderland, a world that was painted in the invisible and therefore even more insidious colors of increased radioactivity. I saw what it had been impossible even the day before to imagine in the most fantastic dreams, although, in general, everything appeared to be rather ordinary. But later on, on the following occasions when I visited here, everything still seemed to be ordinary...

But the first time...

This was a city without inhabitants, without the loud shouts of children, without the ordinary, everyday, unhurried, rural way of life. The shutters were slammed shut, and all the houses, institutions, and stores were shut and sealed. On the balconies of five-story buildings, there were bicycles near

the fire exits, and laundry was hanging out to dry. Not a single domesticated animal remained in the city. In the morning you could not hear the cows mooing. The only animals one could see were ferile dogs running down the streets, chickens pecking, and the birds unconcernedly twittering in the leaves of the trees. The birds did not know that the dust-covered leaves had become a source of increased radiation.

But even the city that had been deserted by its inhabitants was not dead. It lived and it was fighting. But it was living according to stern laws that were absolutely new to all of us -- the laws of the emergency situation of the nuclear age. In and around the city there was a concentration of a tremendous quantity of equipment: powerful bulldozers and tractors, truck-mounted cranes and scrapers, ditch-diggers and cement trucks. Across the street from the party's raykom, alongside the Lenin monument, an armored personnel carrier was in arrested motion, and a young soldier wearing a gas mask was looking out of it. Radio sets and military trucks were covered by spotted camouflage nets. Parked in front of the raykom and the rayispolkom, from which the entire operation was being controlled, were dozens of passenger cars -- black Volgas, Chaykas -- it looked as though a summit meeting was being held there. Some of those vehicles that had received a large dose of radiation subsequently had to be left forever in the Zone... On the approaches to Chernobyl, numerous radiation-monitoring posts were in operation, carrying out the strict checking of trucks and tractors; in special areas, soldiers wearing green chemical-defense uniforms were decontaminating the equipment that had come out of the Zone. Sprinkler trucks were continuously and lavishly washing the streets of Chernobyl, and numerous GAI [State Automotive Inspectorate] traffic controllers were standing in the streets as though those streets were traffic-packed roads on the days before a holiday.

But what was the history of that little town that was destined to become part of the history of the twentieth century?

I have in front of me a small book which was published in what can only be called a pleasantly comfortable and old-fashioned style more than a hundred years ago, in 1884, with a title that is extremely attractive for the modern reader: "The City of Chernobyl, Kiev Guberniya, Described by Retired Military Man L. P."

The author, with the scrupulousness of a genuinely military man who had time on his hands and who did not know what useful thing to engage in, studied the geography, history, and economy of that unimportant little town lying 120 versts to the north of Kiev. "Ancient historians say," L. P. writes, "that when Grand Duke Mstislav of Kiev, the son of Monomakh, in 1127 sent his brothers out over the four curving roads, Vsevolod Olgovich was ordered to travel by way of Strezhev to the city of Borisov. Strezhev was considered to be the most southerly town of the Polotsk principality, where Rogvold installed Vsevolod Glebovich in approximately the year 1160. Under that prince Strezhev, which was subsequently named Chernobyl, was considered to be an appanaged principality.

"In 1193, in the chronicle, Strezhev is already called Chernobyl. The entry reads: 'Prince of Vyshgorod and Turov, Rostislav, son of Grand Duke Ryurik of

Kiev (who ruled from 1180 to 1195) went with a capture from Chernobyl to Toritskiy.'"

The author describes in detail the complicated paths in the history of Chernobyl, including all the many people who ruled it. At the end of the seventh century Chernobyl became subject to the Polish magnate Chodkiewicz; up until the October Revolution itself, the Chodkiewiczes owned more than 20,000 desyatinas of land here.

The name of the town of Chernobyl flashed in the history of the Great French Revolution in a strange manner: during the period of the Jacobin dictatorship, a person who had been born in Chernobyl, the 26-year-old Polish beauty Rosalie Lubomirska-Chodkiewicz was guillotined on 30 July 1794 in Paris on the basis of an order issued by the revolutionary tribunal, after being accused of having ties with Marie Antoinette and other members of the royal family. Under the name of "Rosalie of Chernobyl" the blue-eyed blonde has been immortalized in the memoirs of her contemporaries...

Ancient Chernobyl gave its bitter name ("chernobyl" means "wormwood") to the powerful nuclear power plant, the construction of which was begun in 1971. In 1983, four power units with a capacity of 4.0 million kilowatts were in operation. A very large number of people not only abroad, but also in our country, to this very day, after so many reports in the press and so many television broadcasts, do not completely understand, or completely misunderstand, that Chernobyl, which remained a modest rural-type rayon center during the years that preceded the accident, had almost nothing to do with the nuclear power plant. The city that became the chief capital for the energy workers was the young, rapidly developing city of Pripyat, which is situated 18 kilometers to the northwest of Chernobyl.

In the "Pripyat" photograph album published in 1986 by the Mистetstvo Publishing House in Kiev (photographs and text by Yu. Yevsyukov), one reads:

"It was called Pripyat after the name of the beautiful deep-flowing river which, twisting whimsically like a blue ribbon, unites the Belorussian and Ukrainian Polesye and carries its waters to the gray Dnepr. But the city owes its appearance to the construction here of the Chernobyl Nuclear Electric-Power Plant imeni V. I. Lenin.

"The beginning pages of the chronicle of the labor biography of Pripyat were written on 4 February, when the first peg was driven in by the construction workers and the first shovelful of dirt was removed. The average age of the inhabitants of the young city is 26 years. Every year more than a thousand children are born here. In Pripyat alone one can see a parade of baby carriages when, in the evening, the mommies and daddies take a stroll with their little ones... Pripyat is confidently striding into the future. Its industrial enterprises are continuing to build up their production capacities. In the next few years many structures will be built here: an energy technicum, an additional secondary school, a Pioneers Palace, a young people's club, a trade center, a covered market, a hospital, new buildings to house the bus and railroad terminals, a stomatological polyclinic, a movie theater with two viewing screens, a Detskiy Mir [Children's World] store, a self-service

department store, and other structures. The road leading into the city will be beautified by a park with various attractions.

"According to the general plan, Pripyat will have as many as 80,000 inhabitants. The nuclear city in Polesye will become one of the most beautiful cities in the Ukraine."

I was given this colorful album in Pripyat's empty main administrative building, its "White House," by Aleksandr Yuryevich Esaulov, the deputy chairman of the Pripyat City Ispolkom, one of the heroes of our story. We walked with him along the lifeless corridor, glanced into the empty offices: displaced furniture, papers thrown onto the floor, open safes, piles of empty Pepsi-Cola bottles in the rooms where sessions of the Governmental Commission had been held (to refresh my memory, I removed from the doors the pieces of paper with hastily written names of who was supposed to be located in what office), files of newspapers that were opened at the date "25 April," dried-up flowers in flower pots... And above all of this, the heavy smell of disinfectant to prevent the rats from multiplying.

On that day Esaulov and I were the only inhabitants of the deserted city. It was just the two of us, plus a few militia men from the patrol service who were protecting the homes that had been left behind by the inhabitants.

And the road leading into the city was beautified by a park with various attractions, but a thick barbed-wire fence that was equipped with an alarm system to prevent unwelcome looters from breaking through into the Zone and stealing the radioactive items that had been left behind in thousands of apartments. Because there were those who tried that.

Before the Accident

Exactly one month before the accident -- on 27 March 1986 -- the LITERATURNAYA UKRAINA newspaper, the organ of the Union of Ukrainian Authors, published an article by L. Kovalevskaya, entitled "Not a Private Matter." It must be said that the newspaper for several years had already had a regular series with the rubric "LITERATURNAYA UKRAINA Post at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Station," which threw light on various events in the life of the power station. The article, which was destined to cause such a sensation throughout the world (after Chernobyl it was quoted recklessly by the Western mass information media), at first did not attract any attention: the writers in Kiev at that time were preparing for a meeting to hear reports and hold elections, and most of them were much more interested in the personnel changes within the organization than in the matters at the nuclear power plant.

L. Kovalevskaya's article did not deal in any way with the operation of the fourth unit at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant, although many people who know about the article only by hearsay continue to this day to be convinced otherwise. The author concentrated the fire of criticism -- which was very professional and uncompromising -- on the construction of the fifth unit, the construction period for which had been reduced from three years to two years. L. Kovalevskaya cited egregious instances of irresponsibility and sloppy work: for example, in 1985 the suppliers had undershipped 2358 tons of metal

structurals. Moreover, even that which had been delivered was usually defective. Furthermore, 326 tons of slotted covering for the facilities to store the used nuclear fuel arrived with defects from the Volzhsk Metal Structurals Plant. The Kashin ZMK [Metal Structurals Plant] delivered approximately 220 tons of defective columns for installing the storage facilities.

"But working this way is inadmissible!" L. Kovalevskaya said at the conclusion of her article. "The prompt activation of the next power unit is not the private matter of the construction workers at the Chernobyl nuclear power station. Acceleration is many things -- our rate of active participation, our initiative, stubbornness, and conscientiousness, our attitude to everything that is being done in our country."

To be completely honest, when I read that article completely through (and, like many others, I did not read it completely through until after the accident), I thought that it had been written by an experienced engineer, some kind of gray-haired lady wearing eyeglasses, who had ground her teeth down on all these insipid construction terms and norms. Imagine my surprise when Lyubov Kovalevskaya turned out to be a young woman journalist from the Pripat newspaper TRIBUNA ENERGETIKA, and a talented poetess.

She has remarkable eyes -- they are light-colored with hard dark pupils; sometimes it seems that her gaze is directed somewhere far away. Is she looking into the past? into the future? But at such times her glance is very sad. She has a gravelly voice -- she smokes a lot.

Here, then, is what Lyubov Aleksandrovna Kovalevskaya says:

"You wouldn't believe all the things I was accused of after my article appeared in LITERATURNAYA UKRAINE. I was accused of incompetency, of being half-educated (true, they chose other expressions, but the sense was the same), of having washed dirty linen in public, and of writing to the Kiev newspapers in order to make a name for myself.

"With us, if something completely out of the ordinary happens, that's the only time that people believe us or understand the situation.

"We -- that is, our newspaper TRIBUNA ENERGETIKA -- for the most part wrote about the problems of construction, but the party's Pripyat Gorkom wanted us to encompass the unencompassable, to write about everything, about the city -- because, after all, this was the only newspaper in the city. But there were only three of us working there, we did not have our own transportation, and with a gigantic construction project like that, how could we poor women run around and see everything? And not simply run around and see everything, but also get back to the editorial office. If, God forbid, anyone were to call us and there was no one at the editorial office, people would say, 'They're not working.'

"At first I was the editor, but when the conflict got more acute, I again took the job of correspondent, and the people at the gorkom heaved a sigh of relief. Because I had always insisted upon the newspaper's right to

independence in thought, analysis, arguments, and conclusions.

"I wrote the article for LITERATURNAYA UKRAINA in one evening."

I asked, "Could you tell me whether it was a case of the leadership persecuting a journalist who was fighting for the truth?"

She replied, "No, with respect to the construction project it would not be justified to say that. But if you take the gorkom or the managers of the nuclear power plant, the answer is yes. I did not run over to the gorkom, I did not try to find out their opinion about the article, but there were rumors flying around. Reliable ones. I learned that they were planning to call me on the carpet at the buro. They might have expelled me from the party.

"But then the accident happened..."

"I feel that one of the reasons for the accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power station was the abnormal situation that had developed there. No 'outsider' could get in there. Even if he were as wise as Solomon, or the most qualified specialist. Because entire dynasties were working as the managerial staff. Nepotism flourished. The salaries were high there, people received hazard pay, and people were promoted according to the 'dirty wage scale.' Ordinary workers even wrote that there was rampant nepotism there. No one worked there but friends and acquaintances. If anyone was criticized, all the others would immediately rush to defend him, without even trying to find out the crux of the matter.

"If an ordinary worker did anything wrong, he would be punished. But if any of the administrators, anyone at the upper level, did, all the others would come to his defense. It got to such a point that the administrators were able to walk past the workers without saying hello to them, or they could converse with the workers in a supercilious tone, or even insult them. The administrators became completely arrogant. It was like a state within a state. They did not consider the fact that, after all, people cannot fail to notice all of this... So the people would come to the editorial office and ask, 'Don't mention my name, because, you realize, they could fire me or eat me up, but, since you are journalists, can't you write about this?' Could we have refused? No, a journalist does not have that right -- he would be a coward. But we couldn't do anything, because we couldn't give the person's name.

"When I was the editor, I never carried materials anywhere to coordinate them. I do not know whether I acted correctly or incorrectly, but I never tried to coordinate anything. I was responsible for my articles. I bear the responsibility -- both as a Communist and as a journalist.

"I got the idea of writing a series of articles for LITERATURNAYA UKRAINA. The first one was about the improper situations at the construction site. Then the second one... the second one would definitely have been about the operational personnel. About the moral climate at the Chernobyl nuclear power station. To put it honestly, the best cadres left the construction site to become administrators. Because of the salary. The administrative jobs even

lured the good specialists. If you make an experienced construction worker a curator, he will know that construction site completely. He is a valuable cadre. A curator is a person who checks to see how things are being built for him. But at the construction site by that time there was no money. It was for good reason that many people just stopped working, even the skilled construction workers. But now, when the accident is being eliminated, how have those construction workers been working? I read in the newspaper that in one month they completed the yearly plan. There is no price that you can put on these people. They know how to work and they want to.

"So many of them left to become administrators. But then they would come to see me in the editorial office and they would say, 'You wouldn't believe how many people are honestly working at the construction site or how difficult the moral climate at the station is. They say that you have come there to take someone else's place. There's careerism, fighting to get a job, a position.'"

I asked her, "But they earned a lot of money, didn't they?"

She answered, "Of course. Three hundred rubles or more. They always overfulfilled the plan. There was always 'progress...' Also, if you were in the 'dirty zone,' you also got meal tickets, rations, trip tickets, all the benefits which for some reason -- I do not know why -- do not exist at the construction site. And apartments were assigned more quickly at the nuclear power plant than at the construction site, although the construction workers are engaged in construction, but the project is an important one, and the correlation between the apartments (although I do not remember exactly) was something like 70 percent for the administrators and 30 percent for the construction workers."

"What basic problem would you have raised in your article? What would you have said in it?"

"I would have said that people must believe. I am a subordinate -- I must believe my editor. Believe. So that we can work together. Believe in his authority, in his level of proficiency. In his competency. And this must also apply to the workers. If the administrators are honest, decent, and well-principled, then, naturally, the workers also try to conform. But when some people are allowed to do everything, but others are not, then this gives rise not to envy, but to spiritual discomfort. People think, 'Why should I live like a fool when others are living well, and are living the way they want? The ordinary workers are asked to work honestly, to work enthusiastically, but what about the administrators themselves?... they steal the Czech urinals from the hospital. They put their own urinals there, and then take the others...' Because it is a small housing area, and every blunder, every moral lapse on the part of an administrator becomes known very quickly. And all of this is discussed and chewed over. Rumors and gossip abound, especially since there is a major attempt to suppress criticism.

"Judged according to outward appearances, everything seemed to be all right with discipline. Everyone was afraid -- that is the proper word, 'afraid' -- to leave early. But he would indeed leave early when no one could see him. He was afraid to be late, but he would be late when no one could see him.

Everything had the effect of shaking loose those little moral cores in people. And so it was for good reason that, when the accident happened, it turned out that it was not only the managers who were to blame, but also those operators who...

"And so the article that I thought of writing would have shown the relationship that exists between discipline and the violation of the elementary safety rules. Just imagine: it was possible to see a person sitting on the control panel. On the control panel, with all those buttons and switches."

"Do you mean that a person could actually sit on the control panel?"

"That's right. He would just go over there and sit down. He can sit down on the control panel. Without any to-do. But what do people say now? 'Things have been set up so that the systems provide backup for one another. They protect people.' Everyone believed in the systems. But they did not protect anyone. And the reason why they didn't was that we had got to the point -- and I mean 'we,' not somebody else somewhere, I do not even blame the administrators, but I mean 'we, the people' -- had got to the point where we had split in two. One half says that it is necessary to do this, it is necessary to work honestly, and the other half says, 'Why should we, when no one else is doing this?'

"A commission on nuclear power engineering operated on the basis of the ChAES [Chernobyl Nuclear Electric Power Plant]. I attended the meetings and frequently visited the nuclear power plant. Not even our newspaper had permanent clearance. The administrators would not give it in order to assure that, God forbid, we would not write any critical material. But if we wanted to write something good, they would show us everything. Except that first it would be necessary to tell the people at the party committee where you would be going, and for what purpose.

"There were also outages for which the personnel were to blame. And there were also holes in the steam pipes. It was so bad that we had the vicious psychology: when a foreign delegation is coming, they are afraid of that. They realize that there shouldn't be any holes in the pipes. But the attitude that we take to them is, 'Well, the pipe has an air hole! The hell with it!'

"After the article appeared, people said that I had predicted the accident. I didn't predict anything. God forbid that I should be a Cassandra -- the prophetess of such calamities... But deep within me, I must confess, I was always afraid of that. I was always uneasy. I was afraid because people said one thing, but actually the situation was completely different. People talked about this, including people from the work safety department. When did I begin to be afraid? Once some people came to see me, bringing documents with them. They showed me figures, facts, etc. -- in general, I did not know exactly what it was, but at that time I had no shortage of boldness in writing things. I knew that none of that would be published.

"But still I was afraid. And I always wanted to leave -- I might as well confess -- and take my child with me. I have a daughter who is ten years old, and she has been ill."

The Accident

In May 1986, in one of the Kiev hospitals, I became acquainted with the following young people: Sergey Nikolayevich Gazin, 28, senior engineer in the turbines administration; Nikolay Sergeyevich Bondarenko, 29, air-separation apparatus specialist at the nitrogen-oxygen station; and Yuriy Yuryevich Badayev, 34, engineer. They were all united not only by the fact that they were lying in bed in the same ward, gradually coming out of the serious condition in which they arrived at the clinic, but also by something more substantial, that had sharply divided their lives into two parts: before and after the accident. On that fatal night they were all working at the nuclear power plant, and were in direct proximity to the unit that broke down.

In even, unemotional voices they gave all the details about what had happened: how two mighty tremors shook the power plant building, how the lights were "chopped down," and how everything was engulfed in clouds of dust and steam -- the only illumination was the flashes of short circuits in the room where the unit panel -- the central for controlling the entire power unit -- was located. Only from time to time would their outwardly unemotional stories be interrupted by a deep sigh or by a mournful pause, when the recollections of "that night" came rushing in on them.

I would like to quote one of these stories.

Yuriy Yuryevich Badayev: that night he was working on the Skala computer-information complex.

"The Skala is the brains, eyes, and ears of the power plant. An electronic computer carries out the necessary operations and computations and feeds them to the unit control panel. If the Skala stops, they are like blind kittens.

"My job is electrician. Do you think that's strange? Well, it's so. By education I am an electronics engineer. Usually the people working at computer centers are electronics specialists, but at our power plant, for some reason, the job title is 'electrician.'

"Everything happened very simply. There was an explosion. I was on shift 40 meters from the reactor. We knew that tests were being carried out. The tests were being carried out in accordance with a previously planned program, and we were debugging that program. Our computer records all the program deviations and outputs them onto a special tape. We were debugging the reactor's operating mode. Everything was normal. Then we got a signal that said that the senior engineer for controlling the reactor had pushed the button for the complete shutting down of the reactor.

"In literally 15 seconds there was a sharp tremor, and a few seconds later, a more powerful tremor. The lights went out, and our computer went down. But

an emergency power supply was turned on, and from that moment we began to save the equipment, because everyone needs our information. Moreover, this is the most important thing, the diagnostics of how the accident developed. As soon as the power supply was turned on, we began to fight for the life of the computer.

"Immediately after the explosion, we felt absolutely nothing. The fact of the matter is that hothouse conditions are created for our computer, a temperature of 22-25 degrees [Celsius] is constantly maintained, and blower ventilation is constantly in operation. We managed to start the computer up again, and managed to put a cover over the computer to protect it against the water that was at that time pouring down from the ceiling. The computer kept operating, and the diagnostics continued. What the computer was recording was difficult to understand. But we were all wondering, 'What has happened, anyway?' We had to go outside to take a look. But when we opened our door, we did not see anything except steam, dust, and so on... But at that time, somewhere, the racks that control the reactor were turned off. Well, that is the holy of holies, and we are required to do everything to assure that control continues. I was supposed to go up to marker 27, where the racks are located. The marker is something like the story of a building. I started running along my usual route, but I couldn't get to the marker. The elevator was crushed and the staircase was piled up with reinforced-concrete blocks and some kind of tanks, but, most importantly, there was no illumination there. We had not known previously the scope of the accident. We did not know anything. Nevertheless I wanted to get there and I even ran off to look for a flashlight. But when I returned with the flashlight, I realized that I would not be able to break through... The water was really pouring down from the ninth floor. We removed the extra panels and covered our computers, to protect them and to keep the Skala operating.

"Later on, we learned about the scope of the accident -- I succeeded in becoming convinced of that myself. Literally a few minutes before the accident, Shashenok dropped in to see us. He was one of the two guys who died. We had been talking with him, and asking, 'How are things?', and then he came in to ask, 'Do you have direct communication with the area at marker 24?' We said, 'Yes, we do.' They were supposed to be executing the operations there. This was one of the fellows who were carrying out the test program, the recording of the operating features. They had their own instruments in that area. He said, 'Fellows, if I have to communicate with them, I'll get in touch with them through you.' 'Fine,' we said.

"And when we had saved the equipment, the telephone from the area where Shashenok had been working began to ring. It kept ringing. We picked up the receiver and no one answered. We learned later that he was unable to answer, because he had been crushed. His ribs had been broken and his backbone had been crushed. Nevertheless I made an attempt to make my way through to him. I thought, 'The guy might need help.' But he had already been carried out. I saw him being carried away on a stretcher."

Meanwhile the city was still sleeping.

It was a warm April night, one of the best nights in the year, when the leaves suddenly appear on the trees like a green fog.

The city of Pripyat was sleeping, as was the Ukraine, and as was the entire country. No one yet knew the tremendous misfortune that had befallen our land.

"The Entire Guard Detail Started Out After Pravik"

The first people to hear the alarm were the firefighters.

Leonid Petrovich Telyatnikov, Hero of the Soviet Union, 36, chief of Militarized Fire Unit No. 2, Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant, major of internal service (currently L. P. Telyatnikov, lieutenant-colonel of internal service):

"Lieutenant Pravik's guard detail had 17 persons. He was on duty that night. If one speaks about that guard detail as a whole -- unlike what is written in the newspapers -- the third guard detail was not so ideal. And if that had not been the case, of course, nothing would ever have been written about it. It was a very unusual guard detail. It was a guard detail made up of individuals, if one can express it that way. Because each person was concerned only about himself. There were a lot of veterans there, a lot of unusual guys.

"Volodya Pravik was probably the youngest one -- he was 24. He had a very nice, kind disposition and the men sometimes let him down. He never refused anyone's requests. He felt that he had to make concessions. Perhaps that was some weakness on his part -- they had also been squabbles, and he was held to blame because there had also been violations in the guard detail... nevertheless he tried to maintain his own line.

"He was a very nice person, Volodya Pravik. He liked operating a radio and also liked photography. He was one of our active workers, the chief of staff of the Komsomol searchlight. The searchlight was probably the most effective form of combatting shortcomings. It gave a good drubbing to all our shortcomings, even the slightest ones. He wrote poetry for the searchlight, and drew pictures for it, performing that work enthusiastically. His wife helped him a lot. They were very similar to one another. His wife had graduated from a music school and she taught music at a kindergarten. They even resembled one another outwardly. Both of them were mild-talking, their views concerning life, their attitude to work -- everything was very closely interwoven -- were the same. A month before the accident, a daughter had been born to them. Recently he had asked to be transferred as an inspector. Everyone agreed to that, but there simply had been no replacement for him...

"Probably the oldest person in the guard detail, on the basis of age and on the basis of longevity, was Ivan Alekseyevich Butrimenko, 42, a driver. He was one of those people who keep everything going right. Everyone tried to keep up with him -- the chief of the guard detail, and the secretaries of the party and Komsomol organizations. Ivan Alekseyevich was a deputy to the city soviet, and carried out a very large amount of deputy work...

"The three Shavrey brothers also worked in our unit. They are Belorussians. The youngest is Petr, who worked as the unit inspector. Leonid, the oldest, and Ivan, the middle brother, worked on the third guard detail. Leonid is 35 years old. Ivan is two or three years younger, and Petr is 30. They all worked according to the principle: if it has to be done, we'll do it.

"How do things happen in life? Until you poke someone with a fignger, no one will even budge. It's not that way just with us, but is that way everywhere. At classes, at exercises -- a few people try to remain off to one side, to take things easier, to get work that is a bit easier. But that didn't happen here. When the accident occurred, despite the certain frictions in the guard detail, and despite everything else, the entire guard detail began following Pravik, began following him without looking around... The asphalt was burning over there. The machine room had a combustibile roof and the most valuable thing, if one translates everything into rubles, is the machine room.

"Everyone sensed the tension, sensed the responsibility. As soon as I would call someone's name, he would immediately run up and say, 'Yes, sir!' And he wouldsay that without even listening to everything I had to say, because he understood what had to be done. He was just waiting for the order.

"And not a single person flinched. Everyone sensed the danger, but they also understood that things had to be done. The only thing they said what that they would have to be replaced quickly. On the run. How had it been prior to the accident? 'Why do I have to go? Why me?' But now they didn't say a single word, or even half a word. Literally everything was done on the run. Properly speaking, that was the most important thing. Otherwise it would have taken much longer to put out the fire and the consequences would have been considerably greater.

"When the fire broke out, I was on leave. I had 38 days of leave. I received a telephone call. The dispatcher called me at night. I didn't have any transportation -- all the vehicles had left. I called the duty officer at the city militia station and explained the situation. He answered such and such, and said that they always have vehicles. I said, 'There's a fire at the power plant. The roof of the machine room. Please help me to get there.' He checked my address and said, 'The vehicle will be there right away.'

"The roof was burning in one place, then another, and then a third. When I got up there, I saw that it was burning in five places in the third unit. I did not know at that time that the third unit was operating, but if the roof was burning, the fire had to be put out. That did not represent any great amount of labor from the point of view of firefighting. I looked into the machine room -- there were no traces of a fire. That was good. In the 'bookcase,' at marker 10, where the central unit control panel was located, there was no fire. But what was the condition in the cable areas? For us, that was the most important thing. We had to walk around everywhere and inspect everything. Therefore I kept running around everywhere -- I examined marker 5, marker 8, marker 10, and, together with the deputy chief engineer and the operations personnel, made adjustments -- to determine which things were more important and which could be done later... They said, 'Yes,

actually it is necessary to put out the fire on the roof, because the third unit is still operating there, and if the roof collapses, if only one slab falls onto the operating reactor, that means that additional depressurization could also occur.' I had to know all these questions. There was a large number of places. The plant is very large, and it was necessary to be everywhere.

"At that time I had not yet managed to talk to Pravik. It was not until I sent him to the hospital, and even at that moment it was literally only a few words... at 0225 hours he had already been sent to the hospital. They had been up on top for about 15-20 minutes...

"Somewhere around 0330 hours I began to feel sick. I lit up a cigarette, took a puff the way I always did, and then started coughing uncontrollably. I felt a weakness in my legs and wanted to sit down... But there was no time to sit down. We started to drive around, to inspect the posts. I pointed out where to park the vehicles. We drove to the director's office. Properly speaking, I had to get to the telephone -- I had to report the situation. But there was no place to telephone from at the power plant. Many of the areas were already closed down, there was no one there. The director had several telephones, but they were all in use. The director was talking. At that time he was literally talking into all the telephones at once. We couldn't make a telephone call from there. Therefore we drove to the unit."

Meanwhile the alarm kept growing.

It is necessary here to explain one important detail. In addition to Lieutenant V. Pravik's guard detail at VPCh-2 [Militarized Fire Unit No. 2], the alarm also immediately summoned Lieutenant V. Kibenok's guard detail at SVPCh-6 [Independent Militarized Fire Unit No. 6], which was situated in the city of Pripyat. It continues to be located there. It is the small SVPCH-6 on the outskirts of Pripyat; behind the glass-windowed door, a mighty fire truck stands silently, frozen for all time -- as a monument to the exploit performed by Kibenok's guard detail.

L. Telyatnikov says:

"Our unit No. 2 -- which includes V. Pravik's guard detail -- guarded the nuclear plant. It was the project unit. But the city unit where V. Kibenok worked guarded the city. They learned immediately about the fire. When fires occur, we automatically are given a higher number and a report is immediately issued to the central fire-alarm point. It is reported by radio or telephone by way of the city unit. The city unit, with respect to us, is considered to be the chief one. Therefore, upon receiving the report that a fire has broken out, they automatically know that they have to respond to the alarm.

"As I have already said, at first Pravik's guard detail was in the machine room. The fire was extinguished there, and the section was left on duty under his leadership, because the machine room continued to be in danger. But the city unit, inasmuch as it arrived slightly later, was sent to the reactor section. At first the machine room was the chief area, and then the reactor

section. Well, Pravik subsequently even left his own guard detail behind and ran off to help the city unit.

"Pravik was the only person in our guard detail who died. The other five persons who died were from city unit No. 6. It turned out that they were the first to begin to put out the fire in the reactor. That is where it was the most dangerous. From the point of radioactive danger, of course. From a firefighting point of view, the most dangerous place was the machine room, because our guard detail had been operating there at the initial moment of the accident."

Meanwhile the alarm kept growing.

From the very beginning of the accident, V. Pravik has issued an alarm to all the firefighting units in Kiev Oblast. In response to that alarm, firefighting subdivisions from the adjacent inhabited points were sent to the nuclear power plant. A reserve was urgently prepared.

Grigoriy Matveyevich Khmel, 50, fire truck driver, Chernobyl Rayon Fire Unit:

"I love to play chess. I was on duty that night. I was playing chess with another driver. I told him, 'You're not playing right, Misha. You're making mistakes.' He lost. We kept talking until about midnight, then I told him, 'Misha, I guess I'll go to bed.' He answered, 'Okay, I'll stay up a while longer with Boris.' 'Okay.'

"We have trestle beds at our unit. I set one up, put the mattress on it, took a clean blanket from the wardrobe, and put down my head to go to sleep. I don't know whether or not I dozed off for a long time, but some time later I heard something: 'Yes, yes, they've gone, they've gone!' I opened my eyes and I saw Misha, Boris, and Grisha standing there. 'They've gone!' 'Where?' 'Volodya is getting the report right now.' He has just finished getting the report when the siren began howling. They had sounded the fire alarm. 'Where are we going?' I asked. 'To the Chernobyl power plant.'

"Misha Golovnenko, the driver, leaves immediately, and I'm the second one to leave. Our unit has two trucks -- I'm in one, and he's in the other. Well, it often happens that when we leave we do not close the doors, and those doors have glass windows in them, so that the wind often breaks our windows. So it usually happens that the last one to leave has to close the garage. So Prishchepa and I close the garage. I think that I'll catch up with Misha -- I'm driving the ZIL-130. Well, we start going and pretty soon I'm going about 80 kilometers an hour. Above my head I can hear the radio set crackling -- Ivankov, Polesskoye is calling us. The dispatcher is calling us. I sense that he is calling us in response to the alarm. I think, 'Something isn't quite right...'

"Then I catch up with Golovnenko's truck just before we reach the power plant, so that there won't be any confusion at the construction site, so that the two trucks can arrive together. I catch up with him and start tailgating his truck. We drive closer. As soon as we arrive at the place where the power plant administrative office is located, we can see the flames. It is like a

cloud -- a red cloud. I think, 'We're going to have a lot of work to do.' We arrived there at about 0145 or 0150 hours. We look around -- not a single vehicle of ours is there -- neither from unit No. 2 or unit No. 6. What's going on? It turns out that they had gone to the northern part of the unit. But where had we arrived? We see graphite is lying around there. Misha asks, 'What's graphite?' I kick it away with my foot. But a firefighter on the other truck picks it up. 'It's hot,' he says. Graphite. The pieces were different sizes -- large and small, big enough to be picked up. The pieces had all been piled up on the pathway, and everyone had trampled on them. Later on I see Pravik running by. He was the lieutenant who died. I knew him. He and I worked two years together. And my son, Petro Grigoryevich Khmel -- a guard detail chief, just like Pravik. Lieutenant Pravik was the chief of guard detail No. 3, and Petro, guard detail No. 1. My son and Pravik had graduated from school together... My second son -- Ivan Khmel -- is the chief of the fire inspectorate in Chernobylskiy Rayon.

"Yes, Pravik was running by. I asked him, 'What's going on, Volodya?' He said, 'Let's put the trucks on the dry tubes. Bring them over here.' So the trucks from unit 2 and unit 6 drive up and turn toward us. There are two trucks of ours and three of theirs -- tank trucks and a ladder truck. Five vehicles on this side. All of us go into action immediately. We drive the trucks up to the wall to the dry tubes. Do you know what dry tubes are? No? They're empty tubes into which it is necessary to turn on the water and then pull them up there onto the roof, attach the hoses, and then to put out the fire.

"We bring the truck up to the dry tubes. We bring it in close immediately -- we have a very strong truck. We put Petya Pivovarov from unit 6 next to the hydrant, but there's no place for mine to go. I tell Boris and Kolya Titenok, 'I need a hydrant!' Well, we found the hydrant right away. It is nighttime, and it was hard to find it. We had had drills, and we knew that, according to the layout, our hydrant was on this side, but it turned out to be on the other side. We found the hydrant, drive the truck up to it, quickly toss out the hoses and immediately Titenok and, I think, Boris -- I don't remember -- drag them up to Misha's truck. Three 20-meter hoses -- that's 60 meters.

"It's just that we didn't know anything about radiation. And we didn't have any idea about who was working. The trucks were pouring water onto the fire. Misha refilled the tank truck with water and the water went up onto the roof. Then those guys who died started going up on top -- Kolya Vashchuk and the others, and also Volodya Pravik. At that time I couldn't see Kibenok. They went up the ladder, which is a lean-to type, and started climbing up there. I helped to set it up, everyone started working quickly, and then I didn't see them any more.

"Well, we kept working. We could see the flames -- they were burning with heat that was like a cloud. Then a pipe over there -- I don't know what kind of installation it was, it was something square -- also started burning. Then we see that the flames aren't burning, but sparks are beginning to fly around. I tell them, 'Hey, guys, it's going out.'

"Leonenko comes up. He's the deputy chief of unit 2. Well, we know that Pravik has already been brought out, and Telyatnikov was brought out -- that was when we realized that there was radiation there. They tell us, 'Come over here into the dining hall and we'll give you some powder.' As soon as I go in, I ask, 'Isn't Petya here?' Petya was supposed to relieve Pravik at 0800 hours. They say, 'He's not here.' But they had got him up in response to the alarm. As soon as I went out, the guys tell me, 'Grandpa, they've taken Petya Khmel there as a replacement.' I think, 'Things are really bad.'

"Pretty soon a lot of cars arrive. It's our bosses arriving. A Volga arrived from the administrative office. Then cars came from Rozashev and Dymmer. I saw Yakubchik from Dymmer. We know one another. He's a driver. 'Is that you, Pavlo?' 'Yes.' We got in the car and started driving to the first building. We were brought into a room there, and they began to check for radiation. Everyone comes up, and he keeps writing, 'Dirty, dirty, dirty, dirty.' But no one says anything. That was at night. They led us into the shower room, to wash us off. They tell us, 'Ten people at a time, get undressed and throw your clothes over here.'

"I was wearing red boots and pants. As a driver, I'm not authorized to have a tarpaulin. I have a jersey, a coat, and a protective shirt. He says, 'Take your documents and your keys with you, and go straight into the shower room.' Okay. We got washed, we go into another room, and they issue us clothing and shoes. Everyone is very serious. I went outside and looked around. I could see everything. I see my Petya walking up. He's wearing his uniform, a raincoat, his fireman's belt, his service cap, and red boots. 'Where are you going, Petya?' I asked him. Then people started hollering at him, because he had been where we had just washed. They took him and led him away. In other words, they wouldn't let him through. He only said, 'Are you here, Dad?' and then they took him away.

"Then we were taken to the civil defense basement. It was quiet there, and they had cots. This was sometime before 0700 hours. It was 0800, or maybe 0900 hours, when I see Petya walking up to me. He has changed his clothes. Well, he comes up and sits down and starts talking to me. Just everyday questions. He doesn't even say anything about this. He says, 'I don't know, Dad, whether I ought to go home. I feel kind of sick.' Later on, he says, 'Dad, I think I'd better go to the medical center.' 'Okay, go!' And he left.

"I didn't even ask him what he had done up there -- I didn't have any time to ask him.

"Another son, Ivan, had also responded to the alarm. He was subordinate to the Chernobyl Rayon department. He had been awakened somewhere around 0600 hours. He had been sent out as a scout. He has an UAZ and he rushed around here and there.

"At first it was as though I didn't feel anything. But, first of all, I hadn't slept, then I got excited, and finally I got so frightened that I just can't stop shaking..."

Hero of the Soviet Union Lieutenant Vladimir Pavlovich Pravik.

Hero of the Soviet Union Lieutenant Viktor Nikolayevich Kibenok.

Sergeant Nikolay Vasilyevich Vashchuk.

Senior Sergeant Vasiliy Ivanovich Ignatenko.

Senior Sergeant Nikolay Ivanovich Titenok.

Sergeant Vladimir Ivanovich Tishchura.

Six portraits in black frames. Six handsome young men look at us from the wall of the Chernobyl fire station, and it seems that their glances are mournful and have frozen their bitterness, their reproach, and the mute question: how could this have happened? But it only seems that way now. On that April night, in the chaotic job of fighting the fire, their glances did not show either bitterness or reproach. They did not have time for that. They were working. They were saving the nuclear power station, they were saving Pripyat, Chernobyl, Kiev, and all of us.

It was June 1986 when I arrived here, at the holy of holies of the UkSSR MVD [Ministry of Internal Affairs] OO the Chernobyl fire station, which has become the center of all the firefighting work in the Zone. It was an unbelievably hot June, when the sun was blazing in the sky and there wasn't the slightest hint of a cloud -- and all this had happened not because of God's will, but because of man's: the pilots were ruthlessly destroying the clouds in the area of the nuclear power plant by using special methods for applying chemicals to the sky by aircraft.

The fire station itself is very pretty, and almost resembles a dacha. I looked at those doors which "grandpa" Khmel had closed so carefully after himself as he drove out to the fire. The glass is still intact. Two firefighters with hoses in their hands were washing the asphalt courtyard over which a steamy wave of hot air was lazily rising. Red and white fire trucks were parked ready for departure. They had been washed until they sparkled and they bore license plates from Cherkassy, Dnepropetrovsk, and Poltava oblasts. Firefighters maintained duty round the clock near the reactor: anything could be expected. In addition, the united fire detachment that had been on duty during those hot days in Chernobyl had to take part in the fight against "conventional" fires, which are no rarity in these wooded, swampy localities, especially during dry years: the peatbogs were burning in the Zone. But, like everything else in the Zone, these "conventional" fires were also unconventional: as the smoke rose into the air, it took with it radioactive aerosols, and it was completely inadmissible to allow that to happen...

While I was here, I met chief of the UkSSR MVD Fire Protection Administration Major General of Internal Service Filipp Nikolayevich Desyatnikov and chief of the firemen detachment Colonel Yevgeniy Yefimovich Kiryukhantsev. Colonel Kiryukhantsev is a Muscovite and a typical military intellectual: erect, handsome, precise. He told me that in early June their unit had had a very strange, but very remarkable comrade court. The charge that was being judged

was that two of the firefighters had "got two roentgens more than they had the 'right' to" as they were executing a specific operation (all the live actions, before they are executed, are carefully planned and repeatedly rehearsed with a stop watch).

Just think of that!

In May they might have been praised and declared to be heroes. But in June they were being punished. That is the headlong manner in which the times have changed in the Zone, as well as the very attitude that people take to the broad concept of "heroism."

But the attitude toward those men whose black-framed portraits hung on the wall of the Chernobyl fire station has not changed and will never change.

Belokon With the Ambulance

Valentin Petrovich Belokon, 28; ambulance driver, medical-sanitation unit of the city of Pripyat.

"On 25 April at 2000 hours I came on duty. One ambulance team was operating in Pripyat -- a physician and a medical aide. But we have a total of six ambulances.

"When we had a lot of calls, we would divide them up: the medical aide would respond to calls from 'chronics' -- people who needed an injection, and the physician would respond to complicated cases and those involving children. We worked separately when we were on duty, as though we were two teams: medical aide Sasha Skachok and myself. Masnetsova was the dispatcher. So, at about 2000 hours everything left immediately, with surprising speed. No, at first everything was calm at the nuclear power plant, but it was not calm in the city. I kept driving around, practically without getting out of the ambulance. First we had to respond to some drinking party. Someone had fallen out of a window. No, he wasn't killed. He was absolutely healthy, but drunk as a skunk... Then we had some calls involving children, and we had to make a trip to some old lady, and later that night, at about midnight -- I remember it well, because it was a very confused night -- we got a call: a 13-year-old boy with bronchial asthma was having a prolonged attack. The attack was prolonged because a neighbor had called and had not given the apartment number. I started driving onto Prospekt Stroiteley and it was already midnight. It was a tremendous building. I looked around, and walked back and forth, but I couldn't find anyone. What should I do? It wouldn't do to wake up everyone there. So I drove off.

"When I arrived back at the unit, Masnetsova said, 'They called again, and this time they gave the apartment number.' I drove back there again, and as I was pulling up, the neighbor began cursing me because I had arrived late. I said, 'Well, I didn't know the number.' He said, 'Well, you're supposed to know.' But I honestly didn't know. This was the first time I had responded to a call involving this boy. That neighbor kept pushing at me, and we almost got into a fight. But then I took the boy into the ambulance and administered

euphilline intravenously. Meanwhile the neighbor kept threatening to complain about me...

"We were on our way back to the hospital -- I was riding with driver Anatoliy Gumarov, he's an Ossetian, and about 30 years old -- when we saw the TO [expansion unknown]. How could that be? We were driving along at night, the city was empty and everyone was asleep. I was seated next to the driver. I saw two flashes from the direction of Pripyat. At first we did not realize that they were from the nuclear power plant. We were driving along Kurchatova when we saw the flashes. We thought that it was summer lightning. Because there were buildings all around and we could not see the nuclear power plant. Just the flashes. Like lightning, or maybe a bit bigger than lightning. We didn't hear any rumbling. The engine was running. Then we were told over the radio unit that there had been a big blowup. Our dispatcher had heard the explosion. First one, and then a second one immediately after it. Tolya said, 'Maybe it's summer lighting, or maybe it isn't -- I don't know.' He's a hunter and therefore he was slightly confused. It was a quiet, starry night, with nothing out of the ordinary...

"When we arrived at the medical-sanitation unit, the dispatcher said that there had been an explosion. We arrived at 0135 hours. We had received a call to go to the nuclear power plant, and medical aide Sasha Skachok had left to go there. I asked the dispatcher, 'Who called? What kind of fire is it?' She couldn't give any coherent answers. She didn't know whether I was supposed to go, or whether I wasn't. So I decided to wait until I got more information from Sasha. At 0140 or 0142 Sasha called and said that there was a fire, that people had been burned, and they needed a doctor. He was very agitated. He did not give any details, but just hung up the telephone. I grabbed my doctor's bag and narcotics, because there were burned people, and I told the dispatcher to get in contact with the chief of the medical-sanitation unit. I also took with me two more empty vehicles. I myself rode with Gumarov.

"It would take us about 7-10 minutes making a direct trip to get to the nuclear power plant.

"We left on the road that goes to Kiev, and then we turned to the left, toward the power plant. And that was when I met Sasha Skachok -- he was driving toward us, on his way back to the medical-sanitation unit, but he had his emergency light flashing, so I didn't stop him, because if the emergency light was flashing, that meant it was an emergency. We kept driving toward the power plant.

"When we reached the gate, guards were standing there. They asked us, 'Where are you going?' 'To the fire.' 'Why aren't you wearing protective clothing?' 'How was I supposed to know that I would have to wear protective clothing?' I didn't have any information. I was just wearing my doctor's coat. It was an April evening, and it was warm at night, even without a hat or anything else. We kept driving around and I met Kibenok.

"When I was talking to Kibenok, I asked him, 'Are there any burn victims?' He said, 'No, but the situation is not completely clear. Some of my guys are

getting a little nauseated.

"Actually the fire was not yet visible. It seemed to be climbing up the chimney. The floors and the roof had crashed down...

"Kibenok and I were talking right next to the power unit where the firemen were standing. Pravik and Kibenok -- at that time they arrived on two trucks. Pravik jumped out, but he did not come toward me. Kibenok was slightly excited and on edge.

"Sasha Skachok had already picked up Shashenok at the plant. His guys had pulled him out. He was burned and a beam had fallen on him. He died on the morning of 26 April in the resuscitator.

"We did not have any radiation monitors. We were told that there were gas masks and sets of protective clothing, but nothing was there. Nothing was being done...

"I had to make a telephone call. Kibenok said that he had to get in touch with his bosses, so I started driving to the ABK -- the administrative and personal-services building -- which is situated about 80 meters from the power unit. We parked the vehicles on the circle. One vehicle was parked slightly closer to the unit. I told the guys, 'If anyone needs help, I'll be parked here.'

"I sensed a real alarm when I saw Kibenok and then, alongside the administrative building, the fellows from operations. They were jumping out of the third unit and running toward the administrative building -- you couldn't get any coherent information from any of them.

"The doors of the medical station were nailed shut...

"I telephoned the central control panel. I asked them, 'What's the situation?' 'The situation is unclear. Stay where you are, and give aid if it's needed.' Then I called my own medical-sanitation unit. Deputy chief Vladimir Aleksandrovich Pecheritsa was already there.

"I told Pecheritsa that I had seen the fire and had seen that the roof had collapsed at the fourth power unit. This was about 0200 hours. I told him that I was upset -- I had come here but had not yet done any work at all, and the whole city was depending on me. There might even be urgent calls. It also told Pecheritsa that there were no burn victims yet, but the firemen has said that they were becoming slightly nauseated. I began to recall my military hygiene and remember my institute training. A certain amount of knowledge floated to the top, but I had apparently forgotten everything. Because we had felt that no one would ever have to rely on us. Who would ever need radiation hygiene? Hiroshima and Nagasaki were very remote from us.

"Pecheritsa said, 'For the time being, stay where you are. In about 15 or 20 minutes, call again and we'll tell you what to do. Don't get excited. We'll provide our own doctor for the city. We'll call him.' Literally at that very moment, three people came up to me. I think they were on temporary-duty

assignment. They were leading a fellow of about 18 years of age. The fellow was complaining of nausea and severe headaches, and had begun vomiting. They had been working in the third unit and then, I think, had gone to the fourth... I asked him what he had eaten and when, how he had spent the evening, and whether any of those things could be making his nauseated. I took his blood pressure. It was 140 or 150 over 90, somewhat elevated, and was jumping around. The fellow didn't seem to be feeling completely himself. He said that he felt funny... I brought him to the first-aid station. There wasn't anything in the waiting room, not even anything to sit on. The only things there were two vending machines with carbonated water, but the medical station was closed. I brought him to the ambulance. And he began 'sailing away' before my very eyes, although he was stimulated, and at that time he had those symptoms -- mental confusion, inability to speak, inability to walk steadily, as though he had taken a good dose of alcohol, but there wasn't any smell or anything else... He was pale. Meanwhile, those who had run out of the unit kept exclaiming only, 'It's terrible, it's terrible!' -- their mental processes were already breaking down. Later on, the guys said the readings had gone off the scale. But that was later.

"I administered relanium, aminazine, and something else to this fellow, and immediately after I had given him the injection, three more people came walking up to the first aid station. It was three or four people from operations. They all said the same thing as though they had memorized the text: they had headaches with the same symptoms, a stiffening in the throat, dryness, nausea, vomiting. I administered relanium to them. I was all by myself, without a medical aid. So I immediately put them in the ambulance and sent them to Pripyat with Tolya Gumarov.

"Then I called Pecheritsa again and told him such and such. All the symptoms."

I asked, "Didn't he say that he would send help to you right away?"

"No. He didn't say that... As soon as I had sent them off, the guys brought the firemen to me. They were wearing raincoats. Several people. They literally could not stand on their feet. I employed strictly symptomatic treatment -- relanium, aminazine -- in order to improve their mental state somewhat and relieve the pain...

"When Tolya Gumarov returned from the medical-sanitation unit, he brought me a lot of narcotics. I made a telephone call again and said that I wouldn't use them, because there were no burn victims. But for some reason those narcotics were shoved on me. Later on, when I went to the medical-sanitation unit in the morning, no one wanted to take them away from me, because they began to take measurements of me -- there was a very strong background. I tried to give the narcotics to them, but they would not take them. So I pulled out the narcotics, put them on the table, and said, 'You can do what you want.'

"After sending the firemen away, I asked to have potassium iodide, tablets, sent to me, although the medical station at the nuclear power plant probably had iodine. At first Pecheritsa asked, 'Why do you need it?' Then, after

they had seen the burn victims, they didn't ask anymore. They collected the potassium iodide and sent it. I began giving it to people.

"The building was open, but the people were coming out into the street. They were vomiting and said that they felt uncomfortable. They were all crowding together. I tried to get them to go into the building, but they were trying to get into the courtyard. I explained to them that they had to get into the vehicles and go to the medical-sanitation unit to be examined. They said, 'I must have smoked too much. I was simply over-excited. There was this big explosion...' And they kept running away from me. The members of the public also were not entirely aware of what had occurred.

"Later on, in Moscow, in clinic No. 6, I was lying down in a ward with one of the radiation-monitoring specialists. He told me that immediately after the explosion the stationary instruments had readings completely off the scale. They telephoned someone -- either the chief engineer, or the work safety engineer -- and that engineer answered, 'What's all the panic about? Where's the shift chief on duty? When the shift chief arrives, tell him to call me back. But don't panic. The report isn't in accordance with the standard form.' I answered him and hung up the telephone. He was in Prip'yat, at home. Later on, they jumped out with those 'depeshki' (from DP, "dosimetric device"), but you couldn't get to the fourth unit with them.

"My three vehicles kept circulating. There was a very large number of fire trucks, and therefore our vehicles began turning on their lights in order to indicate that they were taking the right of way, and they began blowing their horns, 'Beep-beep!'

"I didn't call Pravik or Kibenok. I remember that Petr Khmel was there. He a very dark-haired person. At first I was in the same ward with Petr in Prip'yat, in the very next cot, and later on in Moscow.

"At 0600 hours I felt a tickle in my throat and a headache. Did I understand the danger and was I afraid? Yes, I did understand it and I was afraid. But when people see a person wearing a white coat, that calms them down. I was standing around like everyone else, without a gas mask or any other protective gear."

"Why weren't you wearing a gas mask?" I asked.

"Where were we supposed to get one? I was on the point of rushing around and looking for things -- there wasn't anything anywhere. I called the medical-sanitation unit and asked, 'Do we have any "petals"?' 'No, we don't have any "petals."'. That's all there was to it. Were we supposed to work while wearing gauze masks? They don't do any good. In that situation it was simply impossible to go back on our word.

"At the unit, after day had broken, you could no longer see the summer lightning. There was black smoke and black soot. The reactor kept spitting -- not constantly, but there would be smoke, more smoke, and then boom! An eruption. It kept smoking, but there weren't any flames.

"By that time the firemen had come down from there, and one guy said, 'Even if it burns with a blue flame, we're not going up there anymore.' By now everyone knew that something was wrong with the reactor, although the control panel did not give any specific information about that. Shortly after 0500 hours a radiation-monitoring specialist arrived on a fire truck -- I don't remember who he was or where he came from. He arrived with the firemen. They had their hatchets and they chopped down a door at the ABK, and carried away something in boxes. I don't know whether it was protective clothing, or equipment, but they loaded it in the fire truck. The radiation-monitoring specialist had a large stationary device.

"He asked, 'Why are you standing around here without any protection? The level here is horrendous. What are you doing, anyway?' I told him, 'I'm working here.'

"I left the ABK, and my vehicles were not there anymore. I asked the radiation-monitoring specialist, 'Where is this cloud going? To the city?' 'No,' he answered, 'it's moving toward Yanov, and only one side of it has barely touched our area.' He was about 50 years old. He left on the fire truck. And I continued to feel sick.

"Later on, Tolya Gumarov drove up, and I am thankful to him for that. By that time I could barely move. I thought that maybe I ought to ask to be taken onto a fire truck and be driven away while I could still move about. The initial euphoria had passed, and I had begun to feel a weakness in my legs. While I was working, I didn't notice that, but then, all of a sudden, it began. I felt like I was going to collapse. I felt like pressure was being exerted on me, that I would burst, that I was being depressed. I had only one thought: I just wanted to hide somewhere in a slit trench. I didn't remember my loved ones. I didn't remember anything. I just wanted to get away by myself, and that was it. Just to get away from everything.

"Tolya Gumarov and I stood around for about five or seven minutes more. We were waiting to see whether anyone would ask for help, but no one did. I told the firemen that I was driving back to the base, to the medical-sanitation unit. If anyone needed us, they could call us. There were more than a dozen fire trucks there at that time.

"When I arrived at the medical-sanitation unit, there were a lot of people there. The guys brought me a glass of alcohol, and told me to drink it. They said that they had been given that instruction, and that it would help. But I couldn't drink it. My stomach was turning inside out. I asked the guys to take potassium iodide to my folks at the dormitory. But some were drunk and others kept running around and endlessly washing themselves. So I took a Moskvich -- it wasn't our driver -- and started to go home. Before I did, I washed and changed my clothing. I brought the potassium iodide to my folks in the dormitory. I told them to close the windows, and not to let the children go outside. I told them everything that I could. I issued tablets to the neighbors. Suddenly Dyakonov, our doctor, came to pick me up, and he took me away. They put me in therapy and immediately began treating me intravenously. I began to lose consciousness. My condition began to worsen and everything that I remember is rather mixed up. Later on I couldn't remember anything..."

That summer I received from Donetsk a letter from an old friend of mine, dean at the school of pediatrics at the Donetsk Medical Institute imeni M. Gorkiy, assistant professor Vladimir Vasilyevich Gazhiyev. Once, during the 1950's, Gazhiyev and I published the satirical newspaper for the Kiev Medical Institute, KROKODIL V KHALATE [Crocodile in a Doctor's Coat], which was very popular among the students and instructors: we drew caricatures, wrote satirical items... In his letter V. V. Gazhiyev told me about a graduate from the school of pediatrics, Valentin Belokon:

"During his years of training at the institute he was, on the whole, an average, ordinary student... He never attempted to make an advantageous impression on those around him, the instructors, administrators, etc. He carried out in a modest, worthy, and efficient manner the jobs that were assigned to him.

"People could sense that he was reliable. In his training he overcame difficulties independently, and there were no interruptions in it. He kept moving ahead to the assigned goal (he wanted to be a children's surgeon) in a worthy manner, executing everything that was required. His natural decency and the kindness of his nature won for him the steady, profound respect primarily of his comrades in his group and school year, as well as his instructors. When, in June, we learned of his worthy behavior on 26 April in Chernobyl, the first thing that we said was that Valik could not have acted otherwise. He is a real person, a reliable, decent one, to whom people are drawn."

I met Valentin Belokon in the autumn in Kiev, when he had a lot of things behind him -- a stay in the hospital, then a sanatorium, tribulations with getting an apartment and finding a job in Donetsk, and various bureaucratic ordeals (he had to apply a tremendous amount of effort in order to receive the wages that were coming to him for -- would you believe? -- the month of April, not to mention the obtaining of the material compensation that was paid to every inhabitant who was evacuated from Pripyat).

Seated in front of me was a rather thin, broad-shouldered, shy person, whose every word and gesture contained restraint and a profound sense of dignity -- as a doctor and as a human being. It was only on the third day that I accidentally learned that he was suffering from shortness of breath, although prior to the accident he had engaged in sports -- weight-lifting -- and had carried large loads. He and I drove to see Professor L. P. Kindzelskiy for a consultation...

Valentin told me about his children (he is the father of two girls -- five-year-old Tanya and very small Katya, who was one and half months old at the time of the accident). He was very pleased that he would finally be working in the specialty that he had consciously selected for himself to follow in life: as a children's surgeon. I was thinking about the way, on that night, he worked, as the first doctor in the world at the site of a catastrophe of this scope, to save the people who had suffered, who had been seized by terror, and tortured by radiation, how he instilled hope in them, because on

that night that was his only medicine, a medicine that was stronger than relanium, aminazine, and all the narcotics in the world.

Special-Purpose Column

Aleksandr Yuryevich Esaulov, 34, deputy chairman of the city ispolkom, Pripyat:

"They got me out of bed at night on the 26th, sometime after 0300 hours. Mariya Grigoryevna, our secretary, telephoned and said, 'There's been an accident at the nuclear power plant.' A friend of hers had been working at the plant. He had gone to her place at night and awakened her, and he told her about it.

"At 0350 hours I was at the ispolkom. The chairman had already been informed, and he had driven to the nuclear plant. I immediately telephoned our civil defense chief of staff, and he got out of bed armed and ready for action. He lived in a dormitory. He came immediately, practically flying. Then the chairman of the city ispolkom, Vladimir Pavlovich Voloshko, arrived. All of us got together and began to decide what to do.

"Of course we did not exactly know what to do. But we knew that it was a desperate situation.

"At the ispolkom I am the chairman of the planning commission. I'm in charge of transportation, medicine, communication, the roads, the employment bureau, the distribution of building materials, and retiree matters. In general, I'm a young deputy chairman of the city ispolkom: I was elected on 18 November 1985. On my birthday. I used to live in a two-room apartment. At the time of the accident, my wife and children were not in Pripyat -- she had gone to visit her parents, because she was on maternity leave. My son was born in November 1985. My daughter is 6 years old.

"Well, I drove off to go to our ATP [transport motor pool]. I had decided to wash the city. I phoned Kononykhin at the ispolkom, and asked him to send a street-washing truck. It arrived. What a situation! For the whole city we had -- you're not going to believe this! -- four sprinkler trucks! For 500,000 inhabitants! That was despite the fact that the ispolkom and the gorkom -- we had a somewhat quarrelsome situation between both agencies -- had gone to the ministry and had asked for more trucks. We had not foreseen the accident, but had asked for them simply to maintain the proper cleanliness in the city.

"A tank truck arrived. I don't know where they had dug it up. The driver was not the one usually assigned to it, and he did not know how to turn on the pump. The water came out of the hose only by force of gravity. I sent him back, but then he arrived again, about 20 minutes later. He had learned how to turn on the pump. We began washing the street near the gasoline pump. I know now, by hindsight, that that is one of the first procedures in keeping the dust down. The water came out with a soap solution. Later it turned out that this was a very contaminated place.

"At 1000 hours there was a meeting at the gorkom. It was a very brief only, only 10-20 minutes. This was no time to have a gab-fest. After the meeting I left immediately to go to the medical-sanitation unit.

"I was sitting in the medical-sanitation unit. As I recall now, the unit was completely visible. Right next to us, straight ahead of us. It was three kilometers away. Smoke was rising from the unit. It wasn't exactly black... it was like a stream of steam. It was like the smoke arising from an extinguished campfire, except that it was very dark. Then the graphite caught on fire. That was closer to evening. Of course, there was a big glow. There was a lot of graphite there... It was no laughing matter.

"After supper I was called by V. Malomuzh, second secretary of the Kiev Obkom, who instructed me to organize the evacuation of the most seriously sick persons to Kiev, to the airport, to be taken to Moscow.

"From the country's civil defense staff we had Hero of the Soviet Union, Colonel-General Ivanov. He arrived by plane.

"He turned over that plane for transporting the victims.

"All this occurred sometime after 1700 hours on Saturday, 26 April.

"It proved to be no simple matter to form a column. It wasn't simply a matter of loading people onto the transportation. We had to prepare various papers for each person -- their documents, their medical history, the results of analyses carried out. The basic delay occurred because of the need to formalize these personal documents. We even had to face situations such as needing a seal, but the seal was at the nuclear power plant. In order to speed things up, we sent the people without the seal.

"We carried 26 people in one motor bus, a red Ikarus tour bus. But I had asked for two buses, because we didn't know what might happen. God forbid, they might be some delay... And also an ambulance, because we had two people who were seriously ill, on stretchers, with 30-percent burns.

"I told the driver not to drive through the center of Kiev. Because those fellows in the buses were all wearing pyjamas. It was, of course, a wild spectacle. But for some reason we drove by way of Kreshchatik, and then turned to the left along Petrovskaya Alleya -- and then headed for Borispol. When we arrived, the gate was closed. It was nighttime, about 0300 hours, or maybe a bit after. We blew the horn, and of course there was a spectacle that was worthy of the gods. Someone came out in his slippers, wearing riding breeches without a belt, and opened the gate. We drove straight onto the field, to the airplane. The crew was already revving up the engine.

"Then there was another episode that struck me straight in the heart. The pilot came up to me and asked, 'How many did these guys get?' 'How many what?' 'Roentgens.' I said, 'They got enough. But what difference does that make?' He said, 'Well, I want to live too, and I don't want to get any extra roentgens. I have a wife and children.'

"Can you imagine it?

"The plane took off. I said goodbye to the victims, and wished them a quick recovery...

"We drove back to Pripyat. By now I hadn't slept for more than 24 hours, but I wasn't sleepy. At night, as we were driving to Borispol, I saw a column of buses en route to Pripyat. They were driving toward us. The evacuation of the city was already being prepared.

"This was the morning of 27 April, Sunday.

"After we arrived, I had breakfast and went to see Malomuzh. I gave him my report. He said, 'It's necessary to evacuate everyone who has been hospitalized.' At first I had taken out the ones who were most seriously ill, but now we had to take out all the victims. During the time when I was absent, more people had come in. Malomuzh said that I had to be in Borispol by 1200 hours. And we were discussing this at about 1000 hours. That was obviously an unrealistic time frame. We had to prepare all the people and formalize all the documents. Moreover, the first time I had taken 26 people out, but now we would have to evacuate 106.

"We gathered that entire 'delegation' together, prepared the documents for everyone, and left exactly at 1200 hours. There were three buses, and a fourth bus as a reserve. They were Ikarus buses. The wives were standing around, saying goodbye and crying. The guys were all ambulatory and were in their pyjamas. I told you, 'Stay together, everyone, so that I don't have to go looking for you.' One bus was filled up, then a second, and finally the third. Everyone is already on the buses, so I run to the escort vehicle. I get it and wait five minutes, then 10, 15, and the third bus isn't there!

"It turns out that three more victims have arrived, and then even more...

"Finally we leave. We had a stop in Zalesye. We came to an understanding that if anything happened, we were to blink our headlights. We're driving through Zalesye, and they start blinking! The driver stamps on the brakes. The buses stop. The last bus is about 80 or 90 meters behind the first ones. The last bus has stopped. A nurse comes flying out of it and rushes up to the first bus. It so happened that there were medical workers in all the buses, but the medicines were being carried in the first one. Someone rushes up and says, 'One of the patients is in a bad way!' That was the only time that I saw Belokon then. True, at that time I did not yet know his name. Later on I was told that it was Belokon. He was wearing pyjamas too. He ran out with his satchel to give assistance."

V. Belokon: "The first group of victims left in the evening of the 26th, at about 2300 hours, headed directly for Kiev. The operators were taken away, and Pravik, Kibenok, and Telyatnikov. But we stayed for the night. In the morning of the 27th my doctor says, 'Don't worry. You'll be flying to Moscow. We have received instruction to leave by lunchtime.' When they were taking us on the buses, I didn't feel too bad. Even when we stopped somewhere on the

other side of Chernobyl, and a few people were beginning to feel worse, I was still running around, attempting to help the nurse."

A. Esaulov: "Belokon was running around, and someone grabbed him by the arm. 'Where do you think you're going! You're sick!' Because he had been affected also... He was rushing around with his satchel. But the most interesting thing is that when we began to dig around in that satchel, we just couldn't find any ammonium hydroxide. I asked the guys in the GAI escort, 'Do you have any ammonium hydroxide in your medicine kit?' 'Yes, we do.' We turn around and start running to the bus. Belokon puts the ampoule under the guy's nose and he begins to feel better.

"I remember one more incident in Zalesye. The patients had gotten out of the buses -- a few had lit up cigarettes, a few were stretching their legs -- when suddenly a woman coming running up, screaming at the top of her voice. Her son was riding in that bus. Did he have to go? There was quite a confrontation... do you understand?... I had no idea where she appeared from. He kept saying, 'Mamo, mamo' to her, trying to calm her down.

"The plane was already waiting for us at the Borispol airport. The airport chief, Polivanov, was there. We drove out onto the field in order to get right next to the plane, because all the guys were wearing pyjamas and this was April, and it wasn't hot. We drove through the gate onto the field, and someone in a yellow car started blowing his horn after us, cursing us, and saying that we didn't have any authorization to drive out there. At first they would not let us approach that plane at all. The car led us out there.

"Then there was another incident. Polivanov and I were sitting comfortably in front of a heap of telephones, filling out documents for transporting the patients. I gave them a signed statement in the name of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant, a guarantee letter that the plant would pay for the flight -- it was a TU-154. A nice-looking woman comes in and offers us coffee. She had eyes like Jesus Christ. You could see that she already knew what was going on. She looks at me as though I was someone out of Dante's inferno. I had not slept for two days, and I was completely exhausted... She gave me some coffee. It was a tiny little cup. I drank it down in a single gulp. She gave me a second cup. It was wonderful coffee. We finally finished up all the paper work. I stand up and she says, 'That will be 56 kopecks.' I look at her. I don't understand anything she's saying. She says, 'Excuse me, but we're doing this for money.' I was so oblivious that I was unaware of the money and everything else... It was as though I had come from another planet.

"We washed the buses again, took a shower, and then started back to Pripyat. We left Borispol somewhere around 1600 hours. As we were driving back, we met buses coming in our direction...

"They were evacuating the people from Pripyat.

"When we arrived in Pripyat, it was already a deserted town."

That happened on Sunday, 27 August 1986.

Before the Evacuation

L. Kovalevskaya: "I lived in housing area No. 3. I used to have insomnia frequently, and used to take sleeping pills. On 25 April, a Friday, I finished writing my poem 'Paganini.' For three months I had worked on it every night. So on that night I decided to relax. I took a sleeping pill. Well, I fell into a deep sleep. I didn't even hear the explosions. And whenever we have backfires, you can hear them. They even shake the windows. In the morning my mother told me, 'There was an awful noise last night -- I don't know whether it was something rumbling at the power plant, or jet aircraft flying over us all night long.' I didn't attach any importance to that. Because it was Saturday. I get ready to go to a meeting of our literary association. I used to head that association. It's called 'Prometheus.' The power engineers and the construction workers, and other people from the power plant, used to go there too... I walk outside and I can see that all the streets are covered with water and some kind of white solution. Everything is white, like foam. All the sides of the street are covered. That was when I knew that there had been an emergency explosion... My heart skipped a beat. I keep walking farther on. I see a militia man here, then another one there -- I've never seen so many militia men in the city. They are not doing anything. They are just sitting in front of the various buildings -- the post office, the Palace of Culture. It's like a state of martial law. I feel cut to the quick. But people are strolling around. Children are everywhere, and it is a very hot day. People are driving out to the beach, to their dachas, to go fishing. Many of them were already at the dachas, or sitting at a stream, or alongside the cooling pond -- this is an artificial reservoir near the nuclear power plant... I never did get as far as the literary association. My daughter Yana had gone to school. I went back home and said, 'Mama, I don't know what has happened, but don't let Natasha (my niece) to outside. And when Yana gets home from school, make her stay at home.' And I told her to keep the ventilation panes closed. My mother did not understand what was going on. It was so hot. I said, 'Don't you go out either, and keep the girls in today.' She asked, 'What has happened?' 'I don't really know, but I feel that something's wrong.' Then I left again, and started walking to the central square. Members of our literary study group were heading that way, and I met them. The reactor was easily visible. You could see that it was smoking and that the wall had collapsed. Flames were coming out of the hole. The chimney that was between the third and fourth units was red-hot. It gave the impression of being a fiery pole. The flame doesn't stay there, but keeps flickering. But the fiery pole keeps standing there. Either that, or the flame is coming out of the opening. I don't know.

"All day long, we didn't know anything. No one anywhere said anything. It was just a fire. But nothing was said about radiation -- that there was a radioactive emission.

"Soon Yana came home from school and said, 'Mama, we had calisthenics for almost a whole hour in the street.' That's insanity..."

Aneliya Romanovna Perkovskaya, secretary of the Pripyat Komsomol committee:

"Starting in the morning, people kept coming into the city committee, offering to help. But we ourselves did not know what to do. We didn't have any information. Rumors were flying..."

"They had put out the fire. But what about the reactor?"

"There were even arguments about whether or not the reactor was broken open. No one believe that the reactor was broken. We talked with the guys who had been studying the reactors, because the reactor, in and of itself, is so well designed that even if you wanted to blow it up, you couldn't do that. Therefore it was difficult to believe that it was broken open."

Yuriy Vitalyevich Dobrenko, 27, instructor at the Pripyat Komsomol committee:

"A doctor was living next door to me, in the Yupiter plant's dormitory. His name is Valentin Belokon. He worked in the ambulance. I used to go fishing with him. He's a nice guy, and we used to go fly-casting together. When the accident happened, he was on duty, and then, later on, he came to the dormitory, wearing only his white doctor's coat. He came at about 0600 hours, woke up his neighbors in the building, and gave everyone iodine and tablets. He said, 'Take them, just in case,' Then the ambulance came for him and they took him away. He didn't manage to wake me up. I was told all this in the morning.

"All day long there was some kind of indefiniteness at the city committee. But after 1800 hours we all met again -- we were confronted with a specific task..."

A Perkovskaya:

"By about 1600 hours on Saturday, 26 April, members of a Governmental Committee began arriving. An idea was suggested -- load sand on helicopters and cover the reactor with sand. I can't say whose idea that was. There were very long discussions about that. Was lead necessary, or not necessary? Was boric acid necessary, or not necessary? Was sand necessary, or not necessary? Commands were issued quickly and then replaced. That was understandable, since this situation had never existed before. It was necessary to seek something fundamentally new.

"Finally it was decided to load up the sand. We have the Pripyat Cafe, which is situated near the river terminal. Sand for housing areas No. 6 and 7 was obtained there. It is excellent, clean sand without any admixtures. The sand was located into sandbags. We had a lot of people in the city who were on

detached-duty assignments. The guys came from Ivano-Frankovsk. They said, 'We need an agitator!' That sounded absolutely military. 'We need an agitator, because the guys are exhausted.' The guys had already been working there for a long time...

"We needed ropes to tie up the sandbags. Then we didn't have any more left. I remember that we took some red calico that we were going to use for holidays, and began tearing it into strips..."

Yu. Dobrenko:

"That evening we all gathered at the city committee, and I was given my first assignment: shovels had been brought to the area of the Pripyat Cafe, and we were supposed to go and get those shovels -- about 150 of them -- and other guys went to the various dormitories to get young people to fill the sandbags. The young people arrived. At about 2300 hours a truck with empty bags arrived, and we began filling them with sand.

"One of the first to arrive was Serezha Umanskiy, secretary of the Komsomol organization of the Pripyat Installation Administration. He was working without a radiation meter, without anything. I remember now that he was given a white uniform. He worked all night, and then they released him to get some sleep. I saw him again the next morning at the Komsomol city committee and asked him, 'Is that you, Serezha?' He answered, 'Yes, I've been working. We've been filling the sandbags.'"

Yu. Badayev:

"On the night of 25-26 April we spent the entire shift at the power plant. Around 0800 hours we were given the command: everyone is to leave his work station. We went to the civil defense area. Then we were driven home.

"I told my wife that something terrible had happened -- from our window you could see the destroyed unit. I told her, 'Don't let the children go outside. And keep the windows closed.' My wife, unfortunately, did not do as I asked her -- she felt bad because I was so exhausted. I lay down, and she let the children go outside so that they wouldn't make any noise. She gave me the chance to get some rest... It would have been better if I hadn't slept... There wasn't any instruction on Saturday that the children not be let outside. We got that instruction on Sunday. At about 1000 hours a woman came running up and she said that the children should not be let outside. They should stay inside and listen to the radio. At 1400 hours the evacuation began."

A few months later, early in the morning, while it was still dark and a terrible fog was hanging over the world, Sasha Esaulov and I drove into the Zone. We were riding in a Zhiguli-008. Esaulov is an excellent driver, and our trip was like a motor rally. The high beams of the headlights struck against impenetrable puffs of fog and reflected back, blinding us. With the low beams, you could see practically nothing, especially where no dividing line had been painted on the asphalt. From time to time, the road slipped away from us, but somehow we found our way back onto the road. The car behaved excellently. ("That's what a front-wheel-drive car can do!" Sasha, a

husky, dark-eyed, ruddy guy, said excitedly.) On my knees I was carrying a cassette tape-recorder, and as we traveled that entire tense and dangerous trip, in order to keep ourselves alert and instill confidence in us, we listened to songs sung by those guys from Liverpool, the famous Beatles. In a kind of surprising way, their music combined with our headlong trip through the Zone. Our car did not have ordinary license plates. But large numbers -- 002 -- were painted on the hood and the side of the car, like on racing cars. From time to time, we would encounter armored personnel carriers coming toward us on the road with their headlights lit, or we would see chemical defense subdivisions at work: the soldiers were wearing black coveralls and special poisonous-green boots.

"Just as we were entering Pripjat, we suddenly saw, on both sides of the road, piles of sand that had been dug out by bulldozers, and tree stumps that had been pulled out. Farther on, we saw a reddish-colored forest that looked as though it had been scorched. This was the sadly famous forest that has already gone down in the legend of the Zone under the name of the 'Scorched Forest.' Some of the effluent from the fourth reactor had been dumped there. The city began on the other side of that forest, and right next to it was the area of the so-called 'Nakhalovka' [Shanty-town], where people had set up 'dachas' without any authorization -- miserable shacks made of wooden boards, and small orchards. On that Sunday people were relaxing there."

A. Perkovskaya:

"On Saturday, a meeting of the civil guard was planned at school No. 3. The school is a large one, with 2500 students, and the civil guard there consists of 1500 people. The meeting was supposed to have been held at the Palace of Culture. Well, at a meeting on the morning of the 26th, that question was raised, and V. Malomuzh -- the second secretary of the party's obkom -- said that we should carry out everything that had been planned. The school director, after we had left that meeting, asked, 'What am I supposed to do?' I answered, 'Conduct a meeting at the school, but it is not mandatory for all the children to be there.' So the meeting was held there anyway, but in the school's gymnasium.

"On Saturday all the classes were held. Nothing was canceled. But there were no competitions outdoors.

"In schools o. 1 and 2, where I was, the windows were closed. Wet rags had been placed against them, and there were people on duty at the door, to prevent anyone from entering or leaving.

"I don't know about the other schools.

"It was planned to have a Health Race on Sunday. The teachers did not know whether or not it would be held. One of the teachers telephoned the gorkom and said, 'In the morning I'm having all the children come to the school.' And when she was told that people were already hollering about the evacuation, she exclaimed, 'What evacuation are you talking about? We're supposed to have a Health Race today!...'

"Just imagine: it was just an hour and a half until the evacuation. Our students' snack bar and large trade center were full of parents and their children. They were eating ice cream. It was a day off, and everything was fine and calm. People were walking their dogs in the city. But when we went up to people and explained the situation to them, their reaction was stormy and incredulous: 'It's no concern of yours that I'm talking a stroll. I can take a stroll if I want to.' And that was that. That is how people perceived the situation.

"I don't know whether they believed us, or whether they didn't. The stores had a large amount of all kinds of food supplies, the holidays would be here soon, people were buying food supplies for the holidays, and everyone had his own plans -- some would be going to their dachas, others would be going somewhere else...

"I remember that Sasha Sergiyenko, our second secretary, was upset. He said, 'I've just seen a kid sitting on the sand, and his dad is the SIUR -- senior engineer for reactor control. How could that father, knowing that there had been an accident at the nuclear power plant, allow his child to sit there and dig in the sand? And the street is right next to those woods.' He meant the 'Reddish Forest'...."

Evacuation

Forty-five years after the beginning of the Great Patriotic War, the people in our country began to hear again that fearsome word: evacuation.

I remember Kiev in 1941, a city that was engulfed in alarm. I remember the confusion at the train station -- we lived not far from it. Some people were leaving, others were remaining behind. Some didn't believe that the Germans would be coming to Kiev (my father said on the first day of the war that in two weeks we would be in Berlin). Some were already buying up food supplies, getting ready for the occupation. No one knew anything about what was going on, and as a result the uncertainty only increased. Meanwhile German aircraft were already flying boldly over Kiev, and under the Plexiglas hoods you could see the heads of the radio operator-gunners who were victoriously looking down on the ancient capital of Russia and the gleaming golden cupolas of its cathedrals. Ominous rumors were spreading through the city concerning encirclement, concerning instances of sabotage, parachute assaults, and breakthroughs by German tanks -- and we were doomed to sit at home, without going making a move, because our father had gone to the front-line zone and we had not heard anything from him. Our father -- an engineer in road-building -- was working at the NKVD highways administration. He was a party member, and we could only guess what the family of an NKVD employee and Bolshevik could expect under the occupation. But on an alarming hot day in July 1941 a one-and-a-half ton truck drove up to our old two-story building on Solomenka. My father jumped out of it and gave us a half hour to gather our things together. My mother started rushing around the apartment, not knowing what to take with us. My father said that it wouldn't be for long -- maybe a month, or as a maximum two, until the autumn. Therefore we did not take any warm clothing, and in the confusion we even forgot the necessities of life... Later on, in the bitter Russian winter, in Saratov, we remembered our father's

optimism, which had been instilled by the newspapers, radio broadcasts, and movies: before the war there had been the excellent movie "If War Comes Tomorrow."

Since that time I have always perceived evacuation -- of any scale -- as a tremendous misfortune that is always unexpected, that always causes people to react in a shocked and confused manner, irrespective of whether that evacuation has been organized poorly or well. A kind of historic hurricane pulls people out of their native soil by the roots, and it is very complicated to rebuild one's life in its previous forms.

A. Petrovskaya:

"The first mention of the possibility of evacuation was on Saturday evening, at about 2300 hours. At that hour of the night we had already been given the assignment of preparing within two hours all the documents for evacuating people. I was left behind and was told to prepare documents for turnover. That had a strong effect upon my nerves -- it reminded me very much about the war.

"Among all of us, including the guys at the gorkom, there was still a differentiation between things that happened before the war, and after the war. We even said things like, 'That happened before the war.' We know precisely what happened prior to 26 April, and what happened after that date. If it is necessary to bring back the recollection of anything.

"I began to think: what should I take away? Certainly the banners, seals, and record cards. But what else? The instruction manual simply did not contain the word "evacuation." Nothing had been stipulated for that eventuality. And yet we had three committees that operated with all the rights of a raykom. What were we supposed to do with their documentation? The Komsomol committee for the construction of the nuclear power plant is located across the street from unit 4 in the administrative building. The nuclear power plant committee is located a little farther away. It was also impossible to get there.

"I called the manager of the accounting sector and the statistician. That was during the nighttime. They came quickly and we began thinking about what had to be done.

"We collected all the documentation. We did not have any time to make records of what we had collected. We just put them into sacks and sealed them. Sveta and Masha were working in the sector, and the guys helped them. And we helped at the party's gorkom. The Governmental Commission was working there, and they asked definite questions about matters that they were not informed about, and they needed a local person. We told certain people to come to the gorkom, and we made telephone calls to others. Then we went to the ispolkom, and I was issued the plan for housing area No. 5. I was supposed to carry out the evacuation there."

L. Kovalevskaya:

"On the night between Saturday and Sunday we went to bed, and suddenly the doorbell rang. It was about 0300 hours. A neighbor's girl had come dashing over. She said, 'Aunt Lyuba, wake everyone up and get everyone together. There's going to be an evacuation.' I turn on the lights, and I hear people outside in the driveway. They are crying and running around. My neighbors have already gotten up. My mother has gotten dressed. She is shaking. I tell her, 'There's nothing to worry about. I just turned on the radio and nothing is being broadcast. If anything has happened, they would be broadcasting it over the radio.' 'No,' she said, 'I'll wait and see.' She waited for a half-hour, and there was nothing on the radio. Then an hour, and still nothing. 'Mama,' I tell her, 'go back to bed. Nothing's going to happen.' But then people got up and they were crying. A few people had left for Chernigov during the night. They had taken the 0400 hours Chernigov train from Yanov station."

A. Perkovskaya:

"At 0500 hours on the 27th we were released to gather up our things. I went home. My brother was sitting in an armchair -- he wasn't sleeping. I told my brother to gather together whatever he wanted. Well, he gathered his documents. I had known previously about the evacuation and had told my brother. But, believe me, he just took his documents, an extra shirt, and a jacket. And that was all."

"And I did the same thing. I had only a small pocketbook with me when I left. I took my documents, and that was all. Later on, it turned out that... When the dosimetry specialists took readings from our clothing, we had to change it. It turned out that we did not have any other clothing to change into. The girls at the Ivanovskiy Rayon committee gave me clothes to wear. But in my haste I had not taken anything at all with me. Especially since we had grown accustomed to believing what we were told. We were told that it would only be for three days. Although we were well aware that this would be not for three days, but for a longer period of time."

"I think that it was very right of them to say precisely that. Otherwise we would not have been able to carry out the evacuation so quickly or efficiently."

"When I went home in the morning, my neighbors began arriving after a half-hour. I calmed them down as best I could. I did not tell them that there would not be an evacuation. Nor did I tell them that there would. I just told them, 'Get your things together and wait for a communique.' I had time to drink a cup of coffee and then, at about 0600 hours, I went back to work. The word 'evacuation' was already being spoken in more specific terms there. We were being asked for our advice concerning the text of a communique to the people of Pripyat. I think that I can remember approximately what is said:

"Comrades, as a result of an accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant, an evacuation of the city is being announced. Take with you your documents,

necessary items, and, if possible, enough food for three days. The evacuation will begin at 1400 hours.'

"We broadcast that announcement four times."

L. Kovalevskaya:

"I told my mother, 'If we are being evacuated, that means it's not for three days. Things don't happen like that.' We took warm clothing for the children. Two suitcases and food supplies. Our refrigerators were crammed full. It had cost us a lot of money, including my mother's pension and my salary, because we were preparing for May Day and the 9th of May. I pulled everything out and threw it into the trash. I removed all the food supplies and locked the refrigerator. Then I packaged up everything that I had cooked for the children, and put it in the suitcases. We had about 50 rubles left, so I took them with me. I took a warm shawl for my mother. For myself, I took a jacket and slacks, and that was all.

"While my mother was sitting there crying, I told her, 'Wait a bit. Don't touch me. First I have to gather all my documents.' And then I went and collected my poems. They were rough copies, and I had them all in notebooks. I gathered all of them and packed them. I had an attache case for my things.

"'Okay, now,' I said. 'I don't need anything else...'"

A. Perkovskaya:

"We ran to housing area No. 5 to carry out the evacuation. Aleksandr Fedorovich Marinich was there from the party's gorkom, and I was there from the Komsomol gorkom.

"At this point I would like to mention an interesting girl. Marina Berezina, a student at the biology school, worked for me as a senior guide. Her husband was working at the fourth unit on exactly that shift. On Saturday she knew ab-so-lute-ly nothing about where her husband or what had happened to him. His name is also Berezin. I met her on Sunday. She was running by, and I asked her, 'Marina, did you find out anything about your husband?' She answered, 'I already know that he's alive, but I don't know anything concrete yet.'

"Then she asked, 'Do you need any help?' She didn't live in my housing area. I told her what had to be done, and that girl helped us to carry out the entire basic evacuation, although she herself didn't leave. She said, 'Nelya Romanovna, if you need any help, I'll be at home, and I'll come to the gorkom if you call me.'

"Later on, after we had conducted the basic evacuation, we began to evacuate those who had hidden and did not want to leave. We had to find them or to call them on the telephone. But Marina called me on the telephone and said, 'They've come to get me. Can I leave now, or should I stay behind?' What a girl!"

Yu. Dobrenko:

"I was the person responsible for evacuating the housing area. I coordinated the work of the militia, the ZhEK [housing and housing-maintenance department], and the transportation. Were we afraid of anything? We were afraid that a traffic jam or panic would occur somewhere. But I have to tell you that the evacuation was carried out in a very, very well organized manner.

"The people came out calmly, carrying small bags, just as the radio announcement had told them to do. They gathered near the doorway, the buses began arriving rapidly at each doorway. The militia man would tell people to get in the bus, and then the bus would leave. My rayon had approximately 15,000 people. We finished the evacuation in one hour and 25 minutes. Where there any problems? We had asked people not to take any baby carriages, but they came carrying them anyway, because they had a small child, and no one would listen to us. No one brought any heavy articles. On the average, each person took two handbags.

"The young people also behaved in an organized manner.

"What other problem did I have? Three hours before the evacuation, a person died in our housing area. He was an old man and he had been sick for a long time. There was a young family with two children, and this was their grandfather living with them. And they had to be evacuated. Well, we resolved the question by taking him to the morgue. People on duty from the medical-sanitation unit stayed there, and they helped to bury him."

A. Perkovskaya:

"Our own housing area, housing area No. 5, was the last one that we evacuated. People were outside for a very long period of time... It was very hot. And the radiation level was rising. So we would ask the people, 'Comrades, please take your children into the doorways.' They would do as we asked them. I started walking away, and after passing two buildings, I see that the children are playing outside again. The people said, 'It's hot in the doorways. You just try to stand in the doorways for hours at a time.'"

Evacuation.

On that sunny Sunday, 27 April, thousands of Kievans were preparing to go for a ride outside the town -- some would be going to their dacha, some would be going fishing, and some would be taking their relatives or friends out to the suburban villages. But something had apparently broken down in the city's well-organized system, because a number of routes were canceled, and on other routes only one or two buses were running. Crowds of people gathered at the bus stops, people began swearing at one another, and cursing the inefficient dispatchers who came from the motor pools.

"In Kiev on that day there were still very few who knew about the accident that had occurred 148 kilometers to the north of the city. Most of the Kievans did not know that on Saturday the motor-transport enterprises had responded to an alarm and, during the night, columns of motor buses from Kiev

and from Kiev Oblast had moved out toward Pripjat. They were ordinary city or long-distance buses. Many of them were double Ikarus buses with an accordion connector."

Evacuation.

Just imagine a thousand buses with their headlights on, traveling along the highway in a double column as they transported the many thousands of inhabitants of Pripjat out of the stricken zone -- women, old men, adults and newborn infants, "ordinary" patients and those who were the victims of radiation sickness.

Imagine those who left their clean, pretty, young city, a city of which they were proud, a city where they had set down their roots and had had children.

They had been given a rigidly limited amount of time to get ready. They had left their homes behind (it subsequently became known that they had left them forever) and were traveling in what they happened to be wearing, in their summer clothing, after grabbing up only the most necessary items. But it turned out the things that most needed were frequently the very things that were forgotten. People did not begin to realize until later what the most necessary, the most important things are for a person. Later on, when it became possible to return to their apartments and pick up certain items, which would be subjected to rigid radiation-monitoring inspection, it was as though people's eyes had been opened up, as they rushed to pick up not their "prestigious" carpets (the pile on rugs "picked up" a very large amount of radiation), and not their crystal, but those articles that represented spiritual value -- photographs of their loved ones, their favorite books, old letters, and various ridiculous trinkets with sentimental value -- everything that constitutes the profoundly personal and very fragile world of the person who lives not only in the present, but also in the past and the future.

Everyone stated unanimously -- not only the evacuees, but also the doctors whom I met immediately after the evacuation -- that there had been no panic. The people were taciturn, concentrated, and sometimes in a state of shock or inhibition, not yet realizing what had happened, and therefore feeling a strange lack of concern. I met people like that. There were almost no tear or petty squabbles. No one tried to encroach on other people's rights. It was only in people's frozen expressions that one could see their pain and alarm.

The columns of evacuees were moving to the west, to the villages in Poleskiy and Ivankovskiy rayons, which are adjacent to the the land in Chernobylskiy Rayon. Chernobylskiy Rayon itself was evacuated later -- on 4 or 5 May.

Evacuation.

The mass exodus of thousands of people from their homes created a large number of very complicated problems -- organizational, personal, and moral. All of this was no simple matter, and one should not look at all these events through rose-colored glasses. Of course, the papers which, during those days, described the cordiality with which the local residents welcomed the evacuees,

were not lying. That really happened. That was a fact. The Ukrainian Polesye, the inhabitants of which are called "Poleshchuks," displayed their age-old traditional national features -- their kindheartedness and their goodness, their cordiality and compassion, their desire to help a person in time of need. But that was only half the truth. Because everyone has to realize what commotion and confusion reigned in Poleskiy and Ivankovskiy rayons in early May. Parents were looking for their children, and women were looking for their husbands, who had been working at the nuclear power plant on the evacuation day, and anxious telegrams from relatives and friends were flying from all parts of the country into the no longer existent post office in the city of Prip'yat.

I remember dropping in at the Ivankov House of Culture during that period -- once again my heart started pounding, I recalled once again the days of the war: mountains of white and gray protective clothing were lying around the rooms, people were crowded around the announcement board, standing in line at the information center, asking one another about acquaintances, and listening greedily to the announcements on the local radio. Information was worth its weight in gold. This well-tended, calm, apparently unshakeable peaceful life had been torn away from its anchor and swept by the current in an unknown direction... The same thing had happened in Polesskoye. The walls of the party's raykom had been converted into a kind of information bureau: you could go there to find the addresses of organizations that had been evacuated from Prip'yat or the addresses of your friends, or to learn the latest news.

L. Kovalevskaya:

"Our bus didn't get to Polesskoye. We were assigned to Maksimovichi. When we arrived at Maksimovichi, the radiation-monitoring specialists measures us and we proved to have increased radiation. We were supposed to be taken away from there immediately. There was a tremendous outcry -- first by the pregnant women and children. You can imagine the condition of a mother who had gone up to a dosimetrist with her child, and he takes readings and says, 'His shoes are dirty.' 'His pants are dirty,' 'His hair is dirty'... When I sent my mother and the children to Siberia, things became easier for me.

"On 8 May, when I arrived in Kiev and Serezha Kiselev, LITERATURNAYA GAZETA correspondent in the Ukraine, invited me to spend the night at his place, I took a bath: I turned on the water and cried my eyes out. Then, seated at the table, I kept crying again. I felt hurt about what had been done to people, about the untruth. The newspapers had written untruths. It may be that this was the first time that I had encountered this face to face... To know the real state of affairs and then to write such bravura articles -- it is a terrible shock, it turned my soul inside out..."

A. Perkovskaya:

"After the evacuation I stayed behind in Prip'yat. That night, when everyone had already left, I walked out of the gorkom -- the city was darkened. It was absolutely black. There wasn't any light anywhere. No windows were lighted up... The militarized militia was standing at every step, checking documents. I walked out of the gorkom, got my identification, and then walked as far as

my doorway. When I got there -- there also wasn't any light there -- I walked in -- in the dark of night -- and went to the fourth floor. I have a comfortable apartment, but it was as though it wasn't mine anymore. It's very upsetting.

"On Monday, 28 April, we left, to go to Varovichy -- there was going to be a party meeting there. We spent the whole night there. As soon as I arrived, we began making a list of the people at the various rural soviets. There was a tremendous number of unclear situations. Finally we had a meeting of the Communist Party members, and then the Komsomol members. The next day I went to Poleskoye, returned to Varovichy, and then was taken to Ivankov -- the headquarters had been organized there, and our people were there: Tryanova, Antropov, and Gorbatenko from the party's gorkom, Esaulov from the ispolkom, and myself from the Komsomol gorkom.

"I worked there from 0800 hours to 2400 hours -- both at the headquarters, and on trips to the various villages. There were crowds of people. Some were looking for their children, others were looking for their grandchildren...

"The fact of the matter is that there had been no kind of overall plan for the evacuation, and we did not know what villages to which the people from which homes or housing areas in Pripyat had been taken. I still cannot understand according to what plan people had been evacuated or where they had been taken. In Poleskoye we had a list of children. So I called the village soviet and asked, 'Do you have parents so-and-so? Their children are looking for them.' The only thing they can tell me is, 'We have children so-and-so, who don't have any parents. We just don't know where these children came from.' So you sit there and make telephone calls to all the rural soviets. Sometimes it turned out that at a certain village some kind lady had been sitting with someone else's child but hadn't said anything to anyone...

"It was necessary to take the children to Pioneer camps, and then the women with preschool children and the pregnant women. It was necessary to determine how many people there were, and where to take them. We held Komsomol meetings and assigned Komsomol organizers so that people would at least have a real person on whom they could rely, with whom they could maintain communication.

"Different things happened during that period. I remember one person. I would like that person to read these words of mine, so that I can clear my conscience. This happened on May Day. In the morning I arrived at the information center. None of our people were there yet. A man who was about 40 years old was there. He asked, 'Are you from the party's Pripyat gorkom?' I answered, 'Yes, I am.' He said, 'Give me the lists of the people who died.' I said, 'Two people died. Shashenok and Khodemchuk.' 'That's not true.' I said, 'What gives you the right to talk to me this way?' He starts shouting, 'Of course, you're so pretty and prosperous-looking (I was wearing someone else's clothing). You're so calm, because you have evacuated everyone from Pripyat. Do you think that we don't know? We know everything!'

"At that moment there was just one thing I wanted to do: put that man into a car, drive him to my apartment, and then have a good talk with him there...

"His son had been working at the nuclear power plant. Therefore I told him, 'All things considered, I would think that he is at the Skazochnyy Pioneer camp.' Then he shouts again, 'Why are you talking to me this way? I'm a miner, an honored worker on all counts.' I asked him, 'Where have you come from?' He answered, 'From Odessa.'

"We gave him a car and he left, to go to Skazochnyy. He found his son there, as I had told him he would. Then there were tremendous expressions of gratitude, but none of them registered. I remembered this situation for a long time. His behavior had so upset me that for a couple of hours I could not come to my senses.

"I realize that there had been many deprivations and difficulties, but I would say that our Pripyat people basically behaved in a proper manner."

Evacuation...

It is true that the evacuation was carried out in a well-organized, precise manner. It is true that most of the evacuees demonstrated bravery and stoicism. All that is so. But are we really to believe that the lessons that the evacuation provided are limited to this? Are we really to begin once more to fool ourselves and to calm ourselves by half-truth, closing our eyes to the bitter truths that were revealed at that time? Are we really to think that it will be possible, by organizational spirit and discipline, to cover up or to stifle the bitter questions being asked by thousands of people? Questions that they are asking of those who were obliged to be guided not by the cold, indifferent calculation of a cowardly official, but by the warm heart of a citizen, a patriot, a Communist Party member who is responsible for the life and health of his nation, and for its future -- the children.

After one of my "Chernobyl" articles was published in LITERATURNAYA GAZETA, the editorial office sent me a letter. Here it is:

"The people who are writing this letter to you are workers from Pripyat (currently we are living in Kiev). This letter is not a complaint, but only individual facts from which we would like you to make conclusions. We shall give examples of the criminal irresponsibility of the officials in Pripyat and Kiev. First of all, the irresponsibility was demonstrated with respect to all the children (in the 30-kilometer zone), when, for entire 24-hour periods before the evacuation, no announcements were made, and no attempt was made to prevent children from going or playing outside. Since we knew the radiation level as a result of the work that we performed, we telephoned the city's civil defense headquarters and asked, 'Why aren't there any instructions concerning the children's behavior in the streets, concerning the need for them to stay indoors, etc.'"

"We were told, 'That's not your concern... Moscow will make the decisions...' And it was not until later (7 May 1986) that everyone learned that the High Leadership had made the decision immediately to evacuate, to send the children (this grandchildren and their grandmothers) to the Crimea, and the 'chosen' children had been sent to the Crimean sanatoriums on 1 May.

"Another example of irresponsibility occurred when, at a difficult moment, it was necessary to make emergency use of the necessary equipment and monitoring devices. The necessary equipment proved to be unusable. How are we supposed to evaluate that? Why is that the administrators who occupy high positions and who, for several years in a row, have been receiving a salary (unearned), did not know the true state of affairs with that GO [civil defense] equipment and those other disgraceful things? Why hadn't they monitored the situation, instead of being satisfied with all those reports that 'everything is proceeding completely well'?"

"We would like the State Commission to verify everything and to take the necessary steps, especially with regard to such painful questions as who bears the blame for the dishonorable actions of the 'big administrators' and the fact that they were completely unqualified for the positions that they occupied.

"Our address is: Kiev, Post Office, General Delivery (the letter was written in June 1986, when the people who had been evacuated from Pripyat did not yet have any permanent addresses).

"Signatures: S. V. Nikulnikov, D. V. Kolesnik, A. M. Pavlenko, N. N. Radchuk."

The authors of the letter had touched upon, among other questions, one of the painful questions in the entire Chernobyl epic: the question of the promptness and quality of the measures to protect the people against the consequences of the accident. That question does not cease upsetting many thousands of people. It can still be heard in confidential discussions among small groups of people, but for some reason has been bashfully absent in open statements made by administrators at the city, oblast, and republic level. It seems to me that the interests of openness -- that very important factor for the restructuring of our society in the spirit of the decisions of the 27th CPSU Congress -- require the fundamental and open discussion of that problem. The time has come to remove from it the cover of secrecy. If the authors of the letter and those who agree with them (and there are tens of thousands of them) are wrong in any way, if everything was done ideally, then it is necessary to prove and explain this convincingly. I am afraid, however, that it is difficult, if not impossible, to do this.

I shall not assume the role of judge or accuser -- now, many months after the accident, it is easy to shake one's fists. I do not want to strike the pose of the all-knowing procurator. But nevertheless I would like to understand what actually happened. Many inhabitants of Pripyat (we might recall A. Perkovskaya's story) will never forget the meeting that was held on the morning of 26 April in Pripyat by the second secretary of the party's Kiev Oblast committee, V. Malomuzh, who gave the instruction to do everything to assure the continuation of the city's ordinary life, just as though nothing had happened: the schoolchildren should continue to go to school, the stores should operate, and the young people's marriages that had been planned for that evening should be held. The reply given to all the perplexed question was: that's how it has to be.

"That's how it has to be" for whom? In the name of what cause does it "have to be"? Let's discuss that calmly. From whom was it necessary to hide the misfortune? What legal or ethical considerations guided those who made that more than dubious decision? Did they know the true extent of the catastrophe? If they knew, how could they have issued an order like that? And if they did not know, why did they hasten to assume such a serious responsibility? Are we really to believe that on the morning of 26 April no one yet knew the radiation levels that has risen sharply as a result of the ejection of the fuel at the nuclear power plant? I recall seeing in one of the Kiev hospitals during those May days a woman inhabitant of Pripyat who, on that fateful Saturday, like thousands of other citydwellers, had been working on her personal plot near the 'Red Forest' that I have already mentioned. The doctors had diagnosed radiation burns on her legs. Who will explain to her in the name of what cause she had to undergo those sufferings?

And what about the schoolchildren who, completely unaware, played outside during their recesses? Are we really to believe that they could not have been hidden somewhere, and prevented from going outside? Are we really to believe that anyone would censure the administrators for this "excessive caution," even if it were actually excessive? But those measures were not excessive. They were extremely necessary. By the irony of fate, three days before the accident the schools in Pripyat had had civil defense drills. The children had been taught how to use individual means of protection -- cotton batting and gauze masks and gas masks -- and how to carry out decontamination operations. On the day of the accident, no measures -- not even the simplest ones -- were taken.

Because of the situation of secrecy that prevailed in Pripyat immediately after the accident, things got to the point where even the responsible workers at the city ispolkom and the Komsomol gorkom did not know the true radiation levels for a period of 48 hours. They remained satisfied with the rumors that were flying through the city, with the vague hints given by their acquaintances, and the very telling glances of the dosimetrists... And yet the city's aktiv had to carry out their work in places where the radiation level was already inadmissibly high. Is it surprising that, in this situation of the complete "stifling" of information, a number of people, giving in to the rumors, started leaving the city rapidly along the road that led through the "Red Forest? Witnesses state that women pushing baby carriages walked along that road, where radiation was already "glowing" at full strength.

Is it possible that, taking into consideration the unusual and unexpected nature of the situation, people could not have done otherwise? No. The specialists said that people could have and should have done otherwise: all that would have had to be done was to broadcast to the city over the local radio that there was a possible danger; to mobilize the city's aktiv to carry out measures to restrict people's actions; to prevent everyone from going outside until he was engaged in operations to eliminate the accident; to close the windows; and to administer preventive treatment with iodine immediately. Why weren't these things done?

Obviously, because the doctrine of universal safety and of mandatory and absolute victories, jobs, and successes, which doctrine during recent decades

became part of the flesh and blood of a number of administrators, played a fateful role here and stifled in them both the voice of their conscience and the carrying out of their professional, party, and civic duty: the saving of people, the doing of everything that was within their human capabilities in order to prevent a misfortune.

An unattractive role was played in this situation by former director of the nuclear power plant Bryukhanov, who realized ahead of everyone else and better than anyone else what had actually occurred at and around the plant. The degree of his blame is being established by the agencies of justice. But we should not heap all the sins of other officials on Bryukhanov alone.

Because there is such a thing as moral justice: how could it happen that Pripyat physicians, medical-sanitation unit administrators V. Leonenko and V. Pecheritsa, who were among the first to learn of the extremely dangerous radiation situation (because by the morning dozens of people with a severe form of radiation sickness had already begun arriving at the hospital), did not begin to issue a general alarm, or to shout loudly from the rostrum of the meeting on Saturday morning about the impending misfortune? Are we really to believe that the falsely understood considerations of subordination, of unquestioning and unthinking execution of "instructions from above" and the following of the imperfect and miserable official instruction guides had stifled in their souls their faithfulness to the Hippocratic oath -- the oath which, for the doctor, is the highest moral law? Incidentally, what I have said pertains not only to these doctors at what is, in general, a low level, but also to many doctors at a higher level -- we might mention, for example, Ye. Vorobyev, former USSR Deputy Minister of Public Health.

However that might be, today it is clear that the mechanism for making responsible decisions that are linked with the protection of people's health did not withstand any serious test. The mechanism is cumbersome and has too many administrative levels. It is excessively centralized, slow-moving, bureaucratic, and ineffective in rapidly developing situations. The innumerable coordinations led to a situation in which it took almost 24 hours to make even the most obvious decision concerning the evacuation of Pripyat.

The evacuation of Chernobyl and the villages in the rayon was drawn out for a still longer period of time -- eight days. Until 2 May not a single one of the highest administrators in the republic had visited the scene of the accident.

Why is that the people who had been given a large amount of authority, people with large privileges, but also with even greater moral responsibility, people who had become accustomed to making public appearances on holidays and at celebrations -- why is it that they did not share this misfortune with their nation? Why had those few kilometers that separate Kiev from Chernobyl proven to be so insurmountable for them? What was the source of this moral callousness with respect to their fellow citizens?

Much later than Chernobyl, an accident occurred at one of the mines in the Donbass. An administrator at the republic level who went there, when appearing on TsT [Central Television], could not find within himself any

simple, human words of sympathy about the great misfortune, but instead reported that the mine was operating at "its normal labor rhythm"... What has happened to us? When will we become real people again?

However that may be, people in Moscow learned more quickly than in the capital of the Ukraine that something that was very alarming and very unusual was happening at Chernobyl, and they undertook the decisive actions that were so necessary.

It was only the visit to the Chernobyl area on 2 May by Ye. K. Ligachev and N. I. Ryzhkov that played a decisive role in extending the additional measures to confine and overcome the spread of the accident.

Today we talk a lot about the new way of thinking. That new way of thinking must be assimilated not only by those chosen individuals who create international policy, but also by those who are in the midst of the daily life of the people -- both those who are in power at all levels, and ordinary citizens. That way of thinking must be instilled in people from the time that they are schoolchildren. And the basis of that way of thinking must be not only thorough knowledge, the ability to make a rapid evaluation of the situation and to react in a time-responsive manner to any changes in it, but also firm moral principles, the ability to defend one's views without fearing the wrath of the "higher-ups."

One of the Members of a "Small Soccer Team"

"In the photograph our All Stars team looks like a chart showing the quantitative growth of mankind from the days of Malthus until the present day. We are standing on a bridge over the sea, holding hands with one another -- the entire team, from the smallest to the largest. The first is Maksim, the second is Bondi, the third is Yurek, the fourth is Slavko, the fifth is Ilko, the sixth is Lenya, the seventh is Lenya's father, who for some reason has wormed his way into our company, and the eighth and last person is myself (height 180 centimeters, weight 95 kilograms). We are holding hands tightly, like a living chain of generations, and it seems that there is no force that can separate or disunite us. The first person standing there is Maksim, and I wonder why, in the photograph, he is not wearing angel's wings. I myself have seen those white and gold wings. He has them hanging on the wall at home; possibly his father, fearing that Maksim might not get involved in the send-off parties that are so frequent in the city, has forbidden him from using those wings. Or maybe it is for some other reason that is unknown to me. In any case, I do not have any doubts about Maksim's angelic origin. He has a very thin body and his thin neck is crowned by a large head with a high forehead: his haircut looks as though a jug had been put on his head. His large gray eyes are beaming -- they always beam with good feelings toward everything that is surrounding Maksim."

I ask the reader's forgiveness for quoting my own work, but it is simply necessary: it is an excerpt from my story "Small Soccer Team," which was written in 1970. The story was dedicated to the memory of young Kievan poet Leonid Kiselev, who died of acute leukemia. Almost all the heroes of that story are real people, although it was written in a grotesquely fantastic

style. But there was indeed a small soccer team -- Yurek, Bondi, Slavko, Ilko, and, of course, me.

Maksim Drach. Son of the important poet from the Ukraine, Ivan Drach.

I have known and loved Maksim for a long time and I make so bold as to assure the reader that I was not exaggerating in any way when I described his angelic appearance or his personality traits. I must say that this Maksim has remained, despite all the mutations of his voice and despite the fact that he became a very thin person who was skinny as a rail: he has remained a very kind and very bright boy, although what kind of a boy is he today?

In 1974 Ivan Drach published a book "Koren i krona" [Root and Crown], which contained a series of poems dedicated to the builders of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant and the city of Pripjat. The basic tone of those poems was optimistic, and this is natural, because it was precisely Ivan Drach who entered -- no, he did not enter, but flew like a rocket -- into Ukrainian poetry, as a harbinger of new times, of new powerful rhythms in the era of scientific-technical revolution. His poems deal with genetics, cybernetics, and nuclear physicists; the deep-rooted folklore-song principles of Ukrainian poetry combine in some surprising manner in his poems with the sharpened perception of that "strange world" toward which the civilization of the twentieth century was rushing headlong. In his poem "Polesye Legend," the Pripjat River carried on a dialogue with the birds and fishes that were thrashing in fear of their nuclear neighbor. The river explained that "a castle of steel is being built" for the Atom, "and after a dozen years steadfast thrones will be erected for him throughout the world." Even this rather romantic perception of the construction of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant, one can detect, behind the cheerful tonality of the poem, a scarcely concealed alarm for the fate of the Polesye environment, which had struck the poet by its primordial purity. Another poem of Drach's in the same series proved to be even more alarming, more intuitively prophetic: "Mariya from the Ukraine -- No. 62276: From Auschwitz to the Chernobyl Power Plant," in which the poet told about Mariya Yaremovna Serdyuk, a construction worker at Pripjat, a person with a surprising fate, a simple Ukrainian woman who had gone through the hell of Auschwitz and who had remained unshaken in her goodness and her love of people. "A small woman's fate, you flew up like a phoenix over Auschwitz and burst into flame in order to light up Atomograd over the Pripjat," is how the poet ended that poem. What vague, alarming dronings were born in his soul during those days when, at the edge of the streams, sands, and pine trees, one could see outlined the first contours of the nuclear plant that would be hanging over the Kiev Sea and Kiev? Could Ivan Drach have thought that his son Maksim would have to enter that struggle against the nuclear misfortune of Chernobyl?

Maksim Ivanovich Drach, 22, sixth-year student at the school of therapy, Kiev Medical Institute:

"I heard about the accident for the first time on Sunday 27 April. I was working in the resuscitation unit at the cardiology center, in the hospital imeni Oktyabrskaya Revolyutsiya. I was working as a medical assistant. A senior one, who is sent everywhere. That morning I came on duty at 0900

hours. At 0930 hours a woman (her husband is a major in internal service), told me, 'They've taken my husband somewhere. They said that some nuclear power plant has blown up, but I think that it's a joke.' But at 1200 hours we got a telephone call and were told that, as a result of the accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant, we and the general resuscitation department were supposed to set up 40 beds on the fourth floor. Our unit is on the second floor. I went up to the fourth floor in order to prepare the department. We transferred the patients there to other departments, brought in new beds, and prepared all the medications -- blood substitutes, etc. No one knew what we would have to deal with.

"At 1800 hours we were told that the first patients from Pripyat were already in the admitting area. We went there to admit them -- our doctors on duty, from the radio isotope diagnostics department and from the general resuscitation department. We saw them come in. For the most part they were young guys -- firemen and workers at the nuclear power plant. First they went upstairs with their belongings, and then a doctor who specialized in radiation measurement came running up and told us in a very frightened, agitated tone, 'What are you doing? These people are "glowing"!'

"We brought all of them downstairs again, took readings, and took them to get washed off, not at the admitting area, but at the radio isotope diagnostics department, where all the water is collected in containers and taken away. That was a wise thing to do, because it prevented the admitting area from getting contaminated. We gave them our operating-room pyjamas, and that is how they were brought upstairs.

"The first group of people consisted of 26 persons. I went upstairs with them.

"I did not make any great effort to interrogate them. Things were not yet at that point. They all complained about headaches and weakness. It was the kind of headache that literally causes a two-meter-tall fellow to stand and hit his head against the wall, saying, 'This makes me feel better, it makes my head ache less.'

"Well, we immediately begun blood-disinfection procedures on them and began giving glucose transfusions. Everyone was immediately put on intravenous equipment and that was organized well. I kept running back and forth between the unit and the ward. Since I had been working at the hospital for three years, I knew everyone, and I knew what to take. I kept going back and forth, getting the life-support systems, and doing all kinds of other technical things. A classmate of mine, Andrey Savran, was also there. He was working in the resuscitation department also, but only in the general department. In principle, he was not supposed to be working that day. He had simply dropped by at the school to pick up his photographic equipment. Well, he stayed there and worked. If it's necessary, you have to do it. There were very many doctors and medical personnel there.

"The patients told us that the reactor had exploded and was burning. They said that sand had been brought in, but as for what had specifically happened

there, there was no time to time about that, and moreover their condition was such that no discussions were allowed.

"I stayed on duty until morning.

"The next day, as usual, I went to the medical institute to attend lectures. I was on duty again on 1 May, but this time it was at the cardiology unit. I knew that there were already more patients, and that plans were under way to free another floor to accept them. The eighth floor.

"On 2 May it was reported on the television that Ye. K. Ligachev and N. I. Ryzhkov had gone to the Chernobyl area. I thought to myself, you just can't do without us medical students, if you are really dealing with radiation at that level. Purely analytically I computed that it was much easier to gather together well-organized students than the doctors from the hospitals. On the morning of 4 May, during the first lecture, our assistant dean arrived and said that we fellows should get ready to leave, that we would be departing at 1100 hours. I went home, got a jacket, a sweater, slacks, a jogging suit, knapsack, cap, something to eat... They put us in a magnificent tourist bus. We had an easy ride there. But 40 people came back from there in a bus that was intended for 18 passengers. That's okay, we'll live through it.

"We assembled at the medical institute before departure, near the radiology department. Readings were taken from all of us there. At first the volume of the operations to be performed was unknown. People talked about having to work at permanent and field hospitals -- they even talked about such things as hauling dirt and digging trenches. I took with me two sets of operating-room clothing and masks, just in case.

"We got into the bus, and our mood was happy. People were joking. Before leaving, we had been given potassium iodide. A friend of ours began shouting at us, 'When are those bums going to leave, anyway?' One of the guys on the bus reached through the window and poured the potassium iodide onto his head from the measuring glass as the bus was leaving. People got a big laugh out of that.

"We arrived at Borodyanka, at the rayon hospital. We were assigned to various villages and hospitals. A very important medical chief from Moscow walked up to us. He was slightly gassed. He told us what we would be doing, and said that we would be beginning the evacuation of the 30-kilometer zone that day. One of our people asked, 'But what about the dry law?' He said, 'Listen, fellows! There isn't any dry law in the adjacent rayons. You can drink as much as you want. Just so you can keep working. But remember that you are medical students. So don't fall face-down into the mud, because it's radioactive.'

"We were taken out to the various villages. They took us from village to village, and they left us there to reinforce the medical personnel. I was assigned to Klavdiyevo. We were put up at a hospital, in a ward. I shared a room with my friend Mykola Mikhalevich from Drogobych. We unpacked -- it was already nighttime -- and then went out to the road. We stood there in order to monitor the vehicles that were coming from Chernobylskiy Rayon. We had one

stationary radiation meter. It operated on a cable from the truck. We also had two battery-operated DP-5 [dosimetric devices]. We remained there until about 0200 hours, then the chief doctor came for us, and I slept until 0600 hours. At 0600 hours he said, 'One of you guys, come with me.' I am used to getting up quickly like that at work, so I said, 'Okay, I'll go with you.' We went somewhere far away on the road. I remember that there was a field, with disinfection chambers and a fire truck parked there. There was a table there, with glasses and bread on it. And there were ambulances from Poltava and Zhitomir.

"We carried out the dosimetric monitoring there -- we checked the background radiation in the buses and on people's clothing.

"I worked there from 0700 hours on 5 May to 1000 hours on 6 May. That was 27 hours straight.

"At first there was no special traffic. Large military helicopters, in camouflage paint, flew over our heads, moving rapidly. They were flying low over our heads, deafening us. The traffic along the road seemed to be pulsating. A large wave lasted from 1000 hours to 1300 hours. Kiev buses, mostly Ikarus buses, traveled in columns of from 17 to 20 vehicles, and there were also buses from Obukhov and Novoukrainka, there were all familiar places, and that's why I remembered them.

"People were sitting in the buses. Mostly they were from the village of Zalesye, which is situated 12 kilometers from Chernobyl. At that time not all of them had left, because of the people had stayed behind in the village -- to load up the livestock..."

I remember how, during that period, trucks loaded with cows were driving along in an unbroken strong in the direction opposite that of the people who were driving to the accident area. The animals were standing there unconcernedly in the trucks, dolefully looking at the flowering trees, the homes and fences that had been whitewashed for the holiday, the bright green grass, and the springtime flooding of the streams. Very complicated problems arose with the decontamination of the cattle, because the hair "picked up" a rather large amount of radioactive dust. Those cows that had had time to pasture on meadows and to savor the fresh grass had already ingested radioactive iodine and cesium. Those animals were slaughtered at meat-packing houses, and their meat was collected into refrigerated storage facilities that had been specially allocated for that purpose, where it was supposed to get rid gradually of the radioactivity, which was defined as being caused by iodine-131 -- an isotope with a short half-life.

M. Vrach:

"In our brigades we had two girls who were laboratory assistants. They immediately took blood from people for leucocytes. There were a lot of things in the buses, and we checked the things with our dosimeters.

"At first traffic jams occurred, and then we adapted to allowing buses through at three different times, so that there would not be any confusion. One

person checked the radiation on the bus itself, and two people checked the people. The people would get out of the bus, get into a line, and then, one at a time, would approach me. Up to a certain level, we were still letting petting through. Those who had a higher level were sent to have the radiation washed off them and to have the dust shaken off their belongings. There was an incident when the reading on one old man's boots was very high. 'But I just washed my boots, fellows,' he said. 'Well, gramps, you're just going to have to wash them again.' He went and washed his books, and he had a much lower level. He had to be sent back there three or four times to wash.

"There were almost no people between the age of 20 and 50. Why was that? We were told that they had either left -- sometimes even leaving their children or parents behind -- or had stayed behind to keep working there. That was why most of the people were old, bent-over grandfathers and grandmothers and small children. We also took readings from the children's thyroid glands. We had instructions that if the reading for the thyroid gland was twice the reading for the background radiation, that child had to be hospitalized. I didn't see any cases like that.

"After being checked, the people would get back into the bus. It was felt that they had been completely washed. They had actually been washed. True, I encountered buses with a high level. Our guys caught a Kamaz -- you wouldn't believe what it had on it. It had come from Pripyat. That Kamaz was driven out immediately into a field, to a distance of about 600 meters, and just left there.

"And so the columns continued all day long. Toward evening we began to haul people's belongings. First we hauled their cumbersome things. On Kovrovets trackers with trailers. We caught about a dozen trailers that were very dirty -- with dust-covered belongings. We sent them off to be washed.

"During the night we would put a flashlight on the table and would sit around in our doctor coats. Individual buses would come by with people -- they were trying to catch up with their columns. I remember seeing a Belarus tractor driving along, with an old man sitting in the cabin right next to the tractor operator. He was probably the tractor operator's father. The old man was leading a chicken and a dog. And he said, 'Take a reading from my dog.' I told him, 'Gramps, make sure you shake that dog good if you come over here.'

"There was a militia man there, a young guy, in a jeep. He said, 'Hey, buddy, check my radiation.' I told him, 'Okay, buddy, but you'll have to get out of the jeep.' He said, 'Buddy, I can't get out. I'm so afraid of what the radiation will do, that I can't get out. But, here -- let me stick my feet out so you can take a reading'... He hung his feet out and I took a reading -- and it was very high! I told him, 'Buddy, you'd better give those boots a good shaking!'

"Later on, when the evacuation had ended, we carried out medical inspections, comparing the data for the blood analyses with the other data. We took for observation -- to the hospital -- those people who did not feel well. I drove those people there.

"On 6 May we were brought protective clothing: black coveralls, caps, boots, respirators. They said that correspondents would be coming.

"On 8 May we sent sent to Kiev. Our replacements had arrived -- the fellows from the stomatology department.

"Well, on 10 May I went to classes, as usual, and then returned to my job at the Oktyabrskaya hospital. In May we had a lot of patients, with heart attacks -- apparently the stress had had its effect. We were working a lot at the unit.

"On 11 and 12 May I noticed I was sleeping very much and could not wake up. I usually sleep five or six hours and wake up completely. But now I was sleeping eight to twelve, or sometimes even 14 hours, without waking up. And somehow I felt all limp and lazy. They performed a blood analysis on me and put me on the eighth floor in our very own department."

I remember that ward on the eighth floor of the cardiology building where the students from Kiev Medical Institute who had been working to eliminate the consequences of the accident were put for observation: Maksim Drach, Dima Pyatak, Kosya Lisovoy, Kostya Dakhno, and Volodya Bulda. Professor Leonid Petrovich Kindzelskiy and I drove to the department -- the professor consulted with his students, looked at their case histories, and studied the results of the blood analyses. Subsequently Maksim Drach became acquainted with Doctor Hale, who had visited Kiev in early June.

Currently Maksim Drach and his friends are healthy, and they have nothing to fear. They are looking forward to their final exams.

In the story "Small Soccer Team," I predicted this future for little Maksim Drach: "I think that he will become a wandering philosopher, a Skovoroda of the twentieth century."

I made a mistake.

I am absolutely sure that Maksim will become an excellent cardiologist, a responsive and sensitive doctor who, like Skovoroda, will bring good to people, but good that is reinforced by the latest achievements of twentieth-century medicine. And Maksim will be made wise at the very beginning of his medical activity by the unique experience that he acquired during the days of this large national misfortune, when he saw everything that exists side by side -- the complicated and the contradictory, the high and low -- in the stream of alarming events.

After the consultation, Maksim and I stepped out onto the broad balcony-terrace of the cardiology building that is situated on a mountain. From there we could see opening up before us an epic view of Kiev -- the eternal city that had been frozen on those springtime Dnepr hills.

We stood there, we looked, and we thought.

What exactly had occurred during those days in Kiev.

(To be concluded)

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