

Heroes Among Us

Valentina Kobrin

On April 26, 1986, there was a nuclear accident at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant in the Ukraine. The accident killed or injured many people and caused massive economic and environmental damage.

I was only 11 years old in 1986, and my sister was two. We lived in a small town in Siberia. My father worked as a flight mechanic on a helicopter. He was 35 years old. I remember that day very clearly. When I came home from school, I heard my mom and dad having a heated discussion. My

My mother was crying. The government was calling for volunteers to help with the Chernobyl accident. My father signed up as a volunteer.

mother was crying. The government was calling for volunteers to help with the Chernobyl accident. My father signed up as a volunteer. He and a few others from our region were sent to Chernobyl. Now I understand why my mother cried that day. It was not a regular flight mission. It was a dangerous mission that has affected my father (and many others) ever since.



A helicopter participating in Chernobyl clean up (from <http://chernobyl.hu/thestory.html>).

Right after the explosion at Chernobyl, lots of firemen, military people, and other specialists were sent to work on the reactor and surroundings. They were later called “liquidators.” Once they got the maximum allowed amount of radiation, they were sent back home and others came to take their place. My father lived with other liquidators in a nearby city. In June in the Ukraine, the flowers are blooming, and so they were that year. It was hard to realize that there was death all around them.

My dad was there for two weeks. He returned home alive, but not healthy. After a while he developed serious health problems. He started to be sick often. He began having problems with



Women hold portraits of emergency workers who fought the blaze at the Chernobyl nuclear reactor, during a commemoration ceremony in Kiev in December 14, 2007.



Medal of Valor and Compassion

his lungs and nervous system. Doctors told him that if he did not take good care of himself, he would not live long. He listened to their advice. He was discharged from his job. It was a shock for my dad, because he loved his work. All the other guys from my father's crew had similar problems. Some are already dead. Others have lots of health problems.

After the Chernobyl accident, all the liquidators were awarded medals. The government es-

tablished a fund for them. On the 25th anniversary of the tragedy, my father was awarded the "Medal for Valor and Compassion," but he can't get his health back. Recently my father was diagnosed with thyroid cancer. Meanwhile, our government doesn't do much for the liquidators. They have not received many of the privileges and payments that they were promised. When my father realized what was happening, he started to fight for his rights in court. After many years, he won and got some payments and privileges for himself. I think this situation is the same everywhere. At first,

the government needs the heroes and volunteers – and perhaps gives them medals. But then the government forgets about them.

All of the liquidators are heroes to me. They didn't think at that time about fame and medals. They went to save our lives. We all have to be thankful for what they did. It could have ended awfully if they did not show their heroism. I

asked my father, "Would you do it again, now that you know about the consequences?" He said, "No, probably not." But then he thought about it some more, and he said, "But, if not me, then who? Someone has to do it."

For me, he always will be a hero and I am proud of him!

Valentina Kobrin is from Russia. She is married and has two sons. She is learning English at the Norwood Adult ESOL program in Norwood, MA.



This situation is the same everywhere. At first, the government needs the heroes and volunteers—and perhaps gives them medals. But then the government forgets about them.

Research this! And write about it!

What is nuclear power? Look it up at the library or on the Internet. Write an essay that describes how nuclear power works. Include diagrams if possible.

Is it safe? Explore what scientists, energy experts, and environmental groups say about nuclear power. Write an essay in which you state your opinion and back it up with evidence.

Pick your own topic related to Valentina's essay. Choose something you are interested in.

When writing, don't forget: start by reading and collecting information on your topic; then organize your information and write an outline; expect to write several drafts; include citations for your sources and use at least three sources.