

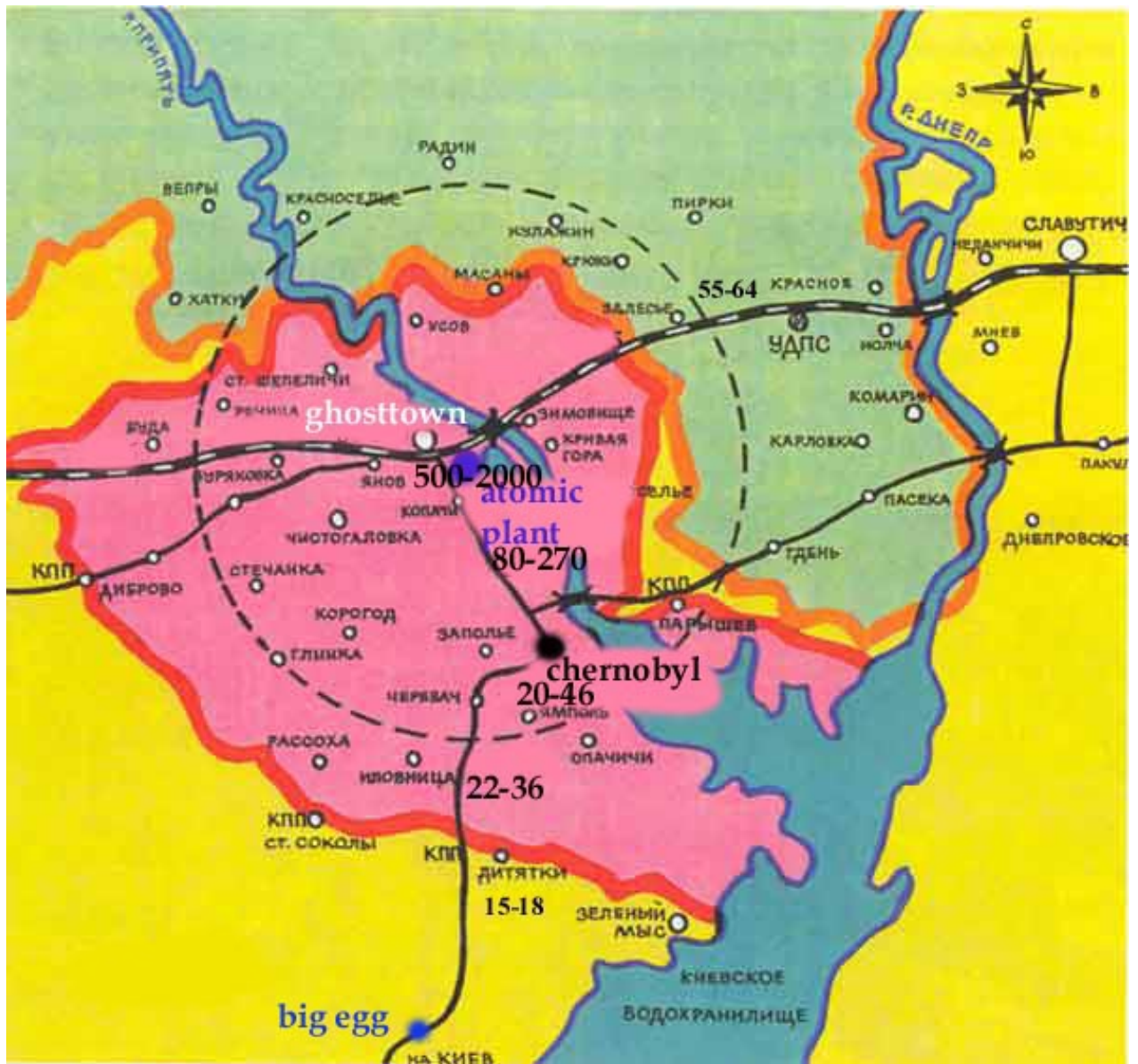
Short introduction

My name is Elena, I run this site and I don't sell anything in here and to tell the truth, I don't have anything to sell. What I do have is my bike and this absolute freedom to ride it wherever curiosity and the speed demon takes me to.



biking

Motorcycling is a great hobby of mine. I ride all my life and I owned different bikes and I ended with big Kawasaki Ninja. This motorbike has matured 147 horse powers, some serious bark. It is that fast like a bullet and comfortable for long trips. I travel a lot and my favorite destination lead through so called Chernobyl "dead zone" It is 130 km from my home. Why favorite? Because one can ride there for hours and not meet any single car and not see any single soul. People left and nature is blooming, there are beautiful places, woods, and lakes. Roads haven't been built or repaired since the 80th but in places where they haven't been ridden by trucks or army technics, they stay in the same condition as 20 years ago. Time does not ruin roads.



To begin, we got to learn a little something about radiation, it is simple. Device that we use for measuring level of radiation called dosimeter and if you will turn it on in Kiev, it will show 12 to 16 microroentgen per hour, in cities of Russia, America or Europe normally it will be 10 to 12 microroentgen per hour. 1.000 of microroentgen make one milliroentgen and 1.000 milliroentgen make 1 roentgen. To die quietly, human need to acquire a tan of 500 roentgen within 5 hours. This sort of radiation can not be found these days in Chernobyl. In first days after the explosion, in some places around reactor it was 3.000 roentgen per hour and people who were thrown to put down that fire have been dying on the spot. Now everything is much better, they put a big sarcophagus on that thing and we can travel there with no danger for health. Here is map that shows radiation level in different parts of dead zone and which I updated for our local biker club in March 16 of this year (2004) map shows level of radiation on asphalt, usually on the middle of road, because on edge of road it is twice as higher and if you step 1 meter off the road it 4 or 5 times higher. Radiation sits on earth, on the grass, in apples and mushrooms. It is not on asphalt, which makes rides through this area safe. I always go for rides alone, because not need anyone to rise dust and I had never problems with dosimeter guys. They are on check points and if they will find radiation on you vehicle, they give a chemical shower and this eat ya bike.

900 years

1960-1970th has been a time of a great nuclear enthusiasm. With such slogans as "atom is our friend"... they were building atomic plants here and there, like starling houses and then in April 26, in the year 1986 a guy named Akimov pushed wrong button and launched the biggest nuclear catastrophe ... Akimov was jailed for 14 years and as it was in tradition with soviet justice, they put in prison all the other people that worked on that day shift with no matter who was guilty and who was not ... In theory radiation will stay in Chernobyl area for the next 48.000 years, but in reality first people must start to populate those area already in some 300- 900 years. This is when the most dangerous elements will disappear. If government will find money to finance our science, then, I suppose there will be someway discovered to neutralize or clean up this area sooner, otherwise we will have to wait this 900 years until radiation will evaporate by itself.



disaster in my memory

In Ukrainian language Chernobyl is a name for a grass, wormwood (absinth). This word scares holly bejesus out of people here. If I tell someone that I am heading in a "dead zone"... you know, what I hear ... In best case "are you nuts?" My dad used to say that people afraid of a thing which they can not see, can not feel, can not smell and that kills. Dad is nuclear physicist and he also says that of all dangerous things in my life, he can only think about one, which is riding my bike on fifth or sixth gear. In any way, dad and his team is working in "dead zone" for last 18 years. They are doing researches from the day when nuclear disaster happened. The rest of guys in a team are microbiologists, doctors, botanists ... etc. I was 7 years old back in 1986 and in a few hours after accident happened dad sent us with sister off with the train to Grandmother. Granny lives 800 km from here and dad wasn't sure if it was far enough for us to stay away of troubles. Communists kept silence about this accident. In Kiev, they forced people to take part in their stupid Labor Day parade and then people start learning about accident from foreign radio, from relatives of those who died and real panic began in 7 to 10 days after accident. Dad says, that in those first 10 days exposure to radiation was the most powerful and can not even be compared with what we have now



heading up north

Time to go for a ride. This is our road. There won't be many cars on those roads, these places having ill fame and people trying not to settle there. The farther we going, then cheaper is land, then less people and better roads.



big egg

As we passing the 86th kilometer we'll see this big egg. This is where civilization ends and where the Chernobyl ride begins. Someone brought this egg from Germany. The significance of this egg is LIFE that will break through, life that will survive through radiation. Here is last place where one can get something to eat and fill bike with fuel. Choose any direction from here and you will see the same picture - desolated towns, dead villages, ruined farms.

cruising around big egg

This is what is left of a village with population of 4.500. So called exclusion zone is a territory of 30 km around atomic power-plant. We are not in a dead zone yet, we cruising around big egg and now we are some 50 km on South from reactor.



Now we are 50 km on west from reactor



This old man lives in Chernobyl area. He is one of 3.500 people that either refused to leave or returned to their villages after 1986. I admire those people, each of them is a philosopher in own way. When you ask if they not afraid to die, they are telling that at home they may die with radiation and in some other place they would definitely die with home-sickness. They eat food from own gardens, drink milk of their caws and claim that they are healthy, but we can't get away from facts, only 400 of them left out of 3.500. It appears that stubborn people, those of fortitude-are first victims



Belorussia

We cross the border with Belorussia, it is another country. Evil wind brought here 70% of Chernobyl radiation. If we will travel deep into Belorussian territory we'll get an idea about total area that is polluted and not good for living. Houses here mostly made of wood and they absorb radiation like a sponge.



This is Belorussian cemetery, in many villages scratches on that crosses the only chronicle that left. I couldn't find particularly this village on my map and on cemetery I saw that all people that lived in this village for last 200 years were Smirnovs. It must be sectarian village, one of the sects where brothers have been marrying sisters and they all used to have one last name. I put this village on my map as Smirnovka.



road on Chernobyl

Time to fill bike with fuel and open throttle, we are on best road in this area, this one lead from big egg to Chernobyl. There are no commercial gas stations in a dead zone, so the tank must be full. We don't need to run out of fuel on the middle of some nuclear desert.



checkpoint

We are going through passport control. One needs to have a permission to enter zone of exclusion. I have one of nuclear research center. This is where they give a chemical shower.



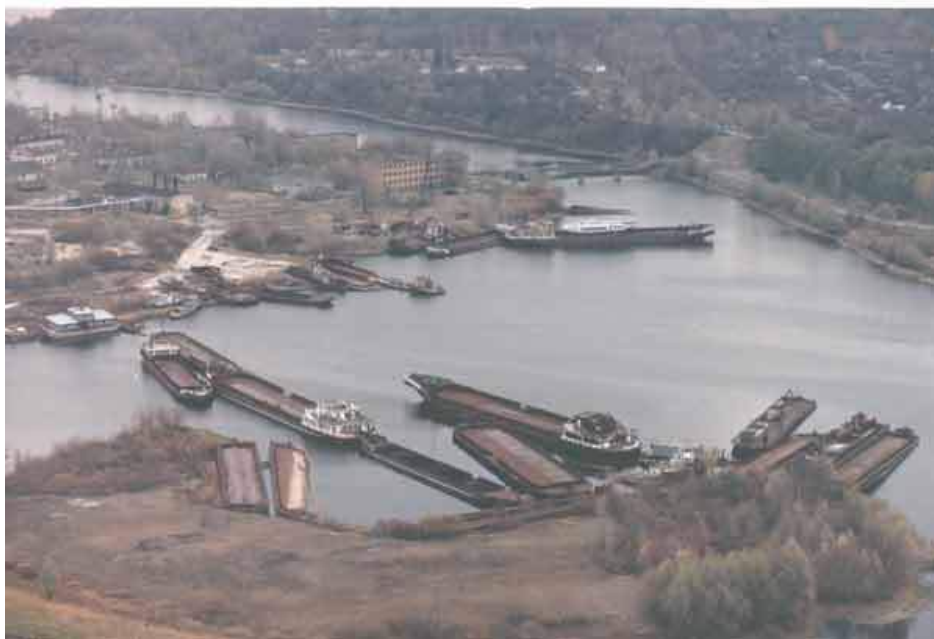
Every time I pass through a check point, I am trying to realize what I feel being in a dead zone. This is new feeling. Villages, roads, woods here might look the same as beyond zone, but they are not the same. It feels like you stepped inside of the picture. Everything is not real, like painted.



Who can count how many people died of radiation? No one, even approximately. Some tell that 400.000 died, soyuzchernobyl report of 300.000 people that died since 1986 and this is not over, in 30 years people will still die.



It is easier to calculate material losses. For economy of region it is catastrophe.



Fire-engines are the most polluted objects in a region. They have been trying to put down those radioactive fires. First firefighters thought it was just a regular fire. No one told them what they have been really dealing with, as no one told to soldiers and helicopter pilots.



Fire-engines never returned in their garages.



What was hell for humans, turned in a paradise for wild animals. Population of wolfs and wild boars growing rapidly. They are occupying houses and sheds. They are not aggressive here - they probably have enough food because population of other species is growing too. It's quite usual to see wolf, fox or wild boar crossing road. Also deers may show up on road and this slows me down, especially you got to be careful on narrow roads. I am afraid if in the future Chernobyl rides will be more exotic rides rather than high speed ones.

It is Predgevalskogo Horses. They are in the red book. Someone brought couple of them from Asia a few years ago and they liked it here and now there are 3 herds running in Chernobyl area. Those horses sturdy, always on the move ...

Predgevalskogo horses having this prehistoric look around them and when they sweep by, it feels like next herd will be of some ancient pangolins. Zoologists also brought two American Bisons, but idea to breed them didn't work out and bison male run away. I don't know if he run from radiation or from his bride, but last time bison has been seen in Belorussia, he heading west and may be he just decided to return to America.



We are at Chernobyl town. This is not my favorite. All population of this town has been evacuated in 1986 and it used to be some sort of a base for those who work on Atomic Plant. Dosimeter shows here 2080 microroentgen. This is the safest area in a zone. As we passing this town, we leaving behind all people that live in a zone. Ahead is the atomic plant.



There is 18 km from Chernobyl town to the APP and 22 km to ghost town. I usually turn off from main road and going through villages.



This is election house in a village.



It's was quite boring to go on election where one could only vote for one candidate and for one party. People haven't been coming. Then, in order to bring people on elections, authorities arranged free drinks.



Door on the right is free drink room and door on left is election room.



Atomic Plant

Usually, beeping of dosimeter speed me up and I pass this part of road as fast as road condition allow. The place in front of me called red or magic wood. In 1986 this wood has been red with radiation and then they cut it off and left there and bury under 1 meter of earth. As you can see, on asphalt things not bad, but if I step 10 meters forward, my dosimeter will run out of scale, if I walk few hundred meters towards reactor, then I will find 3 roentgen. If I keep walking all the way to reactor, then at the end of a journey I will glow in the darkness. Maybe this is why they call it a magic wood. This sort of magic when one walks in, in a biker leather and coming out like a knight in shinning Armour.



Here, we enter territory of atomic plant. Dosimeter will show here 500 to 3000 microroentgen per hour, depending of where you stay.



Here is the thing that turned whole region into a desert. It is closed now.



persona non grata

I can't ride by plant any more. I shouldn't do this first gear hard launch in front of leading personal and some committee ... that's fine with me ... after all, what did I lose, except for those several hundreds microrentgen.



GHOSTTOWN

4 km leap and we are at the gates of ghost town. This is my favorite. It was founded in 1970 and located 4 km north from reactor. 50.000 people lived there.



Usually a police officer who calls himself a town guard is telling me that I am in town alone. Then I can hit roads with no worry that I will run across some car or a foot-passenger. This town might be an attractive place for tourists. Some tourists companies have been trying to arrange extreme tours in this town. But people, their customers, scared and complaining about silence which is hard to stand in empty town. They charged 1200 hryvnas for 2 hours excursion and town guard says, they all were leaving in some 15 minutes, complaining that silence is tremendous as if one got deaf and it ring them in ears and place is bad ...



quiet town

This is residence of a town guard. From the first look ghost town seems like a normal town, someone put their washing hungs on a balcony, some windows open, other clothed, here is a taxi stop, there is a grocery store ... then, you read this slogan on building "party of Lenin - lead us to the triumph of a communism" that helps to realize that clothes hung on balcony for 18 years and that town is empty ...



If I am in ghost town just for a ride, then I go alone, but I never go alone inside of a buildings. There are many places that not safe. Usually, when I go to explore buildings I pick up a girl, who live in Chernobyl and make her living with leading people through dead zone. She is native here and literate in issues of atom. There are bad places where no one goes, even scientists staying away, one of such place is magic wood and other is cemetery in Ghost town. It's buried some radioactive graphite in there and now people can not visit and commemorate their relatives.



bike shop

I believe it was easy to guess what place we are going to visit first.



No motorcycle shop can survive through evacuation day.



Label tells - motorcycle Chezet, 26hp, 343cc, price 1050 rubles ... Chezet! That was a dream bike for all young people in a Soviet Union. Crowd of boys have been hanging around in those stores dreaming of what they could do with 26 hp bike if Grandpas had only 15 ponies and how can you afford it, if average monthly wage was only 180 rubbles? Then alarm, evacuation, panic ... no shop assistants no police ... This shop has been emptied out in a matter of hour. Banks survived, even jewelry stores survived through evacuation day, but this shop didn't have a chance. P.S. Police start shooting marauders as only first radioactive TV sets appeared on a second hand market, in Kiev.



hotel

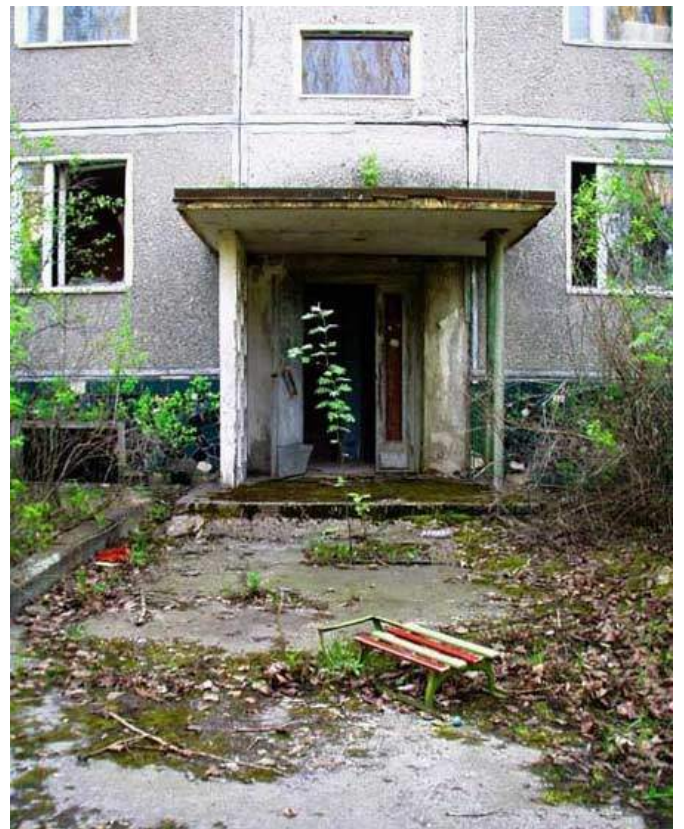
You are at reception desk of largest hotel in a ghost town.





houses

It is safe to be in the open air in Ghost town, it is inside the houses that the danger lays. Especially one got to be careful in houses which windows facing Atomic Plant and open. I went for a short excursion with my friend doctor, he said taking such walk with no special radiation detecting device is the same as to walk through minefield without mine-detector. Doc has self made device, this one is never out of scale.



Doors are open, just make sure it is safe, push the door and you will see how everything was left 18 years ago.

new beginning

People had to leave everything, from photos of their grandparents to cars. Their clothes, cash and passports has been changed by state authorities. This is incredible, people lived, had homes, country houses, garages, motorcycles, cars, money, friends and relatives, people had their life, each in own niche and then in a matter of hours this world fall in pieces and everything goes to dogs and after few hours trip with some army vehicle one stands under some shower, washing away radiation and then step in a new life, naked with no home, no friends, no money, no past and with very doubtful future.



I found this funny photo in dad's archive. This is red bikers taking part in a parade in this town, in year 1985. They ride old soviet bikes. My big Ninja will probably produce as many horsepower as those bunch of bikes all added together.

The most exciting thing about rides in Ghost town is to hit a red line on my bike's tachometer and break this silence with roar of a wounded dinosaur and then to close throttle and listen how all those ghosts cursing 1100cc Kawasaki engine.





Their flags are still there. Stuff has been prepared for May 1st Labor Day parade on post office they also have been waiting for a Labor Day.





May 1st had never come in this town. In April 26th all population has been evacuated and since then this central street has never seen parades and will not see them ever ...





This is ghost of cafe. This is how town looked back in 80th



This is how it looks now. This park is the most polluted area in town. It is in front of the reactor. In day of disaster northern wind brought first clouds here and they say, people have been running for their life, looking for kids in a smoke ... I don't know if it's true.



It is last day of Pompeii sort of place. Every step towards little cars adds 100 microrentgen on my dosimeter.





In Russian a big dipper is a devils wheel. Well, this one looks pretty much like it. On a carousel we are having 103 microroentgen on the clock. This place gives the most comprehensive idea of what really happened here.





This is the highest building in town. In a day of disaster people got here on the roof of this building and have been looking at a beautiful shining above Atomic Plant. This was the shining of radiation.

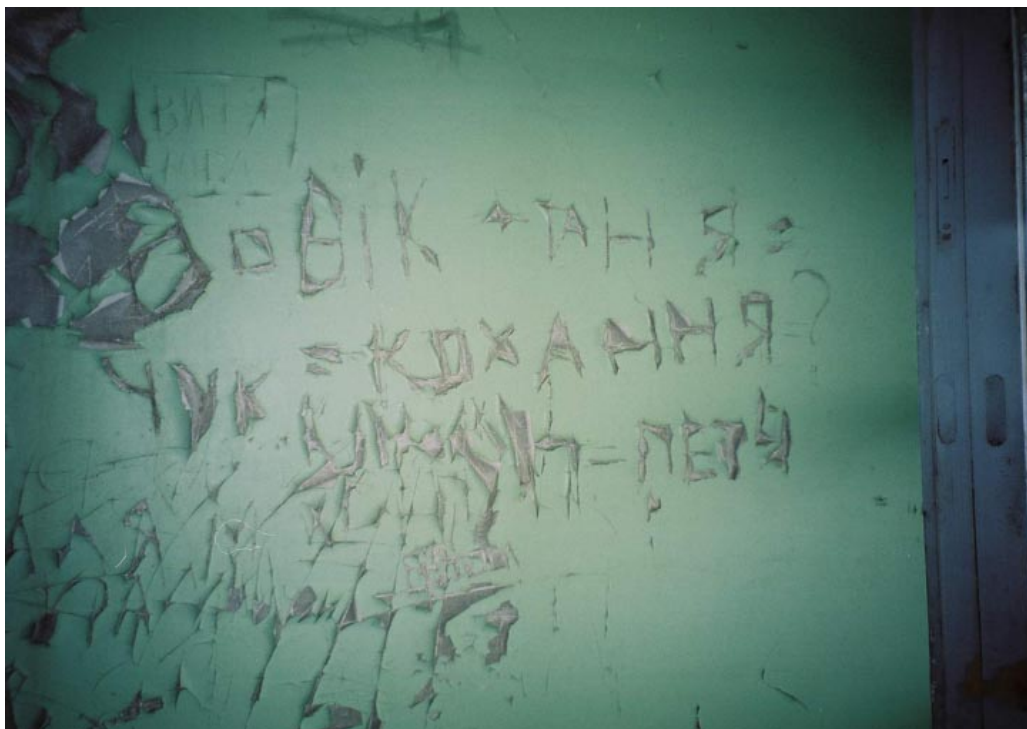
climbing up

We are going on the roof of this building.



Elevator doors all open

I noted someone didn't receive their mail, couple of papers and April addition to "fish and hunt" magazine. It suggest, this people might have been out of town and were probably never been able to return to their home.



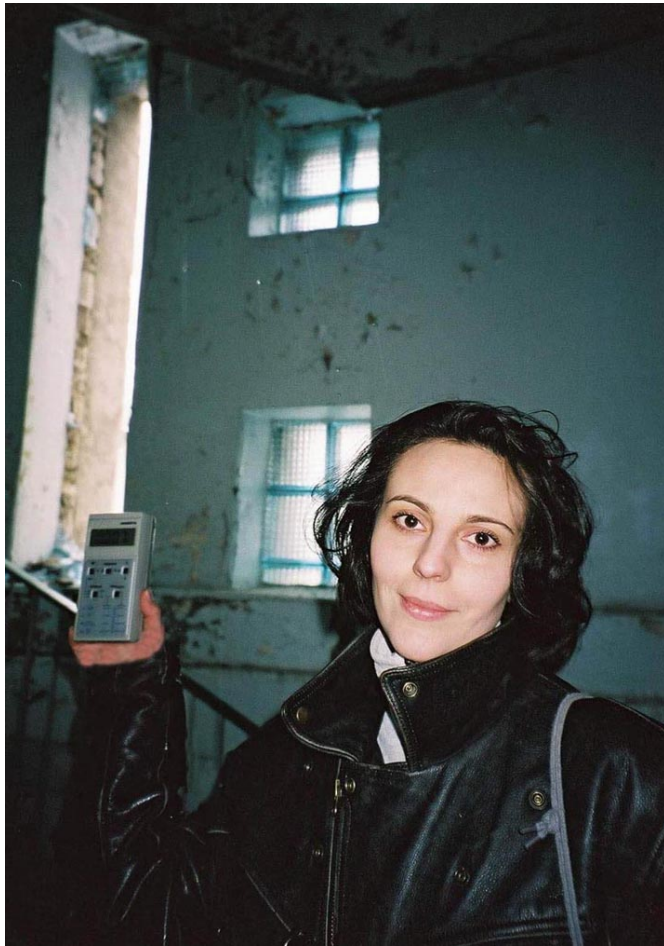
Feelings expressed on the wall, Vovik + Tanya = love

We are visiting a guy who didn't receive his papers. The Calendar shows that something was planned for a Saturday in April 26. Judging by stuff that he left at the door, he obviously went for fishing.



I wonder how this guy feel, who once went for a fishing trip and who was not able to return home. It is like your life is cut in two pieces. In one is you slippers still under you bed, photos of a first love that left on piano ... in other is you yourself, your memories and a fishing rod.





As we walk upstairs, the dosimeter showing 20 to 100 microroentgen.



On the roof. From this roof people have been looking at beautiful shining



They call it a town where the time stands still. May be it is because clocks in a ghost town don't show real time, they are set for showing a radiation level.



Weird to see this thing right on the street there is no phone connection in town, mobile phone does not work either. Someone appreciated Beethoven's moonlight sonata.



kindergarten

It is time for the author of this page to thank everyone who read this and to say goodbye, I will leave some more photos of kindergarten, they won't need comments, they speak for themselves, there are hundreds of children gas masks all over the place and diary of a teacher is interesting read, it always opened on page where last note tells that their walk on Saturday has been canceled due to some unforeseen contingency.







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