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Palina – the girl with two families

In the early hours of April 26 1986, the worst nuclear accident in history occurred in the Ukrainian city of Chernobyl.

Two years later and two hundred miles away, **Palina Yanachkina** was born in the village of Polessye, in northern Belarus. Like many others in her village she had a lot of health problems and her future didn't look good. Then a holiday in Ireland changed everything.



Life in the village of Polessye



The nuclear disaster changed the lives of everybody in the village. It took away all hope for the future. However, when Palina was born in 1988 her parents did their best to give her and her brother Micha a good life. They were farmers and before the accident, sold meat, fruit, and vegetables to the international market. After the disaster, no one wanted to buy anything.



The villagers were often ill and depressed. When Palina was eight, experts from the capital, Minsk, came to her school and did health tests on the children. The experts told them to stop picking the mushrooms in the forest because they were badly contaminated. When she was ten the experts returned with news of a charity that helped children like her have holidays abroad. They asked Palina if she would like to go to Ireland and stay with a family in Limerick. Palina felt a bit nervous about leaving home and she didn't speak a word of English, but she decided to go.



Life in Ireland



When Palina met her Irish family, she liked them immediately. John and Fiona Quaid and their two children, Chloe, three, and Evan, six, gave Palina a warm welcome. At first the only way to communicate was with a phrase book, but soon she became good friends with the children. They didn't need language to play.

So many things in Ireland surprised Palina. They visited a shopping mall and she couldn't believe her eyes, there was so much to choose from. She only knew her little village shop. She missed her family, but couldn't speak to them because they didn't have a phone.



By the time she went home, Palina could speak a few words of English and was delighted when the Quaid's invited her back for Christmas. After that **she started to visit the family twice a year** and often spent three months with them in summer.



Palina today: 'I'm so lucky!'



When Palina was in her teens the experts returned to Polessye and checked her again. They couldn't believe how healthy she was. **Her time in Ireland was improving her health and her English.**

In her free time Palina helped run the farm. However, she didn't want to continue doing this for the rest of her life. She dreamed of becoming a doctor, but had no money to study. John and Fiona understood her problem. They offered to pay for her to study in Ireland and said she could stay with them full-time. Palina was amazed and delighted. It was hard for her parents, but they wanted the best for their daughter.

Palina is now studying biochemistry at the University of Limerick. She hopes to study medicine one day and return to Belarus to help those who are not as lucky as she is.