

**Canadian Relief Fund for Chernobyl  
Victims in Belarus**

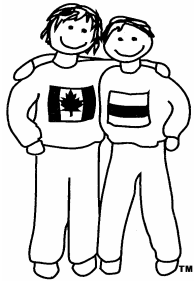
**Fonds canadien d'aide aux victimes de  
Tchernobyl en Biélorussie**

**2001  
Host  
Family  
Guide**

# Host Family Guide

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Thank you and congratulations for choosing to dedicate your summer to a Belarusian child!



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# 1.0 Canadian Relief Fund for Chernobyl Victims in Belarus

## 1.1 *Who Are We?*

The Canadian Relief Fund for Chernobyl Victims in Belarus (the “Fund” or “CRFCVB”) was formed in 1989 to provide medical and humanitarian aid to the people of Belarus who continue to live each day amidst the radioactive pollutants of the world’s worst nuclear disaster.

A non-profit, charitable organization, the Fund is Ottawa based and coordinates over 40 groups in seven Canadian provinces.

## 1.2 *Why We Formed the CRFCVB*

The early-morning explosion of Reactor 4 at the Chernobyl nuclear plant on April 26, 1986 is still a grim fact of life for the people who live in contaminated regions of Belarus, the Ukraine and Russia. The small country of Belarus (just 10 km north of the Chernobyl power plant) received over 70 per cent of the radioactive fallout due to wind and weather patterns that day.

Our Fund focuses on the most vulnerable portion of the Belarusian population - the children. An estimated 800,000 live in the affected areas.

## 1.3 *Our Programs*

### **Children of Chernobyl Program**

This program brings children from the contaminated areas of Belarus to Canada to allow them a healthy respite from their dangerous environment. Clean air, pure water and uncontaminated food results in a substantial improvement in the condition of the children. Typically, visible changes in the children include improvements in skin colouring, disappearance of bruises and sores and relief from coughing bouts. Less visible, but more important, are the reductions in radiation levels and improvements to the immune systems of the children. While in Canada, many of the children receive dental care not available to them in Belarus.

### **Medical Professional Training Program**

Doctors and nurses from Belarus are brought to Canada by this program to observe Canadian medical techniques and practices. The visitors are placed primarily in children's hospitals and specialize in sicknesses related to radiation exposure. In order to minimize costs, the doctors and nurses stay with Canadian host families or are provided with other low cost accommodations. The Canadian medical facilities provide observational training free of cost.

### **Medical Equipment and Supply Program**

Hospitals and clinics in Belarus are so poorly equipped they are barely functional. This program provides medical equipment and supplies to specific facilities in Belarus. Distribution is supervised in order to minimize the chances of misappropriation. Although an expensive program to operate, the benefits are visible and the assistance is efficient and direct.

### **Communications Program**

The goal of this program is to maximize the use of computer technology and the Internet as it applies to the activities of the Canadian Relief Fund for Chernobyl Victims in Belarus. It involves international communication, cooperation and education.

Under this program volunteers design and maintain our own worldwide web site on the Internet; it is an excellent resource to learn about Belarus and the CRFCVB. Check it out at

**[www.cybertap.com/belarus](http://www.cybertap.com/belarus)**

Canadian host families communicate by email with 'their Belarusian families'. Messages from Canadian Families are emailed to Minsk, translated (optional) by Belarusian volunteers and forwarded to the Belarusian families and vice versa. Many Canadian families find that once their new Belarusian friends become familiar with this system, they are good pen pals. They look forward to our monthly letters as much as we appreciate news from them. If you have email, or a kind friend who does, and would like more information, there is an application form on our web site.

Used computers are obtained from Canadian businesses and delivered to the Belarusian Children's Schools, where Canadians and Belarusian volunteers install them in working order. This also involves working with the Belarusian schoolteachers and officials to set up an education program.

We promote and lead the way to use the Internet to conduct business between NGO offices in Belarus and Canada, and other countries. The aim of this is to speed the sharing of good ideas and help to Belarus.

We develop Internet contacts in Belarus and around the world.

### ***1.4 Financial Status***

The Canadian Relief Fund for Chernobyl Victims in Belarus is a non-profit charitable organization and issues official receipts for income tax purposes. Administrative overhead is minimal and the charter specifies that this amount shall not exceed 15 per cent of the total charitable contributions and must directly benefit the programs supported by the Fund.

The Fund is responsible for the children's transportation costs to Canada. However, once in Canada, the cost is borne by the host families. The Fund does not disburse any funds to the host families. This efficient sponsoring system reduces the financial burden on the Fund and maximizes the number of program participants.

Adult interpreters accompany the children to Canada and are responsible for their safety en route. Host families also sponsor the interpreters, and while in Canada they provide translation services for the host families and general advice on the well being of the children. There are approximately 10 - 15 children per interpreter. The Fund pays the transportation and insurance costs of the interpreters.

## 2.0 Belarus

Belarus, one of the most culturally and historically interesting republics of the former Soviet Union, is also among the least known. Today, it is an independent country operating in a loose economic association with Russia and Ukraine.

### 2.1 Geography

Once commonly called White Russia, Belarus forms a border with Latvia and Lithuania on the north, Poland on the west, Russia on the east and the Ukraine on the south. It is 207,600 square kilometers in size - roughly four times larger than Nova Scotia. Similar in makeup to Eastern Ontario or inland Nova Scotia, Belarus is a land of forests, lakes and marshes. The landscape is flat with woods covering approximately one-third of its territory.

### 2.2 People

Belarus has roughly 10.5 million people. Eighty per cent of the population is Belarusian. The remainder is comprised of Russians, Ukrainians, Poles and Jews. Two-thirds of the population are urban dwellers, the result of rapid industrialization after World War II, before which only 20 per cent of Belarusians lived in cities. Major centers include Minsk (the capital, a city of roughly 1.8 million), Gomel, Mogilev, Vitebsk, Brest and Grodno.

### 2.3 Economy

The devastation of World War II practically wiped out Belarus' agriculture and industry, leading to intensive postwar restoration efforts. As a result, a largely rural society was transformed almost overnight into a modern industrialized state.

As part of the Soviet Union, Belarus' role was to supply the empire with trucks, cars, agricultural machinery, fertilizers and other agri-chemicals, timber products and agricultural produce, mainly potatoes and flax fibers. In return, it relied on the rest of the Union for oil, coal, natural gas, metals, cotton, synthetics, canned goods and pharmaceuticals.

In 1991, the collapse of the Soviet regime gave Belarus its independence. It unfortunately was left in a state of economic chaos that has worsened during its first years as a free country. Today, Belarus struggles to make order from that chaos and, as with other republics that were dependent on the Soviet system, it still faces drastic shortages that are basic to a functioning society.

In his book, *Belarus - At a Crossroads in History*, historian Jan Zaprudnik comments:

*"The structure of the national economy inherited from the Soviet period is indeed out of joint. The restructuring and retooling of the republic's various industries of which 40 per cent has been geared to military production, require not only much time but huge sums of money. The barter character of such deals burdens the procurement of raw material*

*imports. The labour force must be retrained. New markets must be found and the quality of goods improved. Finally, better management techniques have to be worked out and learned.”*

## 2.4 Climate

Belarus' proximity to the Baltic Sea provides a major moderating effect on the climate. The average July temperature is 64F (18C) with high humidity. January's average temperature is 21F (-6C) with frequent thaws. Average annual precipitation is 22 to 28 inches, similar to Ontario and Quebec but only one-half to one-third the average annual levels found in Atlantic Canada.

## 2.5 Language and Communications

Until recently, Russian was the language used in schools. During the Soviet years, Belarusian was discouraged and even outlawed in schools. In many regions the language fell out of use entirely among generations educated after the 1950s. This is changing in the wake of the fall of the Soviet Union and the rise of Belarusian nationalism. Belarus has 28 daily newspapers. For every 1,000 residents, there are 303 radios, 315 television sets and 108 telephones.

## 2.6 Culture

Belarus has a rich and varied cultural history; its poets, writers, artists, playwrights and musicians are recognized the world over. It is also renowned for its achievements in sports, architecture and applied arts, especially its decorated linens, carved wooden dishes and threaded belts.

## 2.7 The Future of Belarus

The following excerpt, again taken Zaprudnik, summarizes the modern status of this remarkable country and places it in the world.

*“In the modern world - particularly in the complex passage of Eastern Europe from communism to democracy, threatened by the disruptive forces of chauvinism Belarus can be viewed as a laboratory of changes, to which a careful evolutionary approach must be taken. Located in the geographic middle of the European continent and straddling the East and West, Belarus has been the arena for hundreds of military battles and encounters of sundry tongues and creeds. By necessity, the Belarusian people have become deeply imbued with a tolerance of other people's views and needs. Their historical experience shows that force and violence do not solve problems but, only postpone and aggravate them. This experience has translated into political cautiousness, gradualism, and an evolutionary methodology in solving problems. Taught throughout their history by suffering and sacrifice, the Belarusians have indeed developed a deep sense of humanity.*

*“Of modest size and economic potential on the world scale, Belarus epitomizes both the woes of history and the predicaments of the modern age. It lost more than two million people to Stalinist genocide and as many more in the whirlwind of World War II. Twenty-five per cent of its present-day population of more than 10 million, including 800,000 children, lives in the area affected by 70 per cent of the nuclear fallout from Chernobyl. Yet amidst all its shortages and dire needs, and beset by a burdensome legacy of yesteryear that has significantly slowed progress, the republic continues to display an overall calmness (sometimes mistakenly interpreted as meekness and docility) that could serve as an example for others.*

*“The outside world is finally beginning to become acquainted with this East European nation that had been all but hidden in the shadow of a military superpower. Emerging from behind the information curtain as an independent state, Belarus will gradually present itself to the world in all of its colours and shades, offering humanity both its historic experience and its peaceful nature.”*

## 3.0 The Children

### 3.1 *Selection of Children*

Our Fund works in conjunction with charitable non-governmental organizations in Belarus. Similar to our Fund, these are non-profit, grassroots organizations comprised of thousands of Belarusian volunteers. These volunteers have sent more than 150,000 children for health respites to over 20 countries around the world since 1989. Within the framework of their programs they have also sent hundreds of children abroad for medical treatment, distributed humanitarian aid, constructed homes for resettlement projects, arranged for physicians to train abroad, set up educational centers, and organized many more projects to aid the victims of the Chernobyl disaster. Our Fund is one of many worldwide organizations that helps Belarusian victims of Chernobyl.

For the children's program, we send requests to the Belarusian organizations for specific numbers of children according to age and sex as invited by prospective Canadian host families. In Belarus these requests are passed on to organization volunteers in the village(s) that we sponsor. Selection committees made up of at least one social worker and one doctor review the requests. On our behalf they choose children that they believe will be most likely to benefit from our program.

### 3.2 *Where Do the Children come from?*

Since many countries are inviting Belarusian children for respite vacations, our Canadian Fund has decided to focus on one area of the contaminated zone. For the past several years we have directed our aid to the district of Chaussy (approximately 35,000 people) not only through our children's program, but also by sending medical supplies to the Chaussy Hospital and by bringing their doctors to Canada for training.

The village of Chaussy, situated 40 km southeast of Mogilev, the provincial capital, has a population of around 10,000. It is made up of small communities situated around a central core. Chaussy lost 50 per cent of its population in World War II. There are virtually no cars on the streets, but an occasional horse and cart will amble by. Canadian visitors have described the town as a step back in time to the 1930s.

A typical house in the village is a small wooden frame cottage heated by wood stove. In many of these buildings there is no water or communal sewer systems and on average a house has 4 to 15 people living in its two or three small rooms. Most homes have a small vegetable garden with a few fruit trees.

High-rise apartments are the other type of dwelling your child could live in. While they offer heating and plumbing, the families are again crowded into very tiny living spaces, often shared with grandparents.

### 3.3 *Children's Health*

The children selected for our program are considered healthy. They have passed a standard health examination required to enter Canada. However their immune systems

are weakened due to the lack of vitamins in food and the accumulation of small doses of radiation.

These children pose no health risk to others. Host parents may find their visitor will tire faster than Canadian children will. Headaches, nosebleeds, poor skin colour, many bruises and slow-healing sores are reported often by our host parents.

### *3.4 Dental Care*

Almost all of our visiting children are in urgent need of dental treatment. Dental hygiene, preventative dental care and common dental treatments are just not available to the average Belarusian. In most cases, Canadian families have approached their own dentists and have been successful in receiving free treatment. If this is not possible, contact your group leader who may have names of dentists who have offered their services.

You may give your dentist the following information — It is a good idea to have the Belarusian interpreter accompany the child on the first visit. The children are not used to having anesthetics and they will be very frightened. A Canadian dentist who traveled to Belarus in 1995 to treat children as well as research their dental treatment system reported that dental services, even in the major centers, were equivalent to what we had 70 years ago. This explains why even the interpreters don't believe that a trip to the dentist can be painless. Please be gentle with the children's fears—they have good reason to be frightened. In their country, most believe it is better to endure a toothache than a trip to the dentist.

Note for dentists — Dr. Gerald Wright of the Faculty of Dentistry at the University of Western Ontario offers the following advice:

1. Expect possible management problems, as many children have had no local anesthetic with past treatment.
2. Introduce them slowly to dentistry. Begin with hygiene.
3. Expect high cavity rates similar to Ontario in 1950.
4. We have encountered no serious medical (contraindications -?) for treatment. However, be on the outlook for problems. Last year I picked up a fibroma. If the children look pale, have them extend their hands and be certain creases on the palm are pink. It is a superficial way of checking hemoglobin without a lab test—I am always on the watch for leukemia.

The cost of the treatment that is being provided by you to the child is already part of your office overhead expense and is deducted before taxable income is calculated.

### *3.5 Language*

As noted in the discussion on Belarus (see Section 2.5) children are taught Russian in schools, but many speak Belarusian at home. Older children may have had some instruction in English or German. Hand gestures and simple words may be enough in many cases. Encourage the child to point to the English words in a dictionary if they can't pronounce them.

Other suggestions:

- Post signs in Belarusian (Cyrillic alphabet) and English,
- Post “food” words and translations on the fridge,
- Write common words you'll use on recipe cards and pull them out for quick use,
- Be creative with your pronunciation, expression and gestures and hopefully the children will do likewise,
- Keep a sense of humour; laughter can be a form of communication.

## 4.0 Hosting a Child

### 4.1 *Role of the Host Family*

The most important role of the host family is to provide the visiting Belarusian child with day-to-day care in a loving and stable environment. Remember the children are coming to have a respite from radiation. They are in need of wholesome food, fresh clean air and the love that will make them feel at home in a foreign country so different from their own.

Undoubtedly, the true pleasures of Canada for these children are the simple ones, many of which they have been restricted from doing in their home country. They love to swim (agreed by all host parents to be the #1 favorite pastime) and they love to ride bicycles and play cards. Unlike many of our own children, they do not need the countless toys and trappings of our materialistic society. Driving through an automatic car wash or getting take-out food at the drive-through at McDonald's are unbelievable thrills. This, of course, provides an excellent lesson for our own children.

It's a good idea for host families to participate in some or all of the group's planned summer activities, which allow the child to speak his or her own language and play with friends from home.

In the event of an illness, accident or emergency, host families should seek the immediate help of the Belarusian interpreter and the group leader. (See Section 4.8) The host family should also inform its dentist of the child's proposed visit and solicit his interest and hopefully free dental treatments.

Other duties of the host family pertain to the administrative requirements by the Canadian Fund in order to bring the children to Canada. The Fund requires that each family fundraise to cover the full costs of health insurance, visa, airfare, interpreter costs and administration costs.

### 4.2 *Arrival*

Gift giving is a very important part of the Belarusian culture and the children always arrive with something special for their host families. In return, if you wish to give "your child" something, popular gifts for the Belarusian child include Barbie dolls for the girls and Lego and baseball caps for the boys, brightly coloured T-shirts, etc.

Most of the children arrive extremely tired. It may be their first time away from home and the length of the trip takes an understandable toll on such young bodies. Many of the children seem to have a problem with motion sickness and will have been ill on the airplane as well as the buses and cars bringing them to your town.

It is a good idea to have a brief introduction with the interpreter the first night and another visit in the first or second day. (On this visit general information can be exchanged by asking the children if he has allergies? Are they afraid of animals? Do they get carsick? Names? Nicknames? Brothers and sisters? etc.) Ask if there is

anything your child would like to see or try while in Canada. One little girl always wanted to try a pineapple, she tried it and found she didn't like it but her curiosity was satisfied.

Once home, the child will most likely want to unpack right away. In most cases the luggage contains more gifts than clothes and the children want to present them immediately to their hosts. If you are helping your child to unpack, check for food he might have brought.

Pour a bath for your guest, showing him the soap, a towel and a supply of fresh clothes. After the bath offer a light snack and then get her off to bed. You will be pleasantly surprised the next morning by a much more relaxed and excited child.

Don't overdo the activities in the first week, it is very tempting. Try to remember how overwhelming and over-stimulating our lives, customs and material wealth are for these children. Try to get a few of the Belarusian children together in the first week or two for a barbecue so they can see that their friends are O.K. and they can share impressions in their own language. They may also be able to exchange phone numbers if it is not long distance. A phone call can be a great cure for homesickness.

**Important Note for Host Families on Farms:** Agriculture Canada strongly urges the visiting children be given clean shoes immediately. They should not be around livestock with the shoes or clothing they have worn at home. Wash the soles of their own shoes and their clothing right away. When leaving, make sure all clothing that has been worn around livestock is thoroughly washed in hot water. Footwear worn around livestock should remain in Canada.

### *4.3 Bathroom and Grooming Habits*

Buy a toothbrush and toothpaste for your child before he arrives - he will most likely not have one. Encourage him to brush his teeth regularly.

As soon as possible show the child the toilet and flush some paper down. By hand signals you should be able to make it clear that in Canada toilet paper can go down the toilet, but nothing else. (In Belarus their system cannot handle toilet paper, so it is usually discarded in the wastepaper basket.) On the one hand you might have a child who thinks nothing can go down the toilet; on the other hand, there are the children who begin to think anything can go down-as one family learned after pulling apart their entire bathroom to find a peach that had been flushed.

Another important point to get across is that soap is not rationed in Canada. This means washing and changing underwear daily is part of normal hygiene. Show her where her soiled clothes should go and let her know you will do her laundry. As her visit progresses, you will want to show her the washer and dryer. Most of the children find this quite interesting.

### *4.4 Food and Mealtimes*

The Belarusian diet includes many potatoes (cooked in a million different ways), many pickled items-and plenty of fried, greasy, fatty food. Belarusians are not used to salads or raw vegetables, and have little access to fruits. Bananas, fruit juices, watermelon,

peaches are rare treats for the children and many will make up for years of shortages at one sitting. With a plentiful supply of these fruits and other good foods, many host families literally watch their children “bloom”. The colour comes out in their cheeks and almost all go home many pounds heavier.

The children are not used to drinking milk. At home, they are warned that dairy products are high in radioactivity, which ends up in the bones of those that consume them. They can be encouraged to drink milk here, but sometimes are not able to digest it in large quantities.

One child informed her hosts that the doctor told her not to eat spicy food (heard from many host families) but she loved salami and sausages. This same child struggled to eat cold cuts and bread with a knife and fork the first night in Canada, then observed the family's example and made a sandwich. She wouldn't eat spaghetti, but the sauce on a potato seemed to work. The children are more likely to eat cooked vegetables than raw. Cabbage is very popular. Many hosts found the children to be picky eaters. Suggestions: try ketchup on everything (they universally love it); let the children help shop for and cook some Belarusian meals; and when all else fails - cook lots of potatoes.

Some of the children have wonderful manners, others don't. Have an interpreter explain which behaviours are not acceptable in your household and why. A common problem is children leaving the table before everyone has finished. This is because in many Belarusian families, the children are allowed to roam around during mealtimes. Children may or may not be familiar with all the eating utensils, or respectful of grace being said at the table.

#### *4.5 Bed*

Many families may have problems getting the children to bed. In Belarus children may not go to bed until their parents do. In many cases, this is because the living area doubles as a bedroom. One girl was up and dressed every morning, but did not come out of her room until her host mother knocked on the door to see if she was awake. The host mother managed to explain that she could sleep in and come down for breakfast whenever she wanted. If they had an early appointment, she would be told the night before that she had to get up early.

#### *4.6 Using the Phone*

If you allow the children to use the phone, show them which numbers they may call. One boy called 911 because it was written on the phone. If this happens or you have reason to believe it may happen, have an interpreter explain that calling 911 under false pretenses is a serious offense. Phones in Belarus are uncommon (108 for every 1,000 households) and unreliable. However, they are inexpensive (for calls within the country.)

#### *4.7 Behavioural Problems*

There is a general tendency for Belarusian boys to be rambunctious and aggressive. Try to keep in mind that aggressiveness is a key to survival in their home country.

Belarusian fathers are often absent figures because of working two jobs, standing in line-ups, a more sexist culture, etc. Girls may take time to warm up to host fathers.

Having children a similar age as the visiting Belarusian children may cause some sibling rivalry problems. Your own children should be warned well in advance that the visitor won't speak English, and that he will require a lot of extra attention from Mom and Dad. Families with older children of their own fare well for several reasons. The older children were able to take some of the responsibility away from the parents (taking them to a movie, or bowling, etc.) and for young children, it is always a treat to hang out with older children. Host parents with no children also managed well because the visiting children received lots of attention.

Very early in the visit, it is important to establish the house rules by which you expect your visitor to abide. You are less likely to be challenged on an issue if you have been consistent from the start and have not spoiled the child with special privileges at the beginning of the visit, which can set the tone for future expectations. Some children (like our own) are very timid and may never challenge your authority. Others may become very stubborn about having to wear seat belts, putting on lifejackets or getting to sit in the front seat. One host mother laughed as she told the story of how east met West at a campground in Ontario when her eleven year-old visitor refused to take her turn in the back seat of the car. Her own three children had been kindly giving up their turns in the front seat for the first few weeks, but now wanted them back. The visitor wouldn't hear of it and refused to get into the car. The standoff between the host mother and the visitor lasted well over an hour, until finally the visitor gave in.

It is important to remember that children use two main tools to communicate - language and behaviour. Their ability to use language has been reduced. Expect the behavioural expressions of feelings, wants and needs to increase. Being aware of this simple fact can often help us to adjust our own expectations of the child. Sometimes, with this in mind, behaviour might not be confused with "behavioural problem"

If behavioural problems are serious, call the interpreter to try and determine the root of the difficulty.

## *4.8 Emergencies*

In a medical emergency, contact your Belarusian interpreter in charge of your child. Have your insurance number on hand to give to the doctor or hospital.

In case of dental problems, contact your own dentist and ask if he would consider treating your child free. If you are turned down, call your group leader who will most likely have names of dentists who are willing to treat the children at no cost.

If an emergency in your own family means the Belarusian visitor can no longer stay in your home (either short- or long-term), contact your group leader.

## *4.9 Interpreters*

**Who are they?**

Most of the interpreters are mature students and professors studying Language at the university level.

### **What are the interpreters' responsibilities?**

All the interpreters are responsible for the well being of the children they accompany to Canada. They are in fact acting as the children's guardians while here.

The other aspect of their "job" is translation and interpretation duties, for the child and host family, including letters if any. Most families like to write a letter to their child's parents at the end of the summer and the interpreters try to translate these before getting on the plane home.

### **What are the Host Families responsibilities?**

Host families must always let their interpreters know about any times the child will be away for more than a couple of days. They should contact their interpreter for any medical emergencies with their child, and hopefully for dental visits that may be stressful for the child.

Many families invite an interpreter to accompany them on trips or excursions. As when inviting someone to be your guest it is usual for the hosts to cover the costs of the event.

### **When to call (and not call) the interpreter.**

There should be specific "office hours" set by your group for calling the interpreters to make appointments for visits, dental work etc. Outside of these hours, calls should only be made in emergency situations.

### **Interpreters' Schedule**

While in Canada, the interpreters are a wonderful source of information on Belarus, its culture, customs and history and are happy to share this information with host families. Many families invite the interpreters for dinner or to go on outings with them which they seem to enjoy. However there have been times when the interpreters seem to book up every hour of the day and become exhausted. To combat this, your group leader may designate a member of the group to become the "social secretary" and schedule dental and medical appointments and any other requests for the interpreter's time.

## *4.10 Lines of Communications*

To help streamline communications throughout the organization, a chain of information has been developed. To keep everyone properly updated, please follow this chain.

Each first year family should be "buddied" with an "experienced" family. This is a good starting place for problems like food dislikes, discipline, creative communicating etc.

Group Leader - Any problems not solved by the host family that they feel require attention could be brought to the attention of your group leader. He is an experienced person who will do their best to help.

Regional Coordinators - Regional coordinators are members of the national board of directors. The group leaders will be in contact with the Regional Coordinators with any problems she feels are not able to be solved locally. This would include medical emergencies with the children or interpreters. The Regional Coordinators will be in close contact with the Executive Director and other members of the board of directors.

Please Note: At no time should individual families call the National Office. They must go through their Group Leaders.

#### *4.11 Medical*

A reminder for Host Parents(s) who have not recently been involved in medicating children. A.S.A. is no longer an acceptable medication for children. An acceptable medication for pain control i.e. headaches, muscle ache or to reduce fever in a child is acetaminophen (Tylenol). Also, the recommended dosage by age may not be appropriate for your Belarusian child, as Belarusian children are often smaller than their Canadian peers.

#### *4.12 Helpful Hints*

**BELARUS** Capital – Minsk  
Population – 10.5 million  
Time Zone – GMT+3 hours  
Difference – Pacific - +10, Eastern - +7, Maritime - +6, Newfoundland - +5.5

**Phoning Belarus** – If your Belarusian child's family has a telephone it will have a 5 or 6 digit local telephone number. It will also have a routing (area or city) code as well as a country code of "375". You can dial this number yourself using your telephone company's overseas access codes. For example, if your telephone company is Bell Canada, you can place a prepaid call to the number "2-34-56" in Chaussy, which has a routing code of "2242", by dialing

011 375 (2242) 2-34-56

Consult your telephone directory for overseas access codes in your locality. Also, check for discount time periods because rates for calls to Belarus can be up to \$3 or more per minute. Finally, keep the 7-hour time difference in mind when placing a call.

**Web Site** - The Fund has its own web site on the Internet. The site is updated as required and has a wealth of information about our Fund as well as Chernobyl and Belarus and is worth a visit at:

**[www.cybertap.com/belarus](http://www.cybertap.com/belarus)**

**Special Thank You** - There may be several people or organizations who help in bringing the children over or while they are here, for example dentists, doctors, local business. These people may appreciate a special thank-you. Below are a few ways to do this or be creative.

Take a picture of your child and send it along or take a picture of the donor with the child and give them a copy. This helps personalize the help that was given.

If your child has brought some gift from Belarus you do not have a use for, someone special may love it.

Take your child to meet the person who donated to the group. It's nice to be able to put a face to the help given.

Have your child draw a picture or some other artwork for the donor and give it to them.

## 5.0 Saying Goodbye

Saying goodbye is more difficult for the Canadian host family than their visitors. Typically very strong bonds will have formed during the child's visit. Sending such young vulnerable children back to face the hardships of their homeland is hard for host parents. The children also feel the trauma of a difficult goodbye, but it is usually balanced by an equal desire to return to their parents and siblings, full of exciting stories of their summer in Canada.

### 5.1 *Gifts to Send Home*

Don't feel as if you must spend hundreds of dollars on your child. Some families can, but many cannot. The most important gift you can give is sharing our healthy environment. With a little ingenuity, you can probably get many suitable gift items without going over our own budget.

The children themselves need winter clothing, coats, boots, socks and shoes. Sometimes neighbors, friends and relatives ask how they can help. You may consider asking them to buy clothes that you are not able or willing to buy. Many groups organize a clothing exchange where used clothing is collected and distributed to the children before they leave. These clothing exchanges usually provide sufficient donated items of clothing to ensure the children can bring home items for siblings. Winter boots are very difficult to get in Belarus. Our fund has heard of more than one child unable to go to school on very cold days because they did not have boots.

Gifts for family members can include some common everyday items - taken for granted here, but impossible to find in Belarus and greatly appreciated. Please use common sense! A new bike would be great, but how practical will it be in comparison to new winter boots? The Belarusian lifestyle is one of harsh practicality; it is not filled with designer or brand name items.

Sewing kits, thread, sewing needles, knitting needles, wool, soaps, gloves, Teflon pans, cooking spices, gloves and inexpensive perfumes are all wonderful gifts for Mothers and Grandmothers. For the men in your child's family, small tool kits, wrench sets, fishing poles (that can be disassembled), fishing line, gloves and utility knives make useful and welcomed presents. Dried fruit, art supplies and school supplies are also great items to send home with your child. Photo albums are greatly appreciated. Photos of daily life and special events make it easier for a young child to recall and explain what he or she has seen while in Canada.

Basic health care items we take for granted are practically nonexistent in most of our children's homes. Due to the harsh climate, poor living conditions and ongoing radiation, Multivitamins, Vitamin C and Tylenol are items that are extremely useful for the entire family. Some groups canvass their area drug stores for donations and discount pricing for bulk purchases, ensuring they will send a year's supply of vitamins home with the children, enough for the entire family. Toothbrushes, toothpaste, antiseptics, toilet paper, Band-Aids, are for the most part very limited; these items will be appreciated. When sending ANY HEALTH CARE ITEM HOME WITH THE CHILD ENSURE A COMPLETE TRANSLATION OF THE INSTRUCTIONS IS ATTACHED TO THE CONTAINER!

If you choose to send money home with the child, send AMERICAN DOLLARS ONLY, ALL BILLS MUST BE IN PERFECT CONDITION, TORN OR WORN BILLS WILL UNACCEPTIBLE IN THE MARKET PLACE. Money should be hidden inside the clothing the child wears, possibly sewn in a secret spot. Make sure your child knows where the money is so they can alert their parents when unpacking. A letter should be sent home with the child explaining the items sent home and their uses. This will ensure they are distributed and used correctly.

## *5.2 Luggage Restrictions*

Each passenger on a traveling with our program is permitted:

- 1 piece of carry-on hand luggage (this must be able to fit under the seat of the plane)
- 2 pieces of checked luggage (40 Kilograms total weight)

It is critical you remember that the children must handle their own luggage during the return trip. Baggage must remain within the weight and size tolerances to ensure nothing is left at the airport. No child or interpreter will be allowed to exceed the weight, size, or bag limits.

The departure at the airport is a stressful and confusing time for the volunteer members that help in organizing the children's departure. To improve the chances of your child's baggage arriving safely at its destination do not send new luggage home with the child. Should your child require additional luggage pick this up at a second hand shop, Salvation Army or a garage sale. Ensure your child's luggage is labeled well and she is familiar with it. It is recommended that groups individually weigh all luggage BEFORE it is loaded on the bus departing for the airport, this ensures they refuse no OVERWEIGHT luggage at the airport weigh in. The meeting at the departure bus is an ideal time to colour code the luggage with duct tape. Color coding the baggage by interpreter will help the interpreter in finding the baggage and provide security from tampering. At the airport there is a real risk that luggage will be opened if it is not secured with duct or box tape.

### **CARRY ON LUGGAGE DO'S & DON'TS**

**AIRLINES WILL NOT ALLOW THE FOLLOWING ITEMS ON THE AIRCRAFT IN CARRY ON BAGGAGE**

String, rope, fishing line (even on the fishing reel), tape, knives, plastic or toy guns, sharp objects, anything that could be remotely considered a potential weapon. (Believe me they have a good imagination) Should any of these items be found in the child's carry on luggage they will remove it! Make sure these items are packed in the suitcase.

### **SUSTENANCE FOR THE LONG RIDE HOME**

Please remember the length of the children's trip home; they will spend a minimum of 24 hours on the move, and in some cases, 30 to 36 hours. Food and drink will be provided on the plane only. It is your job to make sure that your visitor has enough food and drink to get him from your home to the plane and for the 10 hours or more it will take to get from the Moscow airport to his home. Please ensure that your child has plenty of snack

items and juice boxes in his carry-on luggage. At the airport he will not be subject to search or removals of any food items from his carry on luggage.

### *5.3 Letters to Belarus*

Before your child leaves for Belarus ensure that he or she writes down (in Cyrillic letters) their home mailing address, this can be photocopied for future use as a label on any correspondence. Note that addresses in Belarus are written in reverse order (country, province, city, street, person). Most standard letters from Canada are now getting to their destinations in Belarus in 8 to 14 days. Please be careful to use standard size envelopes, oversized or thick envelopes generally do not reach their destination, many are stolen with the assumption that they contain money. The inconsistency of the mail makes communication to the Belarusian families extremely frustrating although the result is worthwhile.

If you are connected to the Internet you may wish to use email for letters to Belarus. Consult our web site for details.

### *5.4 Food Packages to Belarus*

A few companies commercially send packages, parcels and "electronic parcels" to Belarus. They offer various services and usually provide a written confirmation, signed by the receiving family. Due to the instability of the government and the changing regulations at times food packages are not allowed in from other countries. When operational, these brokers provide a guaranteed service, fax them a copy of your requested items, selected from the menu of more than 100 items and they fax this information to an office in Western Europe where they purchase the items and hand deliver to the family's home. One of the most common companies is KARPATY, in Toronto, 1-800-265-7189. There are many good companies' available. Check with your group leader or our web site for additional information as no particular company is recommended.

## 6.0 Hosting a Child from an Orphanage

If you have made the decision to host a child from an orphanage this year or are considering the possibility for the future, please read the following section carefully. Although children are children, and all of the children we invite to Canada share the need for respite from the effects of the Chernobyl accident, the fact that these children live in institutions rather than families has a direct effect on the ways in which we meet their needs.

### 6.1 *The Orphan Project*

In 1994, Reverend Jim Baldwin initiated a new project in the Fund. Sponsored by the Fund, he visited six orphanages in Belarus to assess the viability of providing ongoing support for the orphanages and the possibility of including orphaned children in the summer respite visits. Reverend Baldwin delivered medical and dental supplies to the orphanages and met with the directors to discuss the program. As a result, in the summer of 1995, sixteen children from orphanages in Belarus visited Canada as part of the Children's Program. Since that time the growth in numbers has been steady as Canadians have opened their hearts to the plight of these children and, this summer (1997), forty-four children from orphanages will be hosted in Canadian homes in Quebec and Ontario. As well, the host families that make up the orphan groups have all committed to the primary mandate of the Orphan Project, which is to provide ongoing support to the orphanages throughout the year. In choosing to host one child who lives in an orphanage, you are helping to support several hundred children who are unable to make the trip overseas.

The directors of the orphanages we support are very appreciative of the help we are providing for their children and will do their utmost to cooperate with us. In turn, we try to meet their needs when it comes to the children's travel. Regulations in Belarus require that each time a child or group of children leaves the orphanage, they must be accompanied by a staff member until they are turned over to the person who will be responsible for them while they are away. This can become very expensive and inconvenient if children are coming and going at all times of the summer. Therefore, we have committed to having the orphan children travel to Canada as a group. We have two dates for departure from Belarus - one for the 12 week children and one 6 weeks later for the 6 week children. At the end of the summer all of the orphan children travel back to Belarus on the same flight. This minimizes the number of times staff must be taken away from the schools. This causes some inconvenience at this end for areas who have groups from both the Children's Program and the Orphan Program, in that they may not be arriving and departing on the same dates, but we are better able to deal with the problem here than the directors are in Belarus.

### 6.2 *The Orphanages*

At the present time the Orphan Project supports six orphanages in Belarus - the six visited by Reverend Baldwin. Some of these are Children's Homes which house children from the ages of 3 to 8, some are specifically geared to children with disabilities, and still others are basically boarding schools for children from 8 to 14. The children who visit Canada to take part in our summer program come mostly from this last group. This

summer (1997) our guests come from Chaussy, Minsk Schools #3 and #5 and one child from Volozhin. The children are selected by the directors of the schools based on their need as well as their perceived ability to cope with such a trip. You can be quite certain that they have all been told they are ambassadors of their country and their school and are expected to be on their best behaviour!

The children are in orphanages for various reasons. Unlike Canada, Belarus does not have a system of foster parenting so children who have lost their parents, been abandoned, or must be removed from the family home due to neglect, abuse, health problems or just the inability of their parents to cope with raising a family, are placed in an institutionalized setting. In the aftermath of Chernobyl, the need for this kind of care is great. The orphanages are filled to overflowing. Minsk School #3, for example, built to accommodate 150, now houses 210 children. They often sleep six or ten to a room with beds in rows, head to foot. Storage space is limited and a child's only personal space is his or her bed. You may find that, even in Canada, these children will keep any treasures they collect under their pillows.

Life in the orphanage follows a strict routine. The children rise early, eat, work and play at specified times. They are not accustomed to long stretches of free time with television or a room full of toys and books. To some, the concept of entertaining yourself is quite foreign. Routines are familiar, comfortable and give the children a sense of security.

### *6.3 Welcoming an Orphan Child into Your Family*

Meeting your child when he or she first arrives in Canada is an event filled with excited anticipation and a little apprehension. The children feel that way too! Please remember that they will be watching you very closely and reading your body language carefully. Your feelings of concern for their health and how travel-weary they look could easily be misinterpreted as disapproval to a child who cannot understand your words, only your actions and expressions. It is very important that you convey to them that they are welcome and you are happy to see them safely here. Like any child in such a situation, they will react in their own way to the stress of this first meeting. They may be shy and very quiet at first. Give them a little time and space to find their bearings. We have very little idea of the family background of most of these children or if, in fact, they have ever lived in a family setting. Your best course is to be open and welcoming and to let them come to you when they are comfortable with the situation. You will see a big change after a night of rest.

These children will arrive with very little in the way of luggage. They may in fact be sharing a gym bag amongst roommates. You will find they bring very little with them in terms of clothing and it may not fit or might be totally inappropriate for the time of year. We have, in fact, expressed to the directors that we would prefer they bring as little as possible so that we do not have to be concerned about sending it back when they return home. Once again, be careful of your reaction. These children have very few personal belongings and they can be very possessive of them. It is a good idea to have a toothbrush and some pyjamas ready for the first night as well as a small welcome gift. You will find some other ideas for this first night elsewhere in this Host Parent Guide.

Like the children coming from families in Belarus, the orphan children arrive looking pale and tired. They cannot leave for Canada if they are ill, so you shouldn't expect any major

health problems when they arrive but keep in mind that these children have depressed immune systems and live in close quarters. We have seen cases of impetigo in one or two children each year, a problem easily dealt with if it is picked up right away and treated by your family doctor but that could become a bigger problem if left unchecked.

As the days go on, you will most likely find that this child fits right in to your family routine and thrives on the good food, fresh air and the experience of living as part of a family unit. Keep in mind that they spend virtually no time alone in the orphanage and at first may want to stick very close to you at all times. Even going outside to play will be a new experience if you live in a busy neighbourhood as their outdoor play at home will take place within the schoolyard. If you remember the situation that these children are coming from, it will help you to ease them into the new experience of life in a family.

#### *6.4 Keeping in Touch with the Group*

The children from orphanages travel to Canada as a group and we try, as much as possible, to place several children from the same orphanage close to each other in their host families. To these children, their schoolmates are their family and they rely on each other a great deal for support. We really encourage host families to plan time to get together over the summer. This gives the children a chance to see each other and to speak and play in their own language. It also reassures them that their friends are all right. The added bonus for us as host parents is that it gives us time to share experiences and ideas with each other. It is interesting as well to see our Belarusian children interacting with their peers! This will often give you new insight to your young guest.

#### *6.5 Saying Goodbye*

Probably the greatest difference between hosting a child from an orphanage and hosting a child from a family is saying goodbye at the end of the summer visit. We are not sending these children home to Mom and Dad; we are sending them back to school. It is often difficult on both sides. However, from experience we know that the children settle quite quickly once the bus pulls away from us. They find their classmates and friends and begin to share their pictures and stories of the summer. Those who have visited the orphanages assure us that the staff is very caring and interested in the children. The director of Minsk School#3 visited Canada last fall and certainly impressed us with his genuine concern and understanding of the children in his care. The children are grouped in the orphanages under the care of housemothers who help to fill the emotional gaps. You will often find that there are some strong attachments there for the children.

The children in this program have a great need for stable relationships in their lives. We certainly encourage you to keep in contact with your child throughout the year. You may also wish to invite the same child back to your home next summer. If this is the case, it is a good idea to show the child that you will put some of their things in a special place to be there for them when they return. Let them help you pack a box, mark it with their name and put it away for next year. This will also help to ease the problem of what to take home to Belarus.

## *6.6 The Luggage That Goes Home*

Another major difference in hosting a child from the Orphan Program is in the luggage that goes home with your child. Our instincts as parents urge us to give them as much as we would provide for our own children. We want them to have new clothes and be warm through the winter. Remember the limited storage space and the numbers of children cared for in each facility. If a child returns with more than is deemed necessary, the extra will be taken away to be shared with the others. Although this is understandable, it can be heartbreaking to the child. Keep in mind as well our commitment to support all of the children in the orphanage. You will send your child home with one piece of carry-on luggage. This could include one or two outfits, socks and underwear, personal grooming items and one or two treasures. We often find that they will want to take back gifts as well. These can be something as simple as stickers or pencils for their friends and scarves, gloves or even coffee or tea for the teachers or housemothers. Do not send your child home with jewelry that is, or even looks, expensive. Experience tells us that this leads to jealousy and theft once they arrive home. These are extra problems that the directors would rather not have to deal with at the beginning of the school year. The cargo baggage that is allowed for each child will be filled with supplies for the orphanages. We try to send enough vitamins, medicines, first aid supplies, blankets, linens and other necessities to see them through the winter. These boxes will be packed centrally by the Orphan Project volunteers in Ottawa and will arrive at the airport when the children are ready to depart. In the cargo luggage as well, you will be permitted to send a snowsuit and boots for your child and the clothing they brought with them when they arrived. This box will be packed by your group locally and clearly marked with the address of the orphanage it is destined for. You will need to have these articles to your group leader or designated volunteers well enough in advance to have them sorted and properly packed in time for the trip home. If your group has collected other supplies for the orphanages, please inform the director of the Orphan Project so that we can coordinate the supplies being sent to each school. This is an important shipment for us as the cost is included in the flight costs for the children. We want to be sure that the supplies they need most are sent at this time. A commitment has been made by most of the orphan groups this year to raise \$100 over the cost of bringing each child to Canada to buy the medical supplies we send back with them. Through organizations such as Canmap, we are able to purchase these items at a greatly reduced rate- often at 10% of cost! This way we can be sure that we can provide what is needed in a very efficient manner. We know that we would each spend much more than this to fill the cargo luggage of a child going back to a family in Belarus so it is not a great burden. The dimensions and weight allowed for the carry-on bag and the cargo baggage will be sent to each group. We also need to remember that the translators and children will move these boxes through the airports. We need to be reasonable.

## *6.7 Ongoing Support for the Orphanages*

Our goal is to send three more shipments of supplies to the orphanages over the year. Our ability to do this depends on donations to the Orphan Project above the fundraising done to bring the children to Canada for the recuperation visits. Shipping is expensive. We encourage you to keep this yearlong goal in mind when speaking with service groups or corporate donors in your area. Please contact the Orphan Project Director for more information.

A List of Supplies Needed for the Orphanages (always changing, growing...):

First Aid and Medical Supplies:

Vitamins, Multivitamins

Decongestants

Tylenol, etc. (for pain, fever)

Advil, etc. (for inflammation)

Cough Syrups, Lozenges

Antacids

Ear, Nose, Eye Drops

Laxatives

Antibiotics

Head Lice treatments

Band-Aids

Disinfectants (alcohol, peroxide)

Antibiotic ointments (Polysporin, etc.)

Bandages

Cotton Balls

Q-tips

Vaseline

Latex Gloves

Nail Brushes

Disposable syringes

Personal Items

Shampoo

Toothpaste (they have plenty of toothbrushes for the moment)

Dental Floss

Sanitary Napkins

Soap

Clothing, Linens

Socks, underwear (new only please)

Tights

Shoes, particularly good athletic shoes

Winter outerwear - hats, mittens, jackets, snowpants

Winter Boots

Blankets

Towels, facecloths

Other Needs

Cleaning products - dishwashing detergent, disinfectants for bathrooms, etc

Tools, caulking, plastic for windows

Plastic Tablecloths for dining hall

Volleyballs, Soccer balls, Basketballs

Hair Clippers, Scissors

## *6.8 Adoption*

Many host families have asked about the possibility of adopting some of the children who come to Canada for the summer. At the moment there is no adoption the possibility, chaired by two families who personally began the adoption process more than two years

ago. **To date there have been no successful adoptions of Belarusian children into Canada.** Please do not talk to your visiting children about adoption. If you are interested in being kept up to date or being involved with the Adoption Committee, please contact the Orphan Project Director. Under no circumstances should you try to contact the orphanages directly. The directors have let us know that they will only deal with requests that come through the Orphan Project Director.

## *6.9 Conclusion*

Congratulations on your decision to host one of these special children! You are certain to find it a rewarding experience. Your group leaders will be a good source of support for your family this summer and they have access to the Orphan Project Director and other families who have hosted children through this program in previous years. Don't be afraid to ask for help if you need it or to pass on your questions and concerns. Have a wonderful summer!

## 7.0 Belarusian Culture, History & Children

*by Nancy Neal-Oldenettel, Director of the Seattle Children of Chernobyl Project*

I have visited the Soviet Union and former Soviet Union five times between 1990-1994 and, in so doing I have realized that there are some profound differences between the cultural values way of life and perception of this immense part of the world and those who live in North America. My grandparents were immigrants from the Ukraine/Slovak region during the 1920's. I grew up hearing the language and experiencing the culture and religion of this region through them and my mother. This is why I would like to convey to those who are interested in or who are hosting a child from Belarus for the Chernobyl children's health recuperation, some of my understanding from the inside.

Though the children who are visiting look much like our North American children it is important to realize that they come from a very, very different world than ours. The land and people of Belarus (AKA - White Russia) as well as the other Slavic Nationalities have a very long history which is deeply connected to their love of the earth on which they walk. This earth in many ways has a soul which they are nurtured by and which they call, with all sincerity, the Motherland. The earth holds the remains of their parents, grandparents, great grandparents and on and on for generation after generation.

The Belarus people were among the first to accept Christianity through the missionary work of the monks Cyril and his brother almost one thousand years ago. They were ahead of others in the development of the printing press and the Bible was printed by the philosopher and astronomer, Francisk Skarina at the same time that Martin Luther was active in Germany. The patron saint of Belarus, Euphrasinya of Polotsk, belonged to the ruling class during the Polish domination of Belarus. At sixteen years old she refused to marry and joined the convent with the vision that she would serve the real needs of the poor and needy of Belarus. She was a philosopher, geographer, an expert on world religions as well as a princess.

The people of Belarus have been divided and fought over throughout their history, being at times a part of Poland, at other times a part of the Baltic empires and a large part of the time a part of the Russian Empire. It is an unanswered question why this part of the world, which lies exactly in the center of Europe and Asia has endured so much warfare and hardship. The people of Belarus are by nature very tolerant and non-aggressive. They have been profoundly religious. Yet history has time and again brought unbearable suffering to her soil. The climate is a northerly one and is not easy to grow enough food in the short summers. It can never be said that life in Belarus has been an easy one even before the Communist revolution.

There have been three great tragedies in this republic since the turn of the century. During World War II (called the Great Patriotic War) Hitler turned all of his-vengeance on the Belarusian nation. There is a monument now standing outside Minsk, which stands where the former village of Khatin once stood. All of the people in this village were gathered in a barn, which was set on fire, and the homes were burned to the ground. There was one survivor to tell the tale and a statue stands in the place where he found his son who had been shot by the German army. At this site there are lights and earth from hundreds of villages, which were destroyed in this way during a two-week blood bath by the Nazis. There are at least 25 sites created to remember the concentration camps which contained between 30,000 and 200,000 people each. In the final toll,

Belarus lost one third of its population to Hitler during a reign of terror to match no other in the history of Europe. It has been a popular belief of political leaders that the country that owns the "heartland" or corridor between Europe and Asia can own the world. This is Belarus.

During the worst years of the Stalin regime, Belarus was again to experience the barbarism of uncontrolled power and fear. In an insidious war against those who might oppose him, Stalin had the most independent or religious sent to their execution and placed in mass graves of sometimes 30,000 which were hidden in the dense forests.

On April 26, 1986 an even greater tragedy silently befell this nation which lay under the constraining power of the old Soviet regime. The Chernobyl nuclear reactor, which was, positioned just a few miles south of Belarus on Ukrainian soil exploded. The prevailing winds carded the intense radiation of over 40 Hiroshima bombs north and the officials made a quick decision to create rain over Belarus before the cloud turned toward Moscow. This time the tragedy would not be over in a day or a year but would last for unknown generations in the future.

In many ways the tragedy is compounded because the effects of it are not easy to see. Unlike the photo of the dying child in Africa, the children who suffer from Chernobyl radiation develop illnesses and diseases slowly and many times without diagnosis. Most of the highly contaminated areas are in remote regions where the villages are similar, in effect, to those at the turn of the century. It is not uncommon to find a family living on the food produced on a plot of land behind the cottage, for a family of seven or more to be living in a two or three room house without a toilet and to use a horse drawn cart for transportation and assistance.

There is a high level of ignorance and superstition still prevalent in these areas and though they might be able to watch a television, there is no real understanding of the rest of the world. In many ways, it is as though time has stood still. It is not unusual to find that one or both of the parents are alcoholic. Vodka was used by the former regime to pay the collective farm and factory workers and to saddle them with an addiction which would keep them pacified.

The children who come from these areas and other parts of Belarus may feel easily overwhelmed by the extreme differences they are at first exposed to. The technology and material life in North America is almost like being in a Star Trek movie. I have met many children who may have only 2 or 3 small toys. There is very little to do which is why many children study music or read a lot. It is very comparable to the stories I have heard from my parents about the depression era in the United States. In many places there may not be hot running water.

It is not a part of the culture to use ice cubes in soda, in fact, it is a very expensive luxury for them to see or taste Coke. Many families are surviving on the equivalent of \$15.00 US or less. I spoke to a nun who assists the children who are dying of cancers related to Chernobyl and she told me one of her greatest problems is to help the families collect enough money to give the child a decent funeral.

The food in general is very bland by any culture's point of view. There is little seasoning and sour cream is the universal dressing of choice. Sour cream is a basic food, which is used to calculate inflation by the local people. The children may not like any kinds of

special sauces or spices or even peanut butter right away as these things are very foreign. They seem to adjust to granola very quickly though. An average family meal has a heavy brown bread, which is cut in thick slices, cucumbers, tomatoes, sour cream, potatoes (boiled or fried), sausage, possibly solid fat, a soup such as borscht with sour cream, grated beets, and tea. They usually love fish, which is of very poor quality in Belarus and very expensive. Tea is a universal drink and an inherent part of the diet. Chocolate, fruit and ice cream are great luxuries for most of the population especially now in a time of extreme shortages and inflation which makes it impossible to purchase new shoes or a new coat or fancy foods.

Children are taught from the time that they are very young to have control and restraint. Their lives are far more controlled by the constant watch of a grandmother, mother or teacher. If they are asked if they would like something, it may be hard for them to decide for themselves if they do and they are trained to say no to things even if they might want it. It is important, therefore, to ask them over and over and insist that they take things that they might obviously like. Make it clear that they can have fruit set in a bowl at any time. Our children are used to just taking what they like but these children will not be aggressive as a general rule.

The medical care and medicines available to the general public of Belarus bear almost no comparison to the West. The hospitals are usually completely unequipped and the care is so poor that it is a necessity for a family member to stay with the sick person, bringing them food and help. It is absolutely scary by our standards to see how the sick are cared for. The hospitals in the village areas receive almost no attention and the humanitarian aid they receive is sparse since most of it stays in Minsk. If medical supplies are donated by doctors or companies it is important that the expiration dates are not expired, or if they are, that a pharmacist include a note saying how long it is safe to use the samples. I have seen cases of medical supplies unused because they were a few months over the expiration date. The average person doesn't have Aspirin, Tylenol, antacids, antibiotics, antibiotic cream, decongestants, or vitamins. Vitamins are an absolute necessity. Good gifts to send home with the children should include vitamins and Tylenol or Aspirin for the elderly family members.

It is wise not to overwhelm your child with gifts. The desire is to give everything but when the children are reunited with the others it is inevitable that they will compare and those children who received few gifts feel very badly. If you send money home with them sew it inside of a seam or the bottom of a pocket. In this culture where material things are so scarce, the people compare smallest differences.

Given sensitivity to the first week or so of adjustment it should not be difficult to overcome the vast differences between our standard of living and theirs. It is a good idea to try to prepare cards, which have some basic Russian and English words, which will be used most often to have a beginning of dialogue.