

THE CIVIC ASSISTANCE COMMITTEE

LAST TO KNOW stories of a war



The Civic Assistance Committee



NORWEGIAN
HELSINKI COMMITTEE

The Norwegian Helsinki Committee

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This book is based on the materials gathered from interviews, the personal recollections of people who lived through the Chechen war. Various stories are presented in the book: stories of the young and old, of Russians and of Chechens, of the military, of journalists, and of human rights defenders. Each interviewee tells their own version of and attitude towards what happened, relating his or her own truth, enabling the reader to consider the same events from different points of view. The publication is meant for a wide audience of readers interested in these matters. However it is also primarily aimed at young people, those who are starting to show an interest in the Caucasus, in the problem of the war, in the issues of memory and peace-building.

The position of the Civic Assistance Committee and the Norwegian Helsinki Committee may not coincide with the contents of the book.

Editors:

Sabina Folnovic-Jaitner, Tatevik Gukasyan

Consultants:

Svetlana Gannushkina, Varvara Pakhomenko, Ekaterina Sokiryanskaya

Collection of materials and transcribing: Anna Kadimskaya, Arisha Zolkina, Timur Voskresenskiy, Masha Romashkina, Daria Sokolova, Karina Kotova, Alexandra Maleeva, Tatevik Gukasyan, Sabina Folnovic-Jaitner, Irina Mozhaikina

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Design of the cover: Igor Bulychev

Translated into English by Ekaterina Kokorina

Edited in English by Fiona Wood

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FOREWORD

Many years ago, a friend came to visit me. She came from a country which had been heavily stricken by war, where neighbours killed neighbours, families were torn apart, her country remained divided and conflicts unresolved.

Showing her my hometown Oslo, without really thinking about it, I time and again came back to stories from the Second World War; about the grave of the Norwegian traitor Vidkun Quisling where people still put flowers, the rooftop where the resistance movement escaped after a sabotage mission, the Karl Johan's street where people were dancing and cheering upon the liberation in 1945. All of them stories told to me by my grandfather; taking me for a walk a quiet summer evening to make sure that I would not allow myself to forget what happened – suspecting that I found the history lessons at school boring.

I told her about what I perceived as my war, she told me nothing about hers. Finally she asked me to stop talking. She wanted to see the sculpture park of Gustav Vigeland, the Viking Ships, the Munch Museum and the castle. And she wanted to go to McDonald's and later have a coffee at the waterfront. I was embarrassed, immediately realizing that I just assumed that war was a straight forward subject to her; not listening to her telling me nothing.

The year after, I came to visit her city. I was deeply shaken by craters from years of shelling, remnants of homes and buildings, tombstones, and the knowledge that hundreds of bodies never retrieved from mass graves surrounded us. Walking around she told me bits and pieces, filling in the gaps from what I saw, but also showing me the playground from her childhood, the river where they used to swim, the old salt mines and the new artificial salt water lake, her friends and their music and what they did on weekends.

The book you are about to read portrays exactly such vivid stories from Chechnya; another country than my friend's. But also a country where the personal stories challenge what may look like

the one and only Truth to an outsider, which is the Truth claimed by those with power. The book let people tell their stories, many of them for the first time. It is a deeply personal book about war, but also about other aspects of living in Chechnya, and it is an important document of the past and present. It is a brave book: telling stories about the war and human rights violations committed in Chechnya has proved to be dangerous for those telling.

The book has been developed within the framework of the programme Human rights education in the North Caucasus, in which Civic Assistance Committee and The Norwegian Helsinki Committee have been partners since 2009. Teaching young people about human rights we see that people's memories, traumas and the feeling of being forgotten by the world must be an integrated part of such education programs. With this book the Civic Assistance Committee has provided a collection which has done exactly that.

My friend wanted me to understand that while I could talk about war as easily as I could take her to see our new Opera house – nobody would object to my stories, attack me, estrange me nor hurt me – she did not trust me to believe her story, because it was only one.

This book makes sure that even if you would be hesitant of just one person's recollection of memories, you may listen more closely after having read so many. Arisha, a student from Russia says it well: 'We never talked about it all. Well, because it was in the news every day. And when it's every day, you stop noticing it, it becomes routine. But people, they never showed people, only how the rebel fighters were done for, but never people. There were no people...'

Mina Skouen
Project Manager
The Norwegian Helsinki Committee

PREFACE

Dear Reader,

We are glad to present 'Last to know: stories of a war' – a collection of interviews taken by young members and interns at the Civic Assistance Committee during the 'Personal Memories of the Chechen War' project. In these interviews people who lived through the recent tragic years in the Chechen republic tell their personal stories.

At the end of 1994 when the war in Chechnya began, the world split into two halves for me. There was the world of those who were thinking about this war every minute and there was the world of those who lived as if nothing in particular was happening. And there were many more of the latter than of the former. If their sons, husbands, or brothers had not been sent to Chechnya to kill or to be killed, they never even noticed that there was a war going on.

Yet the war continues to this day, it cannot end until society comprehends it, until its essence has been revealed, until it becomes evident that this was a war not between two peoples, but between a criminal power and a nation. This war is a lesson to us all, not yet understood, still going on, but nevertheless a lesson which has driven and has been driving our society into savagery, cruelty and crudity.

And now the war has stung the young authors of this book. They were astonished to see how people could live without noticing the war, how they could keep silent about it. I do hope that this book will interest other people, primarily other young people, and that it will force them to confront and accept a reality in which war holds an important place.

The participants of the project are right in saying they have inherited this war. But this is a heritage of the present not the past. Today we are still living in this time, this page of history has not yet been turned, neither in people's consciousness, nor in their reality.

And it is those who created and realized this project who will have to struggle out of this reality into the future.

I hope they will be more successful in doing so than we – the elder generation – have been.

I hope that this collection of sincere personal stories of this time will help people to better understand each other and will prevent the dissociation process we observe in the world today.

Svetlana Gannushkina,
Chair of the Civic Assistance Committee

INTRODUCTION

The book you are holding was produced as part of the Personal Memories of the Chechen War project organised by the Civic Assistance Committee. This is a pilot project of the committee devoted to examining the past. The project aims to begin a process which would lead to an understanding of the consequences of the Chechen war, to initiate dialogue between those young people who lived through the war and those whom it did not affect in any way. Students and graduates of Moscow universities were invited to take part in the project and many of them had never concerned themselves with anything to do with the problem of the Chechen war previously. Within the framework of the project they met and listened to witnesses and participants of these events: their peers, activists from Chechnya (about half of those interviewed), the military, journalists, and human rights defenders.

We attempted to interview different people, to hear as wide a variety of opinions and positions as possible. It is for the reader to judge if we have succeeded in this, we must only note that it proved quite hard to find people willing to tell their story. War is a very difficult subject to remember, a subject somewhat tabooed and dangerous, especially in Chechnya. Many of those who agreed to be interviewed confessed that they had been keeping these memories inside for many years and found themselves only now able to discuss the events they had lived through in such detail for the first time. Some of them doubted until the very last minute that they would be able to break such long silences. The interviews were taken following an oral history method, where the emphasis is placed upon the transfer of personal experience and perception of events.

To prepare for such challenging work all project volunteers undertook special training which included consultations with psychologists on post-traumatic stress, attending lectures by expert human rights defenders on the problem of the Chechen

war, and by specialists in the culture and customs of the Caucasus, and also receiving advice from methodologists on how to conduct an interview. Thus the participants were able to conduct all the interviews planned without complications and reducing the risk of repeated traumatisation of the witnesses and interviewers themselves.

The texts of the transcribed interviews became the foundation of this publication. It was impossible to include the full stories in the book due to its limited volume. But we hope that there is sufficient material to bring the reader closer to these events and to provide them with an understanding of the Chechen war (or wars) from a human rather than a political perspective; through hearing the voices of ordinary people: children, mothers, fathers; civilians, the military, human rights defenders, journalists; and of Russians and Chechens both living in Grozny, in Moscow, in Chechnya and in Russia.

Our objective was not to describe in detail the factual events, and none of the cases cited were verified by us. In letting people have their say and share their memories in the pages of the book, we were instead trying to create space for dialogue concerning our common past.

An attentive reader will notice that this larger dialogue is made up of smaller conversations with several people – those who were present during the war and those who saw it on TV; those who were waiting for help in Chechnya, and those who rendered it from Moscow, Saint-Petersburg and other cities; those who were in captivity, and those who were liberated; those who fought, and those who tried to put an end to the war; those who hated, and those who forgave; those who survived and told their tale, and those who listened and wrote it down; as well as those of you who are reading and finding out about it now.

Hoping to convey the atmosphere of face-to-face communication we deliberately preserved the narrators' style and peculiarities of speech. The editing of the interviews' transcriptions was minimal and used only to make the texts readable and comprehensive.

The title of the book, its summary, and its contents, contains the term 'the Chechen war' or 'the war' basically in reference to the events that took place during the period from December 1994 (the beginning of the first Chechen campaign) till the end of 2000 (the completion of the active phase of the second campaign). However, some narrators talk about later events, including some as late as 2009 (the official end of the counter-terrorism operation) also as about the war. Since there are different approaches to defining the events during this period we also decided to use the term 'war', like our narrators, in a broad sense, including all possible interpretations based on the context.

It is important to note that the so-called Chechen war was, in fact, the result of a conflict and confrontation between the state and a particular group of citizens. Officially the military operations were instigated by the Government within the boundaries of one of the republics of its own country, against citizens of its own country. That is to say, it was not an inter-ethnic conflict, although with time it was often perceived as such in everyday life. This transition is most likely due to the fact that in the minds of the Russian military it was a war against not just rebel fighters, but terrorists who were mostly ethnic Chechens, it was the Chechens who were fighting against them. For the population of Chechnya, who have an acute sense of national identity typical in the Caucasus, Russian troops were Russian speaking people, and hence it was the Russians who were fighting against their people. This contradiction is reflected in the speech of our narrators: on the one hand many of them deliberately make a distinction between soldiers fighting in Chechnya and all other Russians, and between 'rebel fighters' and all other Chechens; while on the other hand they mistakenly talk about relations between Russia and Chechnya in terms of 'Russians' and 'Chechens', 'us' and 'them'. Thus we have to admit that the war helped to create the impression that there were two peoples, the Chechens and the Russians, fighting against each other. This misconception unfortunately spread, and was fixed in public opinion as one of the numerous stereotypes of this war. Moreover, today discrimination between Russians and Chechens has grown

into a confrontation between Slavic and Caucasian people with all the inevitable problems of inter-ethnic relations, particularly acute amongst youth groups. This is a separate although equally topical matter, which, as it has been shown above, also originates from the Chechen war.

This book 'Last to know: stories of a war' consists of several chapters in which people tell of their life before, during, and after the war. Each chapter contains the stories of different people, but one can also trace the story of a single person using the 'People' index of names. For security reasons the greater part of personal and geographic names were deleted or changed. The text contains practically no comments, additions or explanations, since, as we have already noted above, we were not attempting to establish the factual side of the events described. A brief chronology and a list of additional materials on the issue will help the reader orientate oneself. Whether the reader wishes to gain a deeper understanding of this topic depends on their personal wishes. Numerous books, articles, photo and video materials prepared by our colleagues in Russia and around the world exist for this purpose.

For us the completion of this project and the publication of this book became an opportunity to join together and contribute to the many-years of peace-building work that human rights defenders and journalists have been conducting since the first war. Our generation of the end of the 1980's – beginning of the 1990's is a generation of children who have inherited the war. It seems to us that it is time to look into our inherited past, as we still feel its consequences.

The publication 'Last to know: stories of a war'¹ and the Personal Memories of the Chechen War project were completed as part of the programme Human Rights Education in the North Caucasus organised by the Civic Assistance Committee and the Norwegian Helsinki Committee.

¹ The book is titled after the movie 'Jeder schweigt von etwas anderem' (translated from German as 'Last to know'), 2006, directors Marc Bauder and Dörte Franke

WHY

Why is the topic of war relevant for you? (The interviewers' introductory words)

Sabina, 27 years old¹

Coordinator of the Personal Memories of the Chechen War project

Whilst a student in Croatia I volunteered in the 'Personal memories of the war' project run by the NGO 'Documenta'. We interviewed people who had been through the war after the collapse of Yugoslavia. Different people told us their stories – Serbs and Croats, children and adults, the military and civilians. We wanted to find out what was happening in the country during the war, at the time when we were children. And people told us about it, though many were against such conversations, as many are now. It was not easy, it's hard to listen to people telling you about how they survived, how they felt. But it was necessary for us – us, who knew nothing but bare figures and facts from textbooks and newspaper articles, us whom no one asked whether we wanted this war or not.

When I came to Russia and learned more about the Chechen war, I could not understand why people did not talk about it. The consequences of the war are everywhere, but everyone keeps silent. When I met people from Moscow and Grozny, I gradually understood what needed to be done – it was necessary to give people a chance to have their say, to listen to them without trying to judge who's right and who's wrong, to allow them to let it out.

Together with volunteers from Moscow we managed to arrange these conversations. It was very hard, but I am convinced that

¹ Hereinafter the age is indicated as of the moment of conducting interviews – summer 2012

running away from everything bad and difficult does not make life easier.

Many people asked me why I was doing it, why I cared about that war. Well, I asked myself that question too. I think, it doesn't matter where, in which country the war occurred or is going on, it doesn't matter what my nationality is, what matters is whether I'm shutting my eyes waiting for everything to disappear on its own or admitting that everything going on around me concerns me, whether I'm able to overcome my fear and start doing something. That's what matters.

Tatevik, 27 years old

Coordinator of the Human Rights Education in the North Caucasus programme

I guess for me this story started a few years ago when I accepted an invitation to one unusual tea party. At that time there was a seminar on human rights going on in Moscow, and my peers from Chechnya invited me over for a cup of tea after a difficult day studying. I was late as usual and got there late into the night. I entered the room where the guys had been waiting for me a long time. We started talking quietly about the seminar, someone joked... but a few minutes later, as if from nowhere, completely unexpectedly for me, the topic of war came up. And it was then that the real conversation started. Bombings, basements, sweep up operations, planes – faraway events came alive and filled the little room. They were talking, and I listened holding my breath, silent, afraid of ruining something important that was happening to us all at that moment, a late night moment. The next morning, it seemed, we were different. Now that we had talked it over we could look each other in the eyes fearlessly, without being ashamed, we could be honest, we could trust, we could be together.

I am sure, consciously or not, everyone of us had been waiting for this conversation, we wanted to tell our stories and be heard because, probably the only way to get over this war which separates us, is to relive it and rethink it together. I will never forget the feeling

of relief and gratitude towards each other that we felt after this conversation.

For several years of working in our educational programme I've met many young people with surprise and joy: Russians, Chechens, Ukrainians, Belarusians, who were willing to talk and listen, who were ready for these discussions. They want a personal conversation – an open and frank discussion, where a spade can be called a spade.

And we tried to make this book like that, as if in reply to all these people, unedited, without excessive political correctness and politeness, without hushing things up, we are just telling what we heard and put down – direct speech.

Timur, 22 years old

Law student

I will start with memories. You'd say, how can a person who's never been to the Caucasus, not to mention Chechnya, have these memories. But I do.

I remember, when I was a kid, Chechnya was often on TV. I didn't know what or where Chechnya was, but I had very definite associations of the place with war. News about the war made me very upset. 'They're showing Chechnya again', I would complain. At that time I was more interested in cartoons.

I loved drawing. I remember I often drew planes. The planes had a bent nose, maybe they looked more aggressive that way or I thought they would fly quicker like that. When I was asked what those planes were, I explained they were like those flying in Chechnya. I guess I am not the only one who drew planes or tanks 'like those in Chechnya'.

I think you're really lucky if war in your life is only in drawings. I was about 5 years old. I lived in the Novosibirsk region.

Honestly, I don't know if the topic of war is relevant to me. War is above all the people who find themselves at war. War is these peoples' relatives. I don't see any other way of understanding war than trying to understand the people of the war.

Anna, 24 years old**Social anthropology student**

It is surprising, but this event, the war and all its consequences, has indeed created two different worlds, absolutely incompatible with each other. In one world people live in one way, in the other, in a different way. And while they are living in different worlds, they won't be able to understand each other. This is not a question of different interpretations or evaluations of facts, of different convictions, but really the question of some people talking about one thing – let's say, the participants of the war, those to whom it happened, and other people knowing nothing about it, and even if they knew something, they knew different facts. I believe that as a result a gulf has opened up between these two worlds and hence between these people. This gap is not going to disappear on its own. It will grow bigger, if the people on both sides don't try to bring their worlds closer, if they don't share their visions of the world.

Arisha, 23 years old**Cultural anthropology graduate**

I remember being at home at night watching TV. My mother loves watching the news. She's always watched the news on Perviy Kanal, her whole life. And at that time everyone was also watching the soap opera Santa Barbara. Everyone. And so my memories of the first war are cars with missiles and Santa Barbara. Two in one. And Santa Barbara sort of tipped the scales.

As for the second war, I have quite definite recollections of how it started. I remember the same cars, planes, and Putin standing talking about the 'Johnnie'. That's how I remember it. We thought: 'Of course, we have to defeat these rebels so that everything in Russia is okay'.

We never talked about it at all. Well, because it was in the news every day. And when it's every day, you stop noticing it, it becomes routine.

But people, they never showed people, only how the rebel fighters were done for, but never people. There were no people...

Irina, 26 years old**Youth policy expert**

Every time I leave Ingushetia and cross the Chechen border, I feel death. It's everywhere. Everything is lifeless. The wind blows through the grass, the birds sing, and you can see the mountains in the distance, but there is no life in the landscape. All the land was shelled and soaked with blood. Being in Grozny is the hardest. Grozny is a now tombstone to the city which used to flourish on this land. It is custom for a rich man to get a big and expensive tombstone once he has died. The city was turned into ruins, and now a tombstone to it is being erected.

In 2000 when the war was going on in Chechnya, I was a teenager and almost never watched TV. I only heard about the war once. A guy in a coffin was brought to the village where I lived. He also lived in that village and a year before had gone to the army for military service. People were saying that the car he had been driving fell off a mountain road. Almost all the people living in the village came to his funeral, everyone cried, even me, although I didn't know him. Volley shots were fired, and then everyone left. At the time there was talk for a while about the officer who had been in the car that the guy had been driving. He survived, and it was partly thanks to the dead guy, but the officer didn't come to the funeral. And that's what people talked about and were unhappy about. And then that was that. People forgot about the war in Chechnya. It's possible that only the mother of the dead guy thought about it when she sat weeping at her son's grave almost every day.

Masha, 25 years old**Graduate of the governance department**

I once heard the words of Adam Michnik: 'Patriotism is defined by the degree of shame a person feels for the crimes committed on behalf of his nation'. You might say that from this point of view I am a real patriot. I am torn apart by the feeling of pain and shame for my own country.

The word 'relevant' is not quite accurate for me as far as the topic of war is concerned. I would say 'permanence'. The permanence of this topic is explained by the fact that before it was only perceived positively: there was 'us', and we were good, we displayed heroism, fought as partisans, defended our ideals. And then there was 'them', and they were bad, they were trying to conquer and enslave 'us'. Then some solemn music was supposed to play and something about the 'Proud 'Varyag' will not surrender to the enemy'.

But what if 'they' are 'us'? What is there to do if for a thousand years of the existence of the state we haven't learnt to respect ourselves? What is there to do if 'they' don't want to live like 'us' and have the right not to do so? What have 'we' done that means no one wants to live with us in a common state?

Karina, 34 years old

Instructor of Russian as a foreign language

Throughout this time I lived with the feeling that something terrible was happening. And it was important for me to find out, not through the papers and TV, but in personal communication, how people lived at that time, what they were feeling, how they got through it. I wanted to look them in the eyes: I always think that an honest conversation helps turn a corner, to get rid of whatever is troubling you. When you see an intelligent person, who is worrying and suffering, you start thinking about his story not as a drop in a whirlwind of historical events, but as an important part of your own life, which for some reason has been erased from memory and is now being recalled. Such conversations always influence relationships between people, it brings them closer. I would love to see Russians and Chechens start to come together like this, because it is simply impossible to remain in a state of confrontation for much longer. I am afraid this might lead to some kind of tragedy, to very sad consequences.

Daria, 26 years old

Graduate of the public law department

To hear the truth, the living truth, which is capable of bringing about change.

I wanted to find out the truth, what people saw with their own eyes and not what was on TV or in the papers. I want to feel a part of the history of my own country.

This is an attempt to take the first step into a conversation about the past, a past which is being carefully hidden from us. To provide people who've never heard living history with various versions of events, different feelings and different fates. In this way we'll get a picture of the past with many faces.

LIFE BEFORE

How did you live before the war?

Lilya, 51 years old

In pre-war 90's Chechnya, just like everywhere else in Russia, there was chaos and devastation, there were no payments, in short, it was a very difficult period for all families. There were no pensions, no allowances, no salaries, and though both me and my husband worked, we didn't receive any money. I worked in a teaching college, as an instructor – the backbone of the old staff collective stayed, as we thought that if we left, the building would be taken to pieces as had happened to all uninhabited buildings. That is why we worked without any salary, then at some point we started collecting money from the students for education and survived on that. Before the war I talked to our Director about opening a school at the teaching college to keep the remaining members of staff together. Because of what was happening teachers were leaving, most Russians left and many students left. Our college had been the biggest teaching college in Russia with 1200 students, 120 teachers plus assistants, but fewer and fewer people stayed and the number of hours we worked was reduced. So to keep teachers and give them some sort of salary we decided to set up a school. It was my idea, and though I was the youngest on the staff, the Director entrusted me with heading the school. I was 30 years old and I was pregnant. I could not explain to him that I would be going on maternity leave, because he was older, a Chechen. I tried to explain that I was the youngest in the collective, that people would get me wrong, that he should ask somebody else to do it. But he said, 'If this is your brainchild, your idea, you'll do it better than anyone else'. And right before the war I opened a school at the college, and my son started studying

there. We had a multinational collective, there were many Russian teachers.

One of the teachers told me, 'There's nothing good in store for you here, go away, you're young, intelligent, you've got prospects, go away, best of all go abroad, there'll be war here.'. At that time it sounded absurd – how could there be a war?

Satsita, 48 years old

We lived together with my mother. We lived quite well for those times, we had a nice house, our own garden. My mother is a real workaholic, a very hard working woman, well, and I am not particularly lazy either. I wouldn't say we were well off, but we were fairly comfortable. I had, for instance, to work for three months to buy myself a coat, and two months for shoes let's say, and so on. There was a rationing system then.

Manifestation of nationalism, it might have been going on. No offence meant, but I rather blamed the Russians for that, because it's not that it was forbidden to speak our native language, but it was not encouraged to speak and write it. If you started speaking Chechen at work, you'd rudely be corrected, 'Speak Russian!' but I guess the two languages couldn't play such a role in opposing the two cultures.

Veda, 28 years old

My mother is a history and geography teacher, my father is a math teacher. They worked at school before and during the war teaching. I have two brothers and two sisters, there are five of us. We lived in a village. I was a little girl. And we lived, well, worked, played, and studied, a country life. Before the war there were many Russians in Grozny, we had Russian teachers. And I remember in the first grade we had a Russian language teacher. It was unusual, interesting, because we didn't understand anything and did not understand the homework. I remember how funny it was.

The differences were mainly because of the language, at least at that age. I never thought to myself that there were us, Chechens,

and there were others. We never thought anything like that at home, it didn't even occur to us. Yes, we spoke Chechen, but still, the teachers at school were Russian.

I didn't go to kindergarten, and at school my friends were my classmates. But there were no children from other ethnic groups, only Chechens. At that age we all usually played together, we played bouncer, hopscotch, war, hide-and-peek, and leap frog together, these were our favourite games. We played all day long.

Arkadiy, 35 years old

We are Muscovites, born and bred. My mother is a Russian language and literature teacher, my father an engineer. He worked on space projects, in particular, his last project was the construction of the bar holder for the Buran energy system, that is he occupied quite an important position in the space sphere. But my dad died in 1996, at the same time as I was in the army.

Well, how did we live before the war? Just like everyone else. There was no money, mom and dad earned some kopecks. When the Soviet Union collapsed, we lived like everyone else in those hard 1990's, we were just an ordinary family. Dad did not go into business or any kind of theft, he just did not know how to do it all, so he stayed in the space field, and my mom worked as a teacher. I finished school, if I am not mistaken, in 1993, and in 1995 I entered the Modern Humanities University. There was such a bunch of dropouts there, you could get in without sitting any exams and paying the smallest amount money, so I went there. To the law department. I was in my third year when I got my call-up papers.

Ali, 22 years old

We lived in the city before the war, but I was little. I remember there were five kids in the family, and I was the youngest. Our parents worked, but I don't remember where. We didn't go to kindergarten. We played in the yard, especially in our free time. We lived in an apartment, and we loved fooling around. We threw plastic bags filled with water from our balcony onto the street, – these were our

kind of pranks. I was a very calm kid both at home and at school. I was shy of everything, the teachers were always kind to me.

I was aware of my ethnicity because I spoke Chechen. When we played in the park there were kids of other ethnicities there as well. But they spoke Chechen with us, because they could speak Chechen. But of course, they did not look like us. We were darker and they were fair. But we didn't pay any attention to it. I remember our mothers sat on a bench speaking Russian. So, there were Russians then. I remember Russians brought us painted eggs when it was Easter, and we invited them for Uraza. We came over to each other's houses on holidays, went to weddings, all together. And these guys, who played with us, they danced Lezghinka really well. Even though I'm Chechen I don't know how to dance Lezghinka, but they did. It was okay. And I don't know what ethnicity they were, but they weren't Chechens for sure. And differences – you are Chechen, and you are not Chechen, we never thought about these things.

Ruslan, 24 years old

I really can't remember now that there were any differences between us. Russians came to see us, we went to see them. We knew an Armenian family, they used to come over, and we visited them. They were my father's friends, he was born and bred in Grozny, but they spoke Russian. My father did not allow us to speak Russian at home, but they mostly, even with each other, spoke Russian. And they had Russians, Armenians, Jews among their friends, everyone you could possibly think of...

Hussein, 57 years old

My mother had already retired, before the first war in 1994. They lived in the Chechen Republic while I worked in the Volgograd region. I had not been home for a few years and when they declared independence in 1992, I decided to go back to be of use to my people and work for the good of my people. This was the choice I made for myself and I went back home. At first I tried to get involved in some small business, it was 1992, there was not a slightest hint of a war

then. But I was quite strongly politicized already. When a state of emergency was announced, and the GKChP (State Committee on the State of Emergency) seized power in Moscow, when they wanted to restore the Soviet Union and so on, I think it was after the Belavezha Accords. But I took quite a tough stance – I supported the liberation of the people. This is what I believed in. For me the future of the Soviet Union and that of other ethnic groups could only be in the self-determination of nations. And then I learnt that the Chechen Republic had declared sovereignty and independence, and by that time Dzhokhar Dudaev was already in power.

Of course, no one could expect that there would ever be a war within the Soviet Union because everything was so interrelated, the friendship ties, there were such good relations between all the ethnic groups living there at that time. With no exception. We didn't even have any sense of this. When I was heading back home there were a lot of things I really didn't expect to see. I understood that the Soviet Union had collapsed, everywhere I worked, in the Volgograd region, literally everything was rationed, all the food. It was very difficult for the local population to survive. Well, maybe people had a job in some kolkhoz or sovkhoz but they didn't have any far-reaching plans. They were self-sufficient, content with what they had and didn't strive for more. Unlike Chechens who wanted to have a good house, who tried to build houses all the time. And no matter where we worked, we saved money to build a house in Chechnya. Traditionally we have large families and it is our responsibility to build houses for our children, our sons, marry them off and give them the opportunity to continue the family. And that's why, when I came to Chechnya, I saw that the situation there was much better than in the Russian Federation itself. As Chechens are historically more adaptable to hard conditions, all those suppressions and the systematic wars hardened our spirit and developed a sense of survival in the people to such an extent that these people found an occupation straight away. They organized the largest market in the North Caucasus, imported consumer goods, textiles, clothes and other things from all over the world, which the whole of the North Caucasus used. People came, bought, wholesalers would buy these

goods and deliver them all over Russia. The atmosphere was great when I arrived. Everyone was so full of enthusiasm. If you watch the old videos, the newsreels, you see how people went out to welcome Dzhokhar Dudaev, any word spoken, not to mention any decision taken by that power was greeted with enthusiasm, and people were ready to jump through hoops. Not just in the military, but professionally as well. At that time Chechens, despite the fact that the territory was small and the population few, had already taken such a swift step forward in economic terms compared to Russia that it was setting a bad example for the neighbouring republics and that other nationalities might also organise themselves and try to declare their independence. I think this is why there was so much fear and why the Russian authorities were frightened that there would be a domino effect and Russia would collapse. And that's why they started playing games with the opposition, planting arms and pouring in money to discredit our economy or seize power through a coup allowing them to put their own people at the helm.

I saw at that time and I still see, despite the wars, a very bright and beautiful future for our motherland. I didn't expect that piles of gold would fall at my feet, or that I would hold some big position. This didn't matter for me at all. What mattered was to see our people winning after what we went through in 1944 and in the 19th and 18th centuries, with all the misfortune, and what's more the Soviet government's ban on learning our native language and practicing religious traditions. The Soviet government intentionally turned us into alcoholics. It deliberately fixed it so that there were no jobs for Chechens in the Chechen republic and we had to leave Chechnya together with our families and go elsewhere in Russia to feed our families, to earn some money, to build a house here. And that's why I thought we needed to remember our traditions; that was the most important thing for me. Because I could see clearly that we had already lost them to a large extent. At that time we were no longer native speakers of our own language, because even now, if I speak Chechen, 50% of my vocabulary is Russian words. This is also due to Soviet policy when I couldn't speak my language, learn my native language and so on. This was also one of my expectations of us going

back to our roots. And the most important thing, the thing I was really against, was alcohol addiction which was everywhere and had reached such disgraceful levels that almost every family had vodka in their fridge. I even thought at that time, that if, God forbid, two more generations grew up like that, at that speed and without war there would hardly anything left of the Chechen people. I mean we would be Chechen-speaking, but not entirely Chechen any more.

I lived in a 15-storey building and naturally I had neighbours. There were a hundred apartments in the building, a hundred apartments. Out of those hundred apartments Chechens occupied only five or six. The other 95 apartments belonged to Russians. Well, maybe, there were some other ethnicities as well, but the greater part were Russians. And it was like that everywhere. Well, take my neighbour, my classmate for example, his name was Gennady. We studied together, we were friends. He graduated from the oil institute a bit earlier than me and left for Stavropol I think. And those who lived with us, they lived, well, if I stayed overnight at their place then they stayed at mine, these guys, that is, there wasn't any hostility towards each other. None at all, at least in our generation. Relations were very good.

Aza, 23 years old

Our family lived in a village. It was before the war, I was about 5 years old. I didn't go to kindergarten as by that time I already knew how to read and write, and there was no need to go. You could say we lived well. My mother didn't work, she was a housewife, and my father worked as an accountant. It was a very small village with only 7 streets. There weren't many people there. I have one brother, he is the youngest in the family, and he was born the very year that the war started. I also have three sisters, they are all married now. One is older, the others are younger than me.

I can't say I noticed any differences between the people. I remember the neighbours' children, there were many Russian families in our village, and we were friends with them. There was no division at all – Russians, Chechens, Armenians or Jews – there was none of that. We mostly had Russian neighbours, well, and Chechens,

and sometimes Ingush. At the same time we communicated and we never asked, who are your parents – Chechens or Russians? We talked like kids and played, everything was okay. And I had Russian and Chechen friends. I think there were no differences in those times. It started later.

Minat, 26 years old

I was rather a naughty child, I was off playing somewhere all the time. I laughed a lot, and the neighbours called me 'the laughing girl'. And I was always at the front of whatever our neighbours' kids were up to, I was always the ring leader of all the pranks, and was always climbing trees. My father and everyone called me a tomboy, 'You should have been born a boy' they said. And my mom said: 'It's good you are not a boy, otherwise we would have had even more problems'. I loved literature, history, Arabic. My parents didn't have any education, they worked in the village. They collected firewood and sold it. We didn't have gas at that time, the gas line had been recently laid. It was hard to live there and even now the bus rarely comes to the village. It is not profitable for the drivers, there are practically no people.

I don't think I would be able to live in a village now, I got out of the habit a long time ago. But sometimes I miss the village, the hustle and bustle of the city gets on my nerves, and then I run away from it all and three or four days later that's it, you need all the city noise again.

Marem, 49 years old

During the first war people didn't believe that the Russians could fight against us. No one could believe it and neither did I. I was a student, and I studied alongside students of various ethnicities. I was raised on classical Russian literature which I read since childhood. I was used to watching movies about the Second World War and I saw there the 'us' – all ethnicities fighting together for Russia, and the enemy, that was the Germans.

Vyacheslav, 58 years old

I was born in Dagestan and I really understood their mentality. I had been all those places as a kid. I've been to Chechnya many times.

I served in the army for 27 years and served in Afghanistan, I was deputy battalion commander in Afghanistan from 1985 till 1987. At that time, in 1995, my family left for Israel, my first family, my wife and daughter who was 15 then. I was a military man, and I could not go anywhere. So I didn't have the choice, I did what I was told to do.

Natalia, 72 years old

Before the first war, and more precisely, before Dudaev came to power, we lived a normal human life. That is I had a two-bedroom, privatized apartment, I had work, I worked as a teacher of Russian and literature. I had many friends and acquaintances. It all changed with Dudaev. Firstly, they stopped paying us our wages in the 90's, we didn't receive any money any more. Then, the tension kept growing...

THE FIRST SIGNS

What were the precursors, the first signs of the beginning of war?

Aminat, 67 years old

First of all, it was a period when financial problems started in the Republic. The Republic was hardly governed. Generally everything was quite chaotic. The crime rate increased drastically. It was a period of simmering. When the Soviet Union fell apart in a matter of minutes and the former republics became independent states, the Chechen Republic immediately followed this trend. And though we were an autonomous republic, still, this centrifugal force carried us away. Chechen society was captivated by this force and thrilled by this movement.

I think there were certainly historical reasons for it. If we go back and look at the history of the Chechen people we'll find all the moral, psychological, and historical reasons for such aspiration. And it worked. Chechnya joined this process, and movements, parties, political forces appeared. There were some voices stating that Chechnya also wanted to become an independent country, a republic. And there were those who were for and those who were against.

This division affected every family as well as my own. For instance, my brother and my parents supported independence. They were open supporters of an independent Chechen Republic. My husband doubted it, said it was a risky venture, that that wasn't the path we should take. Yes, we wanted to be free and independent, but we didn't have enough strength, enough resources. We were not ready. And he cited arguments, geographic, historical, economic ones. And in general, he was saying, why be a separate state? It means we'll have to create our own army, police force, our own customs, borders. This is too unrealistic for our people.

Frankly, I didn't have a strong opinion about the matter. I sympathized with those who fought for independence. I know that our history led us there, urged us, that it was not an unexpected, spontaneous, impulsive decision on the part of the people. It was the result of history. It was the feeling amongst most of society. People remembered the history of the wars, all the wars for independence and freedom. At different stages confrontation between Russia and Chechnya had taken different emphasis. At some moments this was just clashes with the army. At others it was an organized resistance providing political expression for the nations' hopes. But Chechen society always knew that it was a Russian military expansion into the Caucasus and that our nation was the victim of this expansion. This alone was already enough for the desire for independence to ripen. To restore a lost freedom.

A strong argument against staying within Russia voluntarily were the recollections of deportations to Kazakhstan and Kirgizia, the deportation of Chechens together with other ethnic groups at the end of the Second World War otherwise known as the eviction of 1944. These cruelties, this injustice, this permanent suppression of the people as a group aroused an even stronger reaction – we wanted to be an independent state. There were even arguments along the lines that 'we don't want anyone to evict us from our native land, from our Motherland. While we are part of some strange country, they will try to evict, resettle, expel and even totally destroy this nation'. The Soviet Union and its predecessor Russia wanted to control the Chechen territory, but were not interested in the Chechens. All these thoughts, undoubtedly, reinforced the desire for an independent republic. And there were people who got obsessed with the idea. And Russia itself was just not ready at that time to work with that the idea politically. The Soviet Union had just collapsed, the Russian state was just emerging. There were a lot of internal problems, and there was enough to think about besides Chechnya. And that is why independence was proclaimed in Chechnya, and there was an attempt to construct a state system. All these attempts were accompanied by huge mistakes, of course, by drawbacks and difficulties. In short, the Russian centre at that period did not care about Chechnya, and Yeltsin, how to put it, allowed

these outskirts, and in particular Chechnya, to run free. There was even a slogan, 'Take as much sovereignty as you can swallow'. Such a phrase sounded like encouragement for these movements.

I saw the rally in support of Chechen independence. Already at that time there were rumours that military forces were drawn up to the borders and military planes were flying over the republic. And they looked very threatening. That rally gathered thousands and thousands of people. The planes came down over the rally, over the people, over that square so low, so dangerously low, that we could see the pilots' faces. They dived sharply. Yes, on purpose, as if they were diving over the meeting, the people dashed in different directions, ran, fell, pushed each other, hurt each other. And at the very last moment the plane would lift its nose and soar upwards, and fly away a bit before turning again and repeating this same threatening manoeuvre. At this point I realized that there would be no political discussion on the issue of independence.

Ramzan, 57 years old

From the moment when Gorbachev gave some degree of freedom to talk, to write, to rally and so on, I think, those who wanted to exit Russia felt it very well. I mean the geopolitical picture arose at once. Inside Russia, naturally, there are forces, both independent and those supported by the West, let's put it like this...and the West is always interested in preventing Russia from being strong and competitive. The interests of various forces who wanted to create a conflict coincided on this point. . The Chechen people proved very suitable for this, as historically they had been offended on numerous occasions, many of our ancestors died in Tsarist times, and then there was the deportation and collectivization. Many religious figures were repressed even before the deportation. For all these reasons it was easy to be captivated and lead in the wrong direction by this mistaken idea, as in fact happened. Dudaev's appearance was the start of a situation which was supposed to split our society, create irreconcilable confrontation, and in turn provide grounds for bringing in the troops. It was clear, with the emergence of the two rallies, the pro-Dudaev and the anti-Dudaev marches, that nothing

good would come out of it. That some action from Moscow would follow. No one had any idea what form it would take and the scale to which it would manifest, or what methods would be used.

The point was that the pro-Dudaev rally did not accept the possibility of the republic staying within Russia. But, any reasonable person could tell you both at that time and now, that this was impossible. Historically and hierarchically it just so happens that we live in Russia. Our psychology, our way of life, everything points to the fact that this has been predetermined, there is no other way. We are Russians. My schooling, my interests, the Russian classics, Pushkin, and Lermontov, these are all so close to me, I don't know any great Eastern names, either in literature or any other sphere. That's why my choice was certain. From time to time I went to the anti-Dudaev rally realizing that the pro-Dudaev rally was a way to nowhere, Russia wouldn't let us go, they couldn't create such a precedent. When one link breaks, the whole chain goes to pieces.

In short, I was quite active at that time, but gradually a certain apathy overwhelmed me, as it was clear that everything was doomed, and neither Dudaev's supporters, nor his opponents would win this fight. And we held our breath; well, what would happen next, what might happen next?

Marem, 49 years old

Everyone was absolutely euphoric. Well, if I'm honest, I did not feel any euphoria about Dudaev. Because history teaches you that when the military rules the state... They are people from another world. Of course, we probably can't live without them, but they are people from another place. They do not really respect peaceful or civilian life. They are used to getting orders and obeying them at any price. That's why I was cautious about a military man coming to power in Chechnya. Though I didn't care about politics honestly. If no one's shooting everything is fine.

I was scared by Dudaev's inauguration. There were so many people, as if the whole of Chechnya had gathered in one square. I think I was on my way to work and I couldn't get there. It really scared me that day.

And when the first tanks appeared, it was as if the opposition had entered Chechnya, but in fact those were Russian tanks with Russian guys. And these tanks fired at the houses. I couldn't believe it. I thought they were deceived people, that it simply couldn't be true. There couldn't be war because there just couldn't be.

Hussein, 57 years old

It didn't even occur to me that there might be war. Well, yes, there were skirmishes, there were these first opposition clashes in 1993, there were two attempts of the occupation of the Presidential palace. Then there was a second attempt after the leadership of Gantamirov and Avturkhanov Umar, both figures tried to carry out a coup. But both attempts failed. The second time Russians came in tanks with Russian crews. There were mercenaries from Kantamirov division, they broke through, a few tanks practically reached the Presidential palace and were shot down there, the rest were shot on the way, and a few tanks were captured by our detachments safe and sound. Later on we used them in war. And there were captives, 18 men from the Taman division, officers, lieutenant colonels, serious majors, contract men, who wanted to set right. I don't know what they were looking for there. And at that period we didn't even think the war might start.

Then in 1992 the Russian army moved forward to the territory of Ingushetia, to the Chechen border, and our army stood there, in fact, they were standing in front of each other as if on the battle field. But then Dzhokhar Dudaev managed to somehow smooth out the conflict. Then I listened to an interview of that time and one journalist from the Chechen republic, I think she even was Russian, she took an interview with Russian soldiers and officers who were standing at call at the Chechen-Ingush border. This woman, she was trying to explain that this might be war, that there might be blood, big blood, a fratricidal war. We lived well, peacefully, well, what are you doing, and so on. She was talking, and that officer, or a major, or a lieutenant colonel, I can't remember now for sure, I remember his words: "But why have they called the republic the Chechen republic, not the Sunzhenskaya or Groznenskaya republic?" I couldn't get it

why he cared how we had called our republic. But it was important for them why we had called it the Chechen republic. They didn't want that word, they wanted us all to live somewhere quietly, not like a nation, they didn't want us to reach the level of a nation.

Satsita, 48 years old

1992 was an extraordinary year for Chechnya, I guess. It was a time of chaos, an already troubled time. At times like this a lot of weapons appear in the city, along with strange people, and strange armoured carriers. And something is already in the air, but you still have to believe in the best, and you can't believe in the worst.

By that time, in 1992, I had already become a director. Out of thirty three libraries (I remember submitting statistical data to the Ministry of Interior) I guess 17 libraries had already been looted. We weren't receiving any salary. People survived as they could, and me and my mother learnt to live very modestly, we got by. And I didn't leave my library for a minute, however hard it was. We all knew, to be more precise, waited for the regime to collapse, that is Dzhokhar's Ichkeriyan regime, it had to collapse, something had to happen, as the confrontation in society was so powerful, the civic positions so strong, that I assure you if it hadn't been for the troops moving in, Chechnya could have even peacefully... We waited for something to change, and to change for the better.

We received a telephone call and we were told to come to Lenin Square. I arrived and saw people standing on two sides. One group supported Dzhokhar, the other was against Dzhokhar. And when I saw the hatred in people's eyes, I realized that it could never come to a peaceful end, because somebody seemed to be pulling strings attached to both crowds, as if they were puppets who had gathered in the square. When I looked at that crowd (I was of course on the opposition side), at the other side, I realized that something bad would happen. But we were hoping that as if with the flick of a magic wand Moscow would carefully dismiss Dzhokhar Dudaev, would send him back to Estonia as a storm trooper. I thought I would get up in the morning, and everything would be so beautiful, the

same old street as always... I realized something would happen, but I didn't imagine it would be war...

Vyacheslav, 58 years old

I was serving in Estonia at the time when Dudaev was air division commander there, I was even assigned to his division a few times. I was told he's a Chechen, someone or other. But I never saw him, never met him. It turned out that in 1990 he pretty much became the Chechen president. And then plants and companies were shut down, money was permanently embezzled, there were even several abductions. Well, in 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994. Money was stolen in millions, planes were hijacked. The train from Makhachkala to Moscow which went through Grozny was regularly robbed, armed people attacked it and took women's earrings, gold and so on. Well, they were bandits. At that time people who were in prison in Chechnya during Dudaev's rule, mostly criminals, were released. That was how things were.

Lilya, 51 years old

There really were some signs of war, people knew it. There was a journalist who worked in our city, then she went to Russia and worked there on the radio. She called us several times, she knew my husband well, and asked us to leave because some top officers in the Russian army had told her that there would be war in Chechnya – it was several years before the beginning of the war. Again, it sounded absurd, how could there be war! And then, even if there is, how can we leave, who needs us, and where could we go? That's why, even though we were already expecting the war, we stayed in the republic. The idea that there could be war in our country seemed monstrous.

There was a period when a part of the intelligentsia was against this division that was beginning, against this aspiration to a so-called sovereignty, well, I understood that the sovereignty was just a banner, a slogan, that things were going the way they ended up. My husband in particular did a lot to warn people about where we were being led. I kept telling my students about it in my lessons, but this romantic halo of independence – it was in the air and many

students, especially those from the mountain regions, supported this Dudaev, thought we would be able to live freely and independently. I understood they wouldn't let us live freely and independently. That's why I was part of the opposition, it was mostly members of the intelligentsia in the opposition, and Dudaev's supporters were on the other side. In short then, even before the war, the people were divided into two parts, even within their families. Brothers weren't fighting against brothers but ideologically the population was divided. And many of my students said: we love you very much but you are saying things we just can't accept. Our parents say one thing, and you another. Later many of them realized I was right, and after the war we met and they told me that they wished they had listened to me. It's a shame people weren't smart enough to see beforehand where we were being led. Then people opened their eyes, saw whose interests it had all been in and what it all led to.

Aslan, 24 years old

At that time my father and I went to the rallies. I saw our first president, Dzhokhar, and realised that people were dissatisfied with something, wanted to achieve something. I clearly understood that, I was 6 years old, everything was just beginning, and my father and I often went to the rallies. And after the war we went to the rallies. My father was a fervent supporter of independence. He never was a supporter of the war, but he was a supporter of independence.

Minat, 26 years old

During the first war I was a kid, and I remember these rebel fighters, young guys, driving along our street shouting something inspiring. Well, they had real spirit, 'Oh, we'll win, we're freed, our own republic'. At the time I thought of it as something very good. Though I was a kid, I liked the idea, I thought it was a really important cause for which people were prepared to sacrifice their lives. But then, when we got this 'freedom', and when everything started, well, they beat up anyone they came across – the drunk, girls with slits in their skirts, they attacked and insulted them. Then I realized it shouldn't be that way, it is not done in this way. Islam is a voluntary

religion, everyone chooses for himself, this is a personal matter, a person should come to it on his own.

Ali, 22 years old

They started beating up other people. That is, I guess Russians. They turned them out of the cities, killed them. Everyone who was not Chechen fled. It was not so obvious during the first war. It was very clear during the second. We had neighbours, they lived in the next entrance to us. An old Russian woman, and she was killed, because they wanted her apartment. Well at that time I didn't really pay any attention to such things but I remember my parents talking about it, 'How is this possible? It's not human!' They disapproved. But during the second war it really started – 'Chechens are the best', and 'All the others should be driven out'. But I didn't really notice that during the first war.

The second campaign started. I remember we were celebrating New Year. My father came home from work and said, 'This could be the last New Year we celebrate together'. But I was little, I didn't get him, I only started thinking about it later. I can still remember the silverware near the table, and he also brought a big pile of chocolates; we ate and drank. The next morning we went to the village. On 1st January. I realized there would be war only when they started bombing our village. Until then I didn't understand.

Ruslan, 24 years old

It was so weird for me: we had some neighbours, two women, a mother and her daughter, the daughter was half-Chechen. The father, a Chechen, lived in Moscow. They went to Moscow, well they went on holiday. They left us the keys to their apartment. They didn't take any clothes, nothing. The holidays finished, but they never returned. The war finished, they didn't return. I guess, the apartment was looted. They gave up their rights to it, and now there are different people living there, the state gave it to another family. It was just so weird – we used to visit them all the time, and they visited us...

Aza, 23 years old

Yes, I remember some unrest started, tension grew, but for some reason my parents didn't tell us anything. I remember our family started hoarding food. We didn't usually store food, we had enough, we had our garden. We lived in the countryside and grew everything ourselves. And for some reason we started storing food, and people became very tense. I could feel it, but no one told us anything. I don't know why. But we didn't think there could be war. We didn't have any thoughts like that. It was 1994.

I just couldn't understand why it all started.

Arkadiy, 35 years old

Well, actually, I had a deferment, but I decided not to take it, decided to do my service and went to the recruitment centre, went through the draft board, then had an appointment with a woman, a psychiatrist. She was young, well, about 30 years old I guess, a really beautiful woman. 'What do you want?' she said. 'I want to serve'. She said, 'Are you nuts?' I said, 'No, I wanna serve, defend my Motherland'. She says, 'Let's do this: you pass the examination, if you are healthy, I'll help you dodge it and say you're crazy'. I said, 'Well, all right'. I had a fitness test and I was healthy, I came to her and said, 'I don't wanna dodge it, let me go serve' 'No, you go stay in Kaschenko¹ for three weeks, and then we'll see'. I stayed in psychiatric hospital No.17 for 3 weeks, in the narcotics department. But I didn't dodge the service, although I missed my draft and went to serve not in spring 1995, but in fall 1995. I missed Bamut and the spring Grozny assault, for which I am, in fact, thankful to this woman.

Well, what did I know, an 18-year-old guy? Of course, I saw the newsreels on TV, saw burning tanks in Grozny, understood that the war was going on there, but in the recruitment centre they don't talk about the Caucasus straight away. I was sent to the Urals. My basic fears concerned not the war, but rather the hazing, because

they wrote a lot about hazing then, all those gruesome stories, stuff about hazing was out in the open. I was mostly scared of the hazing, and actually my fears were proved right.

And as for Chechnya, well, I didn't even know where Chechnya was. I knew there was war somewhere in Chechnya, but what it was like, why, for what reasons – I had no idea.

¹ Kaschenko psychiatric asylum (translator's commentary)

THE BEGINNING

How did the war start?

Natalia, 72 years old

I lived alone in a two-room apartment. All my relatives had left. I had a brother, he had buried his wife but had an apartment of his own, and we each lived separately in our own apartments – he was afraid to leave his flat, and I was here, in my two-room one. He also didn't want to move in with me because he had a daughter somewhere in Ukraine, he wanted her to come so that he could leave her the apartment, and all his property, everything.

But still! Still we had some hope that it was not for long, that it would all end, and peaceful times would come again. You see? We lived with this hope. Though awful things happened, tanks entered the city, planes flew overhead dropping bombs, all those long-range guns were firing shells. Well, that was war! And there were casualties already, people died. I thought, 'Well, maybe in Moscow, in other Russian cities, people will rise up against this war, will make the authorities stop the war. Because any war is death, and not only for soldiers but also for civilians who are not to blame for anything'. But it didn't stop.

It was all coming from above. It was terrifying, the war in Grozny, it makes me shiver when I remember it. The first Chechen war, it started sometime in November of 1994. I remember we were celebrating New Year, the turn of 1995, then Grachyov was celebrating his anniversary and decided to strike a blow. Oh, it was horrific! We sat there, families gathered together, with the table laid, having decided to celebrate the New Year, and they came, the shells. Oh! Everyone scattered, to the basement, under the bed, the windows were blown out, door frames came loose. We dashed

around, didn't know where to find a corner to hide. This was the kind of New Year we had, this is how we celebrated.

Marem, 49 years old

The tanks entered on 26th – 27th November. It was a pretext for bringing real troops into Chechnya. At first they let a few tanks in, and these guys were captured, then they said those tanks were not theirs, our state did not send them. The guys were shocked, they couldn't understand. They were asked, 'Whose order did you fulfil?' They named the unit, the commander and so on, and at that very moment the same commander was giving an interview somewhere, saying, 'No, I didn't give such an order, I didn't let them go. They are deserters. And they will have to answer for the damage caused to the state property, to the tanks'. They damaged the tanks, you see? This treachery shocked me so deeply... I always thought these things are sacred for the military, that they would do anything for one of their own. I thought they would fly to Grozny at once, take the guys and apologize – I imagined that was what would happen. But when this happened I realized there would be big trouble.

Then the planes came. At first the planes just flew over. But they flew very low, with such a roar. Military planes, heavy bombers. And the city turned sort of black at once. A black city. And when the troops entered on 10th December, the column moved, it was shown on TV, that the Ingush met the troops. Civilians lay down on the road saying, 'We won't let you pass! Don't fight with us! You see, we are unarmed. Why would we kill each other?'

When I went to look for my brother in Khankala, a certain K. was there, he held some post there at that time, and he asked me to take him to the Russian mothers. And a lot of women gathered, and he told them that there should be an exchange of people for people that day at the OSCE. I was shocked by the way he deceived these mothers. I started crying and shouting, 'He is lying to you!'. Submachine gunners approached me and maybe would have beaten me up, but these women stood up for me, took me into their circle and said, 'We won't let you do that!' And then we talked with these women in the OSCE office. Their sufferings were familiar to

me. I knew that most of their children were probably no longer alive, because there were still corpses lying in the streets, and people were not allowed into some buildings – there was such an unbearable putrid smell. The orderlies kept taking away the corpses. They hid these corpses, you see? It was clear a lot of people were no longer alive. And these women, they turned to me with such hope, and to other Chechen women who were looking for their relatives.

They found out my brother was alive. ‘Well, look, your brother is alive, we’ll help you. We’ll exchange him, please, dear, help us. My Zhenechka, he’s so young, he’s only 19’. What could I say? What was there to say, you see? This is awful. Nothing, no political situation can justify such sacrifice.

Vyacheslav, 58 years old

When these events started in December... at first in November we were supposed to support the local opposition in Chechnya, and then the Minister of Defence, Grachev, refused us the soldiers under his command because they had been hired by the FSB. There was the feeling that Yeltsin thought, or the authorities thought that the tanks would come and that would be the end. The tanks would go in and everyone would surrender, but the Chechens did not surrender, they started destroying the tanks.

I worked at a military recruitment centre in the town of Zhukovsky from 1992 till 1995...The reason was I had served in Germany till 1992. And when they started withdrawing troops from Germany I went to work at the recruitment centre, and worked there for three years. And I enrolled guys, people I’d seen in Afghanistan, people who shouldn’t have been drafted because of some illness or another. There were mentally troubled people in Afghanistan, and afterwards they were in Chechnya as well. And working in the recruitment centre, I was the only ‘Afghan’ there. I said at once, ‘Not a single unhealthy person will be drafted here’. And I told the doctors, ‘If you don’t want to send your own kids to the army don’t send other people’s kids there? I don’t care about the plan!’. The recruitment centre ranked 46 out of 47 recruitment centres in the Moscow region, I didn’t give a damn about it – let them fire me

I thought. It would be all right, I already had a long record of service by that time. That was from 1992–1995.

I was not intending to go to Chechnya. And when our troops entered Chechnya, I thought, ‘Damn it, are they nuts?’ I saw our army in Afghanistan during the military operations there. I believed it would have been better if we had never been there. And now they were doing the same thing in Chechnya.

Ella, 71 years old

In the fall of 1994 soldiers came to us who were forcedly driven onto the planes with dogs and machine guns. The guys ran away from it, they told them they were being sent to Chechnya. There was no state of emergency in Chechnya at that time, a state of emergency had only been declared in South Ossetia. That is why in December we didn’t understand what was going on. And then suddenly some soldiers were killed on New Year’s Eve, they were lying in a street in Grozny. Yeltsin refused to call a ceasefire and bury the dead, Dudaev asked him for it then. We also saw it on TV. And then we decided to find out what was going on, it was the TV guys’ initiative, that of journalist Pavel Lobkov. He was on the NTV channel then, he called and said, ‘I’ll try to go to Kamenka where these soldiers were running away’. At that time we didn’t have as much access to military units as we do now, we didn’t even know where it was, and at that time soldiers were dispatched from Kamenka.

Kamenka is a town near Vyborg, a hundred kilometres away. And the guys walked from there. We got into the NTV car, drove there, and looked around ourselves, the tank tracks lead us to Kamenka. It was January 1995. It was already known that there were casualties, there were coffins, and at that same time mesmerized parents were feeding their sons with chicken at checkpoints, while the sons were to be sent there. And when we told them, ‘Take your sons away, do you know what’s going on there?’ – they just waved us aside. Though we met a father there, he said, ‘I’ve come to take my son, I won’t give him to them.’ Then the NTV guys filmed a few stories like these, and then they put me in front of the military unit gate and said, ‘Well, say something.’ And I said, ‘Parents, what’s up with you?’

Your sons are being killed, why do you tolerate this? Take your sons away!’ Sometime later a few parents came from their cities, they said they had seen that report and for them it was like a trigger, they joined the cause as parents, became indignant and started acting.

At that time a state of emergency had only been announced in South Ossetia, and the troops were being sent into Chechnya illegally. And the battalion from which the guys were sent to Chechnya, was a peace-building one, it had all the peace-building signs. And the guys, the soldiers, to be sent there, were let through this battalion. A peace-building battalion was sent to war. It was against all the laws, they violated all the rules of military ethics, guys from various corps were put into the military unit, the peace-building battalion. And the lists were written in pencil (we received these lists), the guys changed into another uniform, the papers were re-drawn – and off they went. And many draft cards contained the record – ‘*za shtatom*’ (to be assigned). I asked, ‘What does it mean – ‘to be assigned’?’ – ‘It means that the person is not registered anywhere.’

Arkadiy, 35 years old

A group of us were brought to the training unit in the Urals in January and I was assigned to the signal corps. We trained there for six months. Well, that was the only time in all my years of serving in the army that the army was as it should be, it was interesting, they really taught us something, we were being given a profession, there was not much hazing. Well, they beat us... later I realized that it wasn't hazing, they were just beatings, ‘kicks up the butt’. And five months later, in May, we finished training. And then they started telling us that this particular training unit had been created specifically for Afghanistan, and that it was meant for war. When Afghanistan was going on, 90% of the people from there went to Afghanistan, and when Chechnya started, 90% went to Chechnya. And there was talk that most likely we would be sent to Chechnya. Then I sort of started thinking. I was such a romantic boy from a refined Moscow family, and I have to admit I wanted to go to war because of all those childish ideas you have. How does a child imagine a war – heroism, wounds, a pretty nurse dressing them, me

saving the whole battalion with a cigar in my mouth, me the last one standing, Russia's hero – those were my ideas. And we were told, ‘Those of you who want to go to Chechnya, write a request’. And I wrote a request asking to be sent to the combat zone, the Republic of Chechnya. But all these reports did not mean dot, because those who didn't want to go to Chechnya wrote asking not to be sent, to be sent closer to home, to ‘mom's apron strings’, but we were all in the same boat anyway, and the whole crowd went to Chechnya.

There was some kind of boyish cheerful excitement. The expectation of war, expectation of accomplishment. The mood was light, to tell the truth. I mean, there was no gore before dispatch. It all started when we arrived in the hero's city of Mozdok. It was fun in the train, everything was great; we were 13 crammed into one sleeper compartment, it was impossible to sleep there, there was no grub either, they didn't feed us. For a day and a half we were in those trains in our winter overcoats, and it was summer there already. But anyway, it was all easy, as we didn't know where we were going.

But it got scary in Mozdok. When we arrived in Mozdok the train stopped, and there was a woman passing by the train, an Ossetian, and we asked her, we were so merry, laughing, we said, ‘Ma'am, what is this city?’ And she looked at us in such a way, her eyes struck me then, there was a kind of abyss in her eyes already, that everything was already clear there and then. She looked at us, ‘Mozdok, my dear, Mozdok’ – and went on. And just opposite there was a troop train with smashed up, burnt machinery on board, the stuff was being taken away from Grozny, from Chechnya. It was then that we got kind of gloomy, to tell you the truth, that is when we figured out where we had arrived.

We were brought to Mozdok, one and a half thousand people, on 6th or 7th May 1995. And they didn't tell us they were taking us to Chechnya till the very last moment, we were told we would serve in the North Caucasus but not in Chechnya. Told us the war in Chechnya, in fact, was over, and those 80 dead per day the TV was talking about was a lie, they all died because of their own stupidity, and you're gonna end up in Beslan, in a bread factory, gonna bake

buns there. Of course, a hungry *dukh* (the word '*dukh*' – a spirit, is army slang for an inexperienced recruit – *editor's comments*) was dreaming of getting to this bread factory in Beslan – they all lined up to go there. So we were not told till the very last moment, that we were all being taken to Chechnya, and it was only in the train that the lieutenant said, 'You haven't got it yet? You are all going to Chechnya.' We were taken off the train, marched three kilometres to the runway, I guess it was about three kilometres to the station, and about five to the airport. And the very same day all one and a half thousand of them were taken to Chechnya. 10 people were selected and stayed, I stayed to serve in Mozdok, in the signal troop, and served there till 14th July I think, till Yeltsin's second election. And actually, the war started for me in Mozdok, not the war itself, but the feeling of war.

We worked on the runway. We loaded humanitarian aid going there. And there we were also responsible for unloading corpses coming back. So we were sending humanitarian aid there and getting corpses in exchange. And we saw all that, crashed up machinery was brought to the regiment, burnt out machinery, the concussed and the wounded, were all coming back to the regiment. The war started around that time, then I started realizing that there were people really fighting over there.

Ramzan, 57 years old

There was some kind of psychological breakdown. We, a part of the people, and most probably the greater part, were aiming towards a life together with the other people of Russia, were looking towards Moscow, and we were waiting for them to send in the liberators. And when all the shells and bombs started coming down on all the people, regardless of whether they supported Moscow or not, there was a kind of a breakdown – we were expecting one thing, but we're faced with something completely different. It was after all a very big mistake made by those who ruled the country, I mean Yeltsin, that they decided to attack with all that force and those bombs. How many Russians died here! They more than anyone thought that they wouldn't be bombed. They didn't leave the republic during the first

war, they lived in Grozny in those apartment blocks – thousands, tens of thousands of people. If Chechens, with their family ties were able to go to Chechen villages, go to safer places, the Russians living here – and they were born here, they lived here – they didn't have these connections, these places to escape to, so they stayed in their homes, and the bombs came down on their heads. Can you imagine what kind of a despair there was? It was our initial instinct, that things had turned out not to be as we expected, and that you had to save yourself somehow, you had to think about how to take your close ones away. It all was happening so quickly...

Aza, 23 years old

I guess, for me personally the war started when they started bombing our village. When it was happening elsewhere, it seemed that it was all far away and would go on for a while, and then it would pass. But when they started bombing our village, I realized that it wasn't going to end soon, not tomorrow for sure. And that we had to sort of put up with it, at least to accept the fact – there is war, it is going on, it has started and it is not clear when it will end.

I was afraid. My very first reaction, when the plane came – that was the first time I had ever seen a plane. And I was afraid. When it started, I tried to talk to my mom, but as far as I understand, she didn't want to talk, I guess, she wanted to protect us from it, so it would pass, but it was too late. And then I didn't feel like talking about it, there was no need. We just wanted all these explosions and noise to stop, and for there to be silence.

I remember my Mom telling my Dad, 'Do you get that this is serious, the next bomb could hit our house tomorrow?' I heard this conversation by chance, those were the strongest words I heard, and I realized that it was really possible that we might not live to see another day. She said, 'I want to die with my relatives, can we go to my relatives' village?' And Dad was very attached to the village where we lived, and he didn't like moving, and he said he wouldn't go. Mom said, 'All right, I'll go on my own, but I'm taking the children as well, I don't want to leave them here and have to worry about them'. And they agreed that Dad would find a car and take us there.

At 11 p.m. Dad woke us and my mother up. We were sleeping in our clothes then, because you were supposed to be ready to go to the basement any minute, and we all slept in one room, because the electricity and gas had been cut off by that time and we had to heat the stove to keep warm. I realized that we were moving, as I heard their conversation. We went out into the street, and there were some people with a van there. It was some kind of KAMAZ truck, I think, and the back part was open. I still hoped that Dad would go with us. We all sat inside, and I remember the feeling that Dad was staying, and we were all ready, we could leave any moment, and anything might happen to him the next day and we might never see him again. And I realized all that...

At that moment it was important not to let Mom see my tears – I could see she was crying too.

We stayed there for four months and then returned. We were reunited, but that moment from the war, not even the loss of a close one, but that very moment when we were parting and you understood you might never see one of the closest people to you in the whole world– that was very scary for me. It was already 1995.

Magomed, 27 years old

We met the first war without my father, only with my mother. I remember we came to our parents, to my mother's parents, and it was New Year's Eve. Then on 1st January they were already showing blown up tanks, and soldiers were lying in the streets. I even remember that they didn't show the corpses of rebel fighters, fighters on the Chechen side, only soldiers... that was on local TV. And they were saying how powerful we were, and that we could defeat them just like that. This is how I remember that military operation. But I didn't think and didn't know that it would go on. I remember those pictures, the corpses – but I didn't understand what it was, whether it was war or not.

Lilya, 51 years old

For me the war started when... one of our neighbours, he was quite well off, he bought a satellite dish and recorded all the reports on foreign TV channels, whose journalists came and made reports. And at some point all the men gathered, and the neighbours asked me to translate a German TV reportage – I could speak German. They asked me to translate the text of these journalists, and there were images of destroyed Grozny. And when I saw on TV for the first time what they had done to Grozny, that was the beginning for me. You heard about it, but you didn't see it, I wasn't fully aware of how terrible the destruction had been. And that night I couldn't translate anything, I burst into tears, and I could not calm down, it was such a nightmare – what was happening in Grozny. And that was my first trauma during the war years. I could not cope with it for a long time. When the war started, when I saw it all – that's when Grozny became my pain, the concentration of pain...

Aminat, 67 years old

Bombings. The first war, that was New Year's Eve. We lived in Grozny. And there was news that the troops were drawing close to Grozny, that there was intensive shell-firing. There was fighting in the suburbs already. And our family, me, my old sick mother-in-law, my husband and son, we left. You could say, we became refugees. We simply closed the house and went to the village, but on New Year's eve my husband took it into his head... it was very thoughtless, we underestimated the seriousness of the situation. We thought we would stay in the village for a few days till it all ended. He decided to go back to our city, to our street, to our building. You know why? He wanted to buy oranges for the kids for New Year... wanted to make a real New Year celebration for the kids. We had some dried meat at our place. He decided to get this meat to feed everyone. He came to Grozny, went to our street and found himself in a terrible situation. He tried to open the door, but evidently, too troubled by the situation, could not do it, turned around and headed back. And they came under fire. They survived by mere chance. The car which

was driving right in front of them came under fire as soon as it got to a crossroads. It exploded and caught fire. Then they slowed down, turned into the nearest yard, ran and started looking for a basement to hide in. The house was empty, it was open. They told us, 'It was getting dark, and groping around with our hands we found a ring in the floor, lifted it, and it turned out it was a cellar'. It was so small they could only stay seated. And they got inside. They spent the night there, and then they could not leave the basement for 7 days. Then they found a small bag of cornflour. In the cellar they found a jar of pickled tomatoes. And from that cornflour they made dry flatbread and ate them washing them down with the tomato pickle. The main thing was that our 14-year-old boy was with him, my son. The top part of the house where they were hiding in the cellar was practically destroyed throughout those seven days. The roof, the walls, everything fell on them, and every morning they could barely get out. When the firing died down they tried to go out for some fresh air, breathe a little and then hide again. The car was in the yard of the house, it was protected by a few walls and so thankfully it survived the firing. On the seventh day they saw another car driving into the street, the driver of that car was in shock. They came up to him, started asking how he got there, if there was a way out of there. Staring blankly, without even looking at their faces he said, 'If you drive along my tracks, you'll get to the centre and then can get out'. Later we learnt that his brother and some other family members had been shot before his very eyes. We met seven days later. I thought we would never see each other again. A person had left on 31st December and returned on 7th January.

Aslan, 24 years old

I remember when the war started, when people were hiding, the first bombings of our village started, because it's a border village and it's very easy to bomb. There were missile launchers on the Ingush side, you could even see them from a distance, and they were bombing us.

My brother and I were little, he was only 4, and I was 6 years old, and on the first day of bombing we climbed onto the roof of our

house, lay down and watched. The bombings were usually at night, and it was real fun to watch the shells fly above over us, it was so beautiful. There was no light, it was very dark, and the shells flew by. While downstairs everyone was looking for us like crazy, because they didn't know where we had gone.

When a shell hit our house for the first time, it was a mortar shell, then I realized that they were not fireworks, that it was really dangerous. None of us were hurt, because we were in the basement. Just the roof and a couple of rooms were destroyed. It was the first time I had the feeling that this was a real war, it had come.

Hussein, 57 years old

I remember how I began the first war. For me, as for any very young man at that time, I felt a kind of sense of duty, there was some sort of romanticism. The kind of enthusiasm you feel when you know misfortune has come.

When I was 25 years old, I fell ill and was in hospital. There was a man in the same ward as me who had fought in World War II. He was a *Katyusha* commander. When they showed documentaries about the Second World War, I watched him. He covered his tears with his hands, there were tears running down his cheeks, and he was hiding them. And then I thought: here is a generation which spent 4, or 5 years at war and survived, day and night, bullets, bombs, I couldn't imagine. How could you survive a war? He did, that makes him a hero, and the others are heroes too. I wondered, could we, our generation, for instance, be like them and go through it decently? I wondered whether I would be able to go through war and not get frightened, not run away, do nothing of the kind. These were my romantic ideas from that time. I didn't imagine there would be a war within a former state.

Well, when the war started, I felt just as all the other thousands of people did. Naturally, for the first days, just like any other normal person, I was a bit scared, but 15 minutes later this fear went. You just needed to pull yourself together and suppress it, and then it never returned. So that was the beginning.

I took part in the attempt of a coup on 26th November 1994 when Gantamirov, with the help of the Taman division in tanks, tried to seize the presidential palace. Well, actually this could be called the beginning of the war. Although it officially started on 11th December Russian tanks appeared on our territory on 26th November. This for me was probably the beginning of the main war because after a short while, a little time passed from November till December, and Russian troops set off for Grozny. And we attacked near to village D., well, on a large scale, using Grad (multiple rocket launcher – *the translator's comment*). It was Maskhadov's idea, it was a novelty at that time to use this Grad to fire point-blank at a moving column. I think the damage was colossal and there was utter panic amongst the Russian troops. And there were local skirmishes near villages when the troops were coming in from Mozdok, from the Ossetian territory in fact that is where the first battles with the Russian army were.

The war started in Grozny itself when the first planes came flying over very low, sort of intimidating the population. Then they started bombing, either to frighten us or carrying out some kind of a battle reconnaissance. I don't know, it was impossible to frighten the whole city. But then they bombed the depot area. That was exact district which was mostly populated by Russians. There were private houses there and the greater part of the population were Russians. And the first bombing was in that district! I went to the site of the bombing myself to see what casualties there were and how bad the devastation was. And then they started firing at the centre, a plane flew over the Sadovaya street area, dropped a bomb, and an American or an English journalist died there. And then when, naturally, people gathered in the place where the bomb had dropped, there were victims and people gathered to help, this plane made another circle and dropped another bomb on those who had gathered, to create more casualties. There was this kind of pointless murder of civilians. So for me personally the serious, main war started with this.

Satsita, 48 years old

I did not use the word 'war' till the very last moment, even when the tanks entered in November. The war for me was the Second World War, I couldn't imagine another war. And when I felt it on my own back, when the city was bombed, I understood that yes, it was a real war now. What to call this war, even now, I, a mature person, I don't know what it was. Whether it was a war, whether they were counter-terrorist operations – I would name it with one word – murder. This was not a war, it was just the murder of people. War is about ideas, at war one person fights another.

For me personally this war started... during the first military campaign, in 1994, I was away. I don't know why, what fate drove me out of the city. The war for me started when I heard, saw on TV that the city was being bombed. I went to Saratov to see my cousin just before the first military campaign. When we turned on the TV, they were saying that on that day the troops had been brought into the Chechen republic, Dzhokhar Dudaev had gone into hiding. Then I was glad. I told my cousin, 'Well, that's it, finally it will all calm down'. I said, Dzhokhar has been called back to Moscow, everything will be fine. And when a few days later they showed the bombing of the city... My sister was in the city, her children, my mother stayed, all my relatives... And I saw it all only on TV. I returned home only in March 1995. When I got back home, I saw a destroyed city, I stopped at the library. A 30–40 centimetres layer of ash covered everything, everything was crashed, burnt, and on the door was written in chalk, 'Satsita, if you are alive, find me'. There was such a phrase.

Then I went home, like a zombie, I didn't cry. I drove up to the house, the taxi driver dropped me off, evidently, he decided something bad had happened there. I entered and heard a hammer bang: 'Tap-tap! The house was all crushed, I was making my way over the bricks. Mom stood at the end of the yard fixing the hen house. All her hens had died from the explosion, from the blast, they were stunned, and died, because of their eardrums... And there was only one rooster who by some kind of miracle had survived, and who stayed with her throughout the war. I came in, my mother was hammering up a fence to put the rooster there, and he stood

nearby without running away, looking at her. I came up and said, 'Mom' – I was not crying, though I felt I would hear something now. 'Mom', – I said stupidly. – 'Mom, what was the winter like?' I returned in March. Mother said, 'The winter was cold. Well, but it's all right'. – 'Mom, did you have water?' – 'Yes, we did.' – 'And your other hens died?' – 'Yes, you know, their eardrums...'

THE WAR

**What happened to you during the war?
How did you live?**

From Satsita's diary

Confiteor
... only before Thee,
my God Almighty,
before Thee
my conscience,
and a blank sheet
before Thee.

01/01/2000. What an unusual combination of numbers. Now it's about midday. Silence is the only thing to remember and to be happy about.

02/01. We hardly slept in our shelter of hope. At night, at about 10 p.m., there were explosions, they were bombing our house. The basement shook, the lamp went out, it got dark, scary and silent. Sharik's whimpering broke the silence – it seemed like the dog was wounded.

In the morning my mother and I went home to see what had become of our house. Our lane was a pathetic sight: twisted and broken trees, a pile of earth and bricks, all the lane had been ploughed up by mortars. Thank goodness no one was in the street at the time.

The parade of war is gathering pace and taking on new forms. We are being patient. We are slowly waiting for the end of the parade.

03/01. Something weird has been happening this morning. Something has happened to the sun, to the sky, machine-gun fire is everywhere.

05/01. *The fifth day of the New Year is coming to its end. 14 people are sitting in a dark basement with a bright dream – to come out of here into the light. And high up in the sky – 5 thousand meters up – there’s the black cross of death. The barbaric war is still going on. Our predictions that the war would end on 05/01 have not come true. War, beside bringing destruction and killing innocent victims, war kills the best parts of a person. How intricate mankind has become in their wish to kill as many as possible. The devil’s spawn keeps finding new ways to murder people.*

06/01. *A surprising silence. Why? I didn’t even go down into the basement during the day, I was at home the whole day. It was such a happiness: to be breathing fresh air, walking along the street, powdered with clean snow, without fear. Now we’ll be waiting for 09/10/01 (they say, the war will end then). How many times we’ve consoled ourselves that the war is about to end: once, twice, five times, ten, thirty, forty, fifty...*

13/01. *Old New Year.*

When we were young, just girls, we loved this holiday. We set up mirrors, candles and started telling fortunes. Your promised husband was supposed to appear in the mirror. But he didn’t. Not in the mirror and not in life. But that was child’s play. Now it’s not child’s play when we’re ‘telling fortunes’. We are ‘reading tea leaves’ to see when the war will end. Our forecasts don’t come true. We are no longer setting deadlines for this basement novel to end.

All the characters of this novel (11 women and 4 men) are as high strung and tense as people can ever be. We get irritated for no reason at all. We make up a minute later. We are all fed up with this basement life. But there is no end to this war. The same every single day. The ‘black crosses’ have been making circles over the city since morning, like hungry jackals. 100, 110, 120, 150 – how long can it continue! It will die. It has already died. The same problems: water and firewood. They’ve driven us into a corner, and we, like frightened cats, are only scratching the walls.

14/01. *Sharik is dead. Before he died he had such a pitiful and beseeching look. But we couldn’t help him. It seems like the dog had a broken spine. Now he’s lying in the corner with his paws stretched out.*

15/01. *A second day running started with intense shelling, ‘crosses’ are in the sky. After a 5-day silence everything has started anew. The federals are getting ready to storm Grozny again. Poor, beloved and dear Grozny! What the barbarians are doing to you! They have encircled you and are picking at open unhealed wounds. Those once blooming and beautiful streets of yours resemble surrealist paintings. Man shouldn’t do such a thing. This can only be a fantasy. Or a nightmare. From the height of our mountain we can see the black crosses, having made a devil’s loop, head for Minutka square, an explosion shakes the earth, and then we see a black puff of smoke.*

All the night we listened to the roar of the planes, they were bombing throughout the night. And there’s still so much time till the elections. There will still be many smoke puffs in the air.

And the fear doesn’t leave you for a moment.

17/01. *I think it’s 17/01. I can remember neither the date, nor the day of the week. All the days blend into one. I am getting used to this basement life. A human being slowly gets used to anything. A human being can get used even to inhumane life conditions. Could I have imagined a month ago that I would be living in inhumane conditions, sleeping on a hard damp bed knocked up from thrown away planks. And slowly getting used to this life, I will stop resisting. This getting used to everything is the most terrible thing. I can’t get the plot of the ‘Women in the Dunes’ out of my head. Having got used to the life in the dunes, the main character in the end did not wish to leave the shelter he was forcedly pushed into. He got used to digging sand every day, to chopping firewood; he got used to washing himself once a month, gradually losing human habits and thoughts. Finally, he becomes the same as the woman with whom he’s been living for many months.*

It all reminds me of our basement life. But I will resist, I will never get used to this life. We’ll get out of here. I must get out...

19/01. *They’ve been storming Grozny for three days now. We can see and hear the fighting around Minutka square very clearly. The*

shelling has not stopped for a minute for three days running. But my mother and I, we still run out of the basement to feed the hens and the cattle. We finish all our chores in half an hour. We can't stay on the surface any longer, the mortars are firing too closely.

Yesterday we listened to 'Radio Liberty': The federals have reached Minutka square.

21/01. Horror and fear are the two feelings that have been haunting me all day. I can hardly sleep. I can't fall asleep, but I fall into an abyss of darkness. I wake up – the abyss is everywhere, darkness everywhere. I want to see the light so much. But the war goes on. 'Select troops of Russia' are coolly shooting at our houses from the mountain. How long can it go on? It will soon be four months since the war started, four months of expectations and hopes. I don't know a thing about this war. Only bombings and running from the basement home and back. Fear, death, tears. I've started forgetting how the city looks at night, I've forgotten the hum of the bus, the street lamps shining along the streets, I've forgotten what shop windows look like. It feels like I've never had a different life, that there has always been war; destroyed roofs, streets dug up all over, bombings, bombardments, constant hunger, and fear for one's life and home. In the dark basement everything merges into one single spot.

29/05. They keep striking, striking, striking... Houses are burning, mines are exploding somewhere nearby. Crosses are in the sky. It's dark everywhere. I am tired of being afraid, tired of running away.

I want light, a flow of fresh air. Fires are everywhere, streets are burning, burning...

Satsita, 48 years old

What happened in 1999, it is not clear where those people turned up from. During that war I didn't go anywhere, not for a single day. When we left the city, we were going through Gikalo village, when the helicopters fired at the line ahead of us, some people were killed. This must also be part of the system, I guess? Well, they could see peaceful refugees leaving, they could see it from

the helicopter. Why, explain this to me? One day, maybe, someone from the military will interview me? I'll ask him these questions. I'll tell him, 'Dear general, answer one question for me: if you see a peaceful line of people walking, and you see women and children there, why do you fire at it, why do you blow it up? Why?' I can get the rebel fighters, but we are just people, women with kids... So, I also came under fire in the August events. We came back, when the notorious Khasavyurt negotiations were under way. And then there was complete destruction, weapons, firing.

After the August events, precisely one month later I came home and never left again. I saw the third campaign in 1999 from the inside, myself, I was there. I saw the rebel fighters walk along the streets, I saw the heroic 'Red Army' shoot civilians, I saw it... You know, I was just like Mother Courage, I was sitting in my cart: I only thought of how to feed myself and the people sitting in the basement with me. There were 14–16 of us there. And I had to bring water for everyone, to bring firewood, I had to run around, I was the youngest.

When the rebel fighters were leaving, they told us, 'Come on, let's go, they'll shoot you'. I said, 'Let them shoot me, but in my own house, I am not going anywhere'. The rebel fighters left on the night of the 3rd. There was such a silence on the 4th... I've said several times, that silence is the eighth wonder of the world. I recommend you as well – to listen to it. There are times when you don't have it, and sometimes they kept bombing so hard, bombed and bombed, I would lift up my hands and tell the Lord: 'Lord, let there be silence for 15 minutes. It is so wonderful – to look at the world you've created!' There was such a silence, you know, an abnormal silence... I took some chalk, ran about the yard writing, 'There are people living here, there are civilians living here, there are people living here'... On the 4th, I think probably after lunch, they started bombing again. A mortar is the worst weapon. It will get you anywhere. Terrible bombing started, it was awful.

And when sweep-up operations started, they went out into the streets. We were lucky, I'm grateful to the Krasnoyarsk OMON¹ that

¹ Special purpose police unit.

controlled our area. They told us, 'You know, if there are sweep-up operations tomorrow, it's not us'. From time to time patrols from other commandant's offices came to do checks.

A neighbour was killed. They came to their yard for a sweep-up operation (I don't know what OMON it was), and he had beads in his hands, he must have been praying. They took him out of there, put him near the wall, shot him and pelted him with bricks, sat on top of this brick pile and drank some vodka to his soul, while he was lying underneath these bricks, dead. But there were no mass murders in our area. And I repeat, we were lucky, the Krasnoyarsk OMON were there.

This is how we survived in the basement and we climbed out of it on the 3rd. I returned to work on 22nd February. I came to the city, and at the very first checkpoint, no, not the first one, at Minutka square (oh, what a fool I was, what a fool) I had a row with an OMON soldier. How could I know they were real monsters, I was sitting in the basement all the time. And I was young, and so thin. He said, 'Show me your hands'. I showed him my hands. 'Why are they all scratched?' 'I chop wood.' 'Show me your shoulder', he said (to see whether I carried arms or not). 'And where are your men?' And I said, 'The men are fighting in the woods'. I was a fool, I wouldn't say that now.

At another checkpoint a soldier approached us for a check. I asked him, 'Where are the houses? What have you done here?' He said, 'We've come to save you.' I said, 'Why have you smashed the houses?' There was not a single house in Minutka Square. It was my first day in the city, and naturally, they smashed up everything that remained standing after the first war.

I went back to work, to my burnt out library, I started fixing the roof. I don't know, I guess I just had to do something. It was hard, but the war hardened me as well.

I spent 56 days in the basement. I kept a diary while I was there. When somebody gave me Polina Zherebtsova's diary, it was sort of funny, I kept exactly the same diary. I remember my neighbour telling me, 'you'll be killed, I'll be killed, write something beautiful about me, that I was so good, such a hero'.

We sat there for 56 days. There were bombings, shooting, it all happened. And then, I guess, on the night of the 3rd, when all the rebel fighters started leaving, and they all got caught in those minefields near Alkhan-Kala, two guys from our area were killed. They did not fight, they just stayed there, they didn't want to leave their relatives, their parents. Many people were afraid of staying in the city because of the sweep-up operations, and they left together with the rebel fighters, because they had promised them a way out. I guess there were about 50% of ordinary civilian kids who left the city out of a fear of being killed. Two neighbours of mine went like this, and they were killed anyway. One corpse was never found, they said people buried him in a common grave, but the other corpse was found. They weren't fighters.

Well, this was not war... Let somebody think up a new literary word to define it all. When some guys came, during a sweep-up operation, the OMON came, I went out at once (I didn't know how terrible it was). And we'd learnt to run through the private sector quickly – we learnt to remove fences or make holes in the fences, just like in the Vietnamese system, so we could run around everywhere. So I ran out as usual, took a short cut to my place, I wanted to feed the hens. I came out, but they jumped out from everywhere – they kept coming and coming – and surrounded me. Why they didn't shoot me, I don't know, I guess I was just lucky. The top guy, he asked, 'You girl, who are you?' I started to say, 'Guys, there are no fighters here, they've gone. They left last night. I am begging you, there's no one here, I'll go with you and show you the houses and tell you who lives where'. We started negotiating. And one of them asked, 'And who are you? Are there any 'chichiks' here?' I said, 'And who are chichiks?' He said, 'Well, are there any Chechens?' I said, 'Yes, I am a Chechen'. 'How come you're a Chechen? Why do you speak Russian so well?' I said, 'Why, what kind of brief did you get, that we were running around here in loincloths? Actually, I'm director of a library'. And another one asked, 'Wow, you've got libraries here?' And then, evidently, their leader came out, I explained everything to him and said, 'You come up to us, to our basement, everyone'll come out'. And he said, 'All right, lady, let's do it'. We approached

our basement, and everyone came out. They were afraid of climbing down into the basement, they were not brave either. We came out, showed ourselves, there were just old women, cripples standing. So they left.

I would love to find the doctor who saved my life, because if it wasn't for him I would have died. I had a kidney stone stuck, and that was that, I was already dying, I was already in shock from the pain. My mother went to those guys, to the checkpoint at midnight. She shouted from afar, 'Don't shoot, boys, don't shoot!' And they had a huge dog too. They shouted back, 'We're gonna set the dog on you'. Mom said, 'Don't shoot. My daughter is dying'. And a military man, a soldier came out and said, 'I'll go'. And at night he came through those fences, can you imagine. And I don't remember him, I was already in too much shock, I was dying. He came in, he was from Krasnoyarsk, I think, said his name was Victor. And he would come, visited me for a week, brought me books when he found out I was a librarian. He brought me Chase's detective stories to read. Honestly, I feel so much gratitude towards him, but on the other hand, if I saw him now, I wouldn't even recognize him, because I was in such a state, I don't remember him. I guess, I was just lucky.

Of course it's no joke, but a shell fell in the yard of our house, where we lived in the basement, and there was such a big shell hole, such a huge hole. And the second day, when it all calmed down a little, I started looking for a metal sheet the size of that hole. An old man asked me, 'What are you doing? What have you brought this metal sheet here for' And I told him, 'When one of us gets killed, so that we don't have to run around digging holes, we can put him in here', I said, 'cover them with some earth, cover them up and then later we'll rebury him'. I was talking about it as this kind of thing happened every day. The guy joked, 'We'd fit in all right, you and me, we're not so tall'.

Man can get used to anything, he can sleep on a plank bed, not wash, not bathe. Now it's sounds incredible not to wash yourself every day, right? Wild, right? You get used to it. Not straight away, but you do. You get used to crying soundlessly. You're lying in darkness, and tears are running down your cheeks, and you know

your mother is lying next to you, and she knows already that you're crying, and she starts talking to you.

It's hard to watch people being killed before your very eyes. My neighbour was killed right in front of me. Such a wonderful boy. It was in November, when there were still lots of people around, because people had only just started leaving at that time. The bombing started and we all ran to the basement. I was the last to dash out, and our neighbour was there, I saw him running out. I said, 'Let's go to the basement, it's closer'. I remember he looked up, as up above, near the school, his mother and brother lived. He said, 'No, I'd rather go to my mother's'. And he walked a few meters away from me, there was an explosion, I turned around... it hit him, exactly him. I remember, when he was killed, half of his head was smashed, like this. And instead of running downstairs, I ran to him. And that was it, I couldn't hear anything, my ears were blocked. I looked at him, and his face was gone, half of his face was gone. I looked at him and I couldn't remember... then a relative ran up to me, grabbed me and dragged me to the basement. If he had gone with me, he would have stayed alive. There were many moments like that, I saw the murdered, the dead... but I guess, it was not my fate.

For me the image of the enemy is the planes. When they bomb, it's just terrible. Even now I can't hear the sound of a plane. I very rarely get on planes for one simple reason – I can't stand that hum. A plane is the enemy. So black... I call it a 'black cross'. There it is flying and bringing death. I guess this is my image of the enemy, even more than a man in a soldier's uniform...

Minat, 26 years old

It was 1995. As usual, the planes had come, mother was screaming in panic, and all the neighbours came running to our house, because we had a big basement, and everyone hid at our place. When a depth bomb hit our vegetable garden, I remember I got hit because of the shock wave. The bomb exploded, and we were pressed down against the floor, and then everything rose, I don't know, some sort of cushioning. First we were pressed down, then we somehow

managed to get up, and everyone was so dusty and panicked. And then there were no signs, nothing, it all started later. I started having pains. I was a very active child and played all the time, all day in the street, and everyone said, 'You run around for a very long time, you play a lot, that's why you have pains'. It hurt every night, I cried. Mother made me stay at home, so I didn't go out at all, but then the pain got even worse. We went from doctor to doctor with my mom, they said it was shock, but nobody knew exactly what was the matter with me. I was treated in various hospitals, we travelled around the entire republic – to healers, herbalists, but no one could diagnose me.

My parents were born and grew up in our village, they built the house and everything themselves and they didn't want to leave it, didn't want to go anywhere as refugees. And we lived there during both wars. When the house was destroyed – we built it again, mother got everything into shape, first one room, then another; then it was destroyed again, and she tried to fix it again. And I remember also – as they would cut off the electricity – all the neighbours usually gathered at our place, as my father did something with a battery and connected the TV to it, and everyone watched the news. And I had to take medicine every two hours, I had fits, I screamed, cried, and the neighbours could hardly watch till the end of the news, they left, couldn't bear it anymore. After the bombing we only had one room, and my sisters sat crying, one in one corner, one in the other. Well, it was hell. They couldn't move me from the bed at all, I had fits straight away, mother couldn't touch me.

I lay like a log from 1999–2000. In 2000, in February, we were quietly sitting at home, as usual. And there were soldiers near, in the field, they had a unit there, and every night they fired shells, small ones, some people ran to the basement at nights, but I stayed where I was, no one touched me. So, it was all calm, no one actually reacted to these small shells. But at night it started – what a nightmare, shells, fuss, my mom with a neighbour came running, mother lit a fire in the stove in the basement. I understood something terrible was ahead, as she was getting things ready for us in the basement, was doing all sorts. Turned out that was when our Chechen guys were

leaving Grozny, they surrendered and fled to various villages. And then mother took me to the basement, I was screaming, I begged her not to touch me, it all started again, I cried, and she said, 'The main thing is you can't die, the rest will sort itself out. You cry as much as you want, but you need to go to the basement'. They took me to the basement. Our neighbours came too. There was dust, explosions, they were afraid of a grenade getting into the basement (there was a small window in the basement), as they sometimes did then. Everyone was afraid, my mom asked us to stay quiet, but the children were crying. I knew at that time some Ayat, verses from the Quran, and calmed the children down that way. They were sitting around me, I told it and they repeated it with me. One old woman cried, 'Get me out of here, I am suffocating'. It made the children cry even more. And my mother – well, we never raised our voices at our elders, particularly as she was my father's relative – but my mom forgot all about that then, the main thing was not to let people panic in the basement, so Mom told her, 'Calm down, there are children here, you are a grown up, you should know better, you calm down at least'. I spent all night thinking, 'Just to see the dawn, just let there be the light at the window!' I don't know, it seemed it would all end at dawn. And we prayed till dawn and gulped down the dust. We could hardly see each other.

The shells were going through our house, and on top, it was absolutely destroyed. We were on a hill, and the other houses were down the hill. And everything hit our house, because it was higher. And that night – I don't know how, but the main part of the village, they didn't even hear anything. People slept calmly. And even those neighbours who lived two hundred meters away, they slept quietly. They were farther away, and it didn't reach them. They slept quietly and didn't know what was happening to our house. First tanks, and all through the night – shells, shells, shells...

At dawn I heard a helicopter. At first I thought – it was probably naïve, but I was a child – that it would all end now, I had such naïve ideas, 'Now these helicopters will put an end to it'. But it was the most terrible part. The helicopters' buzz, my mom went out, my sister went out, 'Mom, the house!' My Mom said, 'What about the

house! Let them destroy it all, the main thing is we are alive'. She screamed and cried. Then a neighbour came running, 'What's up with you?' – and started laughing. My mother said, 'Are you an idiot? Don't you understand what we went through last night?' And then the helicopters started bombing. And we couldn't stay in the house any longer. I don't know what they are called, maybe some carpet missiles, maybe bombs that they dropped on us, but they wipe out everything. Everyone ran out of the basement, wanted to go down along the river, but it was already impossible – there was firing everywhere. And first we ran to the neighbours, my mother was holding me on her back and ran with me. My two sisters, brother and neighbours followed us. First we ran into the house, then we ran out again. I remember mother could no longer carry me, I was 14, and though I was thin from being sick I was still too heavy for her, and she ran with us, but then there was a helicopter, it came lower a little bit, and then mother threw us under a tree, she had a blanket with her, she threw a blanket over us, and lay on us herself. I remember we saw the soldiers sitting there. When I remember it, it hurts. A woman with kids, well, they could see from above, if I saw them, they saw me as well for sure. And they started firing around us to frighten us. I thought they would get me. And they scared us a bit like that and then flew away. Mother stood up, and we ran again. There were our distant relatives living across the river, they called us, 'Quick, quick, to our basement, there are more of our folks here' – and we ran. Then everyone there got frightened, and we went to my mom's uncle; they also had a big basement.

When we were running in the snow, we could see blood spots, those were the guys who were leaving Grozny, it turned out they were going through our village at night. That's why they bombed our upper part like that. And the next morning the planes and the helicopters they finished off what they started. And then we could see pieces of bread, sugar, their clothes, they dropped everything as they ran. We spent a couple of days in the basement, and I remember our three brothers were killed somewhere in the middle of the village – they were dragged out of the basements, young guys, taken to a field and shot dead. A guy from one of the

houses – he was the only son – was killed. They took out about 16–18 guys, and I think, only one survived. Just because he didn't die from his wounds, he nearly died. They took almost all the guys, all the men, to the field at the end of the village and checked everyone, and those who they dragged out of basements at the height of it all, they shot them. Then, when everything calmed down, we went back to our house – Mom fixed up one room, and we started living there.

I remember the soldiers came behind their leader's backs to sell solar oil – young guys, not the ones that were there at that terrible time. They were guarding it all in spring – there was a military unit in the middle of each village. They usually had units closer to the woods. And these draftees, I think, 18–19-year-old guys, they came and exchanged solar oil for something. Well, they got sick of canned beef, and they exchanged it for bread, for flatbread, and they came often, and I knew that these people – they didn't need it all. They were young, they were brought there, and I know, they were terribly afraid, but at the same time they had to be there. They used to come to our yard quite often, but they were afraid our people would give them away and tell on them. They said, those, who tried to escape, their commanders tormented them, well, these young ones' leaders, they tortured them.

And we had sweep-up operations as well, and they would burst into our house armed, search everything, turn it all upside down, the whole house, and then leave. And once, on one of these days I was lying at the window so that I could at least look at the street, and when they burst in my mother asked them to lower their guns because there was a sick child there, because she would get frightened. And I remember that the major gave an order to put down the guns, and then they came in. Though they were soldiers, I understand now, it was dangerous for them. Anyway, he believed us and ordered them to put down the guns, enter quietly and not to make noise. They entered, searched the house, this major sat down near me, told me something, I don't remember what he was saying, he put 150 roubles near me, told me about some hospital in Moscow, advised them to take me there, and then they left. Then my attitude changed, well, I realised that something made them go

there as well...well, they were serving, they were ordered to come, there was nothing else they could do.

I used to think, when I was little, and when the war was under way, 'Why aren't these people helping us? Why doesn't everybody come out and do something?' I think, it was because there was no solidarity and no compassion. They thought well, this is far away, for some people, everything will end now – everyone probably thought. I don't only mean Russia, I thought, why doesn't the whole world react and save us?

Ramzan, 57 years old

Naturally, our way of life was completely destroyed. The way we lived, tried to build something, work towards our children's future when they got older, work, hobbies – it was all for nothing. Life appeared to stop. People had their own way of life, their own professions, hobbies, this took away that life. This time was thrown out of my life.

We only left once, we went to Dagestan for a couple of months to avoid the first contact with the military, we didn't know how they would behave. Whether they would come into our homes, humiliate, insult us. To avoid this, we went to a village in Dagestan for two months, we got everything ready beforehand to avoid any problems, and we didn't leave our house any more.

I never really set hopes on humanitarian aid, but there were a lot of absolutely desperate families who had nothing, where there weren't any adult men capable of working. Old people, other people who couldn't provide for themselves. And for them, I think, humanitarian aid helped a lot, and I can only be thankful to those international organizations who saved thousands and thousands of people from hunger during that hard period. But personally I didn't have anything to do with it, I would have been ashamed to accept humanitarian aid, I could provide for my family myself.

Every man is a psychologist in his own way. He watches, makes comparisons, comes to conclusions. When we left our home, our city and were in a different republic, we'd hug any vaguely familiar

person – these are such nice, positive feelings. When life becomes unsettled, people become closer, dearer. But when they returned, and life started to get back to normal, everything was as it had been and followed its natural course. As they say, people return to normal. I figured out that these two wars barely brought people closer, it didn't really make them milder, purer, or more honest at all. In fact the opposite is true, a layer of indifferent and cynical people appeared, who had gained some kind of material benefits and had become harsh and cruel with others. You constantly face it – in everyday life, on the roads. New Chechens, new Russians – this is a part of our times.

The war did not affect my family in this regard – no one was killed. But there is, of course, no joy about it, because I have always taken others' pain to heart as if it were my own. I will never forget the hardest moments – when you are in the basement with your loved ones, let's say, for a while, and when you hear explosions, you see your children, your mother right in front of you and you understand that you can't change anything. This helplessness of an adult, of a healthy and intelligent man, when you can't do anything against this absurdity. That's the hardest thing.

Lilya, 51 years old

There were some local wars from time to time. For instance, in 1995, when my younger son was 8 months old, my eldest daughter was 12, and my eldest son 7. There were elections for the head of the republic, rebel fighters entered our town to sabotage the elections, and for a week there were bombings from all directions, and we found ourselves between several warring parties. Most of the time we lived in the basement. The basement was not a habitable place, just a cellar to keep all the pickles and winter supplies. We put wooden planks there to lay the children on, and we sat there. There were no diapers then, nothing. It was the winter of 1995, there was no heating in the basement, and some pipes burst from the firing, there was no gas, no water, no light. We went in with a candle and an oil stove, well, ran into it when the fighting was particularly

intense. My son was 8 months old, and he had just started crawling, he wanted to crawl all the time, he cried until we let him crawl, but you can't let a baby crawl on the floor, on the stones, on cold ground. And when it went calm, we would run out of the basement, through the yard, into the house so that he could crawl a little in the living room and calm down. And then we would run into the basement again, because my mother-in-law was very much afraid, she had a physical fear of these bombings. Fortunately, I didn't have it, evidently I had gotten myself ready psychologically.

When the war started, I realised that it would last for a while, and if I didn't adjust myself and if I didn't cope with it myself, it would affect my children's and my husband's psychological state. As for my family – my parents lived not far from my husband's house – I went to them, gathered all the women, there were many family, and said, 'This war won't last a day, nor two, nor a month, it might last for years, so be ready, try to keep calm, cope with yourself, support your husband, your children, your whole family will be looking at you'. They set on me then, 'Are you nuts, how can it go on, everyone will realize now, Yeltsin will realize now that everything is being done wrongly here, the international community will support us, it can't go on like this'. But I understood it would go on and on.

All my family left – the women, only the men stayed. It was considered shameful for men to leave – they were men, they shouldn't be afraid. And this male pride of theirs – well, it led a lot of people to death. Well, our women, they can at least have a good cry at funerals, but men are not allowed to cry at funerals, women can show their fear, can run away somewhere, but men should keep their self-control. And this necessity to control themselves had a huge impact. I remember, especially during the war years, young men died one after another and we went from one funeral to another. The death rate was very high among young men, and it was because of strokes, heart attacks, it was all nervous conditions, because of fear! We lived in the same quarter, my husband's house and my parents' house. I went there, there were two cows, though I had never milked cows before, anyway milk was food, and then I baked bread in our street and gave it out to our men, to those

who stayed. At that period there were only two women left in two quarters, me and a neighbour – she was single. Everyone left, women with children left, but I stayed, because I didn't want to leave my husband alone, and he wouldn't have gone. Actually, I didn't care, I thought, why should I live if he dies. And I knew he was too unpractical, he couldn't cook, he couldn't wash, how would he take care of himself? And the children didn't want to go anywhere, they were used to their life – their toys, their own little world. There were rumours from time to time that rebel fighters would enter the town, that everyone should leave, and the children started crying, asked me not to go anywhere. The children wanted to stay at home. And when something started, they ran to me at once, they saw I looked calm, though inside I was worried of course, but it was a sense of responsibility rather than fear. They came up to me, for instance, I was kneading dough, they stood watching attentively. Firing starts, everyone runs, panic, my mother-in-law is screaming, runs about the house, they looked at me, saw that I was calm, and I tell them, 'It will fly by, it's not flying here, it's going to another place, the plane, it won't fire at us, they won't fire at us'. I made them believe that we wouldn't be fired at, and they would calm down and get on with whatever they had been doing.

In 1995, when they started firing at us, there were no rebel fighters to be seen in the town itself. With the first snow we woke up and saw the snow lying, and there were shell fragments all over, the whole yard was scattered with shell fragments. Then we realized how much we risked running back and forth, and there were shell fragments even in the house, we were within a hair of death. A relative called, said there were rebel fighters in the suburbs of the town, that the war was about to start, that we had to leave. I got up at once, it was four in the morning, started baking bread, flatbread. My mother-in-law shouted, 'Why bread? What's the matter with you, the war has started!' – and I say, 'Why, have they come to welcome us with bread and salt? The kids will need this bread more than anything else'. Well, I baked the bread, and it saved us for a few days, the next day there was no more gas, no more electricity. And three days later – it was very cold in the basement, it was impossible

to dry out the nappies, it was damp and cold – then we decided to leave. This decision saved us. It was winter, minus 25, very cold, we took our children – 12 and 7 years old and 8-months old, took the bread that was left, some rompers, nappies – and off we went. And it was at that moment that I felt fear for the first time, before that there was no fear, honestly, though there had been a lot of firing and a lot of other things, but such fear... it was the moment when my husband said 'I'll find out, if the neighbour is going with us, if he is leaving with us', – and ran across the street, and they saw him from the hill and started shooting. He ran, and the shells were bursting right after him, and I thought, 'If something happens to him, I won't even be able to take him from here, I won't be able to carry him alone, and what will I do with small children and an old woman, where will I go'. I was so scared for him.

He returned, and we ran along that street together with the neighbours, who had six or seven small children. Women from other streets joined us, and later they told us that for the past three days they had been sitting without food and water, with hungry children because they couldn't come out of the basement. We had at least had something to eat, I had stored some food straightaway. And we walked, for a long time, jumping into basements on our way. At some point we had to walk through a part of an open street which was being fired at. I had the baby in my arms, well, our men couldn't take a child in their arms, and there was a car driving by. My mother-in-law stopped it, asked them to take me with the baby, so that they could run faster, as I couldn't run fast with the baby. And she also hooked the sled on to that car. While driving the sled got unhooked, somebody took it, after we had driven just two blocks the sled was no longer there. And my elder son – we still laugh about it with him now – he didn't understand how dangerous it was, that we could be killed, he made such a scene because of the sled! 'Mom, it was so difficult to find that sled, who will buy a new one for us, where will we get a new one? You've lost it!' He kept nagging me about the sled all the way along. Well, seven years old – what could he understand, he only was only in the first grade, he'd studied for three and a half months, and then the war started.

Then a man jumped out from somewhere, when a helicopter started bombing, 'Quickly jump into the basement, come here'. He was standing at the gate especially to call everyone passing by there, into that two-storied building, the first floor of which was like a basement. There were many people there, it was dark, and my younger son, 8-months old, said his first word there, in that basement. We sat there for a long time, and the thing was he didn't cry, he was hungry, all wet, but didn't cry, evidently, he sensed the situation. At some point the door opened, and his father, my husband, entered, and he sat up a little, 'Papa!' – that was his first word.

That day we walked 20 kilometres through the snow. That day I realized that the war was not against the rebel fighters, because we were leaving the city, in a column – there were but a few men with us, and the others were women and children. And it could very well be seen from the helicopters. Open trucks with rebel fighters with arms drove into the city – they didn't touch them, they let them into a warring city, while we, those who were leaving the city, they saw we were women with children, we were fired at several times, we had to lie down in a field. We were very tired, it was 20km after all. It is very hard to walk with children all day long. At some points my husband carried the baby in his arms.

And like this we reached the suburbs, where our distant relatives lived, they met us, and we lived with them for 8 days at their place. Three days later, when it was announced that the firing was over, my husband and I returned to the town to get some documents. And when we came to the town, there was a terrible sight, there were the corpses of cats, dogs, people, cows lying in the street, it was all lying right in the street, the corpses had not yet been taken away at that time. We came to our yard – it was impossible to go in, as all the tiles, all the roof slates were on the ground, and the house was destroyed. It turned out that as soon as we left in the morning, three shells burst near our basement. Leaving had saved us, if we had been in the basement at that moment, we would have been knocked out or even killed right away.

The most dreadful tragedy that our family encountered happened on the 9th August. This was the day when my sister's daughter, her first child, Maret died. She had not reached the age of seven when it happened. Her parents had bought her school uniform, she put it on every day and spun around in front of the mirror, imagining herself the schoolgirl she was not destined to be. It was on this summer day that the whole family got into trucks and cars and hastily left the town for a neighbouring village. By that time two people from the family had already gone missing. They were young guys who had gone to fetch water in their car. Before that rebel fighters, after entering the city, had burnt down their houses in revenge for a family member working in the city administration. My sister put Maret on an open truck with a group of children and young boys inside, then she got into a car with her father-in-law because she was carrying a baby in her arms. When they were leaving the city, a plane started circling above them, flying very low with a deafening roar. One of the guys sitting in the truck lifted the kids into the air to show the pilot who he was shooting at. At first they were fired from a machine-gun, then shells fell on them. Later we read an article in a national paper containing an interview with this pilot. He asked his commanders to withdraw the order to fire at the line, he told them that there were women and children there, but the order was reiterated. After that the pilot resigned and said that he would never be able to forget that day. I saw 13 corpses lying in a row. The oldest was 22 years old, the youngest, Maret, was not even seven. They didn't have any fatal wounds. Most of them had died from heart failure – from fright. Some family members were heavily wounded.

There was another death, but this was the doing of rebel fighters. My cousin Murat was killed and burnt by a grenade launcher. He had not even turned 20. He was such a handsome guy. He enrolled in the Guards for the commandant's office so that he could buy a TV set for his mother, he never even held a gun in his hands. But a charred corpse was brought to his mother.

Ilman, my second cousin, was taken away by local power structures right in front of all the neighbours. Later they put a

camouflaged uniform on him, it was a few sizes too big and brought the corpse to the local police department, pretending they had killed a rebel fighter. He was his mother's only son, his father had died when he and his sister were small. He was only 22 years old, the girls used to stare at him – a tall dark-browed handsome guy, his mother's hope. I saw him grow up, he was in the same class as my daughter.

Maret and the rest of her family were killed by federals, Murat by rebel fighters, Ilman by local force structures. But their mothers don't care who killed them. There's no getting their kids back. So many years have passed but the wounds don't heal. It's as if it all happened yesterday. What ideas of independence and freedom, what establishment of constitutional order can justify this?

Aza, 23 years old

During the first war electricity and gas were often cut off. Well, this was nothing, we had food anyway. When the second campaign started, then, of course problems started not only with conditions, but with food as well. We ran out of everything, and only Mom's homemade pickles were left, and we had to eat them, but when we ran out of flour, it was scary, as it seemed unimaginable to be left without bread. Then people bought grain at incredible prices, ground it, and stones and sand would get into it, and you had to eat bread with sand. Well, it was terrible at the beginning, but you can get used to anything, and soon that seemed a minor thing.

What helped me personally? I drew. I drew all the time, drew my emotions, some pictures, even my dreams, and wrote sometimes. Well, though, we didn't have paper or pens at that time either. I remember I took old papers and where there were white margins without text – I wrote and drew some small pictures there. When people were cramped in that basement and talked about the war, about the killed and the wounded, it was impossible for me to listen to it, because we saw it all anyway. You'd think, why talk about it? Why do they need to? I didn't understand then, that it was a way for people to reflect, that it made them feel better. But at the time

I thought, why are these adults so cruel, why can't they talk about something else?

I remember, as soon as we left to stay with our relatives, my mom had problems with her breast milk for my little brother – he was four months old – and we needed baby food, but we didn't have any money left at that moment. Mom gathered all her gold, all the jewellery and sold it for some kopecks to buy baby food for my brother. Well, but compared with others, I think we weren't in such a bad situation, as there were cases where people died of starvation.

I remember when I was four or five, I was watching TV, one 9th May. They often showed some military movies – explosions, all that stuff. And I asked my mom, 'Mommy, why do they show these movies? This all can't be true, right? These are just horror stories? There are monsters, but these are movies, we'll never live like that?' My mom said, 'Of course not! What are you saying!' When I realized that the war had started, all those pictures from the movies came back to me, but I didn't feel like talking about it with anyone. Adult neighbours gathered and always talked about someone, about something that had happened, of what would happen, of what was going on in Grozny. But the children – no, children tried to shut themselves off from it all. I asked, 'Mommy, can I sleep in my pyjamas? I am sick of sleeping in these clothes'. Though now, funny as it might seem, I still have the habit, after the war, sometimes I can go to bed in my clothes without any problem, it seems normal to me.

I can tell you about one incident. During the sweep-up operations, I don't know why, but they took many people, killed people, there were a lot of cases like that. There was a guy, at that time I was already 14, we met when we went to have our passports done. We made friends, I can't say close friends, but still. He was a guy from our village. Once I heard that the military had taken him. He didn't have a father, his mother would go to Grozny every day and ask the army to give her his body for burial if he was no longer alive. For a week or two they kept telling her they didn't have him, and that there was no body, that they hadn't taken him, that she shouldn't come, that it was not safe for her. But it was her only son and her only child. And she wouldn't stop, she went there every day, she

would stay there until very late and then leave. About two weeks later they gave her the boy's corpse, well, he was killed, and no matter how they'd denied it, they'd had him. The guy was 14 years old. He could not even hold a weapon, let alone fight. It was scary the way they killed him, because his body was maimed, his nails had been torn off, he was scalped, his legs and arms were broken, there were burns of various degrees on his body. After that I didn't feel like talking at all for a month, but I couldn't show my parents that I was suffering, I didn't want my mom to worry, I didn't want to add to her worries. I had to hide it all the time. And I even stopped drawing and writing at that time, I guess I needed time to store up fresh energy, by that stage my strength had been exhausted. I don't know where it came from each time.

After the first campaign most Russians left our village. As soon as the war started, many people started leaving. But in Grozny, as Grozny was bombed first, more Russians and other nationalities died there than Chechens. During the sweep-up operations Russian neighbours, there were many cases, when they defended their neighbours when the soldiers tried to take them away. I remember an old Russian woman was hit with the butt of a rifle for standing up for a Chechen guy. And it was already considered something extraordinary, 'Oh, a Russian woman stood up for him, can you imagine!'

I remember once when we, the children, we were upstairs, and my mom and grandpa were watching TV downstairs, and they were showing the dead and naming the districts. And I knew they were watching it, and I could hear they recognized someone. And then I heard them say my father's name. And mom heard it. I didn't go downstairs, I just sat there. I didn't want to see my mother. I knew that she would have a terrible face, and if I saw it, it would be too painful, even more terrifying than my dad's possible death, because there were many of us, but my mom was alone. I remember mom didn't say anything. She just started packing. They told her, 'You wanna go there? Everything is blocked there, Grozny is closed, it's being actively bombed, are you nuts? You've got five children, think about the children!' I think mother didn't hear anything, she wasn't

thinking at all at that moment, she was just going to make sure that that message was not true. I know she didn't believe it. But at the same time there was a war going on. And everything was possible. She got dressed and came upstairs, hugged us, 'If I can, I'll come back today, if not, tomorrow'. I didn't look at her, I was only thinking how not to – that I shouldn't burst out crying now, because if I did, she would know that I had heard it, and she could also become hysterical or something. And so she left.

Later she told us that she went out of the house and ran. A driver told her, 'I'll take you to Grozny, but I won't drive into the city, after you do as you please'. They were really bombing there, it was understandable he didn't want to drive inside. And he took mother off there. She went into Grozny on foot, and she walked home till night. But Dad was all right, it turned out that they had made a mistake with everything, that man looked very much like my dad, and the district was the same. Then she had to run back, but everything was blocked, and then she had a fit of hysteria, because she had five children and she couldn't get to them. They said that those roads could be blocked for a month. Two days later she nevertheless managed, by a roundabout way, on foot and by car, somehow she went through it all and came back home. She said that father was all right. After that incident, about two weeks later, we returned home.

Mom used to make a lot of pickles: tomatoes, cucumbers, about fifty jars of each. And then there were jams, salads. I remember she gave these pickles to Russian soldiers. They were such young boys. There was a time during the second campaign when they were quite young boys. It was Spring or Summer already, they came to the village, and of course there was the OMON as well, adult men, but the bulk of Russian soldiers were boys. Then people really felt sorry for these young guys, because it was obvious that they didn't need it, they said themselves, 'We don't want to be here, we don't need it all, we feel bad here'. One guy said, 'I want to go home, just to see my mother'. They were starving. I remember how they picked apricots and how they ate them!

There was a period, it lasted for a few months, they would come and knock at people's doors at night. You opened and saw Russian soldiers, one person, sometimes two, not more, they came one after another, not to frighten, but to ask, 'Can you give me a piece of bread at least? Just a piece of bread'. And people gave. Sincerely, they did it sincerely. And the neighbours talked, 'Have they already come to you? And such a boy came to us'. And so they came. People talked, how sorry they felt for them, for these guys, and why those who had a lot, why they treated them like that. That is people started asking questions, it means, not everyone there wants the war, not everyone is like that, there are people that feel bad, who are really suffering from it all.

I think, when we were all together, it was not so scary, because you were in one place with all your family, and you knew, that if something happened, it would happen to everyone. The most terrible thing was to be alone, to be without somebody. Then you lost the meaning of life. Why live? Live for yourself, live alone? I didn't see any sense in it.

Magomed, 27 years old

Then, during the first war, there was fear, when the planes appeared, the fighters. The first war was different from the second one, because there were trench battles all the time, that is, everyone knew if it started somewhere, everyone needed to leave the village. They left, but when everything calmed down, people returned. You could live normally. We had a small market in our village, there were cars with rebel fighters, they bought food, cigarettes, and the federals' armoured vehicles were also there. They didn't shoot at each other, didn't kill. There were rebel fighters in the village, and not far from the village there was the federals' checkpoint, and they were just driving by. It was good compared to what was going on in 1999.

During the second war there were bombings everywhere, anyone could sense the attitude of the federals towards them, but during the first war there were no enemies. When the first

explosions occurred, those were deep bombs, we ran to the basement – those who had time to. And the neighbours across the street from us, a bomb hit their house, and six people died there. I remember Magomed, almost the same age as me, he was the only one that they didn't pick up in pieces, as they did with others and then they buried them the next day. That was 14th August. After that I remember the Khasavyurt Agreement. Lebed was our saviour then.

The war ended. There was school in September 1996. In September the war seemed to be over, but then suddenly a helicopter appeared, and we had such a fright! I've never been that frightened before. The teacher tried to calm us down, she was saying, that 'everything is over, don't be afraid, they won't be bombing'.

Teachers didn't get any salary, some refused to work, that's why we started paying some kopecks each month for every student. That was in 1999. So it means that in 1996, 1997 and 1998 they worked for free. Now I am surprised, they didn't get a kopeck, but worked.

Sweep-up operations – that's when we got what was going on. Our village was blocked, and no one was let out. They let people in, but didn't let anyone out. My father's cousin and the head of the administration was allowed to leave. People would order food, and there was a truck that delivered the food we ordered. The village was totally blocked. We knew already that something was going to happen in the village, because the draftees said it would soon be a nightmare here. And rebel fighters climbed down the mountains to our village, in small groups, 10–15 people at a time, they were hungry, they could hardly stand. People gave them food, changed their shoes and clothes, and those who had passports returned home through other villages and woods. In the morning on 4th March, it was 6.40 a.m. the soldiers told us and everyone they met, 'Leave the village, it will soon be a nightmare here'. The soldiers gave warnings... We all gathered. We could see some rebel fighters in the streets, they couldn't even stand, they were sitting on a bench, I remember one looked at us, and he couldn't even hold his head up, and he said in Chechen, 'Forgive us, we are so sorry, but we are not to blame, we were framed as well'. I can still remember

these words. He saw children, women, old men were leaving the village because of them.

There was about two kilometres from the village to the commandant's office, and between the village and the commandant's office there were fields allocated for housing construction. We thought they would let us go. No, they said, men from 10 to 60 years old are not allowed to go through the checkpoint. The others can go. I was 13 then, they were not letting me through, and they were not letting my father go. And mother couldn't bring herself to go with my sister and brother, just like everybody else who stayed with their sons, husbands, brothers. There was a whole village, and there we were in the open air, on 4th March, waiting for what would come – sweep-up operations, rebel fighters, they would catch everyone and we would all return or they would let us go. We were told in the evening that we could return, everything was fine, there wasn't anyone. We returned to the village, the rebel fighters were there, they asked, 'Why are you back?' It turned out they hadn't checked the places where the rebel fighters were.

In the morning we left the village again, but they didn't let us go anywhere. We were standing in the open air, and they weren't letting anyone approach us. Behind the commandant's office there were people from nearby villages, relatives, they brought food, but they didn't let them come to us. For two days we drank water from puddles, and some soldiers, Muslim Tatars, secretly gave us some porridge. An order is an order, but they tried to help us. The 5th March out in the open, the 6th, the 7th – they were keeping us there as a human shield. The commandant's office was behind us, and in front of us... they didn't move because we were there. On the 9th March, when they learnt that everything was under their control, they let us go. But about 1,500 thousand people died there, rebel fighters, and on the federals' side – 600 people, according to official data, but there were many more. The fighting continued for three weeks, the village was completely destroyed. After that we moved to my Aunt's place, then again to our Grandparents'. From there we moved to Ingushetia. We lived in a tent camp, received only humanitarian aid. We lost everything we had. We didn't have

the time to take anything, it was impossible to take anything. We lived in Ingushetia for two years. Then we moved to a temporary accommodation centre in Sernovodsk. That whole time is connected with sweep-up operations, I remember it was happening already at that time. Sweep-ups all the time, sweep-up, paper checks, people were taken away, tortured. That was the second war. This is what I remember.

Aslan, 24 years old

When they started bombing our villages, schools were closed, kindergartens were closed. We tried to leave the village, because we realised that the war had reached our border areas. Ingushetia was near, and we had relatives there. We tried to go to them, and when we were leaving during the bombing, I saw corpses lying on the roads for the first time. There was a car blown up, it had been shot at, an ordinary UAZ, there were corpses lying in it, there were women's corpses, two men. Dad had an old car, a 'kopeika', we took our documents, we didn't take any belongings, and left for Ingushetia, we went to our relatives and lived there. There were many other relatives of ours who were also staying, it was very uncomfortable, there were 15–16 people in each room. We were lying in piles, sleeping at night. And it was very dirty – we all caught scabies. After that my father said it was impossible to live like that, that we wouldn't live in these conditions. We didn't have money to rent rooms for a hundred dollars, that's why two months later my father decided we would return to the village, even though the Russians were there, and even though there was war. And we returned and continued to live in our house. It was half-destroyed, half-habitable, there was no gas or light, and we stoked the stove with firewood.

I remember it was a very boring time, there was nothing to do. My parents didn't let me out anywhere, it was too scary to go out into the street, because there were Russian soldiers everywhere, machinery everywhere, almost in every yard somebody was being buried. There was a river near us, and I took the cattle to the watering

place. It was the only entertainment we had. Well, and of course, we played with my brothers, I only had one brother then. And we also had fun collecting cartridge cases. We ran around abandoned vegetable patches and orchards, ate the fruit. But I remember it was scary and dangerous, the situation was tense. We sat at home, we had candles, a battery-powered radio, we listened to the radio. When father stopped listening to the news, we listened to music channels, like 'Europa plus'.

During the first war almost everyone was fighting, all the male population was fighting, this was the first sign that people felt negatively towards the soldiers. We helped our soldiers, the rebel fighters, all those who fought, in every possible way. I remember my mother cooked all the time because her cousins, young guys, fought. There were sweep-up operations almost every day at our place. People would come in in their dirty boots and walk on the carpets, on the beds, that was their favourite – to climb on the beds in their dirty boots, the soldiers had such a habit of doing that. We always dreamt of doing something, when we were little, of jabbing them somehow, of doing something like that. Didn't have enough courage though. Though we were little, we saw only bad things. I don't remember ever looking kindly at a soldier. People disappeared, there were many people missing, and it was impossible to expect that we could, in some way, think positively of the soldiers.

What is a sweep-up operation? Soldiers enter from the four sides of the village, from the four corners and search all the streets simultaneously in ranks, so that no one can run to another street, they come into your homes and search. They had specific objectives, when they were looking for someone, and also scheduled regular checks not to let people relax. It was both intimidating and aimed at making people fear these sweep-up operations, fear helping anyone, fear giving shelter to the wounded. We had a secret basement in our house. And they were always looking for basements. As soon as they found a basement, they looked inside – it was dark, and they would throw a grenade in there without figuring out what was in there, because they were afraid of climbing down. They didn't know who was there, but their favourite tactic was to throw a grenade in. So,

in our neighbours' house they threw a grenade into their basement with an old woman in. Her relatives got tired of carrying her back and forth, because they had to take her down into the basement every time bombing started. So they fitted out the basement, set up a fireplace there, she lived there, and her elder daughter lived with her, was with her all the time. They looked in there, saw there was someone and threw a grenade in. Everyone was torn to pieces there, I remember my father tried to collect what was left from them into a flour bag. So these were the sweep-up operations, with completely simultaneous searches of the streets, starting at the end and reaching the middle. Then there were buses, those detained for checks were loaded into the buses and taken to the commandant's office, some were tortured, some were released straight away...

When the war started, it was 1999, I was 11 years old, I was busy with the household, there were no classes at school. I grazed the cows, which was very dangerous, because all the fields around were mined, all the woodlands were mined. And boys got blown up, men did, the cattle were often blown up.

During the second campaign there was nothing left to bomb, the houses were destroyed, the forest was mined, that's why there were few bombings. The helicopters flew by all the time, I remember there was a helicopter depot in the field. Helicopters flew there, big passenger helicopters, they transported 'cargo 200' – corpses. Helicopters with corpses were white, and food helicopters blue or green, they carried food or people. We, the boys, liked watching the helicopters. We even tried to hit them with a stone, but we were just dreaming. This is what it was like the second time.

And the sweep-up operations were constant. There was an order to check all men from 10 to 60 years old (they were considered potential rebel fighters), and that's when they started detaining me, they detained me twice during the second campaign. Once they detained me, when we went to Ingushetia for food, and took me to the commandant's office. They checked my birth certificate, I didn't have a passport then. They just didn't believe I was 11, because I looked older.

It was 2003. They took me and five more guys, there were six of us altogether. We found ourselves in some basement, I didn't know where it was, because the basement was dark, there were no windows. At first our hands were tied and we were blindfolded. Then they removed the blindfolds, but it was very dark. I was 14 then, I was almost bearded, and the other guys were older than me. No one knew where we were. It lasted for 10–14 days, I don't remember exactly what happened, we were kept in the basement, every day they beat us up, gave us practically no food. They threw canned beef to us to mock at us, we couldn't open it with our bare hands, especially since they were tied up. They threw dogs, sheep dogs into the basement, the dogs bit us, I still have scars from those bites on my leg, on my body. This kind of torture. Those who were with me were tortured with electrical shocks, I escaped that. There were interrogations under torture, everyone heard the screaming. I and another guy, also a very young one, about 16 years old, the two of us were not tortured with shocks, we were beaten up, but not with shocks. It continued from day to day, I don't know exactly how many days passed. It was dark – you don't know, whether it's day or night in the basement. Then they dragged me out of the basement, I was in a very poor condition, everything hurt, was bleeding, the injuries were infected, my whole body swollen, my arm was dislocated, a shoulder joint. And they took me somewhere, I fainted while walking and came to somewhere on the road, near an abandoned farm. I was half-naked, my clothes were torn, I was all black, looked like an African or a miner. I came to, got up with difficulty, started walking, there were no cars, I guess I walked for about 8 hours with breaks, I rested. Then a car drove up, they put me inside, I said where I was from and they drove me home. The other five guys were never found, they were missing, no one ever saw them again, I was the last one who saw them. I spent a long time in hospital in Ingushetia, about a month and a half while it all healed.

Then a more peaceful time began, though there is still no peace in Chechnya now, but the tension, there was tension.

It is hard to find something positive when you hate absolutely everyone, the soldiers. Of course, we are all human and we

understand that there were good guys there as well, who didn't come through their own will, especially during the first war, the draftees. I remember there were cases – my uncle told me, he is no longer alive, he fought and he was killed a long time ago – that captive soldiers were children, what beard, they didn't even have any stubble yet! They sat crying all day. It was absurd to think of killing them, they were so helpless, just children. Of course, everyone understood that they were not soldiers, they were just boys, who had been taken, given a somehow functioning machine-gun and thrown here for quantity. I know many cases when during the first war the soldiers' mother came to Grozny, found their children in captivity, and they were given to the mothers no problem, as it was obvious that the mother found her child. I don't know, maybe I was partial, that's why I didn't notice any good soldiers during the second war. I know there were normal ones among them but... If you are a soldier, then, what the hell, you've come with a gun to my land, right? If you are a soldier, and you are told to get into a tank and shoot at that building it's unlikely you're gonna think there might be people there and you won't shoot. You don't see the people sitting in the building. You shoot, the shell hit the target and destroyed everything – you are free to go, and your conscience is clear. The same thing with a pilot, right? He might be a good family man, a good person. 'Bomb this section'. 'And what's there?' 'There are rebel fighters, go there'. He bombs and flies away, right? After that he will say, 'I am not to blame that there were children there, that my shell went through the basement and a kilometre of soil.'

I think that people who didn't want to fight, they could always desert and escape. Those who didn't want to kill, understood that they were shooting not only those who were armed and protecting their land, but also those who were sitting in the basements. That's why I can't think about who's good and who's bad simply. I guess for me a good soldier is one who came, saw what was going on here, and deserted, ran away somewhere, I don't know... such a guy would be a soldier for me, someone who understands everything and who did something about it, because he understood. And understanding that this is all bad, but doing it anyway, saying I have to take part in

it – this is different already. Even if he didn't kill anyone, but took part in the sweep-up operations, detained people who could have disappeared afterwards, even if he just detained, and others killed. Regardless he took part in it somehow, that's why I think there is a presumption of guilt here.

The second war was almost a contract soldiers' war because they didn't want to repeat what happened during the first war, didn't want to throw "pencils" here. The rebel fighters called draftees the 'pencils'. The 'pencils' stood in a row, and it was very easy to shoot them, they couldn't hide. This time Russia addressed this issue more skilfully, and during the second war everyone was a contract soldier, they were ex-policemen, or reserve soldiers who had served before. And those who participated in the second campaign, I consider to be people who went to war to make money. I am sure there were more thugs among them than good, real good guys, this is purely my personal opinion, some may disagree.

Arkadiy, 35 years old

Actually, I remember the first Chechnya being more like a concentration camp than a war because of all the beatings. If you hadn't got it in the neck at least ten times, then the day had been wasted. We lived together with a reconnaissance company. We'd been brought there, five signallers in all, and there were 46 of them. They had just returned from another sweep-up operation... Their lieutenant, they said he was from Grozny, so I mean a refugee. He fled the city together with his family, he'd had concussion twice, and a number of people from his company had died. Guys said that before the war he was a good, smiley man, but when we arrived... First of all, he couldn't speak after having concussion, he spoke very badly. Secondly, he only explained things with his fists, only with beatings. I remember he called me once, well he didn't actually call you... he sat in the store room drinking vodka, and then – bang! – there was a shot in the ceiling. You got there, 'Comrade Senior Lieutenant, did you call?' He would hit you in the forehead with his rifle – pow! And you knew at once what was expected of you. You took his money,

bought him vodka and snacks, brought it all back to him and he went on drinking. He sat drinking and shooting at the ceiling. But he didn't say a word. He was completely silent. The ceiling was full of holes. Well, he even shot officers. Soldiers with broken jaws were taken away all the time, every day someone was taken away.

The staff list said that there were 32 people in our company. 14 were under 'order of the government to restore constitutional order in the Chechen republic', and the other 16 or however many it makes, I don't remember, they were on the run. Even the lieutenant, the platoon commander. And one draftee deserted because he couldn't bear the hazing. Once 4 or 5 young guys arrived in the company. We were sleeping. The scouts woke up. 'Let's put the youngsters to the test', they said. We said, 'Go on, we don't care. Fire away.' So they made them get up, put them in a circle, and the 'boxing' began. They were put in a circle one by one, and one signalman was made to fight against a scout, to see who won. Once we woke up in the morning and there was not a single youngster in the company, they had all fled... in one night they had all ran away. Only one stayed, but he ran off as well eventually. That's why I remember the first war like a concentration camp rather than a war.

And then I found myself in Chechnya on 16th July, it was the time of Yeltsin's elections. We were taken there. We'd already started writing requests, we couldn't stay any longer, we were ready to go anywhere just as long as we got away from that hazing. To Chechnya, to Mars, anywhere, just as long as we got away from there. Our Sergeant Major was a good man. He said, 'Are you idiots? Well, where will you go? You'll all be done for there. Don't go!' He'd already been to Chechnya. He tried to talk us out of it any way he could, but in the end we went all the same. So we arrived. No one came to us to collect our votes of course. We were sure that this would be the end of the war because no one would vote Yeltsin in. You can't elect a man twice after all these things have been going on. But he was elected. And then we felt betrayed by the whole of society. Not by our country, not by our state – because the state had betrayed us when it had sent us, untrained 18-years-olds, all

the way over there. We felt betrayed by society, by our people. We really did feel like that then.

I guess I had been there for about three weeks when my mother arrived. She came to Mozdok and asked, 'Where is my son?' They replied, 'How the hell should we know? We have absolutely no idea!' They started looking for me. Found me in Chechnya. A warrant officer came and said, 'Come on, pack your things, you're off to Mozdok, your mother's arrived and is pestering everyone, go and calm her down yourself.' So I went to Mozdok.

My mom got there hitchhiking. Her colleagues at school had collected some money for her for the road, she spent nights at checkpoints, saw it all, she went through it all, the OMON checkpoints, their, their booze-ups. After that we couldn't speak for a long time. We couldn't even be around each other: We spent 10–20 minutes together and then started shouting at each other. She has her own problems – those of a soldier's mother. She took me home... I went home and spent some time with her. They gave me leave, so I went home. It was just after my father had fallen ill. I stayed for 10 days and then went back to Mozdok. The sergeant major met me: 'Arkadiy, is that you?' I had brought him a bottle of vodka, I put it on the table and said, 'It's me.' 'Well!' he said. 'What an idiot. Everyone else is trying to get out of here and you've come back. Why did you come back? I've already written 'unauthorized absence from military unit' in your file. I didn't think you'd be back.' And he came up to my mom himself and said, 'Here is your son's draft card, take him away from here, get him as far away from here as goddamn possible, then he'll survive.' But I decided I didn't want to desert. I still wanted to serve the rest of my service to the end. Seeing as I was already there, there was nothing I could do about it. And anyway, the other guys stayed so why should I run away? So I went back.

I went back to our barracks but there was no one there anymore. The whole company had been sent to Chechnya. And those who weren't in Chechnya were on the run. So I stayed there alone, and I think I lived there alone, on my own for about a month and a half. I hardly slept in the barracks at all, I sometimes went into the steppe,

spent the nights in the bush and hung around there, I came to the unit just for meals. I lived in the hospital for a week, I think. There were two guys from our company there. I went to visit them and said, 'Guys, let me stay with you.' So they took me in. The doctors turned me out at night, but I hung around during the day, ate my meals there, took a shower. Otherwise there was no shower, or sauna. I lived there for a while and then August 1996 came around. The Chechens had already occupied Grozny, everything was already patently clear. On about 10th August they started forming a composite battalion from all the people left in Mozdok, all the rubbish – cooks, signallers, mechanics, doctors, all of them were gathered into that composite battalion.

On 19th August they were sending us off, we were in formation in the square, they were giving us a 'A Slavic Farewell'. We turned around, marched to the runway, the helicopters were waiting for us, and then I suddenly saw our postman running across the square with an envelope. He ran up to me, says, 'Here, your father died.' Another 20 minutes and it would have been too late. He made it in time... good guy... when he got the wire he knew at once what it meant and ran after me straight away. Everyone was flying to Grozny, and me, I was going back for my father's funerals. The battalion was crushed once it got to Khankala, as soon as they landed. The helicopter landed and they were shot at straight away. And then after that there was some other trouble and out of 96 people only 42 came back... I know this for sure, I was told later. And I went home for a second time. I arrived just in time for my father's funeral. Dad chose the right time to die... well done to him... a day later and that would have been it, I would have been killed out there. You can feel it, you know it, I mean I knew I would have been killed out there.

So I stayed at home. I stayed ten days longer than I was supposed to. I mean I had ten days leave but I stayed for twenty. But that was nothing, not even worth mentioning, because leave was banned in Mozdok, because no one ever came back. I don't know why they let me go, 'my dad died, my mom died' – they didn't give a damn about that, no one was let out of there. And those who left didn't come back earlier than 4 or 5 months after their leave finished, only for

a discharge... and I was only 10 days late, so what was there to talk about?

I went to the Commandant's office here in Moscow to have my leave papers stamped 'arrived – left': 'Can you stamp my papers? I've already bought a ticket to Mozdok, here is my ticket, and like a white swan I'll fly home, stamp it!' They said, 'But you are late, your leave finished.' 'I know, I'm 10 days late, what does it matter? Put the stamp that I left, and that'll be it. I'll be in Mozdok in a day.' I replied. 'Just a moment,' they said. 'Wait a minute.' The lieutenant left and then came back saying, 'It's all right, everything's fine.' I said, 'Have you sorted it?' 'Yes, yes, we've settled it, come with me, there's just one more formality.' I followed him, we came to the office of the Moscow Commandant. The lieutenant said, 'Wait here', went into the office then came out and said, 'All right, let's go.' He brought me to the basement, handed me over to the officer on duty and said, 'Take this one, we've caught another 'lyzhnik'¹. He meant me. 'Put your belt, laces and smertnik (a cartridge case with a serviceman's ID needed in case of his death – *editor's note*) on the table!' And I couldn't understand a thing: 'What 'belt, laces, smertnik'? I've got to catch the train. I'm running late. Give me the stamp and I'll be off.' 'Hey, soldier, you didn't get it? Your belt, laces, smertnik, on the table!' They took me to Lefortovo, to the commandant's regiment, opened a desertion case and put me into the lockup. I guess I was there for about two weeks. An investigator came and said, 'Here, sign this.' In reality a soldier is a slave, it's the lowest level of slavery, you don't decide anything. They decide everything for you...what to do, how to live, where to live, what to eat, when to get up, to piss or shit, like... everything. But for some reason, at that specific moment I decided to read that paper, I don't know why. They shouted at me, 'Sign it!' – so you take it and sign it. You have absolutely no free will, but I read it and it said that a certain private Pupkin had been detained at Belorussky train station by a police squad when he ran away from the army...something like that... I said, 'Comrade captain, I am not a private, I am not Pupkin, I was not detained, I came myself.'

¹ 'Lyzhnik' army slang for 'deserter' (*translator's note*)

He looked at me 'Of course, that's not you.' He wanted to trick me, wanted me to sign like an idiot, and I would get three years of penal service, as they used to give back then. And he carried on the investigation for about three months while I was transferred from the guardroom. I ended up then with such a bunch of losers, at a Servicemen Assembly Point – a SAP. They gathered all the deserters there, guys from hospitals, guys who'd run away from Chechnya or who had wandered off from their units.

There was a guy, he had been wounded near Bamut. He lay there for a day and after that some soldiers from his group picked him up by chance and took him to hospital. He was seriously wounded in his back. He stayed in hospital for about two months and was then granted leave to go home after his injuries. He went into the building, rang the doorbell, his father opened the door, saw his son and fainted. 'Dad, what's up with you?' he asked. 'Why? what's happened? We got a 'died in battle' notice for you, and we buried you!' He took him to show him the grave, 'Here it is. We buried you.' Well, some piece of flesh was sent to them, and they said, uh, this is your son. And they buried him. So he decided to go back to the unit but the unit was no longer there, it had been disbanded. This is the kind of people that found themselves there, for instance.

There was a guy who'd been in captivity. He was captured and spent a few months in captivity. He told me, 'It was all right, it was fine in captivity. The guys in charge were all right.' He worked for them. They fed him, didn't beat him up. It was not captivity, but rather like he lived with them. Then they put him in the trunk of a car (he was somewhere in the mountains), drove him through all of Chechnya, brought him somewhere, gave him money for the ticket and said, 'That's it, go on, get away from here.' He came to Moscow and then found himself in the SAP.

We had work duties. Our company was called 'special freight' – we transported coffins. That is, everything that leaves Chechnya comes to Moscow. A zinc coffin arrives, you go to a train station, collect the coffin from the freight depot, put it on a truck, take it to another airport, to another train station, and then send it somewhere to Omsk, Tyumen – somewhere 'back home'. If it's in

Moscow, you take it to the address. That was the worst thing. For three months we transported one or two coffins a day, regularly, there wasn't a single day when coffins didn't arrive.

I guess I did that for about three months while my desertion case was under investigation. Then, when the case was closed they told us: 'Guys, you're lucky you were put into this Servicemen Assembly Point, you're not gonna go to Chechnya anyway. You'll all serve in the Moscow military circuit'. And I didn't feel like going to Chechnya at all any more, I'd had enough. Then the order came. Me and ten other people were called. 'Come on.' they said, 'let's go!' I thought it was Nizhny Novgorod. That day my mother and grandma had come to see me and they looked at the order. They saw it said: MU (military unit – *editor's note*), the city of Mozdok-7; they were sending me to the same place. My mom and grandma made a scene, they said, 'We are not letting him go!', and I didn't feel like going myself...it was November 1996, the war was over, the troops were being withdrawn, there were none of my guys there, I didn't want to go. They tried to send me to Chechnya on the quiet twice more. Both times my mother and grandma stood up for me. They just didn't let me go, and that was that. They said, 'We won't let him, you can go to hell, but he is not going anywhere.' In the end I was transferred to Tver, to the anti-aircraft battalion at the end of November – beginning of December 1996. And there I finished my service. I finished it, got discharged, came home, resumed my studies in the university, graduated, and received a degree. Once I had got my degree, two weeks later I came home. I turned on the TV and saw that the second Chechen campaign had started. I went to the recruitment centre and enrolled as a contract soldier and went to the Second Campaign. Just like that. In November 1999 I signed a contract with the Taman battalion, with the motorized infantry regiment. I signed the contract and in mid-December we were sent to Chechnya.

It was an irrational decision, absolutely irrational. Because I went back after all that, and I remember, I passed out, it was freezing in the truck. It was full of holes, draughty, middle of winter, and it was cold. We were transporting a corpse, well, a zinc coffin in this truck.

And we were driving along the Garden Ring passing casinos with Mercedes parked outside. I had only one wish: to have a machine gun, for them to give me a machine gun. I wanted just to drive about Moscow and kill everyone in sight...what the hell, kill everyone, because it was impossible – we've got corpses here, and there are casinos and Mercedes! I sort of lost my senses at that time. When I got home, I just couldn't settle back into this world. I studied in the university for two years, but I didn't really study, I was just loafing around. But I held out for two years. Then I graduated. So what? Go work as a lawyer? Push papers from one place to another? That was not for me. And right at that moment Basayev and Khattab attacked Dagestan. And I had no doubts, not a single doubt – I got up and went straight to the recruitment centre I realized that for me everything was there. I was there. I should be there. It was as if my body had come back from the war but my mind had stayed there. So I sent my body back to where my mind was. It was not about Chechnya, not at all. I didn't give a damn about where the war started. In Chechnya? Let it be Chechnya. If it had been Krasnoyarsk – I would have gone to Krasnoyarsk, if it had been Moscow – then Moscow. The point was it was war. There were lots of guys like that, those who were drafted in the first war, and returned as contract soldiers in the second war. Those who had not become alcoholics in those two years, most of them returned to that war.

I didn't tell my mom or grandma. I told them I had gone to oil rigs in Siberia. Well, my mother understood everything for sure. But Granny didn't believe that I had gone to make oil either, she watched TV, all the news from Grozny, and in one of them she saw me. She called my mom, 'I told you he'd gone to war.' she said.

I was enlisted as a signalman again. When I arrived at the division and entered the barracks the first thing I saw was a man with a smashed up face tied to the grid of the armoury. His hands were tied to the grid, and there were skis on his feet, and a tank track hung on his chest with the word '*samokhod*' (AWOL – *translator's note*). *Samokhod*, *lyzhnik* – this is army slang for a deserter, for runaways. The guy didn't want to go to Chechnya, didn't want to write a request, and this was how they taught him to love his Motherland.

Signal platoon. We spent two weeks getting drunk on our advance. All these boozers went downstairs to the basement, they broke the floor in the barracks, and didn't go out of there once during two weeks of drinking. I still took part in everyday life more or less. The entire preparation for dispatch to Chechnya consisted of sewing labels on our backpacks and putting our names on them. Not once did we go shooting. Not once did we go on field training. There was no training at all. None. The machine guns we got were old. No one could shoot. But we had our labels sewn on all right! Twice a month we had a military inspection. A commission from the Ministry of Defence arrived and checked if the troops were ready for dispatch to war. How we shot, what we could do – no one cared. Everyone looked at the labels. A general came and said, 'Your labels are sewn on with green thread and according to the charter it should be black.' The whole regiment went back to the barracks, cut off the green thread and sewed the labels on with black, and returned to the formation after lunch. Another general was there. 'You've got black thread,' he says, 'but in accordance with the charter it should be khaki.' All the regiment went back to the barracks, cut off the black thread and sewed on the labels with green again. The next day we went out into the square, a third general came, 'Why are your labels sewn on three centimetres from the edge when it should be five centimetres?' The whole regiment returned to the barracks and sewed on the labels five-centimetres away. So we busied ourselves with this bullshit for about two or three weeks and after that we went to Chechnya. While we were on our way, 13 people ran away. It was forbidden to go out at stops. A sentry was posted, but 13 people got away anyway. We arrived in the hero-city of Mozdok. I look, it's all the same, a *déjà-vu*. The same machinery...well, not exactly the same, but the same trains with smashed machinery. We spent the night there and in the morning the whole regiment went to Chechnya, somewhere to the suburbs, into the fields near Grozny. We stayed there for a week. Again, no one trained anyone. I was in the signal platoon, I told the platoon commander, 'Let's go and sort out these machine guns, no one knows how they shoot.' But we never did.

Then we were transferred to somewhere close to village G. There, I remember, two of our soldiers disappeared, and the commandant decided that the Chechens had stolen them, so we went to G. We came in several armoured carriers to demand our soldiers back. We came to the central square, five or seven cars. Ten minutes later the whole square was filled with people. A few thousand people, bearded, armed...well armed, properly dressed. Women, children, everyone climbed out and came to the square. They thought we had come for a sweep-up operation. They weren't particularly happy about it. And we weren't happy about it either, we just had five cars, and there were a few thousand of them. We asked, 'Who are you?' They answered, 'We're not rebel fighters. We're not on your side, but we're not rebels either. We are defending ourselves. We don't want rebel fighters here, and we don't want you here either. Come on, get out of here. We don't have any of your soldiers!' They brought their boss, the head of the village administration I guess. He said, 'We don't have your soldiers...I can show you where they are, let's go look for them in the ruins.' I remember he had split fingers. He said the rebels had taken him, they came a month ago just like us, they seized him by the scruff of the neck, put his fingers in a doorpost and jammed them. So they were all split.

The commandant got nervous of course. We were also on edge. The commandant ordered to set a few mines on the village periphery. We set a few mines and got out of there. Now I understand what we were doing. No doubt, the Hague tribunal complains about us, for sure. But then it was scary, and if there was an order to start shooting and smash the village into smithereens together with the women, children, and everyone, you did it easily just to get out of there. I'm trying to explain how this war was prepared for and how it was carried out.

So we looked for these soldiers. It turned out the soldiers had run away, they reached a police checkpoint with a machine gun. If they hadn't taken the gun, no one would have looked for them... who the hell needs them...so they disappeared, to hell with them... it would have been put down to battle losses. But a machine-gun is a machine-gun.

From there we were transferred to Grozny. I think it was the second storming of Grozny, it started on 17th January. I was in B's headquarters – he's an astounding guy, just a great guy. Of course, everyone treated officers like...officers were nicknamed 'jackals', no one called them anything else, 'jackals' and that was that. But this one was a great guy. He even asked me once, 'Have you had anything to eat today, son?' I answered him, 'No, sir, comrade general.' 'Well, never mind, it's all right, you'll eat after the war.' he said. 'Yes, sir, comrade general.' I answered.

Well, you say a storm, OK, let it be a storm. We were in the second echelon, there was no storm as such, as Basayev had left, they didn't defend Grozny then. We reached as far as...I don't know how far we reached, no one told us anything. And then they declared our victory, at the beginning of December 2000. They announced we had won, taken Grozny, there would be no more war. Then they announced our victory ten more times, I guess. Well, at that time there was some cease-fire, they stopped shooting for a couple of days.

After that, I think we were transferred to village A. nearby. I remember one incident there. We stayed there for a day or two, for a couple of days, and when a new shift came to replace us, when we were leaving the village we came under fire. And we started shooting in response, naturally, and smashed the houses on the outside of the village. We called for armoured cars, they destroyed the houses in the outskirts of the village. We left and then I returned two days later. I was still a messenger. It turned out that when we started shooting, we killed an 80-year-old man and a girl of 12, I think, by chance, the shell hit the house wall and they died there. I know for sure it was not me who killed them, but nevertheless, I was shooting there as well.

Then we came to the checkpoint. A commander of another platoon came. We got along well with him. I said to him: 'I don't wanna stay in this infantry, come on, take me to your platoon'. And he went and bought me out from the company with two cans of beef, and I continued with him in a grenade launcher platoon. We stayed at the checkpoint with this grenade launcher platoon for a week, and then we were taken into the mountains in the first helicopter.

They brought us there, dropped us off, and then the helicopter returned, took the 9th company, and came under fire. I remember it landing, and it was famous throughout Chechnya because it was the only white one. It landed, the door opened, and Oldie, my friend from 9th, leaps out, doesn't wait for the flight mechanic to put up the ladder. He'd hardly opened the door, he jumped out of there, fell to his knees and started kissing the soil. 'Oldie, what's up with you?' I asked. And he couldn't utter a word, and he was so pale: 'Agggghhh, have a look!' He pointed at the helicopter, I looked and saw there was a trace of machine-gun burst all along the helicopter from the nose to the very tail, and two blades had been torn off. They had been fired at somewhere in the mountains. The pilots said, 'Guys, we can't fly in this helicopter, we are leaving it for you to guard.' They called another helicopter, got in it and flew off. So, there were about 200 people in those mountains and a helicopter, and they turned the lights on it and said to us, 'Guard it.' We stood there thinking, 'Why the heck do we need this helicopter? There are only Chechens around. And it's in good shape. Only the blades need to be replaced. It would be such luck for them to get hold of a helicopter.'

We went to the checkpoint from there. Stayed there for a week or maybe two. There was a guy called Arkasha there. We were from the same place and what's more we had the same name. I didn't get along well with that Arkasha, he was a real swine. He beat up Drum all the time. He was a drug addict and an ex-policeman. Drum was a real good guy. Arkasha pushed him around all the time. We hated it. Guys like us, contract guys, we kept ourselves to ourselves, and the draftees kept themselves to themselves. They were hazed no doubt, but we didn't get involved in it, we didn't interfere with their hazing. And if a contract soldier started hazing and pushing the young ones around it was considered real bad. But that one pushed the guys around. He was 38 years old, but said he was younger. He used to say, 'I don't need this war of yours, I've got enough money to buy the whole of Chechnya. I am a cop, I worked in a cop shop, I've got so many bribes that I don't need anything at all. But, he said, 'the security department had opened a case against me for bribery, so

I came here, I need a medal, to get let off.' So he fought for a medal there. A bastard, a cop, and a drug addict.

I remember waking up once, I opened my eyes and saw a man tied up to a tree. I said, 'Who's that?' They answered, 'It's a prisoner, he's been caught. Arkashenka has brought a prisoner.' I said, 'What prisoner?' This 'prisoner' looked like no prisoner to me but a hopeless drug addict, a goner, of unidentifiable age, he was shaking, he had withdrawal symptoms, he was feeling unwell. Arkasha was standing at the checkpoint, saw this body walking along the bridge. He asked, 'Where are you going?' The guy said, 'I am going to see my brother, to get a fix, I really need it, I've run out of heroin, I'm getting withdrawals.' Arkasha asked, 'And where does your brother live?' And starts wheedling him into telling him about his brother to go and get the heroin, because he was a drug addict himself and was shooting. So Arkasha took the guy by the scruff of the neck, brought him to us and tied him up to the tree. And the tree was so crooked, I don't know how he could stand there, he stood there all night tied up. Then Arkasha said, 'Let's go shoot him.' I said, 'I won't let you.' We nearly started shooting each other then, had a real bad fight, but I didn't let him shoot that man. Then we still called the battalion commander, handed this man over to the commander, he took him somewhere, I don't know what happened to him next.

While we were there, our complete victory was announced again and it was decided that we would withdraw from the mountains. Our regiment commander was a coward, a bastard, and an alcoholic. He went to check out the road, and we entered village Sh., just to have a look, well, for looting. We needed some camp beds, some warm bedding. It was winter, and we lived in the mountains – there were no dugouts, nothing, we slept on the snow. We entered the first house, and there was a young Chechen defusing a mine. 'Hi, guys.' he said and went on defusing. Our jaws dropped, 'We're gonna kill you now,' we said, 'you're a rebel fighter, we're gonna shoot you.' And he answers, 'Hey, come on, I'm no rebel fighter, I am a teacher, the rebels had a fortified point here, their first house.' And they really had armed the house well. There was a basement there, and a lot of ammunition had been left. 'I am

a teacher, really, I fought in the first war. Is your commander's name D-ov by any chance?' We were shocked. Well, we were an army, the Russian army, and some guy sat right in front of us defusing a mine and telling us our regiment commander's name. 'Yes,' we said, 'D-ov'. 'Well, send him my regards' he said, 'I fought with him here in the first war, he lost a whole battalion here, so you be careful with him. But I am not fighting now, I am a teacher, those guys left, and they've left lots of mines behind, and I want to defuse them, so they don't explode. The children are running around, I don't want them to get blown up.' And that was that. We made friends with him, we didn't shoot him, left him some cigarettes, some food. He was a good guy, young by the way, about 27 or 30 years old. We reported to headquarters that we had discovered an ammunition stock, told them all about it, that there were piles of ammunition. Then, two years later, I was watching TV: they showed our stock, showed all the same mines that the teacher had been sorting out, 'As a result of a special operation conducted by our brave special mission troops this and that were neutralized-found-destroyed...' Bla-bla-bla, what was destroyed? What did we tell you two years ago? Come and take it!

So this D-ov went to check the road. He went, looked at it, and came under fire. And he, the clever guy – well, he's a colonel, so he's a clever guy right? He sends a platoon to go look who fired at him, 'They fired at me from that hill, go have a look.' And this platoon went to the hill, and there were a thousand and a half rebels led by Khattab there. They went up there and saw that they had mined an area, but they were waiting for us from the other side, everything was ready just in case we came from that side. We came from the rear. So the platoon went over there, and almost all of them died.

Igor, a guy from my town, my best friend, he died there. We got to know each other here in Moscow at the recruitment centre He was my closest friend. There were three guys from my town, only three Muscovites in the whole battalion. And he died there. He got as close as 15 meters to them but they had a large-caliber machine-gun, so he got as close as 15 meters, he was close enough to throw a grenade, and was then hit by three shells at once. He fell down, right on the grenade.

When Igor died I felt I wanted to change the situation. That was a strange feeling. I wanted to kill all the Chechens in the world. All the women, children, old men, newborns, everyone. I wanted to kill them with my own hands. That was the moment when I went mad, I remember I could see myself from the outside. I remember it so clearly. Two days later I came back to myself but I remember those two days of madness very well.

So the whole platoon died there...well, and the commander ordered us to move the battalion and sent us all there. The fighting there lasted for three days. For three whole days the damned fighting continues. It was Stalingrad. It was the only time in my life when I saw the things they usually show in movies. And the only time in my life when I saw how if you stuck your finger out of the trench a metallic rain flew parallel to the ground. You couldn't lift a finger.

I think about 20 of our people died there and about 50 were wounded. Our sniper killed 13 people, crawled to the nearest bushes, laid down in the night, shot during the daytime, then crawled away at night, then crawled back out. He shot 13 people. He was put forward for the title of 'Hero of the Russian Federation', but since there were quotas for 'Heroes of the Russian Federation', somebody in headquarters got it and he was awarded with the Courage Order. For three days this terrible fighting went on, and in the end they just got fed up of us. We kept firing, we annoyed them and they took off and left by themselves. I don't know how but, according to the data of the radio interception, their losses were about 150 people. Well... killed or wounded, I don't know.

But again, our commanders, our very own commanders, if they had used their brains, they needed to withdraw the infantry from there and just level it all to the ground with artillery and that would have been it. If you're going to go to war, then fight it. I am not saying now who's right and wrong, who is on the side of good and who's on the side of evil, who's a goody-goody and who's bad and evil. If you're going to kill people, kill them with minimal losses on your side. Right? But in Russia no one ever counted soldiers, so for

a whole three days they pushed their way there with infantry. And the losses were huge.

A platoon commander was captured. I don't remember his name, I couldn't remember his name, we were on good terms. He died. The rebel fighters took his body, then the body was found. They carved something, cut out something on his chest, something like 'Allahu Akbar', something like that... but the problem was that the day before this platoon commander had written down the whole platoon soldiers' data with home addresses, phone numbers, and all that... the staff list. And this notebook was not found. The rebel fighters had all the personal data of this platoon. And, you remember, between the first and second Chechen war there were cases of abductions and tortures. There were cases when people came because of old stories, and killed someone, or abducted someone, or something else. Then I remember everyone got frightened, started tearing up their notebooks, notes they had made, started burning all the addresses. I don't have a single address from back then.

So we fought for three days, then we gained another victory and we were withdrawn. We were told there would be no more war. We started parading, sewing collars, other nonsense. In the end there was a riot, we said either send us to fight or send us home. They kicked us up the ass again but in the end they sent us home. I was sent in the first batch because I started making trouble, trying to get people to riot and stuff. We had the right, it was written in our contracts: 'Has the right to cancel the contract at any moment.' That means you can throw down your machine-gun right in the middle of a battle, and say that's it, I am breaking the contract – and they are obliged to send you home. Many people did. From there we were transferred to Kalinovskaya, and in Kalinovskaya they started discharging us. So they discharged me. I was among the first. That was thanks to the battalion commander again. I was lucky.

Ella, 71 years old

A wave of human grief, horror and indignation swept over us, 200 people a day came running. People didn't understand what to

do when their sons were being sent to war in Chechnya. Our first task was to calm people down, to find out what was happening, and then to help people figure out what their situation was. Of course it helped that at that time, American priests brought a whole car full of Bibles with black leather covers to us. I didn't even know where Chechnya was then, I'd never met a Chechen in my whole life. We made a map of Chechnya. We gave out Bibles to parents and said, 'Your son is there. Go and get him.' 'But how?' they asked. 'Think how. You want to save your son, don't you? So go and save him.' And people did.

And then I realised I was sending people God knows where, that I needed to go there myself and try to understand what it was. On 23rd February all the human rights organisations got together, whole committees of soldiers' mothers. We founded the organisation in 1991, we never called ourselves a committee but always a human rights organization, we were a civil organization. We took part in the congress in Moscow and there were peace-keepers there as well, and we all agreed to stop the war.

Legend has it that if two men fight and a woman throws a white scarf at their feet, the fight will stop. We decided to organize a 'White Scarf' event. Each of us went back to our cities, we went back to St. Petersburg, got some white cloths and went to Palace Square. People signed the cloths, I should mention that the military signed them as well. On the whole, it was all very humane. Then we created a route from the Kremlin to Grozny which we would travel along with these white cloths, visiting all the cities where soldiers were lying in hospitals. I didn't go then, I sent the mothers whose sons were in Chechnya. They took our banners, our flags, the cloths, and went, they went from the Kremlin to all these cities.

At that time there was one father who had asked us for help. His son, a cancer patient, was in Grozny with all his papers. There was one mother whose son had served in South Ossetia and was supposed to be discharged but instead had been sent to Chechnya and had disappeared. She said her son had disappeared but journalists had called from Chechnya and Ingushetia and told her that they had seen her son alive there, that she shouldn't lose hope.

We discussed the situation and I went with these parents so I could at least understand where I was sending people. To see the route, to see where it was dangerous and where not. We bought air tickets, flew to Minvody and hired a car together with some Chechens there. They were businessmen who lived abroad. When the war started it was a shock for them; they didn't know if their relatives were alive or not.

By that time it had turned out that the ill boy had been sent out of Vladikavkaz through 'Sputnik'. 'Sputnik' is a military unit like Kamenki in Vladikavkaz. Lots of disgraceful things go on there, and it's also now where troops are sent from to South Ossetia. The father headed there. He told us that he came to the Chief of Staff and showed the papers that proved his son was suffering from cancer but had been drafted to war. He was put in an armoured carrier and brought to Grozny. There they gave him his son and they went home together. I had already left by that time.

I went together with the other guy's mother to Nazran and started talking to people there. I saw the President's palace in Nazran, what a square! And I saw a factory, and in the basement of that factory there was an Ingush Committee of Soldiers' Mothers. The most interesting thing was, that there were a lot of journalists in Nazran. They met soldiers and brought important information from Chechnya. If they needed to pass something on to their parents they came to the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers, but no one did anything with that information. I tried to organise things so that they would work there, but the FSB told me, 'Get out of Ingushetia, or you'll have a hard time.'

So we went together with this mother to the Ingushetian press centre where information was also accumulated. I was telling the story of how her son had disappeared somewhere in the war, I looked back, she was standing behind me, and I saw tears running down her cheeks. I said, 'What happened?' It turned out that having heard her story some Chechens had come up to her and shoved some money silently into her hand – she showed me. By that time we had found out in the press centre that the journalists were going to drive to the village where her son had been seen. There was

only one vacant seat in the car, so we decided she would go. When she came to the village, her son wasn't there because the Chechen family which had picked him up wounded, had brought him only to show him and then gone back to Grozny. So the mother went to Mozdok (there was military staff there) to find out where her son was. She went to the military and they named the district where her son had last been seen, so then they went there. She was walking and saw some Chechen boys coming to meet her. She said, 'I am looking for my son.' She gave his name, and they said, 'Let's go over there.' She went with them and saw two young Chechens leading her son, it turned out they were sworn brothers already.

The story was as follows. The guys were caught up in the first battle in Grozny on New Year's Eve. It was foggy, there were no maps, nothing, they were completely unprepared. The boy was wounded, well, it wasn't serious but he fell and everyone went and left him. Some Chechen residents ran up to him and took him into their house. Then Chechen rebel fighters came to the house and asked if he had killed any of their guys. He said that he hadn't had time to. They told him, 'Go back to your guys then, we don't need you.' And he said, 'I can't go back.' And a Chechen woman adopted him and started sending messages to his mother here in St. Petersburg. At that time people in Grozny were very much afraid of 23rd February because they expected that on 23rd February all Chechens would be killed. And as the soldier's mother didn't reply to these messages the family got refugee status and they registered this boy as their son. The tragedy in that family was that the Russian military had killed their elder son. So the woman adopted him in exchange for the one who had been killed. She gave him back to his real mother and they returned home.

After that there were all sorts of different stories. When I returned, I had planned to mobilize people, to protest, to make a fuss. There was, for instance, one story. The first Chechen war wasn't recognized either by Russian residents or Chechen residents, there was no mutual hostility and there was a lot of talk about how Chechens differentiated between soldiers on the ground and the

Kremlin. And they saved soldiers because they were hungry and humiliated.

A march for mothers against the war in Chechnya was organized in Russia, and this march reached Nazran. I flew to the march in Nazran and at the recreation centre there I saw a hall crammed full with people. Besides mothers there were Buddhists. They wrote a 'Declaration of Non-Violence'. We adopted this declaration and everyone had a copy of the text which said that we were going to the combat zone, to the zone of violence, but that in response to violence, if we met any, we would not use violence. It was a very powerful declaration. By that time Dudaev had already sent a letter to the Russian authorities with a request for the war to be stopped. Parents from all over Russia whose sons had been killed and who knew about it came to Nazran. There were a few Buddhist priests, monks and peace-builders, they wore yellow clothes, their heads were shaven and they were beating tambourines. When we got into the buses to leave we saw that there were some trouble makers among us. We threw them off the buses but they got on again. From Nazran we went to the checkpoint by bus and car. And there they made us turn, the road to Grozny was straight but they made us turn to Sernovodsk. In Sernovodsk the local residents took us in to stay at their houses over night. When we arrived we organized a rally there. People cried and said, 'Thank you for trying to stop the war, we have been waiting for this. We are Russian citizens, we don't understand why they are fighting with us, why we are being killed?' I remember there was a bucket full of water in a Chechen house and when we were leaving the hostess told me, 'Look in the bucket.' I asked, 'Why?' She said, 'This is a superstition, it is so that you come back alive.' From Sernovodsk we walked on.

By that time a lot of journalists had died during the war. Two journalists from St. Petersburg, Felix Titov and Maxim Shabalin had disappeared there and my mission was also to try to find the journalists during that march. They were very brave. Felix was a photojournalist. There was a newspaper called *Mectnoe Vremya* then, where they published good articles. I was walking with photos of the journalists, and as a Catholic I had a poster with the Virgin

Mary holding a baby and the inscription 'Don't kill'. I was walking with this poster. We walked out of Sernovodsk and the Buddhists were beating their tambourines. We left very early, the weather was fine, it was warm. When we approached the border, there were mostly Russian mothers and fathers in the group, and we asked Ingush and Chechen men not to go with us any farther because it was dangerous for them. An order had been given to every dispatch of the military from Russia to Chechnya to shoot at all flesh, not to spare anyone, to detain men from 10 to 60 years old. Soldiers had testified to that. I think we had seven cars and buses and our column was walking. But we were badly organized. The military at the checkpoint held the last cars in the column. There were mostly Chechen and Ingush women in those cars and later we found them in hospital. It turned out they were put on the ground in the mud, it was March, and the military fired machine-guns over their heads saying, 'This is what you get for Vilnius.' It turned out they were the same troops who had suppressed and shot demonstrators in the Baltic republics.

But we didn't know about it, we were walking and we walked through Samashki. When we approached Samashki the helicopters fired at the village right before our very eyes. They were shooting at the houses. We approached Samashki and we saw cows and other animal corpses, some strange bags, mines or I don't know what, lying along the road. So we went into Samashki. People came running to us. They brought Chechen bread, they cried and thanked us for trying to stop the war.

There was a Russian military checkpoint before Samashki and they stopped the column. They were shocked by the negotiations with us. I knew from the Baltic events that the military were people used to violence and when they get the same in response they understand it, they are prepared for that. But they were always shocked when, say, in the Baltic republics or in Czechoslovakia people gave them carnations or when unarmed people were praying in the Baltic republics. Non-violence shocks them. And there we were with our Declaration of Non-violence. They didn't know what to do with us. While negotiations were under way I went to the trench to

see the soldiers, they were absolutely worn out, and I also talked to the military, explained that it was an unfair war. We moved on and were stopped near Achkhoy-Martan. It so happened that in the distance was a Chechen village and a field where we were, and there were tanks, heavy tanks, in front we saw the road, and the Chechen residents waiting for us, but we were stopped and surrounded by soldiers. The soldiers sat behind the wheels of our buses and drove them away to the tanks.

There was a long negotiation process, we tried to talk to the soldiers, to the officers. I remember a nice young officer, a Baltic type blonde. He was saying, 'I've stained my hands in Chechen blood up to the elbows, I will go on killing them.' He was being honest. I came up to the tank and there was a walkie-talkie, I started explaining that we had come with peace and asked them to let us go. In reply a drunk officer just swore – like a dog barking. When I came up to Chechens, took their Chechen bread and walked along the chain of soldiers saying, 'What are you doing here?' Some soldiers stood in silence crying.

Then it got dark, and I started praying with this poster saying 'Don't kill'. There were a lot of journalists with us – from Associated Press, Cheliabinsk TV reporters. And when it got dark, the military started, from this column of ours, started firing at Achkhoy-Martan. They fired with tracer shells. They were hoping, evidently, that the Chechens would shoot at us in response. And then they would proclaim that monstrous rebel fighters had shot Russian mothers and fathers. And I stayed on my knees praying the whole time. I saw fireworks go up in the skies over Achkhoy-Martan. Not shells, but flares. An ordinary firework display. Well, the Chechens knew what was going on.

The tension was great at that time, the Buddhists beat their tambourines. You know, it really kept us going. And you'd think, we got up early, had such a difficult journey, met with so many emotions – but we didn't feel tired at all. And suddenly the Buddhist tambourines fell silent. I turned my head and saw some huge people in black drive up in trucks, grab our Buddhists and throw them into a car like yellow rags. They grabbed the Buddhists and a few mothers

and took them away somewhere. And we were surrounded by soldiers with machine-guns. They drove up to our bus, the soldiers took the wheel and started shoving us into the buses with machine-guns, they lit up the tank searchlights and shoved us into the buses. Then they drove the column to, no one knew where. And it was then I was astounded by the Chechen women.

They were driving along the tank tracks, but the bus was a civil bus, such an old bus, and it kept getting stuck. Then they would force us off the bus, pull it out with ropes, an armoured carrier would drive up, pull the old bus harshly from the ditch, and then we would get in again and drive on. It turned out they were taking us to Ingushetia. As soon as we drove by checkpoint-1 'Ingushetia', and Ingush drivers had got into to take over the driving they pretended the car had broken, and the column stopped. And we jumped out at once and said, 'We are not going anywhere, we are in Russia.' At that time there was an Englishman with us and together with him we ran to the checkpoint to call the President's palace to tell them that the Buddhists had disappeared. So there was a line of civil vehicles. We were standing nearby and there were about seven armoured carriers. We weren't going to go anywhere, there was nothing they could do with us anymore. And there was a drunken officer sitting in an armoured carrier, he was ordered to deport us, or maybe to send these Chechen women to a filtration camp, and to throw the Russians back into Russia. I guess that was the plan. But we ruined that plan. While we were conducting these complicated negotiations some searchlights suddenly appeared from the Chechen side. Well, it was dark and you could see everything very well clearly. We thought they were after us. A few armoured carriers drove up, soldiers jumped out of them and said, 'We've come to save you from our 'Hanses' (they called their officers 'Hanses'). Chechens told a lot of stories about how low the military had fallen, with all the looting, and the robbery, even of soldiers murdering officers.

We told these guys, 'We're safe, what are you gonna do when you get home? We can stand up for ourselves, we're not scared. Go back and don't kill anyone.' After that the column moved to Nazran under the protection of the Ingush OMON. The participants of the march

went to sleep, and the Ingush, young guys, were guarding them. The Englishman and I went to the President's Palace and started calling everyone and telling them what had happened, writing letters to the Prosecution Office and the General Prosecution Office. The next day the prosecutors started working with us, we wrote reports on the crimes and then organized a picket in Nazran.

The second Chechen war descended upon a completely different society, both in Chechnya and in Russia. It was met by no civil resistance. Propaganda had created an image of a Chechen enemy that was selling people and human trafficking on both sides was by that time well established. It was around that time that an investigator from Kolpino approached us. He was pleading a case against a Chechen who had been charged with the abduction of a man, but as the case wouldn't be successful in court, he asked if we knew of a soldier that could be used in an exchange. At that time it was still common practice, the 'Lebed mission' did it, there was the RF presidential Commission for POW exchange. Journalists were held hostage, foreigners were abducted. And there were even rumours that there was an exchange in Grozny with different rates for foreigners, journalists and soldiers. I told that investigator that we didn't know of any such soldier, at that time there was no information like that. He said, 'Can I send the father of this Chechen, Magomed to visit you?' The father came, he was a very decent man, and told us that his son was being held in *Kresty* (*Kresty* is the pre-trial centre of the Federal Penitentiary Service in St.Petersburg – *editor's note*). He said that if he was guilty they should try him, but if not he suggested an exchange. And the father started calling his acquaintances, his wife went to the exchange in Grozny, found people who were offered for sale and passed this information on to the father. Then he called their relatives but he had a strong Chechen accent; many of them simply didn't understand what he wanted and hung up on him. Finally, he found a mother in the city of Engels whose son, a soldier, was being held in captivity. He served in the interior troops in Nazran, and evidently had been on officers' business as the soldier had been ordered to go there. On his way he was captured and then resold.

When the father called for the first time, only their grandmother was at home, and she wouldn't talk to him. The second time the mother answered the phone, and when she heard her son was in captivity, she had a stroke and collapsed. She was taken to hospital and as soon as she got a little better, despite the doctors' instructions she left the hospital on her own accord and came to our office. She met the father and they started going everywhere together. Some people laughed at them, what a couple. A real blondie, and that father. We all started thinking about what to do. And we went along to the negotiations. I started negotiations with the investigator. He said, all right, let's make an exchange, seeing as you've found someone. And the Chechen mother bought the son out of Chechnya and told him, 'Vanya, this is the story, you are free, you may go home if you want, or you can stay and help us.' He said, 'I want to help you.' People suggested bringing them both – Vanya and Magomed – to Moscow to make the exchange in the Commission for Exchange in the Old Square. I said, 'And where are the guarantees that when Magomed is released, Vanya won't be arrested and a case won't be opened against him? That won't do.' And they replied, 'All right, let's conduct negotiations at the Chechen border.' I said again: 'And where are the guarantees the military won't capture Vanya? We can't agree to that.' As a result we agreed that the exchange would take place here. And as Magomed had got into serious conflict with the OMON they were very unhappy about it all and wanted to prevent the exchange. The journalists said they were preparing an attack. And the tactics were as follows. As soon as the mother was to bring Vanya to the airport, they would bring Magomed from 'Kresty' here, and then we would conduct the exchange and sign the acts. We went to the airport in several cars, the picture was as follows: the plane landed, the Chechen mother got out with this boy. His mother saw her Vanya, fell on his neck, and the whole airport was cordoned off by informers. We grabbed them quickly and rushed to the car. We had hardly shut the door when some people started pulling at it from the outside and tried to tear the guy out from us. Well, somehow we left. On the way I called the investigator and said, 'We've got the soldier, bring Magomed from

Kresty.’ He said, ‘I can’t. The demands have changed.’ And again we started demanding, negotiated again. It was necessary to ensure Vanya was safe. We found a way to do it. But I won’t tell you about it now because the system is still being used nowadays. We spent the night there as we expected an attack. The next day Magomed was brought and the exchange took place. We signed the acts, the parents took Magomed away and Vanya was given to his mother. Now he has a family, a child, and everything seems to be fine. And before the exchange the military could have seized him and charged him with desertion.

Any soldier who doesn’t return to a military unit on time is immediately considered a deserter. We’ve learnt how to protect these guys. Once a mother came from Kolpino, she sat in front of me saying (the propaganda was already in full swing) that Chechens were so and so, ‘You know, I had a call from Sernovodsk. They said that my son was in Chechen captivity.’ They said, ‘Come and take your son.’ But, she said, ‘They will take me hostage!’ I asked her, ‘Are you a mother? Do you love your son? Even if you are taken hostage, you will be together with your son. If they’ve called you, I imagine they are normal people.’ And then she told me honestly that her husband and his brother had already gone there and taken the boy some days later. They brought him home. It was a guy from interior troops. I saw them with my own eyes – they were dirty, sick, lice-ridden and hungry. He was on a mountain ridge above Sernovodsk and was climbing down with a machine-gun. He fainted from hunger and fell down. He had sore feet from beatings. The Chechens picked him up, treated him, called the parents. When the father was taken to the airport with the boy Chechen submachine gunners guarded them, put them on the plane, and they left.

In 1995 we prepared a report for the Committee against Torture. At that time Russia was reporting to the UN, to the Committee against Torture – this fall there is going to be another report like that, we are working on it as well. And then, in 1995, at the height of war, the RF Ministry of Foreign Affairs writes in the official report that relations between peoples in Russia have been harmonized. We organized a joint conference in St. Petersburg. We had been in

contact with the Chechen Diaspora since the first days of war. We organized a conference and questioned the witnesses – journalists, civilians from Chechnya, federal soldiers, and then compiled a report from these materials and presented it in Geneva at the UN as a non-governmental report – an alternative report to the official one. And we went there. There were Chechen women flying with us, one of them was from Samashki, and we told the Committee members the facts. The Quakers helped us. The Chechen woman from Samashki, a witness of the military crimes, was not let out of the country in Sheremetyevo airport as she had a Soviet passport.

It was an interesting experience. The committee members called us and asked us to prepare questions to be asked to the Russian government. The Russian delegation sat in a huge hall in Geneva talking about how they were fighting torturers, there were CAT members there, secretaries, stenographers, we were also there. And there were students in the gallery. And when our officials bluntly, not shy of being before us in the least, were saying how good everything was, what was that like for the Chechen women to hear all that? It was terrible. During the session we could not speak, but during breaks we spoke to the participants and showed them documents. Then together with the Chechen women we were invited to take part in the Peace March, a peace-building March in Italy. I spoke there and apologised – there were delegations from many countries – I apologized on behalf of Russia for what our army had done in Afghanistan, Chechnya, Karabakh, in the Baltic republics; it was important for me too. Then a speaking-tour around Europe was organized. We went to the European Parliament, told them about everything and showed them everything there. Then we spoke in Paris before the Parliament and NGOs. In London there were hearings organized in the House of Commons, then there was a meeting in the House of Lords, there were also missions to Scandinavian countries. I asked donors to let us give part of the money to the Chechen families who had suffered during the war. Together with Memorial in Grozny we worked out an action plan. It was already dangerous for me to be in Chechnya. At that time, the ‘Missing’ project was launched in Grozny, in Memorial. They

had addresses of the families where parents (one or both) had been killed by the military and they were considered missing, and these families were in no way supported by the state, even if they had many children. And orphans. And we made up a list, a list of the residents of Grozny and as it was summer and school hadn't started yet, it was important for the residents of Grozny to buy school uniforms for their children. The employees went along with the people from the list prepared by Memorial, went to the market and bought what was needed for the children to start school. This was an absolutely unexpected present for people. And then the guys from Memorial suggested that we go to the market in Grozny and buy food packs for the families. So Katya and I went, we got – a bag of flour, about 50 kilos, a bag of sugar, 25 litres of vegetable oil, tea, and some grain. And we started distributing these food packs. Then together with the Chair of Memorial in Grozny (he had to be taken away from Grozny soon after because he was being persecuted) we went to an orphanage. We arrived to see a terrible building, completely neglected. There were children and teenagers, already grown up, some of them had already formed families, both Chechen-Russian families, and Russian families. There were some suffering from TB. They tried to survive, to find work, but there was no work and so they lived in poverty. So we brought food to them as well. And then we hired cars and brought two cars of food to two villages. We came to a third village and there were grandparents there with a lot of children. I said, 'I am so ashamed we've brought such little food.' The grandfather said, 'You know, we've been through a lot. In 1944 we ate grass. So now,' he said, 'It's not scary anymore.' He had such courage; was such a dignified old man.

And then we began observing the consequences of the war, the terrifying consequences for Russia. The war had spread into all military units, a 'Chechen syndrome' started. After the first Chechen war a real fascist came to us, 'Support me at the elections, soldiers' mothers, I've killed as many Chechens as I have hairs on my head.' Then he was sticking up leaflets with slogans on them like 'Beat the newcomers', 'Kill the newcomers'. I don't know what happened to him. The consequences of this war are terrifying, the army was

simply destroyed by this unfair war. The numbers of interior troops grew during this time, terror troops. This is a frightening situation. Millions of people have passed through Chechnya – seamen, marines, everyone who could have been, has been sent there. Everyone has been stained with blood.

Ali, 22 years old

During the first war the village wasn't destroyed, everyone thought it would be spared during the second one as well. Refugees came to us. They brought their clothes, their belongings, their cattle. There were so many people that there was no getting away from them. Men didn't live in the basement, they lived in the houses. Mother went upstairs to the house to make food for us. But she had to cook a lot because there were so many people. There were a lot of children and we sat in the basement.

There were elderly people on their own in the village. We looked after them. When the war started we took them to our house and they lived with us. We all lived together until the moment when we were told to leave the village.

We went to the neighbouring village and lived there for 9 months. Then we were told that we could go back to our village. We returned to the village and thought everything would be all right. And that's when it all started. Only a few families returned. The village is huge. We lived at one side and other people at the other. On a third side there were other families but it was impossible to reach each other quickly. We lived in the basement and, of course, we had brought the cattle back to the village. We had cows, sheep, and hens.

Then the sweep-up operations started, endless sweep-up operations. That was during the second war. We sat in the basements and didn't go out anywhere at all. And we heard the earth shaking – boom! – and everything fell on us. Our village was being bombed already. Then our parents ran into the basement, my mother ran in and sat near us. It lasted for about 10 minutes; they were bombing, bombing, bombing. My mother's parents (they lived at the other end of the village but were away) had a concrete

basement, we decided we would be better there. When everything silenced we moved there. Every morning and evening mom and dad went home, to see how things were going there, they needed to feed the cattle and the hens. They didn't let them out, kept them inside. And we, the children, we stayed alone for that time. There was one woman, she was even more afraid than we were. She wouldn't go out of the basement at all, with any little sign of trouble. When our parents went somewhere we ran out. We wanted to go out and see what was happening. We found shell splinters, various cartridges, and we collected it all and played. I remember we found some weapons... the one you put on your shoulder and shoot, I don't know what it's called. And once our parents caught us just as we were coming out of the basement, and they got really mad at us. They threatened us, 'If it happens again, you'll be sorry!' Two weeks passed but they were still bombing. They crushed our house and killed almost all the cattle.

The next morning I was supposed to lead the rest of the cattle to the river to drink. There was no water nearby so I went to the river. I could see some military cars and bearded people there. But I didn't understand who they were – Russians or Chechens. Russians were soldiers, and Chechens were rebel fighters. I got that something was wrong and ran back. I told my mother, and she said, 'All right, I'll get the cattle myself.' They settled in our village. There were empty houses so they moved in and lived there. But they helped us, they gave us some food. Mother made lavash and carried it to them. Once when Shamil Basayev came to us he stayed at our relatives' house, they were away at that time. And Dad said, 'Let them stay in the houses, they are on the same side as the Russians. This is politics, they are on the same side. If they live there, those houses won't be bombed.' And in fact that's what happened: the planes flew by, bombed empty houses, but not the ones where the rebel fighters lived. Somehow that was how it was. That's why my father allowed them to go into our relatives' house. I remember mother sent me with some lavash once to take to them. This Shamil Basayev met me, he had such a beard. I knew it was Shamil Basayev, because everyone was talking about it. Mother also said, 'Shamil will save us.' And I thought too, what a handsome guy. So I brought the lavash. He

came out, took it, and went away, didn't even say anything, though it was polite for us to say thank you. And he didn't say anything, just took it, as if it was my duty to bring him bread. I told Mom, 'Mom, I didn't like him. He took it calmly, didn't say anything in reply.' 'Yes, Ali, you know,' she says, 'It's such a difficult time right now, he can't care about you. He's got his military plans on his mind, he needs to win the war. And you are thinking about words.'

Then they left. When they left, the most interesting things started, because repeated sweep-up operations started. The rebel fighters had already gone somewhere. First they just searched the streets, these ones were kinder. They were short, that is they were soldiers. This is how we told them from each other – soldiers were small, 18-year old, 19-year-old guys, who were forced to go to war. Their machine-guns were bigger than themselves. Mother made lavash and gave it to them too. And they said, 'Oh, thank you, ma'am. Thank you, you are so kind.' They were in our village. First there were soldiers. We lived normally until they started bombing us. We went walking and playing with them. I went to see them in their unit. They had a camp, a tent camp, where they were all quartered. And we went there, they gave us their food, and I brought them lavash. Well, it was all right, and it was an interesting time for me, very interesting. It was 1998 or 1999 so, I was nine. They left.

After they left contract soldiers came. They knocked on the door, my mother opened the door and bounced back. We all jumped to our feet, I didn't understand what had happened. And they started beating us all. They forced my dad onto his knees, 'You, lie down!' And so on, they were swearing, my mother was lying without moving. And they started beating us. It was not clear what was happening. They were beating us, my elder sister was screaming, the children were crying, and I was the youngest in the family. There were five of us, I was the youngest. I jumped out of there and ran away. Then I heard shots, screams, I ran to the shed and hid there. There was a cupboard there with hay inside. I hid under the hay when my parents upset me. I went away and hid there. I heard screams and shots. I was afraid to go out. Then I fell asleep, it was night. I woke

up in the morning, went out of the shed, went to the basement. And they were all lying there in blood. All dead...

I don't know what was the matter with me, whether I was stressed, in shock, but I didn't understand at all what was going on. I went up to them, started touching every one, as if trying to wake them up. I had a vague idea of what death was, and I understood that they all...

I knew there were our...well...not relatives, but friends living at the other end of the village...we helped each other. I decided to go there. When I reached them, no one was there. Then I didn't know where to go, I couldn't find anyone, I was the only one left in the village.

Then I went back home, and a woman had gone out to feed the dog, she didn't know what was happening. She was walking with lavash in her hands, I stood there, I saw a person. It was such a relief, there was somebody else alive. She asked me, 'Where are you going, what's up?' I didn't answer anything, just pointed at our house. And I understood that she had heard shots at night. I took her there. She screamed, shouted, cried. Then she took me to her place, and I don't know, by some miracle I passed out completely. I woke up the next morning, they had already buried everyone, I didn't see them. I was at that woman's house who had taken me in.

I tried to say something, but I couldn't. I was just speechless, I couldn't talk. She asked me, 'Well, how did it happen, who was it, what happened?' I tried to talk, but couldn't. Then they gave us the 'green corridor', as they called it. She came in and said, 'They've given us a corridor, I'll take you to your relatives.' And she took me to my grandmother.

For two or three months I didn't talk at all, I sat staring blankly at one point. Just sat nodding. Granny, every time she saw me, she came up and cried. But I didn't cry, I didn't feel anything at all. I just had that picture before my eyes. I didn't understand what had happened but I understood they weren't there anymore. That I had to live on with that. I didn't know why I escaped. Now that I've grown up I think about it a lot.

The war continued. Granny, Grandpa and I, the three of us lived together. My granny is a healer, she treats people. And both the military and civilians started coming to her so that she could see what was the matter with them. And late only from my granny's hands, no one could ever approach me, I didn't let anyone close. Then they started bombing the village again, and Grandpa died from a shell splinter. We were left alone with my granny. I was ten years old. Granny was also depressed. She spoke very little, we hardly spoke at all in our house.

I didn't pray, not at all, but Granny did. Then my uncle and cousin came, they played with me. Once they came and rushed to take me to Friday prayer. They took me to the mosque. And we prayed. When we were leaving, an UAZ car drove up, there were corpses lying inside. A lot...they were piled one on top of the other. They were rebel fighters and had to be buried. They needed help, to carry something, to bring something, to dig a hole. I was taken to the cemetery and they showed me: 'There are your relatives, your brothers, your sisters, your parents, there they are.', and Grandpa was also near them. I felt ill and was taken home.

I thought about how if I met the people who had come to our house that night I would kill them all, they were all such bastards. I wanted to kill all Russians, I would kill everyone in sight. Because at that time I didn't understand anything, I only knew that it was Russians who killed my parents, that all Russians were bad, and you were allowed to kill anyone. You could rarely meet Russian civilians, either in Ingushetia or in Chechnya – only Russian military, that's why I had these feelings. I sat silently, thought, analysing what was happening, why it happened like that. And I also thought: why didn't anyone run after me when I ran away? There were lots of them, they could have run after me. They didn't even shoot at me. Maybe, they didn't want to kill us at first? Maybe, something went wrong? Maybe, my father said something, did something when they started beating the children. I don't know...if I'd stayed there, I would most likely be dead. I only got a few kicks from one of them. Boots, he had these big boots. They stank terribly of oil. It happens, you buy

new boots and they smell of oil, oil products. I can still remember this smell.

I thought everyone, not only Russians, all non-Muslims should be killed. And I was happy, when they said on TV that a whole division had been killed near our village, I was so happy. I rejoiced at everything bad that happened to non-Chechens, non-Muslims. All people of a different faith should be killed, they will all go to hell, they are bad, they are beasts...of course, I understand everything now, but then, at that moment, it was normal that I thought that way...I don't know...

After that we decided to go to Ingushetia. I was taken to all the hospitals, to all the doctors. I still didn't talk. I could utter some strange sounds. That was because of the stress. Because I understood, realized everything, but I still had that picture before my eyes and couldn't talk.

I sat in front of the TV, watching TV a lot. They were saying in the news – somebody got killed there, somebody here, I already understood clearly which sides were warring. 'Establishment of constitutional order', they were saying. I was all for the rebel fighters because I didn't want no Russian Federation, I'd gone through a lot thanks to them, thanks to that power. That's why I was very aggressive towards them, I just couldn't stand them. When people spoke Russian, I understood it was necessary because people could communicate only in Russian, but I hated this language, because the ones who had come that time were Russian-speaking. Though, maybe they were not Russian, maybe they were another ethnicity. I don't know. It's just that when they came into our house, they spoke Russian. And because of that I hated the Russian language, and all Russians, and all non-Chechens, even the Ingush...sometimes even them. With time, when you grow up, you start looking at it differently.

Gradually I even started talking. I went to school. There was a Chechen and an Ingush school where Chechens and Ingush studied. It was some time in 2001 or 2002 they tried to send me to the 7th grade. I was not admitted to the Chechen school, there were too many children, there were no places. And then it was decided

to send me to the Ingush school. But I didn't know Russian at all, I didn't know a lot of things, I had gaps. And all the students laughed. I came home and told my granny, 'I won't go to school any more, they laugh at me there.' She gave me a lecture about how it was wrong, 'You have to study, we're all alone you and me, you have to feed me when I am old.' And gradually I started catching up with the rest, started studying well. There was a Russian language teacher, who came from Grozny. She felt very sorry for me and gave me additional lessons. In a year's time I could already speak Russian, though I made stupid mistakes, but still I could speak. We studied in tents there. Then I moved to Grozny with my aunt and uncle. And I finished the 9th, 10th and 11th grade in Grozny.

But before that, I remember...my granny loved snowdrops very much, the flowers that bloom after winter. And I decided to go pick her a bunch. But it was far away from the village, in the forest. And then planes and helicopters came, started firing. The shells were exploding over my head, splinters scattered in the air – pow! pow! pow! I saw a little hole there, left from an explosion, and I decided to get in there, I climbed into that hole. I didn't even notice it was all surrounded with dog rose. Then I climbed out somehow, came home covered in blood, and I had a bunch of snowdrops in my hand. I didn't throw away those snowdrops, but brought them home. And Granny got frightened, of course, and told me off, 'Are you crazy? Why did you do that?' She still remembers it, 'Do you remember when you went to pick snowdrops for me?' she says.

Vyacheslav, 58 years old

There was an article published in *Novaya Gazeta* with Zoya Eroshok, she had interviewed me, and the headline was 'I don't want to draft people into this army!' I worked in the recruitment centre, I got money for doing that! My bosses summoned me, it was a regional recruitment centre in Moscow and – well, back then they acted differently, in a more democratic way. I was an Afghan war veteran, and they very democratically brought me down a peg or two. I mean, they said, 'Well, you are paid for drafting, and you write

'I don't want to draft people into this army', so let's transfer you to mobilisation.' Mobilisation activity. They said, 'Or you can quit the army altogether, go into business or something else... And then I said for the first time, though I was not planning to go to Chechnya, 'Send me where my draftees are being sent.' My family had just gone to Israel, I was alone and responsible only for myself. They caught on to the idea instantly, and off I went to Chechnya. In 1995, in October.

I didn't go to Chechnya to kill. I had my own point of view on that. From the very first day I felt, comparing our army in Afghanistan to the one in Chechnya, oh my goodness, even though I had been in the army all that time – I couldn't recognize it! I could not recognize it! It was some kind of savagery! Savagery towards ourselves, to our own people! I mean, not towards the Chechens! Many people, having served a year, a year and a half in Chechnya, they had never seen a rebel fighter. They'd only seen them on TV.

I was an administrative officer. There was one case I had to deal with where there was a brigade with lots of battalions – a motorized infantry battalion, artillery, rocket, and reconnaissance battalions. And there was the following story. The reconnaissance battalion commander was an Afghan war veteran, he'd been to war, he had two Red Star orders. But he drank with everyone, was such an alcoholic! And a warrant officer arrived, about my age, born in 1954, he was 41 then, had two children. And so this warrant officer arrived and the contract soldiers started drinking with him. They worked him up into such a state and he started firing at the walls, a bullet ricocheted off the wall and wounded a contract soldier. The contract soldiers were real thugs. So a soldier was wounded and the brigade commanders, instead of looking into the situation, brought this warrant officer undressed, in the middle of winter, it was December, just like Zoya Kosmodemianskaya, they brought him to the brigade headquarters. I was summoned and when I arrived I was met with the following picture. Not just anyone, not some illiterate contract soldier, but deputy brigade commanders were going up to him and each one thought it their duty to hit him. So I saw our army in its full charm. I talked to the warrant officer and found out that he had a family, two kids. Then he was sent to the guardhouse for the night.

The next day I learnt that he was dead. The problem was that before sending a person to the guardhouse the doctors should give the go-ahead. And he had been sent there without having been examined. The next morning he was taken to the medical and sanitary unit. The doctor said that he was in such a state – he had been beaten to pulp! He should have been hospitalized, taken to Mozdok. Those contract soldiers had gone to the guardhouse and beaten him to within an inch of his life. The acting unit commander, because the commander was drunk (and a Hero of Russia) had ordered the contract soldiers to go there – and he wasn't sent anywhere, but he was beaten to death. That's when I felt I was at war. I felt it not because of Chechens torturing people, but because this father of two had died, a 41-year-old senior warrant officer. I saw a lot of things like that in Chechnya.

Another scary story. One medical instructor in the logistical support battalion was a woman. Her name was Rosa, a Tatar from the Far East. At that time no one was paid salaries but in Chechnya they paid and people got higher levels of wages. This woman had a daughter, she was 19 years old and had graduated from a medical college. She called her daughter to Chechnya, the daughter came and also started working as a sanitary instructor – mother and daughter sanitary instructors. They lived in the aid station in the barracks. This is what it means to be in Chechnya. The point is no one wanted to go there, none of the officers or soldiers wanted to serve in Chechnya, because it was death! Because it was impossible to understand what kind of war it was! A war against who?

There was an officer, a captain, he'd been to Afghanistan and after that was discharged. He saw what a mess civilian life was and three or four years later he decided to go back to the army. But how? He was sent to Chechnya! Officers were sent there like that. The Soviet Union, when it collapsed, wherever you had served you stayed, in the same army. Let's say you served in Kazakhstan – you are Russian, you had an apartment and served in Kazakhstan. Why the hell would the Russian army need you? You stayed in the Kazakh army. If you served in Moldavia you stayed in the Moldavian army. If you served in Ukraine, in the Ukrainian one. And you were told, 'You can be reinstated only if you go to Chechnya.' And people who

served in the Kazakhstan army, when they came to Russia, they were sent to Chechnya. And where else can you go if you've been an army man your whole life, that's the only thing you were taught, you can't do anything else. That captain hadn't even been assigned a position. He was at the women's lodge in the morning – one of them, Rosa, was supposed to go on a mission with her artillery division. There was a machine-gun lying on the bed, he got hold of it, she told him, 'Put it back.' He replied, 'What? I am an Afghan war veteran, I am a captain, I...' And accidentally pushed the cartridge into the cartridge chamber and pulled the trigger. And a bullet hit Rosa. She died in my arms, poor woman, when I was carrying her to the sanitary unit. And this captain jumped out of the window and tried to escape. He was caught – and what did he get? Four years – a suspended sentence. He continued to serve in Chechnya. In short, there were lots of horror stories like these and it was even worse in Khankala.

For instance, there was the Khankala garrison duty. There were paratroopers, the MVD interior troops, Ministry of Defence troops, tank men, artillerymen, the FSB and so on. And they took it in turns to be on duty. So when the paratroopers took over the watch they caught everyone in sight – the infantry, tank men, interior troops – everyone! With the exception of their paratroopers. 'They're our guys!' If it was the motorized infantry's turn – who did they catch? The interior troops, paratroopers – everyone but their own! And they didn't just catch them – they beat them up, shot at them! So it our brigade's turn again. They caught some paratroopers, beat them up, and there was one huge officer who was even bigger than the paratroopers so he beat them up himself. The next day it was the paratroopers' turn. The paratroopers' aim was not a spy weaving his way out of Chechnya – they weren't thinking about him, oh no! All they thought about was how to catch the infantry soldiers who had caught the paratroopers the day before. And they caught four people. What did they do? They were drunk, and these others were drunk too – all of them were completely drunk. They started killing them! Shooting them. They shot three of them. And the fourth one hid himself, he was seriously wounded but managed to escape and tell the tale. And these things went on all the time. I couldn't

care about the Chechens, Gelayev or Basayev. I had enough of my own idiots to deal with.

Officially I was responsible for brigade statistics, but in reality my status in Khankala was a sort of deputy commander in charge of policy for the whole of Khankala. I knew what was happening all over the garrison. I knew, let's say, that there were battle losses and non-battle losses. So, well... there were battle losses during the period of military operations against rebel groups in Chechnya from December to January 1994–1995 and in August 1996, when the rebel fighters entered Grozny. And the rest of the time – there were no military operations being carried out and if there were losses, they were very few. Most losses happened inside the garrison, and were not due to rebel fighters but were losses because of our own people. They were three times higher than those caused by rebel fighters. But everything was put down to rebel fighters! In Afghanistan, I might say, a third of the losses were inflicted by our own people, and two thirds by Afghans. And here our own people accounted for two thirds of losses, not the rebel fighters, but our own people! It was horrible! A continuous horror story.

What's more the war itself was stupid. What I saw was pure idiocy. And I behaved accordingly. I mean when you take part in something dirty, even if you are an innocent person, if your intentions are good but you take part in it, you're gonna mess yourself up in it. And I understood everything very well. So I was telling myself, it's better if it's me than somebody else because at least I can understand what's going on.

At the end of 1995 there was a structure set up by the President of Russia called the Commission for POWs and Missing Persons. A representative of this commission was in Chechnya and his objective was to liberate soldiers, to exchange rebel fighters for soldiers who had been captured. We sent captives there, and they were sending soldiers out. Vitaliy Ivanovich Bencharsky, the General Staff colonel, headed this commission. We spoke honestly and openly with each other but I was not involved in liberating people then, not at that point. And he had to exchange them. The Rebel fighters gave four soldiers for one Chechen. They had given four soldiers out of 31 captives.

And the Chechen who was on our side and who was handed over died an hour later. After the exchange he had been beaten all over. It was a huge scandal. Right before the eyes of the soldiers' mothers; and our mothers were furious! So Vitaliy Ivanovich turned to the commander, 'We have exchanged one Chechen for four soldiers, and there are other captured Chechens we're gonna exchange as well.' But they were kept in terrible conditions, without any heating and it was the middle of winter. They were kept in the guardhouse, it was an old half-destroyed club building fitted out as a guardhouse. There was no central heating, and it is quite cold in Chechnya in winter, the temperature is below freezing. The commander ordered a stove to be built there. A day later Viatliy Ivanovich went to check if they had set the stove up. He looked inside and there was no one there, not a single person, not a single one in sight. No stove, and not a single Chechen. He started to ask where they were, we were supposed to exchange them! A senior lieutenant turned up and said they were no more. It turned out that he had shot them all, so that they didn't have to build the stove. And he got away with it. Yes, that's what it was like. In Chechnya rebel fighters were kept in a hole. Special interior troop squads kept them in a hole. But these holes were inaccessible to me. I was supposed to deal with staff and that was way out of my control.

And there was another incident. A company commander caught a cold, felt unwell, and flew to Khankala to go to hospital. They gave him some pills, he was supposed to fly back, but there were no planes. And he was company commander, had a Courage Order. He was told, 'There are no Ministry of Defence planes, but the Ministry of Interior Troops have planes, go to them.' He went to them and the interior troops said, 'Who are you, what do you want, why have you come here?' And they started laughing at him! That's the kind of idiocy there was in Chechnya, such idiocy! You are not one of ours, you are from the Ministry of Defence! So there was some way still to the rebel fighters and you were already faced with your own! Such hatred – everyone's armed, everyone's got grenades, this hatred had to be channeled somewhere. Psychological mechanisms mean that hatred increases regardless of the will of the people when

they don't deal with a real enemy. And this company commander was driven into the hole where they kept rebel fighters, Chechens. They started shooting under his feet, taunting him, beating him. He managed to get a note to me with some soldier. I kicked up a fuss and got him out of there. He was taken to hospital on a stretcher, in hospital they learnt that a criminal case had been opened, and he had to write a statement. But against whom? You had to know the people. And they got frightened, came to the hospital, to this senior lieutenant, and he was so scared! He'd been awarded with the Courage Order but was so frightened! I told him, 'You just show me, don't tell me, but show me, which of them.' I wrote a report for the investigation but these documents were taken from me and those guys got away with it.

In June 1996 – beginning of July, the Russian presidential elections were held. Before the elections Yeltsin was saying the war was over, and every shot from the Russian side would be investigated. Many people lost their relatives, loved ones and children. And then the elections took place. 'After we elect Yeltsin, there will be peace,' people thought. Yeltsin was elected on 3rd July 1996. The next day our troops entered the Urus-Martanovsky region and there were copious civilian casualties. I was dealing with the presidential elections in Chechnya, regularly went to the centre of Grozny. I had a direct phone to Moscow in the republican central election committee, and I could call anywhere, talk to anyone.

I came to Grozny again, it was 5th or 6th July, and a man stopped me. He recognized me, came up and said to me, 'Do something. The Russian military came into my house, asked me: 'Are there any rebel fighters?' I am a school headmaster in the village, I am an elderly man,' I said, 'There are no rebel fighters, only my son and daughter are at home.' They started shooting, wounded my son and my daughter seriously.' And so with the help of that direct phone I called Sasha Lyubimov and Dima Muratov. I told them, 'Send your reporters, I'll go with them and show them how our army is fighting!' Dima sent two people, and Sasha sent two reporters.

So, it was a Sunday in July. My deputy brigade commander had fought in Afghanistan and he was actually in charge of the brigade

in Khankala, and I was his deputy. I asked him, 'Be a guy, cover for me on Sunday. On Monday I'll be here at eight on the dot. I'll go to Urus-Martan.' I went with the reporters to Urus-Martan, and there they saw houses destroyed by the Russian military, a school in ruins, a mosque destroyed and so on and so on. I was talking to them and showing them how our guys were fighting. It was all shown in the *Vzglyad* (Glance) TV show. I spent a day there, stayed overnight at a Chechen's in Urus-Martan. And I was wearing military uniform the whole time.

My superior saw *Vzglyad* with my on it and called me to his office. His three deputies were sitting next to him and he said, 'I'll crush you, destroy you.' He was saying something like that. I answered, 'I'd sooner run around Grozny three times than let you do that' I said, in front of his three deputies. He didn't expect that from me and threw me out. I left. And then his deputy told me, 'Slava, you should get out of here. He ordered the scouts to kill you.' And so I was lying in my hostel thinking, 'Damn it all! I am riding an armoured carrier about Grozny, on the top, and there is a boy, whose parents have been killed, and this boy can shoot me. What am I to do? Do I need a gun, a weapon to get him first? Kill this child, this boy, I don't want to do that. Or if this one ordered some officer to kill me, am I supposed to be quicker than him? Be the first to shoot this officer? He's also got a mother and children. I don't want to do that either. I don't want any of this.' I thought, 'Why am I carrying arms? Arms can only compromise me. If we have another clash...' So, without saying anything to anyone, I finally went to the depot and turned in my machine-gun and my pistol. I kept the holster, there was a grenade in there, but no machine-gun, no pistol. I had turned in my weapons. And there was a stamp in my draft card proving I had turned everything in. In August all sorts of things happened, the rebel fighters entered Grozny, the brigade commander sent me to the centre of Grozny, and I, the man who was supposed to fight rebel fighters, didn't have any arms. The Brigade commander asked me, 'Where is your machine-gun?' I said, 'In the car.' And I spent a whole month in Staropromyslovsky district where God knows what happened, but I didn't have any arms.

You can talk about war for a long time...I tell you about the episodes I remember. One night I went to check if the guys were sleeping in the trenches, so that the rebel fighters wouldn't get close. In one place there was a fire burning, and about seven or eight guys were sitting around it. One of them was talking about something. There was a contract soldier among us. He was talking about how he fought, how he had killed 7-8 year-old Chechen boys 'so that they didn't grow up into rebel fighters'. And he was telling them about it! I heard him when I was coming up to them. And for the first time I was at a loss, couldn't think of anything to say. I didn't lose myself before rebel fighters or before my superiors, not with anyone, but right then I was at a loss - because of the words he had spoken. Seeing me he continued telling everyone about how he killed children. I was absolutely gobsmacked, I thought about it all night. And in the morning, at dawn, I went back and gathered all the people who had been there together. I pulled out the contract soldier who had been telling the story and said, 'I am a major, I live in such and such a place and I will do my best to tell the whole world what you've been doing here.' And everyone was confused.

A few days later there was a cease-fire, and the reconnaissance battalion was being pulled out. A few guys, about 30 people, were to form a platoon to cover our withdrawal. And that man was in that platoon. It was such a terrible order, to leave 30 people behind and for the others to leave. And so I was walking to the car with a big melon in my hands. And that group, that was staying, they were looking at me. And that contract soldier was among them, and he said: 'Good-bye, comrade Major.' As if saying, well, you spoke well but now we're staying, and you're leaving. I could see him, I heard his words and I was carrying that melon and thinking how if I left along with everyone else then all my words would be empty! So I took the melon to the car, give it to the driver and said, 'I'm going to stay with those thirty.' I stayed there.

With this kind of attitude, with the way I behaved, I could easily have got a bullet in my head from our own people. There is a science called 'victimology', the science of victims of crime. I studied at the law faculty before going to Chechnya and my dissertation was

entitled 'Certain criminological aspects of crimes committed by the military in the Chechen Republic'. How not to ever become a victim of a crime? I had a theory – one should never feel a victim, never.

Then there was the Lebedev cease-fire. Joint Russian and Chechen commissions were established. I came to the brigade commander. He summoned me and said, 'There are complaints against you, Major. The scouts complain, the FSB guys are complaining that you didn't let them fight. That you were walking around without a helmet, went to Chechens.' That I walked around without a helmet – that was thought up by the FSB and the reconnaissance battalion. 'Why did you drive around without a helmet?' I said, 'So that they could recognize me and didn't shoot.' The next day he summoned me again, 'I've got an idea about what to do with you. Take some leave! Go anywhere you want, just go on holiday.' I said, 'I am supposed to get 90 days. Shall I take it all?' He said, 'Take the most you can!'

Before that I had been there for a year, and overall I had spent more than a year there, I stayed till the end of December 1996, till our troops withdrew from Chechnya. So it was September, I got some tickets for the sanatorium and, the next day, I packed my things. I was about to head off on holiday. I was walking through Khankala and met Vitaliy Ivanovich – who was in charge of hostage liberation. He saw me and said, 'They say you're driving around without a helmet and they don't shoot at you, could you accompany me to the central commandant's office in Grozny? I'll arrange it with your superiors.' I said to him, 'Arrange it, and I'll go with you.' He sorted it all out and off we went. We arrived and all the rebel fighters who were there, Maskhadov, Makhashev, they started coming up to me. I'd only saw them on TV but they started hugging me. Vitaliy Ivanovich saw that and said, 'You should work with us'. 'What do you mean – with you? I am going on holiday tomorrow, they are firing me.' He arranged it again, and I was attached to the RF Presidential Commission for POWs and Missing Persons. I did that job wearing a military uniform the whole time our troops were in Chechnya till December 1996. And after that, when I had already taken off my uniform, I did the same job in *Novaya Gazeta* until 2001. I liberated people for the first time in 1996. And the last liberation was in 2001, in August. There

was a woman from Samara who had been held hostage in Chechnya for 2 years and 2 months. After liberation she became a member of the Samara Duma. She was a member for 5 years. We sometimes call each other even now.

I didn't want to see the people whose cases I dealt with, I didn't want to communicate with them, I didn't feel like it at all. They were free, and so good-bye. And it so happened that I became friends with only a handful of the people I had liberated.

What helped me was an accurate knowledge of what was going on. I'd been to Afghanistan, I saw a lot then. I saw even more in Chechnya, things I didn't see in Afghanistan. I knew our army from the inside out, I knew what it was capable of. And that was enough for me. When I went to Chechnya, I was 41 years old, and in Afghanistan I was 30 and the whole time I had been in excellent physical shape. But the thing is you get tired. A year passes by, three, four – and gradually you lose that essential feeling that you won't be a victim. I knew I would lose it with time. But at that moment I was in such a state.

I'll give you an example. In October 1996 I was already working in the RF Presidential Commission for POWs. They gave me an office in the central commandant's office in Grozny, where there were Chechens as well. My tasks were to find Russian military burial grounds and to help liberate captives. But how to help, if there was not a single Chechen to exchange soldiers for; everyone was shot, our idiots had shot everybody. What could I do? The first part, finding burial places, worked well. I negotiated with Chechens, travelled, mapped the places. After that exhumation teams arrived, dug out the corpses and took them to a laboratory in Rostov. But the second part – exchange of the captives – did not work, because there was no one to exchange for on our side.

I met Maskhadov. They gave us tea with lemon, and cottage cheese with sour cream. No alcohol, they didn't have anything of the kind. We ate together with him. He was an officer, and I was an officer. I said, 'So, well, I've been given these tasks. I'm not talking to a boy, you know we don't have a single Chechen, everyone was shot, what should I do?' Maskhadov said to me, calling up a man, he said,

‘Wherever you go, he will be responsible for your life, and however you manage to come to agreements with field commanders, so be it. I can’t order them to do it.’ And that’s what happened.

People who had never seen a Chechen created an image of an evil Chechen. Just like in Lermontov’s poetry. They made up an image of an evil Chechen, but they never saw him. And Chechens over-stress this image, ‘Yes, we are like that, and we’ll be like that.’ There are idiots on both sides. But I can give lots of examples of normal people among the rebel fighters. It was not coincidence that Maskhadov told me, ‘Go and negotiate with them.’

Fury arises from fear, negative emotions were caused by fear. A person has never seen a Chechen but has formed an image in his mind. And it was Russian President Yeltsin who helped to create this image.

The liberation of every person, that’s what I was working on... more than 100 people. The liberation of every person is, as a rule, a lot of work and a lot of worry, and I had to go through it all. But I, just like a doctor, thought if you die together with every patient who dies, eventually you’re either going to die or fall ill yourself. I did that for many years and I didn’t see it as something personal. I understood it was necessary, that no one would do it but me, that it was my fate. But I also understood that if I took it too close to heart I wouldn’t be able to work. So I freed someone and forgot all about it. Unfortunately, not all the cases finished well. In 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999 I didn’t know what losses were. Losses started in 2000. I lost two people for whom I thought I did more for, than for others who were liberated.

My main objective was to involve the authorities in this work. And when I was able to, in the middle of 1998, I decided that I had done everything I should have. Whether the state worked well or badly, it didn’t matter. It mattered that the state officially started to work on this. But when I saw that... Somebody was abducted in Dagestan. There were numerous abductions, soldiers were abducted in dozens. I learnt about a possible liberation, it was impossible to hide it from me. Berezovsky gave 30,000 roubles for the liberation of 10 people. That made it three dollars for each. Eight people

were released but Berezovsky gave money for ten, so they needed two more. The rebel fighter got his money, sent his people, they abducted two more guys quickly, and that was that. I saw, this guy was abducted and released on the same day. When I saw that the main special service was assisting abductions, when in 1998 I saw how they worked, I had to continue working. I didn’t take up cases which the official structures were dealing with, but I selectively took up cases that they were not interested in or where there were some problems.

I don’t really feel like talking about it all, I did at first, but that wish has passed. Maybe because I’m tired, or because people might not believe it or understand it, or maybe I won’t explain properly.

Hussein, 57 years old

During the first war there was an order to draw up all units for the liberation of Starpromyslovsky district and all the neighbouring districts. All our forces were gathered in the centre of Grozny and we dug in there. We held the line almost until 18th January 1995. They bombed us all day, there was artillery bombing day and night. The Presidential Palace was fired at every second. Most of us were on different floors of the presidential palace but there were also units which controlled the approach. There was a chief of the central command post and he arranged for the Ichkeriyan flag to always be flying above the presidential palace and for speakers to be on full blast. And for a whole week, I guess, or maybe two weeks the anthem of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeriya was playing at full volume. The sound of war was in full swing while the anthem was playing all across Grozny and the flag was flying in the sky. And during the breaks in the fighting we held dances in the basement. We needed warming up and it helped raise the fighting spirit. In fact, it was all romanticized a bit. We were all children of the Soviet Union and had been brought up on examples of the World War II of the good Soviet Union and the bad Germans and so on. It all left an impact of course and we, already as part of the Chechen army, thought of ourselves as being in a similar position as the Soviet Union in the war with

the Germans. We believed that another state had attacked us and that we were defending our Motherland. The very school program that they Russians had taught us served us very well. And the Soviet army in which we served had a huge impact on our not firmness, but competent conduct. Although generally I saw a lot of people at war who had no military education whatsoever, they had never even served in the army, but became very professional soldiers right at the start. After the Presidential Palace was bombed with heavy bombs which almost penetrated to the basement it was no longer possible to defend the ruins, there were only ruins above our heads and we could post neither cordons nor soldiers. The decision was made to retreat behind the Sunzha river. The Sunzha was literally a 30-meters distance from the presidential palace. And we just crossed the river to the other bank and held the line on the right bank of the river Sunzha. And we held it there for quite a while.

In terms of numbers in the city of Grozny, I haven't seen any data about it yet, haven't heard anyone speak about it, but at that period specifically, from 1994 till January 1995, 500 persons took part in the military actions on our side in the city of Grozny. This is taking into account not just those in the centre of the city but at all our defence posts too. Altogether we had about this number of soldiers.

The headquarters were located in the Presidential Palace and there were civilians there as well. Well, it was a basement covered by ordinary slabs, not concrete, because when a mine hit the building from the street, it crushed it, crushed that roof all the time. So there were old Russian women there who were afraid to go out. There were soldiers' mothers who were looking for their children and there were our headquarters. There were the wounded, both Russian and Chechen. A hospital was set up where they offered first aid. After that the wounded or killed were brought to Minutka Square at night and from there they were transported further on, to where people could be treated or to another city. Life was pretty well organized there in the underground in these basements.

We came into contact with POWs, with officers, with soldiers. And if I'm honest we treated them with disgust because, these soldiers, they didn't understand at all why they were there. As a

rule they were draftees. I can prove that no one in the Russian army registered deaths at all. I had the draft cards of some POWs, those of dead Russian military. And someone had written on them saying: departed from the unit on a certain date, but nobody had recorded where they arrived. And he had already been killed. I mean he had been in a military unit, in Mozdok or in Russia, had left and was then lost. And that was that. He couldn't be registered as dead after that. That's how people went missing in the Russian army. Or there were empty cards, no arrival stamp, no departure stamp, a draft card had just been given to a soldier, in some commissariat, and he was already at war. He was shot – pow! – dead and that was that. That's why the Russians themselves don't know how many soldiers were shipped over there and how many were killed. I can say this for certain because I worked in the commission for POW exchange and I had access to documents.

As a rule soldiers were hungry, they hadn't washed for months, they were dirty. That was terrible. There weren't enough clothes for them. They were on duty at checkpoints in gum boots, freezing and hungry. After we left Grozny I had to travel from one village or town to another quite often. I had to go through the checkpoints. I changed into civilian clothes and drove by the checkpoints and the first question was, 'Man, have you got something for us to eat? Or, have you got a cigarette? You've got some bread?' I felt sorry for them, of course, we, Chechens, understood that these people, I mean during the first war, well, they hadn't any choice, they were sent to our land not through their own will. We treated them very humanely. We didn't taunt them, didn't kill if they were captured. There were a lot of cases when our leaders gave these soldiers back to their mothers so that they could go home. The only thing we asked was that the mother didn't allow him go back to Chechnya, somehow. She should take him to his grandmother, his grandfather, anywhere but he shouldn't return to the war. That's all we demanded.

Once during the first war we took a warrant officer prisoner. He was wounded, and he, well, I talked with him a lot. He told me about how they were instructed and psychologically prepared for the invasion in Mozdok. Some people, allegedly Chechens, cutting

off people's heads were shown to them. In the first war, what heads were they talking about? They must have shot these videos in Afghanistan, with bearded men with knives, cruel men. And this warrant officer told me how they propagandised with these movies, that Chechens were this, Chechens were that, they killed, they cut off heads, don't get caught. And when this guy was taken prisoner he was taken somewhere, he said, 'I saw Chechens sitting in some room, bearded, just like I saw in the movie.' Bearded, because Caucasian people's hair grows quickly. It grows thick and can you imagine shaving during the war, well, who's gonna carry a razor around. So he saw this and said, 'I remembered at once what they showed us there.' And one of the Chechens sat sharpening a knife. Well, this is a habit with Chechens, they love knives, weapons. So he was just sharpening it, playing around, killing time. And the officer remembered the images he had been shown in Mozdok and fainted in a split. When he came to he saw his wounds had been bandaged. He was a good guy. We gave him back to the Russians for treatment.

I can say we treated them well because I saw how I was treated myself by others. I was captured twice so I have something I can use as a comparison. I saw how people treated us, Chechens. I wouldn't say we treated Russian soldiers in the same way. I was in captivity in 2002 in Khankala. They interrogated me there: brought me to some kind of wagon with lots of officers inside, lieutenant colonels. Well, I said, 'I'm a politician, a parliamentary deputy.' I said so just for fun, it was not my first time in such an environment, not my first time in captivity by that time, and I knew a little about how to behave there. So I said, insolently, 'I am a parliament deputy, I demand adequate treatment.' They laughed of course, among themselves. 'But there's a war going on,' they said. And I asked, 'Have they changed the law during the war? The laws have not been annulled.' and so on, I was just joking insolently. But naturally, it cleared the air and we passed on to politics smoothly.

We started talking about politics. And they went on about how, 'You stole people, you killed...' Well, they talked about all the things they were made to believe before they came to Chechnya. And I told them, 'Let's think logically about this. For instance, some guy was

abducted in St. Petersburg and brought to Chechnya. Well, how do you think a guy can be abducted in St. Petersburg and brought to Chechnya, he's not a needle. How is this possible, if there are checkpoints everywhere along the roads to Chechnya where they check you when you are driving. Or in a plane, you can't put a man in a bag, you need to drag him through somehow. If your special services didn't bring them to the Chechen border and hand them over to their agents here, I can't see another way for them to be brought here. Well, we argued a little bit like this with these Russian officers. But luckily for me, of course, they were all from Nalchik.

Though I once met a good one in Khankala when we were held in a trailer there. They treated us terribly, of course. All the other young guys who didn't speak Russian well, they treated them horrendously. But, evidently, this demand of mine to treat me as my status required worked. They seated me separately, they didn't touch me. It was a 2x2 m² and there were eleven of us in there. There was no food, no water, no toilet, nothing. Eleven men and in the centre there were some trestles with a door on top made of two planks and 2 earth coloured mattresses. And the eleven of us, 11 men, were supposed to sleep there. It was May. The nights were cold and in days were unbearably hot. The carriage was made of iron, there was nothing to cover ourselves with. These were the conditions we lived in. Then at about 2 a.m. a sentry came, the one who guarded the trailer and he shouted through the window, 'Get up!' And then he started swearing. So that he didn't get bored the guys had to tell him about their lives, their parents, where they married, how they studied. And if somebody didn't speak Russian well he had a lot of fun with that. He started mocking the guy's pronunciation and so on. And they all kept swearing obscenely all the time.

The trailer was split into two parts, 2x2 on one side and 2x2 on the other. There was a small corridor with a chair in the middle nailed to the floor. And a small table in the corner for the investigator. Masked people came at night, they took a guy and several people started beating him. With their arms and legs, 'Remember, remember something: who carried arms in the village,

who worked in the police, who was a rebel fighter.' It didn't matter what the information was, you just had to remember something so that they could go and take someone else and beat him up. After a while they did detain someone. He cried, 'I don't know anything'. We could hear it all. The cook also came. The cook. He is at war as well, and he also wants to beat up Chechens, to fight them. He can't go to the forest but here they brought a guy and the cook was beating him. Afterwards he could tell everyone at home how he dealt with the Chechens. In short, one guy got two broken ribs. And then the investigators found out, took the keys and the beatings stopped. But they still didn't give us any food.

One day they brought five trucks of gravel for the road. Well, it was May, the rainy season in Chechnya and it was so muddy, there was no getting out of it. So they brought and poured out these five trucks worth into the mud and it all had to be levelled out to make a road. They came and took two of our guys. People who hadn't eaten for two or three days. They took them and they dug with spades all day long to make the road, and the guy in charge gave them a loaf of bread and a couple of cans. And when they were coming back when they were already being taken back to the trailer the other guys took the bread and cans. Later a guy from the Moscow OMON came to guard us. I looked at him and he seemed to be not so aggressive as the others and after a while we started to talk about politics with him. At first I said, 'Guys, why this bad attitude. First of all, no one knows where he will find himself tomorrow and anyone of you might be taken prisoner, you need to think about how you would like to be treated. That's why you should behave in such a way so that people would retaliate similarly. You can't behave like this, it is inhumane'. So he sat there talking to me, and then we started discussing Putin's elections. He said he was in the OMON in Moscow. He was on duty at polling stations, said it was all falsified, that there were no elections at that time in Moscow. He said that he hadn't seen any people at all at the polling stations where he was on duty. Very few people came but then it turned out that Putin got hundreds of percents of the vote and so on. And he kept repeating: 'The main thing is not to lose oneself, not to kill anybody.' I remembered this

phrase of his. When I started talking to him, I told him that two guys had been taken, they hadn't eaten for a few days and they weren't given anything to eat. They worked and then somebody took their food. He said, 'All right, I'll think of something.' It was getting dark already. He came with a can of spiced sprats in tomato sauce. He opened the can and gave it to us. Well, can you imagine the scene. There were eleven people sitting on those mattresses with a tiny can in front of them. The older ones, me and another man who was with me, we said, 'No, we're not hungry.' So we stepped aside so that these guys could eat at least something. Well, this OMON guy was sitting there, I guess, he weighed about a hundred kilos. Such a plump guy, with a good appetite, I guess. So he looked at all that and said, 'One can really isn't much for eleven people.' Then he said he would think of something that night. I thought he might bring another can, something like that. Then he came at night, it was already dark, about 2 o'clock. He brought the cook with him. The cook brought a pan, plates, spoons. The OMON guy opened the door with his keys, let the cook in and said, 'But don't tell anyone.' Well, who could we tell? He had done such a good thing, how could we? They fed us, gave us soup or something like that, we ate. Of course, there were good people among them as well, but rarely. Mostly they were scum, of course.

Throughout the first war we waited for victory. We waited for the end of the war. Still two years is a long time. Two years of life, risking your life under bombing every day.

During the first war the Russians used several weapons banned by the Geneva Convention. There were phosphorous bombs, then 'needle bombs' which scattered some kinds of needles in the air and covered a huge territory. Then they used carpet bombings, in short, they fired whatever they could at us. And in fact we couldn't defend ourselves against any of it – we only had small arms. The biggest thing we had was a grenade launcher which fired at a 500-meters distance. And in fact we fought with small arms: Kalashnikovs and grenade launchers. That's all we had.

During the first war I also met with |misfortune, just like all Chechens. I had a wife at that time. She died when she was walking to the Presidential Palace.

When I came home for the first time I remembered the lyrics from a Russian song about the World War II 'the enemies burnt down my native home'. My situation was exactly the same. I entered my yard and there were 2-meter high weeds everywhere. The whole yard was covered with weeds. I lived in Grozny. So I went in and felt a pang in my chest. I had lived there two years earlier before the war and my wife had walked and ran around the place. So I went there but I didn't even know where she was buried. I tried to find her grave. I looked for it for a long time, walked around. I had the feeling of inexpressible grief. I had to pull myself together, to concentrate. Life carried on anyway. I didn't have much free time to relax, I had to continue my service.

Then I had to adapt to a peaceful life. By 31st December 1996 the Russian army had completely withdrawn from Chechnya. We were left alone. We started to form a government. There were the main headquarters somewhere there, I worked there. Well, I tried to fix my house up a little bit. I restored the house, but moved to a different place, closer to my brothers. I could not live in that house any more. I moved to a different place. And then, in general, we lived an ordinary life on top of the ruins.

The Chechen republic, the city of Grozny was completely destroyed. I guess, 90% of it was in ruins, if not more. When I was in Berlin, I saw photos of Berlin's ruins near the Brandenburg gates, near the memorial to the WWII where Russian tanks are standing. So I looked at the photos of Berlin's ruins and I couldn't tell these ruins from Chechen ones. If these photos and the photos of Grozny were shown to me and I was asked which city was which I wouldn't be able to answer. The ruins were exactly the same, here and there. All the factories were destroyed, all the educational buildings, hospitals. This entire infrastructure was completely disabled. People had nowhere to live. The government couldn't give anything to people because it didn't have anything itself.

Right after the war people were quite merry, they were euphoric after the victory and there were hopes for the bright future we had dreamt of before the war. There was no army. No pressure. We thought we would restore the republic and live a happy peaceful life. But unfortunately, a different fate was in store for us. Russian special services did their best not to let this peaceful life settle in.

I will go back to the year 1995 a bit, to the time of the Romanov – Maskhadov negotiations. We had a principle: POWs would be exchanged 'all for all'. The Russian side didn't want this so they instructed Chechens, Chechen businessmen to go to Chechnya and look for captured soldiers. These people came, found soldiers through relatives, gave some money to the person who could bring that soldier to them and then bought out the soldier. They bought them out, took them away and then this 'all for all' thing didn't work. And all our guys were in prison. Moreover, not a single person was arrested in the Russian Federation as a prisoner of war. They were all under falsified criminal charges and they were sitting in prison with this burden of a criminal case while Russia was buying out Russian soldiers on the sly. As a result the Russian army laid the foundation for human trafficking. The money was coming not from soldiers, but from above. They bought these soldiers and didn't give anyone back to us throughout the whole period. In a ruined Chechnya, with poor people with guns but no work, who were expecting a beautiful tomorrow: such hungry people are always looking for the possibility to make money. There's no opportunity to earn an honest wage because everything is ruined and here, Russia is offering a way to make easy money. There are always some people, with criminal tendencies or past. Just because they are Chechen doesn't mean they are all good. And later serious abductions started. That was in the peaceful period between the two wars. Imagine you were offered a million dollars at that time. Of course, there were even jokes going around: 'Whom can I steal?' But it was all imposed through the FSB agents and through businessmen.

We didn't expect the second war to start so soon. We thought the war was over. We were perfectly aware of all the economic

relations that couldn't be torn apart because there was oil, gas, electricity, even a rouble zone.

But we didn't expect war. Not at all. Yet there was one thing that we didn't take into account – Putin had come to power. And he needed this war to assert himself somehow. No one needed it – not the people, not the army, but this very person, who in actual fact became the Putin we now know during the war. He needed to seize power and lay his hands on it all. And then the war waged by the Russian authorities allowed him to tighten the screws and distract Russian citizens from the problems Russia was facing at that time. While tangible assets were being extensively stolen openly. All these Abramovichs, all the other billionaires of today, they took all the wealth and privatized it. And of course Putin helped them with this naturally. It was all done with Putin's consent. And the Russian Government didn't want Russian citizens to see that they were being robbed. For that they needed to trigger a war. They blew up houses in Moscow and lay the blame on Chechens. Though until now no trace of evidence that it was a Chechen has been found, and no one has been brought to justice. They needed to intimidate Russians that much. That was the Russian power, they needed this war and they created it.

Before the second war Russians chose tactics of Islamization. They sent long-bearded agents. Mostly they were people who had been alongside Gantamirov in the opposition groups. After Gantamirov was defeated all these people disappeared, the number of people who had been involved in the opposition was quite numerous and they all left Chechnya. The Russian authorities gave them good positions. They were registered with the MVD structures and received salaries although they were not policemen and they didn't walk around wearing service caps. They stayed at home, lived their lives and got all the comforts. They lived in Pyatigorsk, Maikop, and Nalchik. And the authorities worked with them, they received salaries and they were coached for Islamic lexis. They were Muslim anyway, so they just needed to learn some Arabic words, grow a long beard and they looked the part. Plus, in addition to them there were agents from Arab countries. As we know in Soviet times

the Arab world was controlled by the Soviet Union. Naturally, we assume they still have their Russian spy-ring. And they sent their agents to Chechnya to split us along religious grounds. They created radicalised Chechens, together with the help of Kadyrov Ahmat-Khadzhi, the former mufti. It was his invention, by the way, this term of 'Traditional Islam'. What is traditional Islam? Islam is Islam. Traditional, non-traditional, these things don't exist. And there is also radical Islam. What is radical Islam? The Koran is the same, the same things are written there, what does it have to do with it? Well, they hammered this stuff into people's heads deliberately. Then this expression – Wahhabism. I never heard in Chechnya what this Wahhabism was. They threw in this word, attached it to these people and the result was these people started to divide. They organized some armed units which we couldn't even control for a while. For some time before the war the Chechen power couldn't control the situation sufficiently. These so-called Wahhabi units received funding from somewhere else, received good weapons and were ideologised. Maybe the young ones really were religious but the leaders who were fooling them, they of course knew what they were doing. Already during the second war, we watched how the attitude towards the authorities, towards the president elect, changed. They tried in all kinds of ways to prevent the orders of the President of Ichkeriya being carried out. And during the war these people didn't actually obey the headquarters. They had their own emirs, their commanders, without whose permission no one wanted to go anywhere. That is while they lived their own life, our units, the ones we headed, strictly obeyed the headquarters, just as in the first war. But these two different organizations were not coordinated in any way. And when you know that these ones do not obey, don't hold the line assigned to them, you have to weaken other spots, take people from there to stop some gaps. And with our resources – I mean in the first war there were about 500 people defending Grozny, together with guerillas and in this war there were a few more people. For instance, when we were leaving Grozny in 1999, there were about 3–4 thousand people already. I mean people who were in Grozny at that time and as they were leaving joined those

who were fighting. These people had guns but were not engaged at the front, and being volunteers they didn't think it necessary to follow orders. They were just sitting somewhere and felt as if they were at war. But they didn't take part in military operations. When we were leaving the city they all pushed forward. This Islamic factor, which Russia imposed on us, still succeeded in separating us and to my greatest regret, has led to such sad consequences.

During the first war I was full of youthful romanticism, but during the second war, I remember it very well, I was so disgusted by it all. I went to war so reluctantly because of these jamaats. I didn't like it, this disobedience, this mess. And I had to deal with them all the time. That was very hard for me. And the war started but we were not ready for it emotionally. We had not yet recovered from the first terrible war. We were all wounded, both physically and emotionally, and these wounds had not yet healed. And then – bang!, the second war started. During the first war I didn't have children and I spent all the time thinking if I get killed and I have no children, who will remember me? I wanted to survive so that someone remained after me, to remember grandpa, grandma, daddy.

After the war I got married for a second time. And then I started having children and by 1999 I already had four children. Then during the war two more children were born. Well, how can you meet the war with little children? I was alone before but now I already had more serious responsibilities. I ran here, there, off to war, back again... Once I left them, took them to a village and then I had a sort of day off. I went to the village to visit them but there was no one there. No one at all. The whole village had been evacuated. They had all left. The Russians were already bombing the village with rockets, helicopters, they were firing with Grad. In short, they killed a lot of people. So I came, and my family was not there. And there was no one to ask where they had gone. I thought they had gone to another region. So I went there, well, I was asking people on the way. It turned out they had gone to another village. I went to that village by car with my brother and with my nephew, who died in the city afterwards. So I went to the village but couldn't find them there, it was a big village. How can you find these refugees, there were a

lot of refugees? A local guy helped us, he knew someone at whose place some refugees were staying and finally there we found my family. There was my wife, my little children and my sick mother too. They were staying at some relatives of my wife's. I found them there, talked to them, we sat together for a while and then I went back. Then again I came to the same place to see them. So I was dreaming about children in the first war but now these children were already a burden. Yes, I was attached, I couldn't leave them, because of my responsibility and everything, I had to provide for their safety, to take them away from this war. It was very hard during that war. Especially at moments like those. In short, the misfortune of the second war weighed heavily on us and we, I think, we suffered even more than during the first war, and not only in terms of casualties, but more morally and emotionally.

Of course, I am analysing this now. What mistakes did we make? Where, how could we have prevented something? Well, in short, I think, if I had to live my life anew, I would choose the same path. I wouldn't change anything. But we still need some time to sort it out the religious factors. And after that, when we realize that we are Chechens and not just Muslims and so on. That we are Chechens above all, the Chechen people, then we will be able to live a normal life.

Marem, 49 years old

If you want to talk about the war, I was in Chechnya during both Chechen campaigns, I didn't go anywhere, I saw everything with my own eyes. During the first war I was taken to the village from the city. My parents were afraid, were worrying about me. I was young, you can't be too careful, it's a normal thing with us Chechens. There was only one radio in the whole village. It was such an old one, an *Okean* and I went to listen to that radio every night. I went to listen to the news, because my father, my mother, and my brother had all stayed in the city. At first the news was very bad: terrible things were happening in the city, there were corpses everywhere and so on. Then my father came from the city. When he came to the village,

and I saw that he was alive, I was extremely glad for sure. Then my mother came. Only my brother stayed. Mother didn't know where he was.

I didn't believe anything bad could happen. I was so angry with my mom: she had left together with her brother, but nobody knew where my brother was. I ran away from home, ran away from the village to look for my brother. I walked all the way: sometimes cars would pass by and give me a lift, but some wouldn't take me. And so I reached Groznenskiy Reservoir...we called it the sea. The Russian military told me I couldn't go farther, sweep-up operations were under way, and my brother wouldn't be there. 'You better go back,' they said. The dam had been blown up and all the water was running out. There were corpses everywhere, it was very scary. I saw buses with signs for refugees. I went up to the buses and started talking to the women. There were many non-Chechens: a Russian, an Armenian and so on. I started asking the women if they had seen my brother. I described him. And some old Russian women told me there was a young man with that description who had helped old Russian women get to these buses, accompanied them as the firings were so bad and spared no one.

I returned with hope, though it was late and I was afraid. Then I went there again in the morning. When I came back again I was told someone had seen my brother at the market. That's how I found him and took him back to the village with me. Later I regretted it. Our mother was living in one village, my father in a different village. They were both elderly sick people, and when after visiting my mother, my brother was returning to our father, going from one village to the other, he was detained. We had documents stamped with an image of a wolf. (A wolf was printed on the official arms of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeriya – *editor's note*). It was not our fault, for a while this was the state, and it was the state stamp. So he was taken because of that stamp. He was tortured a lot. When I learnt that he'd been detained I walked there again. I didn't have a passport because it had been burnt, or any other papers, or any money. All I had was 500 roubles. I remember 500 roubles was like 5 roubles, only enough to get from one stop to another. I came up to drivers

and asked, 'Could you take me for free?' Some kind people did, some didn't. But finally I reached Khankala. When I was going through the checkpoint I heard a car drive up and somebody said from the car: 'We've been called to Preobrazhensky.' For some reason I thought it was the commandant, though I don't think it was a real name. And so I walked through, silent, when they came up and asked, 'Where are you going, miss?' I said, 'I've been called by Preobrazhensky.' The soldiers looked at each other and started laughing. I didn't get it then, but now I understand. Well, they thought a young girl had been called by Preobrazhensky. I guess, they thought something bad. But I got through and when I came to the checkpoint, there was a terrible scene, somebody started shouting, some waved their guns at me, 'How did you get here?' I said, 'You've got my brother!' They said, 'Who told you?' I said, 'The military.' – though, it was not true, I had only assumed he was with them. They said, 'Last name, first name, military rank!' I said I didn't know anything about military ranks. I also shouted and cried. Then another military guy came, he was kind. He started saying, 'We've got captives, our soldiers have disappeared, if you help us find them, your brother is here, we will give him to you safe and sound.' I asked for a photo, and they brought me some photo printed out on a computer, a blurry photo. For some reason I thought it must be an identikit, and asked, 'Is this an identikit?' They said, 'No. This is a real person. He disappeared, and we need to find him.' And I said that if he had been captured, I think I could find him. And they asked, 'Why? Have you got relatives among brigade generals?' 'No,' I said. 'But Chechnya is very small. And I am a sister whose only brother has disappeared, something bad has happened. I've got old parents. You've destroyed our house, we've got nowhere to live. I think that any Chechen, whether he's a brigade commander or a bandit from the street, is sure to help.' And so I did, I walked around and asked people. Then finally they told me in the OSCE that it was an identikit and that it was not worth looking for that man.

Then I sold our destroyed house. I was given four thousand dollars for it. The destroyed yard, the land, I sold everything, brought these four thousand dollars and started demanding a meeting, to

help buy out my brother. Then I went to the International Red Cross, to the Journalists' Union, to the Writers' Union. And I should admit it – everywhere I went people tried to help me. And so I learnt that he had been transferred from Khankala – beaten up, wounded, and barely alive. And I packed some things and headed to where he was. When I was young, I listened to the 'Prisoner' show every night, and for some reason I cared for the fates of these people. I was mostly shocked by the 'White Swan' prison which I heard about in the show. I understood that they were not the best people who were detained there, but it's in people's nature to make mistakes, to be dependent on the environment in which they find themselves. It has been scientifically proven. Of course, people don't become bad on their own, it is needs or bad parents who make them bad, or society which in some cases failed to give them a helping hand in time. And so I remembered these shows, remembered there were a lot of people, they shared everything like brothers, and he wouldn't get anything if I didn't bring a lot. I remember I bought 10 kilos of everything, and brought huge bags of it all. The place was empty, surrounded by barbed wire and soldiers. It was very scary. A small kiosk could be seen not far away. A man was selling stuff there. I told the man where I was from, what my name was, and asked that if they took me inside and I didn't come out, that he would tell somebody I had been taken so that no one looked for me. He said he would. But they didn't take me inside. A young guy came out, introduced himself, said he was Officer Ivan. He took the whole parcel and said I shouldn't bring so much. He also said, 'Your brother is here by mistake.' There was no hope of getting him out. Everyone I met, all the officers, said that only exchange would help... exchange for a captured soldier. Probably there were some POWs, but everyone I met said there weren't. And then our relatives, some young guys, captured two warrant officers – Russian guys. They didn't torture them, didn't hurt them. When they captured them they explained they needed to save a relative – that their cousin was looking for her only brother. And so they exchanged them. I remember this exchange in the OSCE. When I came and told Maskhadov and everyone that I wanted to exchange two captured soldiers for my

brother, Maskhadov and his supporters shouted that it shouldn't be done, that there would be an exchange of everyone for everyone. I shouted back 'You've got no captives! If you have them, why didn't you give them to me to use in exchange for my brother? And I won't let it happen, that my brother... Because of your political whims...' The OSCE prosecutor came up to us and asked them to translate what I was saying. And after the conversation with him we were allowed to go ahead with the exchange. So we exchanged my brother in the OSCE, and handed over those guys. I was afraid to go up to him because I had been told terrible things: that his lower lip had been cut off, that his mouth was torn, all this stuff. It turned out that an old doctor, a Russian, had sewn his lip on without anaesthetic. He said, 'If you can bear it, I'll make it so that your lip is not cut off.' So he sewed it, put eight inner stitches in. They had of course cut out skin shoulder straps on his shoulders...stripped his skin off, stripped all the skin off his back. Tortured him with electricity...

And many guys who came back from there, came to see me, 'You saved us from starvation.' they said. When I brought parcels for my brother I begged the soldiers to give everything to him, and I brought the same amount of food for the soldiers. I said to them, 'This is for you. You eat this. I know you don't eat well here either. But this you pass on to him, please, I am begging you.' And they did. Really, they did.

And the second war was even more frightening. We sent my mother to the village again but my father had already passed away. He died during the first war. He said, 'If there is another bombing attack today I won't bear it, my heart will burst.' And indeed, he had a heart attack that night. We couldn't even bury him the way he wanted because he wanted to be buried in the village where he was born, because of the fighting we couldn't take him there. My brother didn't know what to do. He was very much afraid he would get put in the pounder again. And he said, 'I'll go with the guys. I'll never take up arms, I'm a creative person, and I believe in life and kindness. I won't take up arms but I will be with them, I think it will be safer there. I can't bear the torture again. It's so humiliating and frightening.' And I didn't tell him not to go. That was in 2000 before

the events in Komsomolskoye. Then, after Komsomolskoye, he was sent abroad. Mother had already died. She had a heart attack. She was sitting alone and said, 'I will never see my son again.' I said, 'Mom, what are you saying? You can't say that!' But she lived for nine years with the thought she wouldn't see him again, and she was right, she never saw him after that.

I remember another incident. Soldiers used to come to Staropromyslovsky Highway at night and lay mines in front of the metal storage. And in the morning tanks, armoured machinery would drive up, and were blown up on those very mines the Russian military had laid. It was very frightening. We tried to prevent it. Mother and I would go out and shout, 'Guys, why are you doing this? Chechens have no tanks, we don't have armoured cars, no planes, nothing but Berdan rifles that have been left in military units. It's not enemy tanks that explode it's your own Russian guys exploding!' They didn't believe us, evidently. They had been given orders and they fulfilled their orders. A lot of guys died like that. So one morning a tank was blown up, and a young guy, I can still remember his face, was saying, 'Ladies, please, help me, I don't want to die!' The women stood there, no one would go up to him. I ran up to him, I thought how hard-hearted they were not to do so. But in fact they had frozen in terror. He was only half of a man, lying in front of them. There was no lower half of the soldier's body, you see? The upper part was still alive, talking, begging for help, wanted to live. He had such a thirst for life in his eyes. He wanted to live so much! When he understood he was dying, he said, 'Ladies, forgive me, you are no enemies to me, I didn't want to fight against you, forgive me please!' I stroked his head and said, 'God will forgive, calm down. Neither you, nor us are to blame for this war'. And that is how he died.

And this thirst for life of his, this craving... You see, you can be political and say that everything is fine. But everything is not fine! When there is terrible pain, it has not been talked out by both sides, when so many things have been kept back...

We didn't work anywhere. In my free time I wrote things down. I met the second war in the village. I didn't have any papers. The house where I lived as a refugee was destroyed and my papers and

the papers of many refugees and owners of houses had been buried under the ruins. It was impossible to clear all that because they kept bombing all the time. And when troops landed in the mountains, I said we should go out and meet them and do something otherwise they would pass by and throw grenades into the houses and kill us all. A lot of houses were destroyed and they couldn't know there were people inside. We needed to go and meet them and explain there were people in the village. And we went out, women and children, with a green sheet to meet those paratroopers. We went to meet them and said, 'If you need to check our papers we will go together with you to all the basements, and we would like you not to use arms. If you want, we will go ahead, and you will be behind, and then you can check our papers'. They agreed, and this is how they checked our passports. The guys were very much surprised there were people in the village. One of them even said, 'Can you imagine, and we've got an order to destroy anything alive'. We were a human shield for the tanks, so that nothing happened to them. We understood, of course, what was possible. Can you understand the feeling that you know these people are armed? It is impossible to understand this if you haven't been through it.

And I felt like a traitor. Though I understood we had to do it to save the lives of civilians. But if the rebel fighters really wanted to they could have finished us off as well. That was the picture. And I felt myself a traitor. I felt like no one knew what we would have done if we were in the shoes of those rebel fighters, you see? So that is how we accompanied that column.

During the second war my son, who was with his father, he was 12 years old then, he heard of new atrocities. He came to me with tears in his eyes and said, 'If something happens to you, I won't be able to bear it. Carry a grenade with you. If the military take you or something else happens, you just pull the ring and hold it. It doesn't hurt, you'll die'. I understood what he meant when he was saying 'something else happens'. He was afraid of disgrace, he was afraid I would be raped or taken away or something like that. He'd rather die than he experience shame. It was an awful discovery for me. I still can't get rid of the stereotypes he has in his mind, though he

is a grown man now. Sometimes you need to step over this barrier and survive what is considered a disgrace. 'This shouldn't happen. Better death than this'. It is certainly shocking.

And if this is important, I think, if this is so important for people, why humiliate people so much, destroying this last barrier, destroying the last human values? The matter is not that it was a physical war. It was also aimed at moral and psychological humiliation, you see?

Sometimes I really wanted to die. At night, when I was sleeping and the planes would start flying, my aunt would wake me up. Once I burst out crying and told her why I was upset, 'Why don't you want me to die happy? I will be sleeping and won't know anything. And I will die happy' I shouted. I thought, 'I wish I could take a lot of sleeping pills, fall asleep and die happy not to see it all'. It was terrifying, petrifying. The despair was very harsh, it was as if everything had finished and I had to leaf through my whole life again, and I still hadn't started living it. It seems like something surprisingly good is about to happen, and I will start another, good life, afresh. But that feeling of despair is only growing worse, it isn't disappearing.

Natalia, 72 years old

My mother died in 1992, and my dad died even earlier in 1974. In 1996 there was a corridor, and many people fled to Moscow, and so did I, to my friends. I only had my passport with me and that was all, no other papers. I left everything with my brother hoping that it would all calm down and we could come back. I applied to the migration service for compensation in case everything was destroyed there or something. Many people did so and we found out that we also needed to. Well, we contacted them. But I didn't have any papers for the apartment, I had to return to Grozny to confirm that I really lived there. And so I went back to Grozny, especially as my brother was still there and he was sick. I didn't have anyone else.

In 1999, it was awful – I got into a trouble. My own personal tragedy. I was on my way to school with a girl, we were on the bus, it was a small bus, a UAZ, I guess... it was on 14th March, I remember it as if it just happened, it was Sunday, we worked on Sundays and had

Fridays off, according to Chechen custom. I was going to work with a girl from 9th grade. At the stop where we were to get off she got off first and I followed her. I had to pay the driver for the ticket. I gave the money and got off. She had already crossed the road and stood waiting for me on the other side. I got off the bus, and it hadn't even started off yet! And at that moment a car drove out from behind the bus in my direction. It stopped abruptly and a young guy got out of the back. You know, he looked awful, had such savage eyes. They say they selected such people on purpose. I was shocked by his looks, and I was frightened. I was at a loss, I didn't know what was going on. He grabbed my arm roughly with such a strong grip that I couldn't pull my arm out. I was wearing a spring woollen coat, it was March and still chilly, a warm scarf on my head, ankle boots on my feet, well, and a skirt, we didn't wear trousers there. So he grabbed me and started pushing me into the back seat of the car. I only had time to cry out, 'Help, save me!' But it happened so quickly, in a flash, so even if anybody had heard my scream, no one would have been able to help me. In short, he pushed me into the back seat, and the car drove off. I was terrified! I didn't expect it at all. Well, when you know that there you are under threat you can prepare yourself. But in this case absolutely nothing had warned me – and there I was! They turned the music on loud. Pulled my scarf off my head, blindfolded me and warned me, 'If you cry, we'll kill you.' I already understood, the music was so loud, why cry? What would be the point?

They went through my pockets straight away. I had the key from my apartment in my pocket, they took it and I knew at once that that was that. 'That's it, I've lost the apartment,' I thought. Well, thank God I had me veteran's card, the 'Labor Veteran' card in my purse. I had a black purse with me, I used to go to school with it. Inside were the children's exercise books and some money. The parents chipped together to give us some money because there were no salaries, 10 roubles each they gave. We were to hand it in to a kitty and then it was distributed. As far as I remember I had 70 roubles in 10-rouble banknotes. So they took the key from the apartment and the money from the bag, and threw the bag to me. Oh my Goodness!

Well, and then they took me I don't know where. We were just driving, driving without stopping. They were speaking Chechen, roaring with laughter, the music was playing loudly, and it hurt me so much, pained me. I thought about how that was the day I was supposed to give a lesson on Dostoevsky's biography to the 10th grade. My favourite writer. I was so well prepared. I had a splendid photo album with photos. I wanted so much to show it to the children one day. And it was all ruined. I never gave that lesson and I couldn't understand why they had grabbed me, and where they were taking me, why? I thought, 'They will kill me now and that will be that.' There were such cases when people were abducted, it was a mass phenomenon. Not only Russians were abducted but Chechens as well. They took people's apartments, property, everything. And if a person returned – it meant they needed some information from him. And I thought, 'They will kill me, bury me and that will be that – there's no one to look for me!' Because I had no one! There were no relatives. 'Somebody must have lead them to me, so they can take the apartment. I am alone...'

It was still light when they stopped and led me somewhere blindfolded. Then those who abducted me said something in Chechen and left. And other guys were with me, the ones who had been waiting. It was the first stop, the first stop for a rest. I was awfully hungry, my eyes were swollen with tears. I had been crying quietly because if I started sobbing and weeping... they don't like it when people resist or go off into hysterics, it drives them wild. And I thought, 'Why humiliate myself and show my fear?' But still, there were tears, and it hurt and it was painful. I thought, 'My goodness! Guys, children, I taught you for so long, didn't I? And what is this for, how is this possible, ah? Well, what did I do to you? Oh my!'

And I started, do you know what I started talking about? I said, 'Oh lord! What a shame! I've got a lesson today – my favourite writer, Dostoevsky's biography. Well, what is this, what for, why!' They told me, 'You'd better not think about Dostoevsky now, you should be thinking about how to get out of here.' I said, 'Well, if you help me, I'll get out of here.' 'No, we can't.' the replied. I said, 'Have you at least read 'Crime and punishment' by Dostoevsky?' Naturally, they

had no idea what I was talking about so I started to tell them the story briefly. And I must have somehow touched their hearts, they became gentler and one of them asked me (they used the informal Ty (you) all the time), 'You must be hungry?' I said, 'Yes, it wouldn't hurt to eat a little something.' 'Well, wait, wait a bit,' he said. They brought me lavash, it was so hot, I guess their houses were not far away, I don't know. And a thermos of tea. I thought to myself, 'Well, this must be thanks to Dostoevsky, to 'Crime and Punishment. Because of that they gave me something to eat and drink'.

Then the abductors came and started asking for my address. 'Tell me your home address'. I thought, 'If I said somebody else's address – why should other people suffer?' Can you imagine, they can... 'No, I thought, they've taken the key. That's it, let it be! The Lord sees everything anyway, He will figure it out.' And I gave my address. Then I learnt that they had played at being landlord of my apartment, had taken everything out, completely robbed it and had even taken the papers.

Then they put me into the car again and drove somewhere. I was brought to a private house with a basement. They dragged me downstairs somehow, then went upstairs themselves and closed the door to the basement. I looked around, it was dark, I groped around and felt an old ragged mattress and that was it, there was nothing else. I was dressed warmly. A scarf, a thick coat, a mohair cardigan, and a warm blouse under it, well, tights, then leggings, and autumn ankle boots. And the lid of that basement was left ajar, just a bit, so the light penetrated through the slot. I could see the light, and I thought, 'Oh Lord, at least I will tell when it's day and night.' Well, they were not sleeping yet, I understood I was underneath them.

Oh God, how much time, I guess, I spent a few days in that basement. I started making noise. I hoped, I heard a herd of cows pass by every morning and I thought maybe there was a shepherd. So I groped for some stones on the floor. And when this herd was driven by, the cows mooed, and I knocked on the wall with the stones. I knocked and knocked. The cows must have heard me but people didn't.

Well, what else was there in that basement? I had the prayer 'Aid to the Living' with me! Once I had a vision. I tell everyone about it as if it was a miracle, but it really did happen. One of the walls of that basement was wooden, all the others were brick. And there was a stone floor. Once I prayed to Our Lady, asked her to save me, to keep me alive, to help me, get me out of captivity, help me escape. And suddenly I saw her image with a baby in her arms on the wooden wall. I saw her descending to me. I couldn't believe my eyes! But it was just for a moment – she appeared just as they paint her in icons. Then it got light in the basement. So light! And there appeared to be space – as if the borders of the basement had moved farther away. And it seemed to me I could walk somewhere, you see? Farther, farther, father away. There was a lot of space, it was huge! I made an attempt, walked there but no, I bumped into the wall. And everything disappeared, it got dark again. But I had the belief that I would be saved. She would save me, she would help me. I gained confidence. Can you imagine? Some strength and confidence.

One night it was pouring down. They came, dragged me out of the basement blindfolded and took me out of the house into the rain, took me somewhere by car. 'Well, you knocked, so you'll see heaven now'. I thought, 'What heaven? They must have prepared something even worse'. And indeed. Oh my Lord! They brought me. Well, let's say, to a house and a yard. And there was a basement in that yard. So they took me downstairs and there was a pencil box-shaped basement there. You could spread your arms and there were walls either side. It was long. No shelves, nothing, it was empty. And the stones were not flattened. They threw a few sacks to me, and I was supposed to sleep on those sacks. And it was still cold.

Yes, I was lucky, that when I was in the first basement, a Chechen girl had thrown me some woollen socks. I started complaining to that girl, 'You are young, just like my students, I worked at a school. You are committing such a sin! Why do you need to do this? You'll have to answer before God.' And she told me, 'I am afraid myself. If I don't do it, they will kill me. My mother died recently, and I have a weak heart. I am afraid of everyone.' This is what she told me, and I didn't say another word to her, didn't turn to her, I realized she was

worthy of pity herself, this girl. But she threw these woollen socks to me, so thick, though torn in a few spots, but they helped me. If it weren't for them I would have lost my legs there for sure, there in that basement with the stone floor and stone walls.

A real nightmare began. For three days they didn't bring me any food. There was water – a tin mug – and I drank this water little by little. Then I thought, 'If need be I can drink urine, it is not necessary to eat, but if I get dehydrated, that's it, I'm done for.' And so the water was running out, and I thought 'it's time to start'. And they put a bucket for me, well, for toilet needs, I couldn't go out to the toilet. But the bucket had a leak, and so on.

Well, what did I do in that basement? I remembered my vision, I believed for some reason, 'Anyway the merciful powers will come to my rescue, I will be saved,' I thought. I read poetry, prayed, sang songs, just to distract myself from all that, I exercised, otherwise I thought my legs would seize up and that would be the end. The basement was small but I walked anyway, walked and walked. In the night it was cold, I was very old. Well, just sacks on the stones and it was March, it was cold.

One night they came, pushed me into the car again and took me somewhere. I will never forget how they drove rejoicing, sang songs in their language. Talking to me, they said they had been calling my relatives, who had left Chechnya and, evidently, some of these relatives had said, 'Well, we'll think about it.' They would think about how to help me. So they were demanding money. A ransom. And they were glad.

As I found out later they brought me to a village a few kilometres from Grozny. It was my last dwelling. The first thing I saw was that it was a one-room apartment, not a basement. They were now hoping to get money, they were glad. But there was also a basement in that apartment, nevertheless. They told me, 'Here is a metal ladder, there's a basement here, do you know how deep it is? So if you misbehave – you'll live there'. My God, why, what for? I couldn't get it. They threw me a torn mattress to the wall and brought an old blanket. These guys, there were now two different guards, slept right next to the window. Can you imagine: a one-bedroom

apartment, a window, and right under the window there was a steel bed, and there was only a mattress on that bed, and that's where they slept. I was forbidden to go close to the window. And the window itself was curtained, there was a thick-cloth curtain hung at it. They warned me, 'If you go there you're done for'. At first I didn't understand what all the fuss was about. And they were almost always in the room, one or the other. At first I didn't go up to the window, I was afraid. But later there were some moments when they both went out into the kitchen. One of them left, shouted to the other and then they quickly returned. And I grew bolder, came up and pulled aside the curtain. And it turned out it was the first floor! This is what they were afraid of! Now I was just waiting for a good moment.

I escaped on 21st April 1999. Some time passed, the abductors came once and said that in three days they would cut off my finger and send it to my relatives. 'You've got bad relatives,' they said. 'And we'll send them a cassette, we'll have your photo taken.' And when they left, I thought, 'No, no way! To be subjected to this – this is terrible! Some young cowards would do such a thing to me!' And I started praying, 'Good Lord, help me, tell me what to do!' So for three days I didn't eat anything, couldn't eat. I only drank water, asked them for water. And all the time my brain was working, 'What am I to do to stop this happening! They will do it! They have told me so many times that my relatives were bad, that they will kill me and dig me up in the wasteland. And no one would look for you, no one needs you'. I knew they would do it.

So 21st April came. I already had a plan. In the morning it was beastly cold. And it was the first floor, the trees, the branches were beating against the windows, the wind was strong. And I told them, 'You know, I feel unwell, I am suffocating'. And I had already told them several times, that I had a sick heart, that my feet had failed me. I had to pretend sick and feeble, so that they knew that I wouldn't be able to run away anywhere, that I had neither health, nor strength. So I started nagging, 'Open the window, I say! I feel unwell, my heart won't bear it.' And they opened it. The wind started blowing, it got chilly. One of them went to the kitchen, said,

'It's damn cold, I'm going.' Well, I begged the Lord again, 'Oh Lord, let this one go as well, let him go, let him go!' Soon he gave up, because they were right under the window. And said, 'Well, I'm off too.' And they shouted at me from the kitchen, 'You wanna eat? I'll bring you some food?' I said, 'No, I won't eat now, later. I'll tell you, when I want something.' And I thought to myself it was time to start. They were sitting in the kitchen, clattering dishes, eating. And in the meantime I made a doll, as if I was there. I rolled up my coat somehow, covered it with the blanket, put the scarf on top, as if it was my head. Then I took out my Labor Veteran card from my boots. Then the cross, they once saw my cross and said, 'Take it off!' They didn't know it was silver. Well, maybe they didn't want to touch it as it was a cross. I didn't throw it away, of course, and this cross, and the 'Aid the Living' card, the prayer – took it all along. I approached the hall door, there was a bathroom behind it, and the kitchen, where they were. They told me, when I needed to go to the toilet I should warn them, they even accompanied me there, to the toilet. I shouted at them, 'I need to go to the toilet.' No one came out, they said, 'Go.' I thought, 'Thank God!' And so I went, came up to the door of the bathroom, grabbed the handle, opened it and slammed it once and loudly, so that they heard that I was there, that I had gone into the bathroom. And I quickly tiptoed back to the room in socks, closed the door and rushed to the window sill. That was it! I climbed down, looked and saw a ledge below, I stepped onto the ledge and then on to the ground. I even closed the window behind myself. I was free! This was indescribable! One needs to experience it. You can't imagine how it felt! I thought, 'This is it! Now I won't give in to them, I'll shout to the world! I won't let myself be caught by them, I won't give in to them while I'm alive.'

I climbed down and said again, 'Lord, lead me, guide me, direct me! Where shall I go, help me!' And my feet carried me away. Where did I get the strength, where did I get the energy? In those woollen socks, in a ragged gown, I was a frightful sight. But I ran. Then I saw two women standing at the entrance of an apartment block, they looked Russian. I ran up to them, 'Ladies! Help me! Save me! The rebels might run after me, I've spent many days with them. Hide

me, please! I'll tell you everything later!' Oh! They waved me away like mad, 'No, no, we're afraid! We got robbed recently ourselves, they took our money and beat us up. No, no, we are afraid.' I said, 'Okay, well, tell me where to go! Well, where?' They said, 'Here, on the ground floor, the same entrance, the first or the second door, there are Chechens, but they are good.' Those were their words literally, 'Chechens, but they are good.' So I knocked on the first door. A woman opened, she looked about 40 years old. I rushed inside past her, she looked perplexed, but she didn't turn me out. Maybe I looked so pitiable, she didn't kick me out. I said, 'For Allah's sake! Help me, save me. I am not a bandit, I am no swindler, I am a victim, I will tell you everything, help me for Allah's sake, close the door, please!' She closed the door, absolutely calmly. She took me inside, there was a three-room apartment, a living room and two tiny bedrooms. She took me into the living-room, 'Sit down on the sofa.' I sat down and started telling them my story, 'I am a school teacher, such a thing has happened to me, I ran away from these criminals just now.' Well, she listened to all I had to say and said, 'You must be hungry?' And I hadn't eaten for several days. I said, 'Yes, of course.' She took me to the kitchen, took out everything she had in the fridge – sour cream, cottage cheese, tea, flat bread, and put it all on the table and told me, 'Come on, eat.' I ate while she told me, 'I am a woman, I can't help you, but my husband and elder son are working in the small room now, they are renovating it, they will finish and then will help you. You will tell them everything and they will do anything they can for you. So, calm down.' And indeed, they finished working, came through and I told them everything. And then an old woman came, I guess they had told all the neighbours by then – and people came in crowds! There were Chechens and Russians – they all came into the apartment, looked at me as if I was a rare species from the Red Book. Some of them asked, 'Tell us where they are, we will go there now. How can we help you, what can we do, where to take you?' They were also afraid in case my captors should start looking for me. The men went to look for weapons. 'We'll find weapons, we'll have to take them along but we won't give you away to anyone, don't worry.' And when they said,

'We won't give you away to anyone, don't worry.' – that was when I stopped being afraid, I believed them. They came with grenades. They changed my clothes, absolutely everything I was wearing. The women said, 'We will burn it all'. They gave me other clothes, changed my looks. And off we went. There was a driver with me, and another man. They only had grenades with them, they said, 'If something happens, we'll have it out with them.'

I told them to send me to Moscow. Well, they brought me to Ingushetia. But the airport there was guarded. And I didn't even have a passport – how could I get on a plane without a passport? A woman, a teacher, whose family was shot afterwards, gave me her passport. She took a risk. I didn't know how she could do it, but she wasn't afraid! Those were the kind of people I met! I'm thankful to them, those simple people who took risks. She gave her passport without any hesitation. Straight away. And they took me to the airport under guard, bought me a ticket and gave me some money. Well, they gave me a small sum. 'Well, you'll get to Moscow, but what will you do there?' they asked. I was on the plane and the plane was full of Chechens, only Chechens were flying. All strangers, all Chechens. I thought, 'Oh my, just let none of them...' And then I took a taxi and went to my friend's house. They gave me a very warm welcome. They fed me, clothed me, warmed me. I didn't go out of their apartment for a month. I was afraid somebody would come after me, I was afraid all the time. Once I went out and saw a car with tinted windows and no number plates! You should have seen me hiding behind the bushes then! I waited for them to leave finally! Well, nobody cared about me, people got on buses, no one paid any attention to me. Well, if somebody looked at me from the side, they would have thought I was a crazy woman hiding behind the trees, looking for something occasionally. That's the state I was in. I was afraid of cars. I kept looking to see if cars had number plates or not. And what kind of windows they had.

Later on I learnt that the house where I had stayed had burnt down.

Veda, 28 years old

I was little then, that's why I was not afraid. I didn't worry, I only saw other people's fear. Well, I could understand what was happening by looking at my parents', granny's, or grandpa's expressions, by what they were saying. I understood something bad was going on, that they were alarmed, but it didn't really affect me.

We lived in the basement. It seemed funny to me to live in a basement, and to run to look at the missiles and helicopters. At that age it was not stressful for my mind or soul.

We left for Dagestan to stay with my father's friends. I remember we drove for a long time but I don't remember the journey at all, we had to go a long route round. They welcomed us warmly but it was a God-forsaken village in the middle of nowhere. At one end there was a field and at the other some small houses. Everything was so small there! There were no shops, not even a kiosk where we could buy something. It was such an interesting place. It was hard to live there because together with our family there were lots of other refugees in just three rooms. But it was funny too. During the first war I didn't worry or suffer at all. It was just a change of scene for me. Well, it was clear something bad was happening but I didn't suffer from shock at all.

Throughout the war in Chechnya there were rumours from time to time that the war had finished. People believed everything, took it all so seriously. So we went home as well. Firstly, it was impossible to live where we were, and secondly they were saying the war had finished. It was in March, I think, in 1995, when the war was in full swing. We came because we heard that it was over and we could go home. We came back, the war, they said, was over, and that's precisely when the real firing started and we ran to the basement. A friend came to see my father, he had a good laugh, 'What do you mean the war is over? It's only just beginning'.

In principle you can get used to anything, and we got used to this as well... we got used to living without light, we closed up all the rooms and brought a stove. We lived in one room so we could keep it warm. It was impossible to heat the other rooms. We lit candles...

And there was also one major job to be done – we had to fetch water from a few kilometres away, in buckets and cans. There was no water. The water pumps were far away, but there was a spring. We had to climb downhill about a hundred meters and then climb up these hundred meters again, and we, my sisters and I, we did that 10–20 times a day for five or six years. We just got used to it.

During the first war I didn't worry at all about whether they'd kill me or not, but my elder brother, he was a year and a half older than me, it was obvious that he suffered a lot. There were helicopters and missiles flying over us all the time. He worried a lot and couldn't study. My father forced him to. My brother said that when he heard those sounds he couldn't study, couldn't keep anything in his mind. But my father said, 'Get used to it, this will go on forever'. I could see my brother suffered a lot, but I didn't suffer at all.

Of course, relationships between people changed because when there is no war, when there is no death people are not so emotionally stressed, they are kind. But when there is a war going on everyone cries all the time, there are funerals all the time, half of the people leave, everything is so tense. The atmosphere is quite different and people change as well.

When the first war finished, Ichkeriya sort of won and was being built. Chaos started, two years of chaos. It was not safe, the law didn't work. Everyone kept shooting all the time, Wahhabism spread. I can't say it was a peaceful time, war continued. There was no firing, sweep-up operations, or fighting but it was a complete mess and everything was extreme. Every second person was armed, did whatever he wanted, could do anything.

We lived in a small village. It was such a place... During the lessons either rebel fighters, I'll call them Wahhabis, or federal troops would enter the classrooms. They loved taking hold of some place or another and firing from there. There were cases when local people ran after the Wahhabis and tried to catch them because they caused problems, because they kept firing from the village, for instance.

Sometimes there were kind of funny incidents. For instance, our granny's village is big. There were a lot of Wahhabis there and

there were problems there every day. During the day there were federal soldiers walking around the village, they carried out sweep-up operations and behaved badly. But by nighttime they would have left and, just like in the game 'Mafia', Wahhabi rebel fighters would enter the village. And for some reason they never met each other. Sometimes columns of Wahhabis would march somewhere for hours and we couldn't even cross the road. They left, and then helicopters would appear and start bombing the village. Then they would disappear and the rebel fighters would return. This lasted for a few years. It was all very weird.

I remember the beginning of the second war. I don't know if it was necessary or not. I didn't really think about it. I knew for certain that I didn't want Chechnya to separate because when I was a child I thought that, if Chechnya separated from Russia, the border – it wouldn't be just a border. I imagined fences cutting us off from everything else. Chechnya would close the borders and it would be impossible to go anywhere. That's what I thought. There was no feeling in our family that we wanted to separate. Though, among my classmates there was talk, such as 'We wanna separate', 'Ichkeriya', 'We love Dudaev' and so on. When Dudaev died, I heard, everyone cried. But in our family no one even talked about his death.

We learnt that the second war had started from TV, Putin was announcing something. My aunt started crying. And so it began. I remember I worried a lot. We went home. We lived under war conditions for only half a year, but during those six months I had time to suffer enough to make up for all the years that I hadn't suffered. I don't know why, I guess I was older and I was afraid. The war is people. Lawlessness everywhere, anyone can do anything, and there's nowhere and no one to complain about it to, to tell that something extraordinary is happening, something arbitrary. Every day I thought, 'Well, that's it, the next bomb will fall on us, and I will die.' I didn't sleep at night. I couldn't do anything about it. I listened to the sound of the planes. I couldn't play. My elder brother went somewhere to play basketball during the second war. I couldn't understand how someone could play basketball, when they couldn't

hear the noise there – what if a plane came flying, and something happened.

I don't remember talking to anybody about whether we needed the war or not. We went to school, but most of the time we studied at home. We studied at home for most of the first war because the teachers weren't paid. So there was no one to talk to. And there was nothing to discuss, we thought about how to survive...

It was a hard life, I grew unaccustomed to light. I always imagined Moscow in this way – that there is light there and there are no power cuts. And we didn't have light. And still it seemed strange when we moved to Moscow, that there was always light, gas, and water. It was unusual for the first month. I think, such inconveniences as not having light and gas and having to carry water, they bear consequences. During the second war I worried a lot about my family. The worry itself was killing me. I thought every day that that day would be the day we died.

Still it hurts me to think that Chechnya was attacked and as a result everything was destroyed, even psychologically, and God knows what kind of youth the young generation grew up to be. Everything was turned upside down. Such hatred and intolerance towards Chechens was generated. When we moved to Moscow everything was terrible. People told me to my face, 'You should be blown up, killed, wiped off the face of the earth.' For the first two years I really wanted to go back to Chechnya, even though the war was still going on, because I hated Moscow. The attitude towards us was completely negative. Now it's not like that but at the beginning of 2000 you met it everywhere. We had problems with the police – they came to us at 2 or 3 a.m., I heard them saying into their radios, 'They're living here without registration. What shall we do with them?' It happened all the time. The neighbours said, 'They're going to blow us up! They're Chechens!' It was terrible. For the first half a year I had a permanent headache, I suffered a lot. Then it all passed somehow. But at the time it was really painful for me.

Ruslan, 24 years old

The Wahhabis, they were also there. They were everywhere. In Grozny as well, and even before the war. Of course, if you compare what they were doing then with what they are doing today, it was nothing. They asked women to put on headscarves, not hijabs but just headscarves, and women were surprised even by this. If women needed to drive past their checkpoints they showed the headscarves and that was that. The Wahhabis themselves didn't wear anything of the kind, not like today. At the time it seemed shocking, people like that were avoided...

Madina, 29 years old

In 1995 I was in the 5th grade, I was twelve or thirteen years old. I heard that something was going on. My father decided to go to Chechnya and find out what was happening, because our uncle came from there, and they said that so far things seemed calm. But I guess that was before the federal troops arrived. And after that we watched the news. We didn't miss a single broadcast once the decision to bring in federal troops had been made. There was talk that the whole conflict would be over in a couple of hours. And then we heard that sweep-up operations were going on in our village. Father forced himself to go, he was worried about his father, his grandpa. Sweep-up is when papers are checked because the Federal soldiers thought all young men to be rebel fighters.

My father went and took my sister along with him, she asked him to take her, 'I want to go, to find out everything that's happening.' she said. And I also wanted to go but my mother said, 'No, I'll need you at home, you stay and you can go next time.' We didn't think about how dangerous and scary it was to go there. My sister stayed in Chechnya. My father came back, brought pictures of ruins, of a tank standing in our street, a crushed tank. It was both weird and frightening to see those images. My father came back two months after he had left. Mother said, 'And where is Zaina?', my sister. 'She couldn't bring herself to come back so she stayed. She stayed with Grandpa and Grandma.'

Grandma told us that during the sweep-up operations they hid in the basement. No one actually troubled them. When the Federals saw there were only old people left in the house they left. 'That's it, let's go, there are only old people here'. There is a basement in our yard, Father had dug it out so we could store pickles there and so they hid there, put mattresses in there. They were very old. Once there was a sweep-up operation and Grandma told us afterwards, 'It had been snowing since the morning and the winter was very cold. There was more firing and we decided to climb down into the basement'. A bomb fell on the roof of the house and the yard was partially destroyed. And they were sitting in the basement. The soldiers entered the yard. A soldier looked into the basement and saw Grandma and Grandpa. 'Come on,' he said. 'Throw a grenade in there, it's time for them to kick the bucket anyway'. Grandma couldn't speak Russian well. 'Throw the grenade, I tell you!' she ordered the soldier. The soldier looked inside again and other soldiers started arguing with him. 'I won't throw it. How are they bothering you?' they started arguing. It turned out that several other soldiers stood up for them and they were left alone. But they thought these soldiers were about to throw a grenade, there were rumours then about grenades being thrown into basements. There were cases when people were blown up right inside the basements. Grandma said she had gotten very frightened. Grandpa didn't show his fear, didn't utter a word. After that Grandma wouldn't go down into the basement during fighting. 'It's inexpressible,' that's what she said about it. Her hands would shake and she was very worried. You remember moments like those.

And my uncle was killed. He was my mother's only brother. He worked as a taxi driver with his UAZ car during the war to provide for his family. It was in 2002, in January. He was giving a lift to a pregnant woman, a guy of about 24 years old (later it turned out he was the only son in the family) who was a school headmaster and another man. The soldiers fired at them and one of them was shot dead at once. Then they were kept in some destroyed houses, in some ruins. They were kept there till morning and then they were told they would be released. But they were shot to hide any

evidence. They shot them, put the corpses in the UAZ and set them on fire so that it would look like rebel fighters had done it. But there was a man from a neighbouring village driving by. He reported it all to the military unit straight away. Strange as it might seem, both the Chechen police and the Federals drove there straight away and took the soldiers away.

My uncle was the driver of that car. He didn't come home that night. Everyone was worried, they had heard shooting. They heard a burst of submachine-gun fire in the village during the night. You can hear everything very clearly there, it is not far, and in the morning my uncle didn't come home. They were guessing, 'He must have stayed with neighbours because of the shooting, he might be in the next village.' They waited for news. And then a neighbour came, a relative, my mom's cousin and said that something had happened, but it was not clear what. They asked her to call their oldest aunt and she learnt that he had been killed.

There were checkpoints at every step. Cars were stopped. Once I remember travelling to Grozny from a village in the mountains and I saw a group of Chechen women who had blocked the road in Starye Atagi. Some boys and girls had disappeared, students from the 11th grade. And the women had blocked the road completely. They wouldn't let soldiers or tanks pass. There were armoured carriers and Chechen cars, a lot of people had gathered, a huge crowd, and they were not letting anyone through. I remember we waited there for about two hours when finally there was news that the children's tracks had been discovered. Although it was still not clear who had taken them. They demanded that the Federals should give the kids back because they had been taken away in armoured carriers without number plates. I think there were four or five boys and three girls. And thirty women stood there like a human barrier.

Aminat, 67 years old

People died. The village was bombed, and people died. It was very hard. There were mixed feelings caused by the perplexity of the situation, by a desire to understand who was to blame for the bitterness and hatred. People hated pilots in particular. Pilots

bombed without mercy. They carried out carpet bombings. They bombed everything in sight. And then there was direct contact between civilians and soldiers, especially during the second war. When we were faced with sweep-up operations we realized that the soldiers were no better than the pilots.

At the same time we heard that local people sometimes saw pilots fly over villages and drop their bombs somewhere nearby. Then, having dropped off their bombs, they flew off. They had to carry out the order, but they did it in their own way, trying to spare people. People appreciated this. You know, I think, they were in the same position as the pilots who once dropped nuclear bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. But they still dropped them.

I felt differently at various times but in the end I quickly realized that people live separately from politicians. During the war I met many people – Russians, foreigners, representatives of various ethnic groups. And I saw that people who were not corrupted by power and politics made reasonable assessments of what was going on – that the war was unfair, that cruel crimes were being committed, and that the people were not to blame for the atrocities being committed. I understood that people were capable of friendship, even though a war that was being fought between politicians had been forced upon the people as well. The war was against Chechnya as a hostile state. It was not a war against an internal territory, not the establishment of order and justice, not a war against criminals, but a war against a people.

The war changed my life. I worked at the university and after the war I decided not to return there, but to get involved in civil work. During the first war, after the first period, we observed how the military behaved, how they shot people indiscriminately, even shot animals, cattle. In the region where I am living now a group of women gathered together and we decided we needed to make a declaration that it was wrong and unfair. We naively assumed that the international community should apply pressure to put an end to this war and these crimes. One can't commit crimes against civilians under the mask of 'war'. The military should fight each other and there were children, women, helpless people, who didn't

care about this war. At that time we organized a few rallies with posters drawn on wallpaper. We saw the military driving by react by showing obscene gestures, by shouting something against the participants of the rally. It encouraged us – it meant they saw us. OSCE representatives came to take a look at the rally. That's how we found out about the OSCE. We established a very interesting relationship with that organisation. They came to the rally and recorded everything we told them. That every day somebody got shot, somebody was killed, somebody's house was destroyed, somebody's belongings were seized.

Journalists appeared. We shared the information we had with them willingly and we discovered that it interested someone. This was a discovery for us. We started writing down and collecting information. We decided that if the rest of the world didn't know anything about what was happening in Chechnya it should find out. When the world finds out, the UN will interfere. At that time we for some reason thought that the UN was an organization capable of influencing the situation. But soon we realized that it was the most powerless of organizations.

Three years after the first war there was a period of disruption within the Chechen Republic. In the course of the war a group of people appeared alongside those who were fighting for independence whose motivations were somewhat different. They fought for religion, for a new and true religion. This new true religion or religious movement was already then defined as Wahhabism. A radical Islamic wing appeared in Chechnya. And the warring people divided in two parties – those who were talking only of independence for the Chechen republic and those who were talking of Islamic jihad. That was a contradiction. There were clashes between these two powers in the republic, they fought. For instance, Maskhadov supported the idea of a secular republic, and some field commanders were against him. They thought he was as changeable as the weather because he was ready to negotiate with Russia while he should have fought to the last. But Maskhadov looked for possibilities for dialogue, possibilities to stop the war. And it was stopped thanks to Maskhadov.

The elections that took place aroused great enthusiasm. Everyone knows that Maskhadov's elections were the only fair elections. It is surprising, but streams of people went to the polls and openly voted Maskhadov in on their own initiative. After that there weren't elections which could really be called as such in the Chechen republic. All the other elections were artificially organized events, but not elections. But that time we did have elections. And people did vote Maskhadov in, though there were a lot of things about him which could be criticised and weren't acceptable. Nevertheless, both the Chechen and non-Chechen population voted him in.

When the second war started, we had to flee the republic in October. We went to Ingushetia. It was a terrible journey. Many lines of refugees were fleeing the Chechen republic in different directions. Many people suffered on the way. Refugees were bombed, shot. The line which was walking to Ingushetia along the road to Rostov was shot without mercy, very cruelly. And my family was in that line. I saw a lot of corpses on the road. They were executing refugees intentionally. This is what made this war particularly horrific. This war was conducted according to the principles of a famous politician who said that gas should be used in Grozny, so that everyone died. When he was told, 'But your fellow-countrymen are there as well, Russians.' He said, 'So what, these are the inevitable casualties of war'. So the execution of this column was precisely the use of this method. A large number of the people in the line were non-Chechens. I saw old Russian women walking there. On foot. They carried their belongings with them and walked. I saw old people, old Russian people, using prams, pushing them along slowly and walking along the road. At midday the planes came flying over, they swooped over the line abruptly and fired at it with rockets. They continued shooting into the night. It was a bloody massacre.

We found our friends in Ingushetia and they gave us shelter. They had a small house in their yard, a one-room house and our big family (about ten people) lived in that room. We slept in that room, ate in that room. But they gave us a very warm welcome in Ingushetia. I remember that refugee life in Ingushetia, not only ours, with gratitude. Afterwards large camps were set up there. And the

Ingush Republic, together with international organizations, helped the refugees to survive. Numerous Ingush families helped Chechen refugees sincerely. Children went to school. In the yard they always played together. But on the whole a refugee's life is very hard. It is complicated by various processes, interrelations. Ingushetia showed nothing but humanity. And that was the decision of their then present leader Ruslan Aushev. Still a lot depends on the political will of the First Person. Ingushetia won a noble name and a great honour for centuries ahead. We should keep saying that. I lived in Ingushetia from 2004 until I moved on. But then I returned there again, and it was only in 2007 that I brought myself to return to the Chechen republic.

I worked in an NGO. I found my purpose of life there. It was very important for me to work with refugees, for the people. It was a life full of meaning. We helped refugees, helped those who had serious problems connected to the war. We set up an organization and people came together around us, became involved in this sphere. People talked to each other, came together, tried to put their counteraction, disapproval, and resistance into action. It was a period of civil growth for Chechen society and for the civil society throughout Russia too.

When the war was approaching its end, I had meetings with various people involved in politics, in the military action. We discussed current problems. For instance, we demanded that the military should come with documents and un-masked during sweep-up operations, that military vehicles, armoured carriers, and tanks should carry plates, that detained people should be brought to a special place so that they didn't disappear without a trace.

We confronted the military and it was very difficult for me to talk to them like ordinary people. I thought that this man might have been shooting at people he didn't even know anything about, without even looking, and there is no evidence of these crimes. He shot without a trial or investigation. Such a man as Budanov. It was a hard moment for me. I had to talk to them as if they were normal, adequate people. It was hard to see people in the military. But it was necessary to do so, and we did, because we knew what we were

doing it for. Any brutal person had to be driven out of this state. Maybe, in this sense our meetings, contacts, conversations with these people were justified. Though many people said it was useless to talk to these people. But we felt it was necessary, that without this dialogue we would never reach a positive ending.

Accidentally or maybe it was inevitable, I found myself among people who had organized themselves, been united to offer resistance to war, cruelty, and injustice. I realized I was not alone. I discovered there were many of us in different countries and on different continents. And this gave me strength and conviction that this was the right way for people to be. It filled my life with a sense of purpose. It was easier to take risks, to give up comfort, and rest. To spend your time and strength only on this, to give your life for this.

This war made me more open. I understood that I not only represented my people, my land, a tight circle of people, but that I was part of humanity with some universal ideals of good and evil. I was not only a person from Grozny, from the Caucasus, not only a person from Russia but I was a citizen of this world, of this planet. This idea improves my life better gives it more value. What's most important is that this didn't just happen to me. It was not a miracle that fell only upon myself. The same is occurring with most people but many just don't think about it, they're not aware of it. But this process is evolving. People have really opened up, they are changing. And this give me great hope. And that's why I say that our authorities can't flatter themselves by thinking that their beloved people worships them and perceives them in the way they present themselves. People see them in the light they deserve. It's just that they can't express this openly right now. One day people will give their evaluation of our time, our people, and our politicians. But it will differ from the one they are expecting. There will be new inscriptions on new monuments.

THE END

When and how did the war end for you?

Arkadiy, 35 years old

What on earth makes you think it's over? In 1992 there was the first opportunity to end it, when they should have either got rid of Dudaev without unleashing the war or let Chechnya go, grant it independence. And the next chance was in 2000, if we had in fact gone there to establish order and not to take revenge. What can be done with all this now? I haven't got the slightest idea.

I left Chechnya with the first batch of contract soldiers and got almost all my salary, although the Motherland did trick me out of about 400 bucks. It was on 4th April 2000. Well, and it took me a couple of months to get discharged. I was to hand in my helmet, jacket and something else. 'Where is your jacket?' they asked. I said, 'What jacket, are you kidding me?' They said, 'The motherland issued you with a jacket, hand it in!' I add, 'I don't have a jacket, that jacket is nothing more than a rag.' 'Well, then – minus 10,000 roubles Where are your trousers?' 'What trousers?' 'Well, so minus another 10,000 roubles then'. That was how they got us all.

What was the hardest thing? The war itself. It was not the feeling of absurdity, you were submerged in absurdity, you lived in it. No one set any objectives, you didn't understand why you were there. Existing in rat's holes, when you go completely nuts, when your outlook changes. Your mindset changes when somebody tries to kill you and you responded by trying to kill them. Law, order, the legality of war, the guilt or innocence of Budanov, the guilt or innocence of Ulman. These things didn't exist. None of that was involved. You were trapped and the lid is closed over you separating you from all those humane ideas and notions of human rights. You are deep down under that lid, in the sewer. Very different things are

important in that place: where to find some grub, where to sleep, to find warmth, how to survive, that's what is important. You think in a very down-to-earth, animal sort of way.

Physically, precisely physically I felt unwell when I saw all that burnt machinery for the first time in Mozdok. I felt physically unwell when we learnt that we had killed a child and an old man, I felt very unwell, almost vomited. But those were just moments, outbursts, and then you returned to the state of apathy and stayed in that state for the rest of the time.

Vodka didn't help. No one liked drunkards in our unit. They could be beaten up because if you drank, you were putting all the others at risk, you were no longer a unit ready for combat. In Chechnya I drank only once, and I was as drunk as a skunk. In fact, I can't drink vodka, you may pour me just a shot into the lid of the bottle and I'll feel unwell. But that time I guess I drank three bottles by myself – and it didn't affect me, not at all. Only my legs stopped walking, but my mind was clear and bright. We smoked a lot of pot. It helped us to relax more or less. But nothing helped us to get back to a human state, there was nothing that could. And so we lived like animals the whole time. I was waiting to get killed. I went there absolutely convinced that I wouldn't come back from the second war. But it never happened...

Marem, 49 years old

Did it end? The war will end when it ends in our souls. I think it is still going on, both in the hearts of Russians and in the hearts of Chechens. It still continues as we haven't really forgiven each other. And to forgive we need to have our say. Even with the guys who were in Chechnya. We need to understand what they wanted here, and what our aims were.

Satsita, 48 years old

The war? I don't even know... I guess, it ended for me when I went back to work, when I could walk along the street and look around, when silence fell. Murders and sweep-up operations still

went on but it was no longer my war. My war ended when I went out into the street and walked about the city calmly. There were murders and sweep-up operations, but I could go for a walk. For me it was over. Yes, most likely then.

Aza, 23 years old

For me the war ended when I could no longer see traces of it. While I could see it all, gates with holes in made by shell splinters, buildings, I couldn't say the war was over. Everything was fine, there was light, gas, everyone seemed to be happy, but there were still traces of the war everywhere. And then it all disappeared, and you could see bright, pleasant things around you. And you can already go back to those events more rarely. Of course, this isn't the most important thing – that they have built houses, but it is an important moment because what was destroyed has disappeared. When you don't see those things any more it makes you glad, of course, but I doesn't make you excited, or give you get up and go.

Madina, 29 years old

There were traces of war. Houses were destroyed. There are three houses in our yard, one of them was completely destroyed. The gates, steel gates with bullet holes in them were lying on the road. Though, the tank was no longer there. I guess they dragged it away. This tank stood at the beginning of our street till about 2000. It was such a huge tank but it was crushed during the first campaign.

It was only in 2007, 2008, and 2009 when I was finishing university and went to sit my exams that I started noticing that people had replaced the gates there, put in new windows, and fixed the roofs. They were gradually, everyone as much as they could, was beginning to restore their house. For the last six-seven years, they have been doing it all bit by bit.

Ali, 22 years old

For me personally the war ended in 2009, when all the explosions stopped. I witnessed two explosions, which happened here, in

Grozny. I was in my second year of university. I went out of the university, come down the stairs to the ground floor and there was a girl I knew standing there. We started talking to her, and went out to go to a shop together. As we were leaving the university building (there is a Police Department nearby and two policemen were guarding the entrance and the exit) I saw a car drive up, something happened there, somebody came up to somebody, and there was an explosion. The girl and I were thrown back into the building by the blast wave. We got back up on our feet and saw our security man. He was in panic, didn't know what to do. He said, 'Come in, come in, there'll be a second explosion, run in! Quick, quick!' And I just stood there staring. Then, it smelled of blood for a long time, for a couple of months. It was summer, the sun was hot so you got the smell. We sat in lessons and it was impossible to breathe.

Then there was another explosion six months later. After that there was one more operation in our institute. We were sitting in a lesson and we were told, 'No one can go out while the special operation is under way'. Security was ordered to close the gates, to lock all the lecture rooms so that no one could get to us just in case. But we were watching from the windows of the institute. There was a building right in front of the institute where there were a lot of shops. And they said that the rebel fighters had occupied the second floor. The military brought an armoured carrier and started bombing, blew up an apartment. Well, it all passed somewhat calmly. I come home and saw this special operation on TV. They said there were two rebel fighters but they didn't show their corpses. The tenants were evicted – the tenants walked out of the houses smiling calmly. And we knew it was just PR. It made me feel so sick. No military operations, there was nothing of that kind. After that it got quiet. For me the war ended with that.

Minat, 26 years old

For me the war is still going on. It will end when people stop being blown up by mines. The fields and places where military operations were undergone, even in Grozny, have not been cleared yet. A lot of guys have suffered, I know some of them. Two years ago

an 18-year old guy, schoolchildren, from the 11th grade, went into a sports gym with friends. One of them brought some can he had found, and they were going to make fireworks with it. And when the cell phone of one of them rang, the can exploded. The two guys who were sitting nearby died at once, and the one who was walking to the side – his hands were torn off and eyes burnt out. For me it is all continuing. I believe that while people keep dying it will continue. When somebody dies I start thinking about their mother, family, about the person themselves. Well, about everything. And I guess it will go on like that.

Veda, 28 years old

Well, the war might have finished but the problems it has left behind haven't. Already in the eyes of so many a Chechen is not just a criminal, not just a *Churki* (a derogatory term for a person from the Caucasus – *editor's note*), but he's uneducated and certainly dangerous. These are the consequences. I don't know, maybe, in a few decades this stereotype will be forgotten, but not any time soon. I won't even mention the disturbed mental condition, the illnesses people have. These are the consequences.

Ruslan, 24 years old

I don't think the war is over yet, because everything going on today testifies to the fact that we are still going through these horrors still today. It's stuck in people, you can't cut it out of life. No matter how you change your life it's all there people's souls. It so happens that our society is sick, because these wars – two, even three in a row – have left such an imprint in everyone's souls. And all these serious illnesses are also consequences of the war. How many of our relatives die of oncological problems, how many are ill. And it's true for each and every family. There's not a single family whose relatives were not taken by this war. It's hard to live with it all, but you have to work on it, work...

Lilya, 51 years old

For the last few years, when there has been no shooting or sweep-up operations, while we have been living peacefully, people have started coming to us about housing issues. There have become fewer requests to find the missing, killed, or abducted. They have become fewer, but their relatives still keep coming to us. I've always thought, 'Take the Victory Day, May 9th. How they celebrate it! It is such a celebration!' Will we ever have such a day? We didn't have this day. The war still goes on. Well, you'd think it's 2009, the war seems to be over, the counterterrorist operation regime has been cancelled, but the best of us, Natasha (human rights defender Natalia Estemirova – *editor's note*) was killed for telling the truth. I don't think this war has finished, not yet, because there are more than three thousand missing. The war will never be over for their families. I guess while I am working with it I can't afford to live a simple family life, enjoy the fact that everything in my life everything is okay. I guess only idiots can be happy and peaceful in our republic, while it still carries on.

Aslan, 24 years old

I don't feel like the war is completely over even now. But if we're talking about the Russian army there were already fewer soldiers in 2004. They just live here now, they're stationed at Khankala – that's a region in Chechnya, not far from Grozny. Now the greater part of the military and the police are themselves Chechens. So I can't call it a war now, not any more. There was war in 2000–2001, in the 1990s, that was war. When they bombed and shot, there were helicopters, and planes. Murder and lawlessness – it all still exists, for sure, but it is a different story now. When I saw fewer or practically no Russian soldiers around I realised that that was it, it had turned into civil war.

Hussein, 57 years old

In fact, the end of the counter-terrorist operation was declared unilaterally. It was not a decision taken on our side. It was the decision of the Russians to show the world that the war was over.

There was that Kadyrov, then the administration, then Kadyrov senior was blown up, and his son was delivered to the Kremlin in his pyjamas. I mean they knew what they were doing. I think this situation with Ramzan Kadyrov was planned beforehand. They saw his psychology, that he was a cruel person. The guy doesn't have any education, absolutely nothing. They saw this and appointed him to that position, gave him the opportunity to crush everything in his path. With impunity. And he's doing it quite successfully.

And today Kadyrov has made people bow down so low that many don't think it is possible to go on living there. If there was no Kadyrov, well yes, if there was no Kadyrov senior. If in 2000 or 2001 they hadn't come to an agreement, the Russians were actively looking for people to head the administration in Chechnya. If they hadn't found Kadyrov they wouldn't have found anyone. Gantamirov didn't have any authority, neither did others. And Kadyrov as he was a mufti, he had some authority among the people and in doing so he actually prolonged the war for an indefinite period of time in such a treacherous way. It would have been finished in 2001, I think. For sure it would have been finished. But instead he (Putin) in fact charged Kadyrov with suppressing any resistance from inside whatsoever. In practice Kadyrov transformed the war between Chechnya and Russia into an internal Chechen conflict. He did what they wanted, and that is what they achieved. Today we see rebel fighters in the mountains but they are hardly fight Chechens, these Chechens shoot one way and the others shoot the other way while the Russians stand idly watching. This is the sad situation for today. Resistance is still pretty strong up there, it hasn't weakened at all. The only method is ideology. This is not really correct as fighting for freedom and independence, for sovereignty and telling the world about it is one thing, there are people who will listen to this. But if we are talking about things like caliphate and so on, emirate, the things they are imposing, no one will listen to it – even Muslims themselves. There are not only Muslims in the North Caucasus, there are other groups among our neighbours. It has to be presented in such a way that they would want to live alongside us, but not by us taking them by force. That's why while those who are fighting are

not aware of their mistake in their choice of ideology, this situation will only be aggravated. There will be no improvement, in terms of victories and prospects. Gradually people turn away from those who are supposedly fighting for their good but use words that are not always pleasant to hear. This is why they won't be understood. If people don't support you, you are already at a loss.

Magomed, 27 years old

The second campaign has not come to an end for us yet. Of course, there are no sweep-up operations but they can still come into your house and take anyone they like. It still continues. It used to be the assigned military, now it's our own people, Chechens. That's the way it is. Nothing has changed. There is still fear, not in the same scale, but it's still there. No one is sure that tomorrow he won't find himself somewhere else.

Aminat, 67 years old

I don't think this conflict has ended yet. The time should come when we analyse and reconsider this conflict. It's difficult to understand that the conflict itself and all the horrors we've been through played a positive role as well. For instance, many people left Chechnya for Europe. In a while they'll return, but even if they don't, the world of information has undergone a technological revolution. The borders have been destroyed. Even though officially they exist there is no longer an information blockade. This has become impossible and this is a great advantage. It means that living in Chechnya we are living in a big world. We can compare what's good and what's bad, what's ugly, cruel and inhumane and, on the contrary, what's humane and beautiful. It's hard to deceive us now. People hear lies, hypocrisy, but on the other hand they see other things, and they have an opportunity to assess everything adequately. We don't want another war. We don't want to go to barricades armed, destroy walls and so on. Yet a natural process is under way in which neither politicians, nor the military can rule the way they want to. People

choose a better way for themselves, a way which gives them comfort and dignity in every situation, every day.

And so some time will pass and people will reassess what has happened. They have already made adequate assessments of the current powers. Political power can't indulge themselves with the vain hope that the people love them and so this power is weak, ephemeral and is supported only by arms. The slightest change in economic or political affairs will bring down the political establishment they have built up. It will fall down like a glass house and everything will come to light. I can't say it's all so hopeless, in fact there's light ahead. I do see this reality. Otherwise I wouldn't be able to do anything else but go as far away as possible and forget this country, this society, these people. But this is no salvation either, this is a way out only if you are in total despair. I don't think we have reached a state of total despair just yet. There is still light at the end of the tunnel.

LIFE AFTER

What has become of you since the war? How do you live?

Satsita, 48 years old

My priorities and values have changed completely. All material interests have gone – fancy clothes, buying staff, chasing after golden trinkets. I've become more of an ascetic really. What's important to me is my friends, my home, my mother, my family. Of course, I've changed in many different ways. Many of my values have been forgotten. I've become very devout. I am afraid of doing something wrong. Do you remember, in Marquez there is this thing, 'Standing at the wall waiting for the execution, Jose Arcadio Buendia remembered the old gypsy.' I also stood at that wall and at any moment the course of life my life could have come to a very abrupt end. I don't know when my last hour will come but I want to leave the stage knowing that I lived in the right way. So that people can't say, 'She was such a bribe taker, such a dragon, such a...'. I lived very modestly in this life, with no fun, no beautiful clothes, no expensive toys. I made up fairy tales. I escaped into my world of fairy tales, and I lived there. I had my own inner world (despite all my chattiness), where I didn't let anyone in. After the war I didn't need anything. Just to live honestly and properly. I can't watch two TVs, I can't live in two apartments at once, I can't go to sleep in two fantastic beds. I just want a normal average bed.

I would become a dervish, I'd put on rags and walk off, would lead crowds after me if I was allowed. But I am not allowed to do that.

Marem, 49 years old

I had values, Russian classical literature, poetry. My father cultivated the humane and the kind in us. We perceived life differently. And now, when I have understood how hard-hearted people are, I am afraid to look for my friends. What if there turns out to be a huge gap between us just because I am Chechen, and they are Russian? I am trying to preserve the beautiful things we had, and I am living with those. I am friends with many Russians even now. I didn't fight with the people, it was big dirty politics, it was an oil war. In fact, it was not a Chechen war, it was a Russian war. You know, when people come to your house and kill – this is just impossible – either your heart bursts, or you should say 'no', or you should try to come to an agreement with these people. No one wanted to reach any agreement with us, they needed our resistance, they needed the war. And it happened. As a result there were two terrible wars, during which so many young people died!

The wars are over and today Kadyrov has received the same powers Dudaev's and Maskhadov's governments asked for. So, is it good for Chechens today? No, this is not good. Do you see? Today's power is constructing beautiful buildings with the tacit consent of the Russian government, but not for the people. The old buildings I loved so much have disappeared – all the manor houses, which could have been reconstructed. But we have taken them down for bricks, because you can write off a lot of money from something you build from scratch and share it with someone else and so on.

Well, of course, values are being replaced. This ethnic dress and this Arabic wrap around the head – this is not Chechen. Spiritual values are being replaced, I think it's causing a lot of harm. For instance, I am working, I have some income, I have some livelihood. I understand that all this luxury is not for me, that society has become very stratified. I don't think our troubles are over yet.

This terrible misfortune that came to Chechnya, it has not yet been talked out, it is still disturbing people's memory and minds. Many die of heart attacks. At my age I have dilation of the heart, I learnt the other day that I have dilation. Do people understand

this, are they aware of it in Russia? This is not just a problem for Chechnya, this is a problem for of Russia too.

We need to dot the i's. If we are forgiven, if we are loved, we should understand that we are forgiven and loved. And not that I come to Moscow wearing a headscarf and I should quickly hide it so that I don't get beaten up or taken to the police. Or that you come to Chechnya and try to put on a skirt and a headscarf quickly, so that you don't get detained or punished for that. When we realize that Russia is our common home and stop bringing forward these slogans saying that if the majority in Russia is Russian then all the rest should submit to them. These nationalistic slogans, they led to this misfortune and will lead to many more troubles, I think. We lived in Soviet times when we were punished for praying, when our mullahs were persecuted. Yet we preserved our culture, both religious and ethnic. It's up to the individual whether he believes something or not. Sometimes I wonder why politicians in Russia don't understand the simplest things? Why are they always working to breakup of the state? Why do they not love Russia so much?

Of course, I am alive, I've got something to eat, I've got my grandchildren. But I am a person who's empty inside because it hurts so much inside, hurts so much! When I wrote a few poems and showed my friend, he said, 'You know, I feel like shooting myself after reading them'. I must have put my pain in them.

I am a person who laughs a lot but almost always insincerely, because it hurts me too much... I understand I am holding up some kind of external appearance. I know that even now nothing has finished. I want it all to finish at long last, I want these mistakes to be admitted, people to be forgiven, I want these terrible persecutions, murders, extrajudicial executions to stop, so that Chechens are allowed to be Chechens, so that no one tries to turn them into Arabs or anyone else for that matter. We are a people with our own culture, history, and religion.

When I come to any Russian city I look inside the churches. Do you know why? I am interested in these people's culture, it interests me, how these temples are built, what is painted there, I am looking

for explanations. I don't know if my religion condemns it, I have never asked.

What are we dividing on this huge land? Oil? But oil will finish one day, and how will we live afterwards? We need to think about that and not to tell awful lies. We need to stop showing all these cheap movies on TV, admit that Basayev and all the others were guided criminals, that it was not us who had invented them. Everyone knows that he was from the Chief Reconnaissance Department, and fought in Abkhazia on the Russian side. This is well known. It should be said to the people that it was their mistake. It should be said to both Russian and Chechen people, 'Be friends, for God's sake! But forgive us for your children killed for no reason.'

Ella, 71 years old

I must have become more mature, I've become less disillusioned. I started to realise what our authorities were like, and I also understood how dangerous militarization of the mind is. I realized that the principles of non-violence are harmful and dangerous for a system of violence. So we are we are still organising an educational program for people so that they knew how to act, so that they can take responsibility.

I have a deep respect for Chechen women. During the March of Peace in France, in Brittany, I was with a Chechen woman from Grozny who wrote a thesis on the topic of post-traumatic stress syndrome. She said that many Chechen women developed an inclination for suicide. This is a terrifying symptom. It would seem that their energy, that I had admired so much during the first war, has been suppressed by these wars.

And now there's a masked war underway in Chechnya. Society is suppressed. Many people have fled and diasporas in Europe are full of fugitives. During the Soviet period I didn't meet Chechens, I knew about the deportation from Solzhenitsyn. I thought of Chechens as the most active resisters. When you see these Chechens now, quietly submitting to the power, it surprises me. Not surprises, but astonishes and upsets me. Society has been severely suppressed.

Hussein, 57 years old

Among Chechens who took part in the war, and I know a lot of people, I haven't seen anyone with post-traumatic stress syndrome, anyone who is ill, dysfunctional, or aggressive, there aren't people like that. Everyone came out of the war fairly easily, everyone is psychologically sound. Here I am, sitting here, just like everyone else, we don't shout, don't kill. I meet Russians and I don't want to kill them, I've got no desire at all. With some of them I have good relations. We go to various events organized by human rights organizations together.

But of course, I've changed. I look at the world differently. I know the value of human life. I look around and I see that people don't appreciate the valuable life that the God has given us. Life is so short. And during war it can last just a moment. And all this that God gave us, we are wasting it disgracefully. We have stopped respecting each other, we are rude, squabbles start in families. Man doesn't think that he will die at some point. He thinks he's eternal, that he will never die, that he doesn't have to answer for anything. One day atonement will come, how you lived, what good you did, what bad you did. Sooner or later one has to answer. That's why, if we thought about it all, we should treat life, people differently.

I came to Europe after the war. At first I suffered emotionally because of it all, it was in my mind every day, every minute. I haven't forgotten anything now either but I'm trying to do my best so that others don't forget what happened to us. But this state of calm, this absence of fear, uncertainty in tomorrow, I guess, I've lived here in calm and only for the last year I've stopped looking around myself. Then the feeling when you see the police. You get sluggish, you are at a loss because in Chechnya a policeman means immediate danger for your life. Here I had to get used to seeing police as friends and not as enemies.

Here one can get a job, and a professional job. It's a bit problematic for me, I worked as a set designer, a decorator, a scenic artist. But here, in Europe, every second guy is an artist and you first of all you need to know the language, and then to have some connections, friends, contacts, to get into that field. If I were young,

of course, I would swim freely here, I would have prospects. But at my age, it's hard. All the more that for all this time, since the beginning of 1994 I could paint. I lost my skill. This is the sort of work which demands constant perfection.

My life in Europe isn't bad. I have six children, four of them study in a grammar school, there are prospects for other children. For me it is important that the children acquire a profession which would be useful for themselves and for my people in future. So that the cause we were involved in – this freedom and independence, fighting for your people's rights – that my children are not aloof from it all, so that they continue our cause. I just want them to be useful. So that they don't just earn money, this is not an end in itself. Though I am teaching them this too. I instil in them that the future is theirs, that Chechen ties are in their hands and so on.

But here we continue working for the liberation of our motherland in ways open to us. And this liberation occurs through the upbringing of the younger generations. They shouldn't forget what happened to us. This is the main thing. And then they will automatically take our place on this road, perhaps. On the whole my biggest dream is to see a free Chechnya once again where you can move about freely, without fear, without looking around. Just as you can in Europe. So that we finally define our relations with Russia. So that we are good neighbours and not enemies. We are destined to live nearby, to have common borders. It's crazy to say that we are eternal enemies. We should try to be good friends instead of bad enemies. This wish is for the near future. I think it may all come true when the present-day power leaves. Not at once, but many things can change in Russia.

Well, yes, I see Chechnya as a democratic country. Just like in European states any person who comes to live with us would feel comfortable, at home and no one would impose any ideas upon anyone. But what's being done today, I don't see any prospects for other people, for other religions, confessions and so on. In fact, a Muslim should not demand that someone else should be better. Based on the prophets' examples, he should set an example for others himself. Not just talk, but through his actions be a good

example for others. When you want to do something, to strengthen your religion, you should be better yourself and through your own example show people how beautiful your religion is. Otherwise it's just blah-blah-blah. The fact that you have a long beard and short pants doesn't play any role in terms of your religion or education. This is pure mumbo jumbo. Religion is in your mind, in your soul, in your heart, deep inside. Religion tells us all or teaches us to be right, honest, noble, openhearted, wants us to have good attributes. This is the main requirement of religion, and all the rest – it's not mentioned anywhere. But today these people, these services who want to distort religion, they find these words somewhere. Jihad, for instance, the killing of infidels. There's no logic in it because all religions say that we descended from Adam and Eve, hence we are all brothers and sisters. And later different peoples developed, propagated, and so on. So every murder is the murder of your brother or sister. This is how it should be perceived. We are all human beings. Regardless the skin colour.

Aminat, 67 years old

Theoretically I can say I am doing the same thing as I did during the war. But first of all I am working on myself, looking for myself. And every day I'm alive I grow, every day brings a lot of new things.

This conflict is not over because it is now part of the spiritual world. This is a conflict of the soul, and not just a political conflict. And so every day I feel as though I need to analyse what I am doing and what I am doing wrong. We hear the news, events happen, we get involved in those events, we should work to understand our attitude towards them, assess what is going on. I do this, my work should involve this process. I don't live out of touch with what is happening, I take part in it, I react. This is my own personal point of view on this.

I want to live to see a time when Russia will look like a European state. It will be good in Chechnya then as well. I mean, then people will be able to live comfortably. I would like to witness at least the beginning of this process. I don't doubt that it will happen sooner or later. If you look at it from this point of view, if you believe that it will

happen, it is not so important, whether I live to see it happen or not. At least others will get to live in that society. And for myself I would like to be able to continue my work, to take part in this process, to be involved in everything good that is happening around me. I don't want there to be such cataclysm repeated, I don't want this horror to be repeated anywhere in our country, neither in Chechnya, nor in any other republic, or any other region. I don't wish that it would happen in Moscow.

Ramzan, 57 years old

Even though at first sight it seems as though people haven't changed since the two wars, those who were friendly, mild and sensitive, became even friendlier, milder and more sensitive. And those were cynical, the war made them even more cynical.

I think I belong to the friendly category.

Aza, 23 years old

I might say that compared to how life used to be I live very well now. I am studying, I've chosen a profession I like, I am involved in a cause I like. My family is also well, my parents are already retired and they live a somewhat quiet life, growing old and grey. All my sisters are married, my brother is studying too. We are quite well off, we can afford lots of things. Right now things at home are just fine but in the village as a whole things are well too, if we don't pay attention to the other problems in society.

Lilya, 51 years old

I feel guilty towards the children, I feel that. We deprived them of a childhood because of our unreasonableness, the unreasonableness of adults. I am trying to fill in these gaps and all my projects are connected with children and youth. These are educational projects – we organize classes for illiterate children and teenagers in villages, for those who could not study because of the war and remained unable to read or write. We have taught about 300 children in these classes. We are organizing vocational

courses for young people in the villages so that they can support their families, and we have a project on human rights education for young people. There are also traditional forms of work – Sunday clubs, rehabilitation centres. The war has deeply affected the psychological state of both adults and children but the state is running any large-scale rehabilitation programmes as it should. And so the burden of this work lies on the NGOs.

Natalia, 72 years old

I live in Moscow. And there's nowhere I can return to! There's no home left. All my acquaintances, after what happened to me, they all left! There were a few Russian families in the town where I lived, and they all left. There's no one!

There's no one and nowhere to return to!

Veda, 28 years old

The war is still a huge worry, and moving is also stressful. All these negative changes that happen when you're moving around have their impact.

But still, the situation is changing for the better: there's no war, there's a lot of construction, more and more young people are getting involved in human rights activities. If a third war doesn't start, everything should go back to normal. If I try to mention positive things – I can only say that there's no war. Problems do exist – economic, political. We have a bad education system, poor health care. The generation that has now grown up hasn't studied for the last 10–20 years, but they are already taking positions everywhere. It's possible that there are ignorant and uneducated people among them, you can feel it.

I understand that it can't happen all at once, but I think that people all over Russia need to change. They should first of all love what they do, be conscientious about it, and be kind. Because – both here and there – there's only hatred, people only think about themselves. Everyone in Chechnya is thinking about their wallets. Some are beggars, others are rich, people are given jobs only because

of a bribe or because they are somebody's relatives. To retire you need a lot of money, they demand money everywhere. You'd think, people have survived the war, lost their close ones, they should be kinder to each other, but they are so mean to each other.

All the hurt, all the hatred in me has gone as I realized that the problem is not me, but the person who is dissatisfied with something, that's why he behaves like that. Well, this is psychology. There's a joke about an old man walking along a bridge in St. Petersburg with a cane. Somebody comes up to him, takes his cane and starts beating him. Well, the old man gets up on his feet, takes his cane and says, 'Young man, but it's you who have problems, not me!' Well, here it's the same...

In Chechnya there are very strong traditions, our family unit is very traditional, so there are 'us' and 'them'. But now this notion has completely disintegrated. For me the only thing that matters is that a person is good. I don't divide people into 'us' and 'them', only the person himself matters, not his ethnicity, not his religion, because a good man is a good man. There are very good people around me at both the places where I work so I don't have these problems. When I go to see a doctor, there is talk in the clinics about 'these migrants coming in such numbers', but I don't take it in so I don't get stressed. There are others who are affected by it, whom it disturbs a lot, it's hard for them, they are offended. Many people have lost other relatives, that's why they are into 'we won't forget, we won't forgive' rather...

I was not intending to get involved in public social activities, it just happened. I think it is important not only to care for yourself but to help other people at least somehow. It becomes easier to live, psychologically, when you think you've done a good thing for somebody, even if it's small. You understand, that if you've picked up litter, this is good, because if all the people do something positive, a little at a time, everything will change. It's real luck that in our field of work everyone is kind, it's nice to work with these people.

I don't know what will happen tomorrow. In my personal life, in my family I am not thinking about what tomorrow will bring, and I am not thinking about it in a global sense either.

Arkadiy, 35 years old

After all that, I wrote an article about everything I saw, and sent it to several newspapers. Lilya called me from 'Moskovsky Komsomolets' and said, 'Would you like to work with us?' I said, 'Of course, I would'. Since then I've been in war journalism. I worked in MK for two years, then Kirichenko took me over to the 'Forgotten Regiment on the NTV channel, but by that time NTV was already being shut down, when I started there. Then we all went to work at TV-6. But Vladimir Vladimirovich shut down TV-6. And we went to TV5. And Vladimir Vladimirovich, in line with his logic, shut down TV5. Then I didn't work for three years before I came to *Novaya Gazeta* and I worked in *Novaya Gazeta* until recently.

I've lost all my friends from before the war. Once I got my old friends together and we went for a drink. They asked me some idiotic questions. Well, the standard ones, everyone in our veterans' circle knows about these questions. There are three standard stupid questions, 'Did you shoot? Did you kill? How many people did you kill?' And that's it, after that I stopped mixing with them. My friends are now from the veteran community.

I am a completely different person. Everything I have in life now I have only because there was war in my life. The Arkasha who lived between the ages 0 to 18 – he went to war and died there. And from 18 to 35 – I am quite a different guy. These are two different persons.

Ali, 22 years old

The war took away my entire surroundings and then gave me another. I found myself in a different environment. People's mentality has changed so much, there is no more compassion for each other, no sympathy. Everyone has grown more hard-hearted.

I wouldn't wish war on anyone. The war is certainly bad, it means losing your loved ones, a lot of suffering. They say, that wars are necessary in the world because every year more and more people are born, and soon it will be impossible to feed the population of the planet and so on. People are talking such nonsense, and say,

that's why wars are natural. But I don't agree. Wars are not natural. They are politics needed by some people and they bring them a lot of money.

I don't think we should hate each other and try to harm each other because of war, because of politics. We just need to try to understand, be human. Every night when I go to bed I think about this, I think about whether I've wasted the day or not, not to forget all the things that happened in that war. And then I have to take some calming drops. Then I fall asleep.

Aslan, 24 years old

I've become tougher, I think. There's nothing that can be used as a comparison so that we can understand what's changed. For as long as I can remember I've lived in a place where danger is everywhere. Military operations have stopped though there's still fighting in the mountains, and people are being blown up there. Now the danger depends on what you say. As for freedom of speech, you can't say anything, and if you do you'll disappear, you'll be hushed up, and in the worst-case scenario your remains will be found, if you are lucky. This fear has remained, there's nothing to compare it to...

Why? What's it all for? Everyone understands perfectly well that it's all for nothing. I know a whole host of different kinds of torture that people were put through. I keep asking myself, 'Why did they let me go? Why me?' I thought that perhaps it was because of my age, because I was the youngest, I was 14. I asked very few questions then. And now I am thinking, 'What did they do, the others, to deserve that?' There are these Shakespearean questions: why? what for? – but this is obvious. It's obvious that this was a means for carrying out the war, and I don't imagine it was just the Russian soldiers who behaved like that.

War, when it itself is wretched, brings the most rotten parts of a person to the surface. I can understand, for instance, the war between the Soviet Union and Germany. It was a war between two huge states, both of them had arms. But here a huge country annihilated a small ethnicity, an ethnicity that, in principle, couldn't harm such a huge country and with which, regardless, it would have

been possible to reach an agreement. There were no marches, protests, rallies, where Russian people came out and said, 'What are you doing to the poor Chechens!' Everyone thought, 'Damn it they're right, kill them all and be done with it'. Where were you? Where were the rallies? Where were the marches? Where was any kind of activity during the wars? I mean Russian people. So when people say, 'The people are not to blame, it's the soldiers who are to blame.' I'm sorry, but the people are to blame too.

It is somehow similar to the Third Reich in my mind: how did Hitler come to power? Through honest elections. The Nazi party won the elections, people really voted it in. That's why Germans say, 'We are to blame, because we elected them, and for our mistakes let's pay compensation to Jews, Poles, and Russians. We are to blame and now our taxes will pay for this compensation'. None of them say, 'Go and ask the ex-military, Gestapo or SS troops to answer, go and ask them to take responsibility, those veterans'. Everyone understands perfectly well that it was the people who elected the Nazis, the people who supported them with a 'Sieg heil' welcome, and that's that.

That's why they now live better than we do, they even help us.

The most terrible thing for me is the indifference.

My choice of specialist area was influenced by the fact that I became a lawyer and started reading European charters, conventions, and the legal practice of the European Court. Well, there's a lot of literature that helps you to understand that there are laws by which people really live and I chose to go into human rights. Of course this is related to my profession but also to the fact that my rights had been violated. The things I am doing now – creating projects, taking part in events for volunteers – this is all the result of my education, I studied and read a lot. I know how bad people can feel, and I want to do something to see our people as free as those in Germany, the Netherlands, in Scandinavia, in other civilized countries.

I could become an active member of the protest movement, go out into the square and say, 'You are bad, you killed, you maimed, you raped'. But I would never put my brothers at risk. I know what

happens here in such cases, and it really holds me back. My three cousins died because of their brother – he had been detained and killed. These three cousins ran to save him at the regional police department, and they started kicking up a fuss there. They thought he was alive. In the end all four were killed in that police station. They were all changed into military uniform and passed off as criminals, rebel fighters. I don't want anything like that to happen to me, so I am very cautious about certain things and take part in projects connected with disabled people instead, I help children, take part in voluntary organizations. I know that as soon as politics is involved it will end badly for all concerned, well, at least for me. And so I do things that are, at least to some extent, possible in Chechnya at the moment.

Magomed, 27 years old

If the second war hadn't started I would have stayed in the village, would have been an ordinary village bloke. And I wouldn't have had any aims in life: to receive an education, to find a job. Just as my other neighbours live – they stay in the village, busy with their farms. So this is what I would have been like if it hadn't been for the war.

Lack of justice – this is what is torturing people most of all. Of course stability is good. Now it's stable here, it's clean, the city has been reconstructed, streets, parks, schools have been opened – everything is working. But there's no justice.

There's a stereotype that it's impossible to change anything and only bribes can help. But the people who I help see that this is not true, and when they are faced with problems again they turn to me. I have hoped that we can show people that they can achieve realization of their rights, they just really need to want it.

Ruslan, 24 years old

My father disappeared during the first war and I remember my Grandma telling me at that time, 'You don't feel how much you are missing him now. You'll feel it with time. The older you get the more

you'll miss him'. And indeed she was right. Now, when I imagine my life with him and compare it to how I am living without him, I really miss the man. It's very complicated. I think a child should be raised by both parents, not by a mother on their own or by a father on their own. But I didn't have such a possibility. I had a father until I was six and after that I never saw him again.

A lost childhood means lost opportunities. When you see people with a lot of opportunities you realize that the war has deprived you of all of them. We didn't have a normal childhood, what did we see? We saw only the yard, we didn't travel anywhere. There was no park where we could walk, nothing. Anyhow, even if we didn't understand it then it did affect us, it will stay with us for the rest of our lives – the heritage of both the first and the second war. It will stay inside me forever. I will never forget it.

I want to tell you one story. I recently popped in to the Press house, they make you open your bag there and allow themselves to rummage in it, touch your things. There was a man with me, he came in, he also had a bag but they didn't check him. But they checked me. I asked, 'Why didn't you check his bag as well?' And the security shouted after me 'Is there something you're not happy about?' 'No, I'm happy, I'm perfectly happy, can't ya see?' He came up to me started swearing and what not. Well, this pisses me off, these types of things. This impunity, and they are like that everywhere. I mean this regime has produced these types of crazy people.

I was once standing in front of office of the Youth Affairs Committee. Well, on Pobedy Prospekt, and I was standing there. A guy came up to me and said, 'Open your bag!' I told him, 'No, I won't'. Well, he didn't think I was Chechen. And I started talking Chechen, he was surprised 'You're a Chechen?!' He checked my bag and that was that. It makes me sick that people think it's normal, it's not.

Take mosques, for instance. I stopped attending Friday prayers a long time ago because the mosque repulses me. Once I was entering a mosque and the security asked, 'Where are you from?' I said, 'Why do you care where I'm from?' Why should I answer before the security in a mosque. 'Why don't you go to the mosque by your house?' And then he started finding faults with my bag. It made me

sick, I turned around and left. I mean, I think Allah would forgive me for that. Since then I haven't been to that mosque. It's more like a museum than a mosque because when Ramzan comes there, no one is let in, everyone is turned out. This is not quite right in Islamic tradition. And the personality cult created for this man – it pisses me off, I can't live with it. To call all this Chechen traditions is terrible, these are not Chechen traditions or customs. According to Chechen tradition all men are equal, no one has ever been superior or inferior, everyone is the same. That's why Chechens are so freedom-loving. But now there's no equality, there's nothing. This man states directly: 'There's me, my Kadyrov family, there's the Kadyrov name, and all of you, you others – you are nothing' How is this possible, how can we be nothing, excuse me? I live here, this is my homeland, and you, who are you to say so? It's clear who's sent you. They shout in all the TV shows: put this on, look here, sit properly. These concerts, that no one needs, these stars. An ordinary person can't go to those concerts, there are only their people there. And they say it's for the Chechen people. But if you look carefully, there are the same people in the audience every time. It pisses me off, the Chechen people don't get anything from it, and everyone sees it. It's very difficult to live. And what's hard is you can't say or write anything about it.

Madina, 29 years old

There's no peaceful life yet. There are the military here, they are everywhere – federals, soldiers and Chechen police.

You see, the war stopped somewhat imperceptibly. Maybe, in 2009 when reconstruction started in the republic, when some changes occurred.

Though the Chechen republic is being rebuilt, I remember one day I got into a shuttle bus in the city and all of a sudden – bang! There was such a loud noise somewhere. What happened? And it turned out there had been an explosion. They say there is no more war, but it's still dangerous.

And recently we went to the opening of a stadium which seats thirty thousand people, and for some reason I wasn't afraid. Maybe because the time has come or maybe I decided: 'Everyone's going

there, and I'll go too.' And they told us at work that we should go. Everything passes little by little, I didn't even notice how it happened myself...

When you start remembering, it all rushes back to you, but then you continue your daily life – work, studies, home. You live your normal life, try not to remember anything. I don't even know what would have become of me if I had been in the republic when it all started.

I have a cousin, everyone makes fun of him. They say he got scared by a crow. A crow was flying far away and he thought it was a helicopter. He ran to hide. He thought a crow was a helicopter. He is so frightened.

MEMORY

Should we remember and talk about the war?

Aminat, 67 years old

If left undiscussed the past affects our future and can do so negatively. It can make a person act inadequately in new situations. For example, there was a time when Chechens were deported to Kazakhstan. The consequences of this trauma can still be felt today. I think that one of the biggest causes of the resistance and conflict in Chechnya was the unhealed trauma that this deportation caused. The deportations were carried out by the Soviet Union and the new politicians didn't consider themselves responsible for what had happened then. There was no repentance. The government did not acknowledge that it was the successor of that power and was responsible for what was happening with this people now. There was no historical acknowledgment of what had been done to the people, there were no apologies. There was a deportation, as a result of which 50% of the people died. In reality it was genocide. This part of history has not been processed. And this was the primary motivation, so acute and fierce, for the fight for independence.

We now need not only to reconsider the history of the deportations, but two new wars as well. If we don't find a way of analysing and evaluating this tragedy in the future it might extend into the distant future. It is essential that people are able to move forward from this and begin to live a new life. You must understand, that the past is the past and a new life is the future.

I feel that if the authorities were to give some kind of assessment of the deportations this traumatic experience would be forgotten. Because the main aim of the fight for independence was to ensure that no state, be it Russian or Soviet, was officially able to carry out another deportation. To exile a people from their native land, to

physically exterminate it. This is why I say that the past grows into the future. Historical events should have a definite place. Only then can they be harmless for society or, on the contrary, even useful.

Ella, 71 years old

After Afghanistan we were perfectly aware of the fact that the people who had gone over the line, had murdered other people – and a million civilians were killed – that these people had come to power and couldn't do without war. And many soldiers told me that they couldn't do without war, that they made their fortunes from it.

I remember we were in Moscow with some journalists who had come back from the Middle East, there was war there as well, and we saw a news report from Grozny. There was no looting there but there was looting here. They were robbing people completely out in the open and brought their loot back to their families. This was terrible, it completely corrupted people's outlook. This, I think, destroyed the army completely. That's why we should always try to prevent war or another, even more frightful one will follow. We should analyse this experience and allow people to understand the senselessness of the war. Otherwise things will become even more frightening. Society will die from killing its own people. And when an image of an enemy is being created within society – this is the start of another war. Do you remember the Georgians portrayed as enemies? After that the troops were gathered and South Ossetia was occupied. We should promote non-violent means more actively. And we should work on demilitarization of the mind. And in fact, this is what we are actively trying to do.

Arkadiy, 35 years old

I can't say much about the first war because I remember it vaguely.

I started thinking a little bit about it and became aware of everything that was going on only during the second one. We didn't consider Chechens enemies. The image of the enemy was

as follows: a thirty-year old bearded and camouflaged man with weapons. This was the image of the enemy. But to say that we hated Chechens, no, I can't say so. You see, we always rush to extremes when we're covering a war. Our notorious TV shows fearless Russian troops defending the republic from the damned terrorists, extremists, bastards, Wahhabis – this is one extreme. But if you read Anna Politkovskaya's reports, then the Russian soldiers were bastards, butchers with their sleeves rolled up, who killed peaceful, poor, miserly Chechens – this is the other extreme. But it was all somewhere in the middle. If you take these two sides, the truth is somewhere in between.

Were Russians slaughtered in Chechnya? Well, they were, well, it happened. There's no denying it, not on the scale of genocide, not to the extent that patriots are trying to present it now, but it did happen. Was there a slave market in 1997, 1998 in the Three Fools square? Well, no doubt about it, there was. Was there war between pro-Russian and pro-Dudaev Chechnya? There was.

Russia, of course, violated everything that could be violated. Russia is asking for The Hague, this is stuff for a tribunal for sure. But in any conflict, if it lasts for long enough, a couple of months later the sides in any conflict reach the same degree of brutality. Both one side and the other. Everything starts for the sake of some idea, when the Chechens, for example, believed in the ideal of independence. You could feel that, that was sure. I've never seen such unity, such a flow of spirit as in 1995, 1996 in Chechnya in all my life. And Russia was fighting for territorial integrity, for the Constitution. But despite that both sides sank to the same degree of brutality.

I now understand who I was there. I realize all the criminality of the things that the Russian army did now, looking back today. I realize that it's not that we shouldn't have acted like that, but it was criminal, for sure. But at that, the Chechen side shares responsibility to a certain extent as well.

We have not yet understood a single war, tried to understand what it was. Our past is our future. If we want to build our future normally, we should try to comprehend our past. This comprehension is only possible through conversation, through discussion. We

should raise this topic, we should talk about everything, we should bring together both sides, so that they can talk, so that they can tell each other live on Perviy Kanal, 'You killed my folks', and answer, 'And you killed mine.'. And to look not for the truth in it all, but for the reason. To try to understand what happened to us so that we can avoid these things in future. Let the dead bury the dead, this can't be changed, but we should make every effort to prevent it happening in the future. But this doesn't exist in our society at all. It is as if the Chechen war never happened. There is a total gap in information as far as this topic is concerned.

Marem, 49 years old

If some Russian politician said to me with an open heart, 'Forgive us for this war', it would be great. But I guess we won't see it happen. So we should talk about it ourselves, without politicians. We should communicate with each other. We should set up huge programs so that people can realize that it was all so contrived. Children died because of some non-existent idea or most likely because of economic goals. It is likely that all the wars in the world are like this, for the sake of invented goals. But I guess you and me can't understand that.

Satsita, 48 years old

I am writing down as much as I can about everything I remember. We are unfairly hushing up these events. We shouldn't keep silent, because in ten years' time they will again put a label on us, as, for instance, they did in 1944. Chechens were not to blame for the fact that in 1994 they started bombing this city. I know Chechens well, I am a Chechen myself. I know what happened here, and I know all the people who lived here.

Maybe it's good that people have started moving away from it, we can't talk about it endlessly. But on the other hand, it is of course rather bad that we've started forgetting. We are talking less about those events because, I guess, it's hard to talk about them. As soon as we start talking about what went on, I can only think of it from

one angle – I start looking for funny moments. We should remember those who died more often because there is not a single family in which people didn't lose loved ones. That's why many people don't want to talk about the war. This topic is almost forgotten in the society and is hardly being studied at all. These events have not been documented in any way, not in any sources, nor in articles or books. There's just one phrase – 'consequence of military operations', and that's it. No spheres have been examined – neither economical, nor cultural. I don't know why. Maybe, we don't have enough historians, or maybe, there's no interest.

Lilya, 51 years old

I regret that I didn't put things down during the war years, because you forget a lot. Sometimes you even make yourself forget, so that it's not so hard. But of course, we should remember everything. Now it hurts me that every year we talk less and less about the war, it seems, there's an informal ban on talking about what was done to us.

When we were deported in 1944, this topic was also forbidden, we couldn't talk about it for many years. I remember my grandfather told me a lot about it, and I was looking for something in textbooks but couldn't find anything about the deportation and the years of exile, just a couple of lines, and that was it. Well, to forget decades of history – I feel like we shall move towards this now, if the situation doesn't change.

We need to preserve the evidence of the genocide that happened here. Every man should go back to it to draw a lesson from it, so that we shouldn't be driven to this again. I was telling the young, the students I taught, 'They are telling you – hurrah! Freedom, independence, but you should think, who is telling you this, and where they are calling you, if this is real, what it might lead to. We, Chechens, are like that: whoever shouts "hurrah!" we run after him at once, without trying to understand. We should think about who is shouting it. Who is calling you, where he is calling you.' Abuzar Aidamirov wrote that through history, century to century, certain people have aroused= the masses for their own goals, leaving the

people on the edge of survival. It's not the first time such a thing has happened in our history, but we don't learn any lessons and trigger the same backlash again.

Ramzan, 57 years old

I can't imagine myself living today or tomorrow with my eyes shut to our past. This would be a moral crime – to cross out the past, not to think about it. This pain, connected with the past, is not aimed at causing animosity between people, but at preventing mistakes. The past should always be with us. I believe, when a person lives, he should live in the past, the present and the future at the same time, I can't imagine anything else.

Hussein, 57 years old

What is the past? The past is that which might overwhelm us tomorrow in a new wave. And if we don't know the past we can't prevent disaster occurring in the future. If you don't know the past well it is impossible to be faced with disaster and think about how it can, from which direction it can come. Otherwise there's no point. When you are digging in the past, it is an extremely valuable lesson for people who read and think. They can use these examples to say that this can't be done, because you see, it happened here, and we can't trigger this backlash again, we need to somehow smooth over the rough spots. For this reason I think what we are doing here, what you are doing is extremely valuable.

Aza, 23 years old

I think working with the past is essential for me, if I want to continue my public social work. But there is something inside me, that hinders it and is eating me up. I've already said that I haven't worked on that issue, I didn't talk about it at seminars either. When this topic is raised, I start shivering, and scenes, events, dates, people come up into my mind. It is impossible to talk about it calmly, all the more so in front of so many people. So I went out, ran away, I couldn't. Now I can reconsider my past and draw a line, because

this is the past. It is necessary to remember it, it is important to remember it, but it shouldn't hurt you. You remember it happened. But to think about it as if it happened yesterday, to feel such pain every time – this is not normal. That's why we need to work on it.

Ali, 22 years old

If people don't figure it out what happened in the past, if they don't understand, they won't let each other go. If I don't try to understand it myself... I've met a lot of psychologists who told me this, but I couldn't get it. Now I understand this very well. If I deal with the past, maybe, it will let me go. And it will be much easier to live on. Though, of course, there's no forgetting it, I shouldn't forget, I must remember. Working with the past is necessary to change people's outlook, to change one's views on inter-ethnic relations, conflicts, to become more tolerant.

Veda, 28 years old

Working with the past is essential, because it was a real war. And now many Russians think that a Chechen means a criminal. Many people don't know any Chechens. It's very important to have some personal contact, some personal conversations, but people draw conclusions based on watching TV.

There are many people with psychological problems, those who are pained and who are not understood. It is important to forgive and understand something, at least for yourself. I don't know how people, who keep it all inside, live, it really limits the person. Even among Chechens there are people who are not ready to forgive their hurt, there is such hatred inside them. I don't know, I wouldn't be able to live like that – it's too complicated. To hate everyone but 'us' – this is impossible. In fact, I think it is not interesting, boring to live only in one's own circle. That's why we should be more open towards others. And for that we need to meet, talk about things, show things, write to each other, communicate.

Magomed, 27 years old

I mix with other people, when I leave the republic and I can see how strong stereotypes are. They don't know anything about us. Then I realize: they didn't take part in the war, they didn't live through it all. They know only what's in the mass media, and that's it. The people who I've met and who hadn't met Chechens before, they wanted to visit the Chechen republic, find out about it all. 'Is it so? And we thought it was like that'.

In 2009 I was at a festival in Lipetsk. One night we were sitting in the street and one guy asked me who my favourite writer was. I answered his question. He told the other Russian guys, 'I am shocked'. I asked why. 'Well,' he said, 'I imagined Chechens as these bearded men who are always climbing the mountains and shooting and that's it.'

Aslan, 24 years old

If we continue living in the same country, of course, we should try to live together. I will never support people being forced to forget what happened, this is scary. For instance, all your family was shot, and you are told, 'It was a long time ago, forget it, you've got a job now, you are paid a salary, you've got your studies. This is better than nothing, and as for that, forget it, it's over and done with'. Or, 'Forget about the deportation, forget that 60% of the population died while they were travelling in freight cars in freezing temperatures. Forget it, it was all a long time ago. There are lots of us now, there are a million and something. So what, that we were exterminated then, forget the Caucasian Wars, it was 200 years ago.'

We shouldn't forget anything, we should admit what happened on both sides, so that people understand 'these horrors did happen'. Some people say to me, 'Take those photos with killed children, maimed children's bodies, blown up people off the Vkontakte site.' I say, 'Why? Let people see what other people's inaction, indifference leads to.' It's hard for me to look at it as well, but it should be there...

While the past is bleeding, it should be reminded to people. And if it all is forgotten, it might easily happen again in 10, 20 years or

maybe even earlier. That's why mistakes should be acknowledged, they should be thoroughly exposed, so that if something starts again, people can say, 'We haven't forgotten what happened 200 years ago. Remember: the same might happen.' All these horrors of war, all the crimes should be documented. People should understand that what happened to them hasn't vanished. That's why we should remember everything, so that people could forgive each other sincerely, and not just forget. What is simply forgotten, is easily recalled sooner or later. The people who forget little forgive little. Caucasian people, especially those living in Chechnya, appreciate an open attitude towards them and always give back in return for this. If they see that people say sincerely, 'Yes, we made a mistake, yes, we are to blame' then I am sure the people will say, 'All right, it did happen, but we'll live in friendship, it's better to be friends.' But when people say, 'We fought with criminals, we fought with Wahhabis.' and no one mentions that thousands of peaceful people died, this is a global hypocrisy. So this is a complicated task, which we'll have to be done carefully and which will take a lot of time. It won't work just to bandage the wound, just to put a plaster on it – deep inside the wound will remain the same as it was.

Ruslan, 24 years old

History changes, it is presented in a way profitable for somebody. I think it is important for a person to tell his story himself – and then historians will have something to refer to. So that it's clear to everyone that we are not so happy, and that we are not to blame for this war, that we suffered more. So that in history this war is not described in a way that suggests Russia saved us from terrorists, but that Russia came and bombed everything. To show people what kind of war it really was, what people felt. This seems important to me.

WHY?

Why do we need to work with the past? (The interviewers' afterword)

Anna, 24 years old

Social anthropology student

Many people think that these are external matters, that we needn't know about it – this is concerning the memory issue. Should we remember it, why? Maybe, it's better to forget? Maybe, in general, it's better to live in the present, not to think about the past, to build for the future? But the point is that this is a question of acceptance of the past rather than a question of memory. If you've accepted an event, you'll be able to build the future calmly. But if you can't accept it then there are only two ways forward: the first is to escape, not to think about it. And this option would result in complete division, isolation from the residents of Chechnya. Isolation or genocide, because otherwise it's impossible. It's not just about their ideals but it's the facts of their lives. And the other option is to try to build bridges.

For me this is the main objective, accordingly, the main question is: how does this event shape new interrelations between one side and the other, between people? Can both sides and do they want to turn back to this event, to look at it objectively and figure out what happened there?

Irina, 26 years old

Youth policy expert

For many years I didn't know anything about the war in Chechnya. People around me earned money, paid taxes thus paying for the war in Chechnya, and pretended that the war didn't concern

them. For them, and for me, Chechnya was so far away, and the war was somebody else's war. And only when I saw and heard people who knew of the war not according to hearsay did I realize that there was a war going on here. And the war was horrifying, it was so frightful that there was no expressing it. You can't, you shouldn't stay indifferent when there is a war under way in the country where you live. And the first thing to do is to admit your responsibility for the war going on, and then act as your inner convictions and conscience tell you.

For a while I thought that the people who surrounded me were so indifferent to the Chechen war just because they were in the dark, were not aware of it, just like myself. And then I started telling my acquaintances what I heard about the war from people living in Chechnya and Ingushetia. At best I heard a sympathetic silence, in other cases – a short phrase that there's always war in the Caucasus, and the listener wouldn't hear any more about it.

I think a person who hasn't seen war can never understand someone who has survived it. The former may talk, argue about the war, and then drop the subject easily and even joke and smile. But the one who knows what the war is, talks about it with pain, and after the conversation he'll stay thoughtful for a long time, and there'll be frozen horror in his eyes.

The first war ended when people fighting for the independence of their republic, won. A peaceful treaty was signed. But when did the second war end? How can we call this life peaceful, if there's no peace?

It's March, I am heading to Grozny along the Baku highway. Behind the trees I can see camouflaged people, they are all armed. The trees are still bare and it's easy to see the people behind the branches. Every hundred meters, every hundred and fifty meters, two or three men. Some are standing, some sitting, one of them is even making a small fire. Who are they waiting for? The war in Chechnya is not the past, it is the present.

Arisha, 23 years old

Cultural anthropology graduate

I am going back to my insight – to the moment when the war started for me. And now I understand, that I can't live with it. I can't put up with the fact that in my country people are suffering even now.

I want the people who surround me, those who live in Moscow or in Siberia – from whom this is all so far away, I want these people to experience this war just a little bit! I want them to understand that we can't live with it. When they say some xenophobic things about Caucasians they just don't understand what's happening there and who's at fault. They don't know that refugees, for instance, did not leave Chechnya for nothing, there really was a war. They don't understand that the war is part of their story. I would like to convey this truth to people, but not everyone is ready to perceive it, not everyone...

Timur, 22 years old

Law student

It is usually thought that man has five senses, but I've read somewhere that our memory is our sixth sense. This is how important it is for man. Maybe, it is even more important than sight and hearing. A person can live without sight and hearing and without memory he shall also not die. But if we try to imagine a man who doesn't remember anything about himself, wakes up every morning and starts life from scratch, then it's really scary. Will this man be an individual? A man who doesn't remember his past is deprived of the possibility to better himself. He simply has no material to work with. He is deprived of the possibility to become aware of the purpose of life.

It seems to me that many perceive a man as a two-legged creature without feathers. In this perception the value of life is reduced. A two-legged creature without feathers can easily be killed, maimed or tortured. I don't think that those who trigger wars perceive people differently. In my opinion, man is a two-legged

creature with a memory, with a past, with a personal history, joy and suffering. If man were perceived in this way, many tragedies could be avoided. It's hard to cause pain when you see not just a body in a man but his entire past. And you would also have to admit that your past have much in common, as it does with most people, well, with practically everyone.

And now try to imagine a society which doesn't remember its past, can't relive or reevaluate it. Is such a society capable of sound development?

Of course, it's wonderful when the society is well fed, clothed, and happy. But is it positive if it's experienced has not yet been understood?

Daria, 26 years old

Graduate of the public law department

Ignorance of one's own history, the history of one's own country screens off from us the real reasons for many events. I think, we have neither lived through World War II, nor more importantly the armed conflicts which happened later. Despite all the difficulty of what we are to discover and digest, the topic of war becomes the cornerstone both for the present and the future. This topic must be worked on to such an extent that similar catastrophes are not repeated. Considering the attitudes of society – aggressiveness and intolerance towards various ethnicities and ethnic groups, we can say that the relevance of studying and education in the field of the history of the armed conflict in the Chechen Republic is growing leaps and bounds. We urgently need to do our best to prevent the repetition of a similar tragedy.

In the modern world there exists a reparative justice direction, which includes various instruments of working with the past in post-conflict situations. I've studied this sphere of law in detail. The history and experience of setting up commissions of truth and reconciliation in countries where peace seemed impossible proved the expediency and efficiency of these mechanisms. Having gone deep into the details of the work of these commissions and into the

descriptions of various situations in which they were set up, I see that these instruments 'fit' with our country. I think, that little by little we could achieve similar results here as well.

Karina, 34 years old

Instructor of Russian as a foreign language

The events following one another throughout our common history resulted in offence, lack of understanding, and bitterness. At the end of the 1980-s a movement started in the country which could have led to an evaluation of our history, and it seemed we would soon free ourselves from our oppressive past and life would become different. However this work stopped, and the subsequent conflict emerged. This was doomed to become even more frightening and tragic. I think we should start with trying to comprehend what has been happening lately and gradually go further, deeper into history, trying carefully, without breaking this delicate thread, to unwind this tight and difficult ball of twine.

Sometimes people just need to be able to tell the stories he keeps in his heart. You don't need to do anything extraordinary – just share what's built up in your mind and listen to the other.

This is important for the whole of society. Maybe, and even most likely, it doesn't understand it yet, it is not aware of it. It is not ready for such dialogue, but you have to start some time. And that's why I bow to the ground and am extremely grateful to all those who were ready to start such conversation now.

THANK YOU!

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Immensely thankful,

Sabina and Tatevik,

Coordinators and editors of the project

The participants of the project hope that this book will help us all to better understand one another.

We want to live in a world without war.

READERS' CONTRIBUTION

Dear reader,

Thank you for the interest in the topic and our book.

We would be grateful for any feedback. Please, feel free to send us your questions, ideas and comments to our e-mail: silentwarstory@gmail.com. Let's develop this project together.

You can also contribute to the project in the following ways:

- Disseminate information about the book among your friends and colleagues, in your local environment and in mass media, so that more people could learn about the book and read it.
- Post on the Web (facebook, websites) information and banner of the book, join our facebook group.
- Write a review or just your opinion about the book and sent it to us.
- Organise a presentation of the book and its discussion as well as any other actions and activities dealing with the topic of the book.

CHRONOLOGY

Russia and Chechnya: a brief chronology of relations^{1*}

Russians, Ivan the Terrible's Cossacks, and Chechens – the local population, met for the first time in the second half of XVI century in the Sunzha Valley, near the village of Chechen-aul. From here came the Russian title of this highland people – Chechens.

During the Time of the Troubles the Russian state withdrew from the Caucasus where confrontation between Cossacks – free people, having fled Russia to escape serfdom and having settled to the north of the river Terek, and Chechens, having settled on the foothills plains, set in. The Cossacks become the 'Tsar's people' cultivating new territories.

1739

Erection of Kizlyar fortifications, beginning of the fighting between Russia and highland people for the control over the foothill plains.

1785–1791

Uprising of highlanders under the leadership of Sheikh Mansour (Ushurma), who united highland tribes in the fight against Russia.

1817

Beginning of a large-scale attack of Russian troops against highland Chechnya. Beginning of the Caucasian War (1817 – 1864).

1818

Founding of the Grozny fortress.

1834–1859

Russia fighting against Imam Shamil who united many highland tribes against Russian intervention.

26 August, 1859

Capture of the last residence of Imam Shamil, aul Gunib, by Russian troops, Shamil yields himself prisoner. The end of the large-scale highlanders' fighting for independence.

21 May, 1864

Suppression of the last major defense island of highlanders in the western Caucasus, official date of the end of the Caucasian War.

However, after that the highlanders' uprising broke up again (for instance, in 1877–1878).

1869

The Grozny Fortress is renamed into the city of Grozny.

1877 – 1878

Rising of the people in Dagestan and Chechnya against Russian rule in support of Brothers in Faith during the Russo-Turkish war.

1914–1918

Participation of the Chechen and the Ingush regiments in the so-called Savage Division of the Russian Army in World War I.

27 February, 1917

The February Revolution in Russia, overthrow of the autocracy.

March 1917

The First Highlanders' assembly in Vladikavkaz, setting up of the United Highlanders of the Caucasus Alliance.

26 October, 1917

The October revolution in Russia, seizure of power by the Bolshevik party. Refusal of the Chechens and Ingush of the Savage Division to take part in the fighting within Russia, which was in fact conducive to the consolidation of the Bolsheviks in Petrograd.

11 May, 1918

Declaration of independence of the Mountain Republic.

1919–1920

Active military operations in Chechnya and Ingushetia against general Denikin's troops. Part of the Vainakhs fought against their long-time enemies –the Cossacks of the White Army – on the side of the Bolsheviks. Another part fought for faith under the leadership of emir Uzun-Khadzhi against all non-Muslims.

1920

Creation of the Ingush alphabet on the basis of Latin script.

March 1920

Entry of Red Army detachments into Grozny, declaration of Soviet power in Chechnya and Ingushetia.

17 November, 1920

Founding of the Mountain ASSR within Soviet Russia, with Chechnya and Ingushetia as its parts.

1922

Founding of the Chechen Autonomous Oblast.

¹ Reprinted from the materials of the book *To Be a Chechen. Peace and War Through the Eyes of Schoolchildren*. Memorial/ Novoye Izdatelstvo, 2004.

1922–1924, 1925, 1929–1930, 1932, 1933–1934, 1937–1939

'Anti-Soviet' rebellions in Chechnya and Ingushetia and punitive expeditions of the Red Army against Vainakh rebel fighters.

1924

Founding of the Ingush Autonomous Oblast.

1929

Beginning of mass collectivization and dispossession of the "kulaks" in the Chechen-Ingush republic. Campaign against religious authorities.

1934

Founding of Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Oblast.

1934

The uniform Chechen-Ingush alphabet on the basis of the Latin script is approved.

1936

Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Oblast transformed into the Chechen-Ingush ASSR.

1937–1938

The Great Terror in the Chechen-Ingush ASSR. More than 12 thousand people are arrested on political charges.

1938

Cyrillic alphabet is introduced for the Chechen-Ingush written language.

22 June, 1941

The Great Patriotic War starts.

23–27 February 1944

Deportation of Chechens and Ingush to Central Asia. The same year guerilla fighting of Vainakhs who managed to escape deportation started against representatives of the Soviet power.

7 March, 1944

Decree of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR on the elimination of the Chechen-Ingush ASSR. Houses of deportees were handed over to settlers. The exile of Chechens and Ingush lasted for 13 years.

9 January, 1957

Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR on the restoration of the Chechen-Ingush ASSR, beginning of the mass return of Chechens and Ingush to their homeland.

26–28 August, 1958

Spontaneous anti-Chechen pogroms in Grozny. The crowd carried by assault the administrative buildings in the center of the city, mass disturbances were suppressed by troops brought in from other regions. Returned Chechens and Ingush faced lack of working places in industry – for decades latent unemployment and shortage of land (despite the annexation of regions to the north of the river Terek in 1957) became the main problems.

November 1990

The First Chechen National Assembly, election of the Executive Committee of the All-National Congress of the Chechen People (ANCCP) headed by Soviet General Dzhokhar Dudaev.

August 1991

The leadership of the Chechen-Ingush ASSR supported the State Committee of the State of Emergency coup, which resulted in the discrediting of the legal authorities and in the seizure of power in Chechnya by national radicals from ANCCP.

15 September, 1991

Factual division of Chechnya and Ingushetia.

27 October, 1991

Dzhokhar Dudaev is elected president of Chechnya.

7 July, 1992

Withdrawal of Russian troops from Chechnya.

31 October – 4 November, 1992

Bloody clash in Prigorodny District of Ingushetia, 'Ossetian-Ingush Conflict, exile of Ingush from North Ossetia.

26 November, 1994

A failed storm of Grozny by the Chechen "opposition" incited by Moscow, which was in fact realized by Russian military recruited by the special services, who were then captured.

29 November 1994

B.Yeltsin's ultimatum to the Chechen leadership with the demand to surrender.

11 December, 1994

Deployment of Russian troops into the Chechen Republic, the start of the First Chechen War.

31 December, 1994

The start of the storm of the Chechen capital, the city of Grozny, by federal troops. The storm lasted till March 1995. By April the federal forces established control over the lower parts of Chechnya.

7–8 April, 1995

“Sweep-up” operation of the village of Samashki by the federal forces, murder of more than a hundred civilians in the course of the punitive action.

May 1995

Start of a large-scale offensive of the federal forces to the mountainous regions of Chechnya.

14–20 June, 1995

Terrorist attack in Budennovsk. Shamil Basayev’s squad took 1500 hostages in the municipal hospital. Hostages were released as a result of negotiations, peaceful negotiations between the Russian and the Chechen side started in Grozny under the the auspices of OSCE, de-facto leadership of the separatists was recognized, and a six month cease fire break followed.

14 December, 1995

Federal authorities attempt to organize elections for the ‘Head of the Chechen Republic’, the separatists resume combat.

9–18 January, 1996

Terrorist attack in Kizlyar, more than 1500 people taken hostage in hospital by Salman Raduev’s squads, fights in the village of Pervomaiskoye.

22 April, 1996

The President of Chechnya Dzhokhar Dudaev is killed.

23 April, 1996

Vice-president Zelimkhan Yandarbiev becomes President of Chechnya.

6–21 August, 1996

Chechen detachments take over the control of Grozny, fights in the city, negotiations between Alexander Lebed and Aslan Maskhadov.

31 August, 1996

A. Lebed and A. Maskhadov sign a common declaration on the foundations of the relationship between the Russian Federation and the Chechen Republic in Khasavyurt. End of the ‘First Chechen War’.

31 December, 1996

Russian troops leave Chechnya.

27 January, 1997

Aslan Maskhadov is elected president of the Chechen republic and is officially recognized by the leadership of the RF.

12 May, 1997

A. Maskhadov and B. Yeltsin sign treaty on peace and the principles of relations between the Russian Federation and the Chechen Republic of Ichkeriya. Maskhadov’s power in the republic destroyed by war is not stable. In 1997–1999 practically all non-vainakh population left the republic. Its outflow started at the end of 1980-s and was reinforced after the separatists came to power, since ‘Russian-speaking’ residents of Chechnya were subjected to criminal pressure.

July 1998

In Gudermes religious extremists clashed with forces loyal to Maskhadov, who was not resolute enough and in fact lost control of the development of the situation in the republic.

August-September 1999

Invasion of extremists’ detachments from Chechnya into Dagestan, beginning of military actions. Basayev’s and Khattab’s detachments, who had invaded Dagestan, return to Chechnya.

October 1999

Deployment of federal troops into the territory of the Chechen Republic, beginning of the ‘Second Chechen War’.

December 1999 – January 2000

Federal forces are trying to storm blocked Grozny, aerial and artillery bombing of the city continues.

Beginning of February 2000

Chechen detachments leave Grozny and move into the mountains, bombings and fightings in the villages of Western Chechnya.

March 2000

End of large-scale military actions in Chechnya.

June 2000

Former mufti of Chechnya Ahmad Kadyrov, who went over to the federal side in fall 1999, is appointed Head of the Administration of the Republic (without significant powers).

Summer 2000

Beginning of a new stage of war: on the Chechen side – subversive and terrorist tactics, on the federal side – sweep-up in the villages, detentions and disappearances.

2003

The Federal power pursues the tactics of the ‘Chechenization’ of the conflict, using the force structures formed by Chechens and delegating authorities to the loyal Chechen administration.

5 October, 2004

Ahmad Kadyrov is elected President of the Chechen Republic as part of the RF. Human rights defenders noted that the whole election campaign was rich in gross violations. Many international observers refused to be present at the elections.

9 May, 2004

Ahmad Kadyrov dies as a result of the terrorist act.

10 May, 2004

Ramzan Kadyrov, Ahmad Kadyrov’s son, is appointed First Vice-Premier of the Chechen Republic.

29 August, 2004

Alu Alkhanov elected President of Chechnya.

March 2007

Ramzan Kadyrov appointed President of Chechnya.

15 April 2009

Official cancellation of the counter-terrorist operation regime in the territory of Chechnya.

RELATED INFORMATION

Organizations:

The International Crisis Group – www.crisisgroup.org
Memorial – <http://www.memo.ru/hr/hotpoints/index.htm>
Human Rights Watch – www.hrw.org
Committee Against Tortures – <http://www.pytkam.net/web>
Russian Justice Initiative.

Web sites:

Caucasian knot – <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru>
‘Echo of the Caucasus’ Radio – <http://www.ekhokavkaza.com>
Literary miscellany ‘The art of war’ (first-person war – creative works of the veterans of war) – <http://navoine.ru>.

Movies (feature and documentary):

Caucasian Prisoner, directed by Sergey Bodrov (senior).
Three Comrades, directed by Maria Novikova.
Chechen Lullaby”, directed by Nino Kirtadze.

Photo stories:

Heidi Bradner: <http://heidibradner.com>.
Thomas Dworzak: <http://www.magnumphotos.com>.

Articles:

Igor Kalyapin Caucasian Hounds.
Svetlana Gannushkina The Right to be Man.
Articles and reports by Novaya Gazeta journalists: Anna Politkovskaya, Arkadiy Babchenko, Vyacheslav Izmailov – <http://www.novayagazeta.ru>.

Books:

Polina Zhrebtsova’s diary; Polina Zhrebtsova, Detective-Press, 2011.
Russia Confronts Chechnya: Roots of Separatist Conflict), Human Rights Center “Memorial”, Valent, 2001.
Chechnya.Year Three. Jonathan Littell, ad Marginem Press, 2012.
Time of the South: Russia in Chechnya, Chechnya in Russia. Alexey Malashenko, Dmitry Trenin, Moscow Carnegie Center, Gandalf, 2002.
Working days. Galina Kovalskaia. Memorial, 2003.

LAST TO KNOW

stories of a war

The Civic Assistance Committee
127006 Moscow, Dolgorukovskaya street, 33, bld.6
tel.: +7 499 251 53 19
fax: +7 499 973 54 74
e-mail: ccaserver@mu-net.ru
www.refugee.ru

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Grozny, "Dinamo" stadium, 2002



Grozny, Central market, 2002



Grozny



Grozny, Kirov street, April 9, 2002



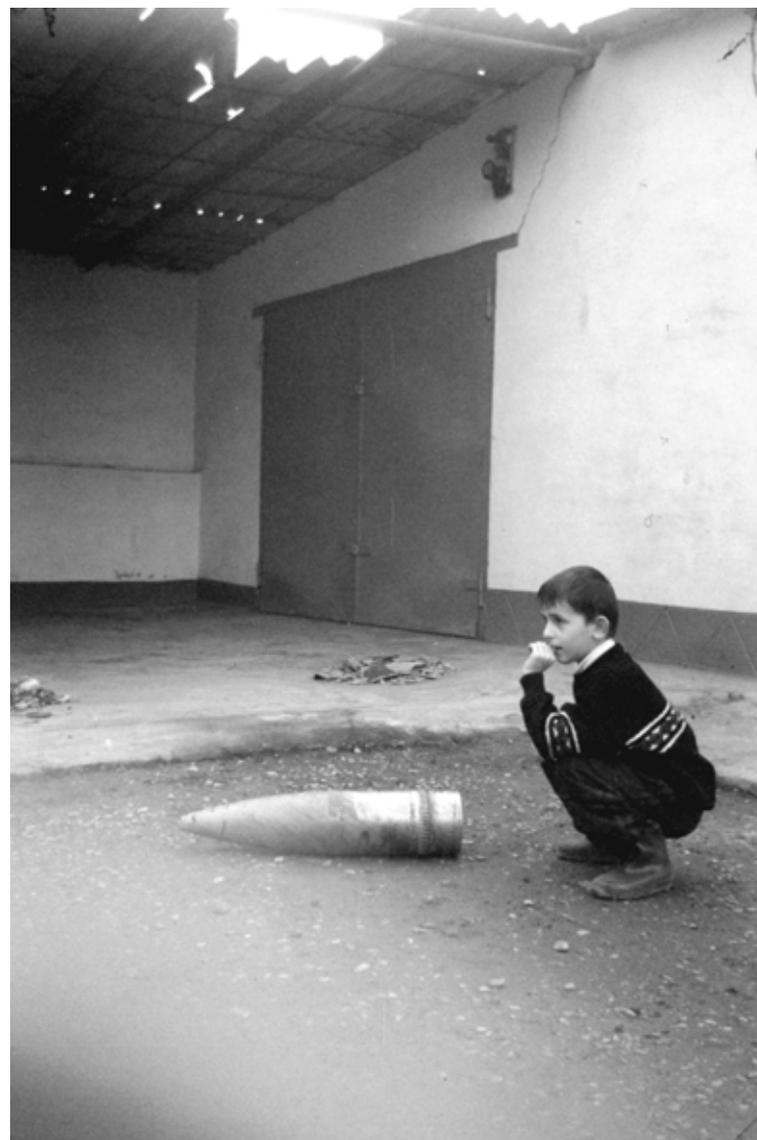
Grozny



Chechnya, unknown date and place



Ruins of a school. Crozny, 2001



Chechnya, unknown date and place



Political meeting, Chechnya, 2002



Crozny,



Tent camp for refugees "Sputnik", Ingushetia, 2001-2002



Tent camp for refugees "Sputnik", Ingushetia, 2002-2004



Camp for refugees, Ingushetia



Camp for refugees, Ingushetia



Political meeting, Chechnya