

HERO *of the* MONTH

THE SERIES THAT CELEBRATES ORDINARY PEOPLE DOING EXTRAORDINARY THINGS

DINA MAZUR

THE CHERNOBYL SURVIVOR WORKING TO RAISE THE PROFILE OF THE DISASTER

At school, I was ashamed to say I was a Chernobyl child. People crack jokes and are afraid of us. They think we are sick or mentally handicapped,'

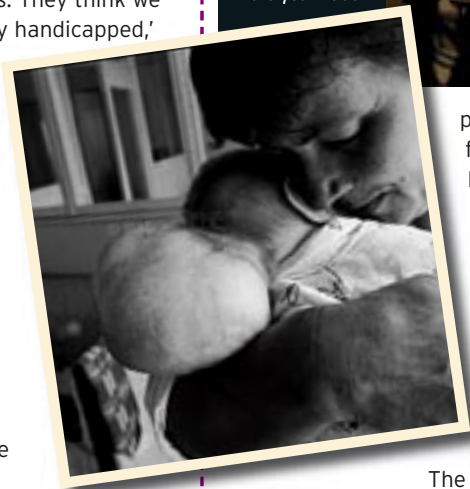
says Dina Mazur, 23, who has devoted her life to ridding Chernobyl of the stigma left by the world's worst nuclear accident 20 years ago.

'I lay in hospital for three months suffering from radiation sickness,' she recalls. 'It is too painful for my mother and father to talk about. There is so little accurate information about the catastrophe – that is why I

came to work at the Chernobyl museum in Kiev, to tell people what really happened.'

Dina is one of the 1.5 million people in Ukraine and neighbouring Belarus whose lives were changed forever by the explosion at the Chernobyl Atomic Energy Station on 26 April 1986. Thirty-one

Dina Mazur, right, in front of a collage of children affected by the disaster, at the Chernobyl museum in Kiev; nurse Alla Komarova hugs three-year-old Yulya, whose brain is in a membrane at the back of his head, at a Minsk children's home in the year 2000



The long-term effects of the explosion are only just emerging, and the children of Chernobyl are still suffering in its aftermath. 'Employers won't take you on,' says Dina. 'This is why I can do that, one person at a time.'

Since childhood, Dina has also been collecting and performing folk songs from

people, mostly firemen, were killed and another 4,000 – mainly children and those involved in the clean-up – have since died from radiation-related illnesses.

the affected region, as part of a campaign to preserve Ukrainian culture. 'There is more to Ukraine than Chernobyl – it's a beautiful place.' Her songs are a powerful symbol of her bravery and determination.

'Now that I work here, it is easier for my family and friends to talk about it. The grief created by Chernobyl crosses borders, uniting countries and people. Disasters touch us all: young and old, rich and poor. Chernobyl was the last warning.' ■

How can you help?

For more information about the disaster, go to www.chernobyl.info. The charity Chernobyl Children's Project International gives medical and humanitarian aid to those affected by the disaster. To donate, go to www.chernobyl-international.com.

