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In Grandma's Thoughts

Part one: Онежье – Onezh'ye, Komi Republic, Russia 2018 (video)

In Grandma's Thoughts is a story of thoughts from the heart, from a place of love and caring for grandchildren. It is a story of one sudden and simple encounter between two grandmothers, a story of values and world views.

I have a privilege to live with my family in Northern Finland, close to nature, within and in it. This is a good place to live and raise your children, I think. My body, mind and soul are part of the Arctic environment, landscape and its ecosystems. I am connected to it with many bonds through my senses and direct experiences, as well as through practical, political and symbolic ways when living in this northern hemisphere, pursuing research and art.

Nothing is dearer to my heart than my children and grandchildren. I am worried. The northern environment is facing a real threat here. The Arctic is warming more than twice as fast as the rest of the globe. The process is accompanied by other major Arctic-wide changes in the ocean, atmosphere and land. For the Arctic ecosystem, and for those of us who live here, this is a serious situation. Scientists have also recently linked Arctic warming to extreme weather further south. All this is happening in my lifetime. What will be the scale of change in my grandchildren's lifetime, can we still make a difference by how we live our life?



Онежье – Onezh'ye is the first part of a series of videos I am working on, called the Circumpolar North: Encounters and Conversations with grandmothers. In Kozlovka and its neighbourhood village of Onezh'ye, in Komi Republic, I wanted to stop and calm down, listen and learn. I asked what is important to a grandmother who lives in a beautiful rural Komi village, close to her daughter and her seven children. What would she like her grandchildren to learn from her? What are her thoughts on the environment and the heritage she wants to share with her grandchildren?



I met Galina Petrovna Ovsjannikova in Onezh'ye on 27 May 2018 in the entrance to the local church. I saw her taking care of tiny children during the service. She is not originally from this village, nor from this part of Russia. Her son-in-law asked her to visit them after the third grandchildren was born. She stayed. This is an outline of her story:

I'm not a local, I have moved here. My daughter has seven children and I came to help her. I am originally from Kazan in Central Russia. My daughter also lived in Kazan and came to visit Komi where she met her husband. So, it transpired that she married a local man and now they had seven children, the oldest being 12 years and the youngest seven months. Five of them are boys and there are two girls. The children go to school or to the kindergarten, and the boys help out at the church.

We participate in the church service every Sunday. I love my grandchildren and I think it is good that they go to church. I hope the boys have a good education, and an Orthodox education is good for children. The boys go every Sunday for the Lord's Supper and tell the priest about their sins.

I hope that children grow up righteously and fairly. There should be love for parents and love for siblings. And helping is really important. You should help not only your parents but also your friends. It is the basic and fundamental part of bringing up children. I love the children and I hope they also treat other people lovingly. And if they insult someone, they should apologize. You have to treat other people with love. In the village, a new children's playground is going to be built, which is a good thing because, otherwise, children have nothing to do. They just go outdoors and play some folk games.

Helping one another and taking care of one another are important in a family. The kids help their dad and mother and grandmother. They take part in the animal husbandry. They bring water to the cows and chop the firewood. Helping around the house is important. There is not as much to do in the city as there is in the countryside. We have a vegetable garden, a flower garden and a forest. I go to the forest in the summer with the children. Olga [the children's mother] takes us to the taiga woods and we pick lingonberries, cranberries and blueberries, which we make into jam. For whom? Everyone!



Here is Anna, or Annuska, born on 26 August. Her name is given according to the glory of St. Anne, the grandmother of Christ, Mary's mother. Anna is in kindergarten and loves dancing. She sings all the songs that she is taught there at home. The boy's name is Afanasi and he is in second grade. He is very artistic, he likes to act and participate in the plays.

This is our story, if there were anything interesting.

I had a photo album of my grandchildren with me. We started to have a look at my dear ones. Galina Petrovna told me her grandsons share the bread and help the priest at church and that only the boys can go to the altar because the priest has given them his blessing; the girls are not allowed to be there. She told me that the boy, Afanasi, who just came to see the photos, is nine years old. He works hard at school; his studies are going well and he has good grades. I received many compliments about my grandchildren, about how handsome and beautiful they are. My oldest grandson is eight; the little girl is two and the baby boy is one.

We looked carefully at the photo where my grandchildren can be seen outside on a river bank in winter time. "That's a lot of snow, just like we have!" Galina Petrovna was interested about where my family live and noticed that our landscape looks like theirs. They also have a dog; I learned its name: Gorga. My daughter's family has a Lappish reindeer dog, whose name is Jarppi.

Galina Petrovna wanted to learn how long our summer is, and whether we have different seasons. "You do have that season when there's a lot of berries? This is probably the summer season when there are mushrooms and berries?" I heard they have many fish in the river and a lot of cloudberry and blueberries in the forest. She asked about us and what we have too. "That is the same, including the berries", she was happy to note. "Bow to your family for me. How nice it was to see them look healthy and well, and do come back with the whole family to our village!"

Galina Petrovna's faith, passion and belief can inspire her grandchildren to foster values that will help them personally, so that they will respect their living environment and nature, learn how to take care of themselves and others, and contribute positively and in a sustainable way to society.

Thank you for sharing your story, Galina Petrovna – I bow to your family.



Image: Tanya Kravtsov

