

A Picture Book



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Introduction

Connected by a picture book — Japan, Chernobyl, and Germany
From more than 200 real-life stories interviewed by a female film director
comes a tale of hope and the future.

Erika is a 23-year-old single mother living in a provincial city, raising her beloved daughter by herself. Raising a child while working a job as a hostess is tough, but no matter how tired she is, Erika reads a picture book "Elena's Apple Tree" to Mana every night. It is a story about a girl who grew up with an apple tree.

Erika's lover, Natsuki, is an elite employee of a major electric power company who has been posted to work in her town, leaving his wife and child in Tokyo. It's an illicit love affair, but somewhere deep inside, Erika is hoping for a future with Natsuki.

One night, a massive earthquake of unprecedented scale hits the city. While desperately trying to evacuate, a tsunami strikes. The city is completely destroyed and Erika is left with only Mana's picture book.

A few months later, Erika, who is pregnant with Natsuki's child, is rushed to a small midwifery clinic. She gives birth to a daughter and is sent to live at a care home to support women in complicated situations. With Mana still missing and no contact to Natsuki, Erika's loneliness deepens and she is unable to open up to anyone.

Meanwhile, Ursula, a woman living in a small village in Germany, can't stay away from the news of the nuclear accident in Japan. She is the president of a renewable energy company, and her life was once changed forever by the tragedy of the Chernobyl disaster. Ursula immediately dispatches a project team to Japan to investigate the health problems of children in the affected areas, along with relief supplies, and she herself comes to Japan.

Erika meets Ursula at the facility. She learns that Ursula also lost her adopted daughter to childhood leukemia, and that her death was caused by the Chernobyl nuclear accident. Later, a survey reveals that Erika's breast milk is radioactive, and confused Erika asks Ursula for help. What's happening to my body? What will happen to my daughter if she drinks that milk? I don't want to lose my daughter again! Erika felt that something was changing within her. It also overlaps with the image of Ursula from the past. The picture book left by Mana further intersects their lives.



Japan



Story

Erika's 4 year old daughter Mana asks her every night to read her favorite picture book, "Elena's Apple Tree". It's a sad story about a young Elena who grows up with the apple tree planted when she was born, but one day she has to leave her hometown.

Erika (23) is a single mother living in a provincial city. She works at a nightclub and has been raising Mana by herself. She is dating a married man, Natsuki (33), who was posted to work in her town with his wife and child in Tokyo. Natsuki, an elite employee of an electric power company, always brags "I'm lighting up the Tokyo Tower!" In the short sleep after making love, Erika had the same dream again. A blonde girl leaves the city on a bus... Erika loves Mana very much. No matter how tired she is, she is always happy to spend time reading her favorite book to her. "The secret spell to bring back the apple spirit...*'Titch, kometch, nelin!'*"

In the middle of the night, a huge earthquake hits the town. Erika gets Mana into the car and drives to higher ground, but she feels sick and gets out of the car. The next moment, the tsunami swallows her only daughter.

"Mana! Mana!" Next morning, Erika, half-crazed in her search for Mana in the ruined town, finds a car in the rubble. All that was left was Mana's tattered picture book.

In Germany, watching the situation in Japan on TV, Ursula (65), the president of an electric power company, is restless. She makes arrangements to send supplies to Japan for children and their mothers, and gets her flight arrangement to Japan as her worried son looks upon. "You don't need to go to a dangerous place." Ursula replies to her son, smiling. "But I have to go. I'm sure it's the same as last time."

A few months later at the evacuation center, Erika finds out that she is pregnant with Natsuki's baby. Her cell phone was washed away so she can't reach him. She has no one to talk to and hasn't gone to the hospital. On TV, the news reported on the nuclear power plant accident caused by the earthquake. Erika calls Natsuki's branch office from a pay phone and is told that Natsuki has returned to Tokyo. She is helplessly lonely and tears flow.

In the fall, Erika is rushed to a small midwifery clinic. With the help of midwife Chikako (65), she safely gives birth to a baby girl, and moves into Kizuna House, a care facility for women run by Chikako. Naomi (32), a single mother who came here a while ago after the

disaster, is concerned about Erika, who is in a similar situation. Rena's (30) child seems to have frequent nosebleeds lately. Ayako (28) has a scar on her arm from domestic violence. Erika is unable to open up to anybody.

Seven months have passed since the disaster. A project team from Germany sponsored by Ursula's company arrives to investigate the health damage caused by the nuclear accident. Ursula is an old friend of Chikako's, and Chikako is worried about Erika's depression, so she brings the two together, and Erika hears that a similar nuclear accident happened in Chernobyl, and that Ursula's adopted daughter Olga died of childhood leukemia due to the accident. As a parent who has lost a child, Ursula tries to be sympathetic to Erika's feelings, but Erika is unable to face the reality. "Mana is still alive!"

Out of the blue, Natsuki calls Erika. Natsuki learns about a new baby, Sana (0), he is doubtful it's his. And he tells her he is unable to visit because the disaster area is "contaminated". Erika is furious and hangs up the phone.

Ursula's project team finds radiation in Erika and Ayako's breast milk. Ayako becomes frantic and panics. Not knowing what to do, Erika visits Ursula. "Tell me what's going on."

Germany in 1986, the year of the Chernobyl nuclear accident. Ursula was living in a small village with her husband and three young children. The village was 2,000 kilometers away from the accident site. Some mothers became concerned about their children's nosebleeds and sickness after the accident. Some time later, Ursula learns that many children have fallen ill in Chernobyl, and she meets Olga, an orphan at the hospital where she went to deliver aid. Ursula decides to adopt the bright and lively Olga. However, before the Christmas market she was looking forward to, Olga's condition worsens and she dies. "Some people say that children are ten times more affected by radiation than adults. Only time will tell what the truth is," Ursula tells Erka. "In the forests of Germany, radiation is still emitted from mushrooms and gibier meat. The only thing we can do is not to eat anything dangerous." Erika rushes to her home and throws away all the food from the refrigerator. "I don't want to lose my daughter again. I want to change. Please teach me more things...!"

At the Kizuna House, residents gathered and learned from Ursula about how to choose food. Out of the blue, Natsuki visits her. Natsuki gets down on his knees and tries to give

Story

her money for child support, but Erika brushes him off. She says, "The glow you were making was a fake. I want to find my own light." Ursula comes in with freshly baked cookies and gives Natsuki a cookie with icing "NO" on it. Erika laughs. Then she gets a call that Mana has been found.

In Erika's room, there is a small urn. Next to it is a picture book, "Elena's Apple Tree". Ursula tells Erika. "If I'm not mistaken, the girl who was the model for Mana's picture book is in Germany."

Two years later, Erika arrives at the Frankfurt airport in Germany with Sana. After a happy reunion in Ursula's office, Erika asks Ursula about what happened after Olga's death. Ursula begins to talk quietly.

Three years after the Chernobyl disaster (1989), Ursula is in a deep grief after the death of Olga. She is reminded of her everyday when she works at the kindergarten. Ursula learns that her house is also powered by nuclear energy, she is worried that a similar accident might happen again. Together with other parents Ursula visits the power company that monopolizes the area. They ask the company to consider the health risk of their children, but are naturally rebuffed. Radioactive materials are still being detected in the forest, and still children's noses bleed. Thinking of Olga who tried so hard to live, Ursula makes a big decision.

Five years later (1994), Olga's best friend Lena (18) arrives at the Treiburg Power Company. Six staff members are busy working in the small office set up in Ursula's living room. Ursula decided to start her own renewable energy company, and she has been working on various activities. Now they are on the verge of stopping the existing power company and getting the right to use the power lines for themselves. Lena had come to help Ursula.

In the square, Ursula appeals to the public, handing out cookies iced with "NO". "Electricity is very important. Can we let a single power company monopolize it? The answer is NO!" It wasn't easy in the beginning but the number of supporters has now increased. To use the town's power lines they had to raise millions of Euros and the current donations and investments are far from it.

On a hot summer day, Heinz, a banker, visits the office of the Treiburg Power Company.

The bank provides loans for social welfare and other social projects. Ursula takes Heinz to a local restaurant and orders grilled mushrooms. But the owner said, "Not today. I've got that thing again." Even now, eight years after the accident, mushrooms and meat from animals are sometimes contaminated with radiation. This reality was the reason for the citizens' cooperation.

After three days of meticulous research and deliberation, Heinz's answer was that he could not provide the loan. Ursula and the others were disappointed, but Heinz suggested that they set up the "Treiburg Power Fund" instead. In the bank's storefront, there was a sign that read, "Treiburg Power Fund: New Power with Your Hands! Share the miracle of our mothers!" A poster was put up at the bank.

In a few months the fund raised more than 2 million Euros. However, the power company charged an exorbitant 4 million Euros for the power lines and it will not negotiate. Ursula is disappointed. "Next year will be the tenth anniversary of Chernobyl..."

Suddenly, Heinz thought of something and snapped his fingers. "The tenth anniversary of Chernobyl! It's perfect timing to ask for donations, people are looking back on the accident" He also searches for ad companies that would support this project and make an advertisement campaign for free. Everyone was skeptical about Heinz's plan, but an advertising agency came forward and agreed. "The tagline is 'Ten years after Chernobyl. We are still here.' It's not just about the mothers in this town anymore. I think this is a test of our own ten years."

Posters were printed one after another and put up in the town. Olga's picture is on the poster. The office received waves of phone calls. They are from people all over Germany who shared the same anxiety and fear that day. From the post office, small piggy banks on carts packed with letters started coming in everyday. It was like a miracle.

In 1998 finally the Treiburg Power Company started generating and transmitting electricity.

Erika is speechless after hearing Ursula's story. Ursula says to Erika. "I am not a strong person, I'm just like you. I've been beaten down so many times. There is only one solution. Make friends. Make friends who share the same feelings." Then, she began to talk about the girl in the picture book "Elena's Apple Tree"...



Germany

“Elena’s Apple Tree”

In Elena's house, there was an apple tree
planted by her grandmother
on the day she was born.

Before she passed away, she told Elena,
"That apple tree is a treasure that will protect you.
Watch over it with all your might, even when it rains and when the wind blows.
If you do so, the apple fairy will bring you happiness.
If you have a wish, ask the apple spirit to make it come true.
It's a secret chant.
Titch, kometch, nelin!"

One day, a big wind blew and Elena had to move her house.
On moving day, Elena waved her hand
until she could no longer see her grandmother's apple tree.

Elena said,
"I'm sorry, Grandma, apple spirit.
I promise I will come back one day."
But that day would never come.

Elena recites a chant from the bottom of her heart.
"Titch, kometch, nelin!"
Then the apple spirit appeared before the crying Elena.

She said,
"Elena, you have been a good girl, I will grant you any wish."

Character

Erika (age 23)

Born in a provincial city in Japan, she had a child at a young age. She works at a cabaret club and raises her daughter by herself. When the earthquake and Tsunami struck, her beloved daughter went missing. She was pregnant with her lover's child, and alone gave birth to her second child. She moves into a facility for single mothers who need support. After the nuclear power plant accident caused by the earthquake, she meets Ursula, a German woman who came to Japan to investigate health problems of children, and her life changes dramatically when radiation is detected in her own breast milk.

Mana (age 4)

Erika's daughter. Her favorite book is "Elena's Apple Tree", and she asks Erika to read to her every night before bed.

Olga (age 11 at the time)

Ursula's adopted daughter. She was exposed to the radiation in Chernobyl and lost her parents at the same time. She died of childhood leukemia at the age of 11, and her death became the catalyst for Ursula's movement.

Natsuki (age 33)

He works in the nuclear power division of a major electric power company in Japan, and is posted alone in the town where Erika lives. He has a wife and child in Tokyo, but has an affair with Erika after meeting her at a cabaret club.

Chikako (age 65)

She is a midwife and runs Kizuna House, a care facility for women. An old friend of Ursula's, she is concerned about Erika's deepening loneliness and brings them together. When Erika and the residents panic when radiation is detected in their breast milk, she reveals her own upbringing to them, that at the age of she was exposed to the atomic bombing in Nagasaki but her mother kept it a secret from everyone.

Ursula (age 60)

President of one of Germany's leading renewable energy companies. She sponsors a health survey team after the nuclear accident and meets Erika in the disaster-stricken area. She lost her adopted daughter, Olga, who suffered from leukemia in the Chernobyl accident. After her death, she began to think about the safety of children and started a renewable energy company. Her movement involved the whole of Germany, and now she is one of the symbols of Germany's energy transition.

Production Company Horizon Features Co., Ltd.

Founded in 2006 the company has produced feature documentary films and TV programs. The feature documentary film "Beautiful Islands – Memoirs of Sinking Islands –" won Asian Cinema Fund AND Award at BIFF 2009 and opened in theaters in Japan, Korea and USA in 2010 and 2011. In 2012, the company produced a documentary film about a post war Japanese female artist Iwasaki Chihiro. The film is executive produced by Japanese iconic film director YAMADA Yoji and was a box office hit for a documentary in Japan. In 2015, the company produced international co-production documentary "The Two Directors: A Flame in Silence" with Korea's KBS TV.



Director

Director's Statement

This movie is a story of many mothers and fathers including myself.

I've been looking for light. Ever since that moment of the Fukushima nuclear accident. Right after the horrible nuclear accident in 2011, I didn't even know I was pregnant, so I went into the coverage of the nuclear power plant up to 6 kilometers. At that time, the major media were too concerned about the safety of the nuclear power plant to cover the accident, but I felt that I, who happened to be born on the same day as the Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant, had a responsibility to face the accident. I can't forget what I saw there. Since that day, I have been looking for a light that will lead to a real solution.

The first part of the story is based on the truth that many mothers have experienced. I interviewed more than 100 mothers and their experiences were miserable. But in their suffering, there was a "Mother's strength and determination" to protect their children. I was overwhelmed by the stamina of stepping forward with the determination to give up their job, hometown, and even husband. It also linked to my own experience of being pregnant after the accident and deciding to leave for safety. The main character Erika is drawn with profiles of all the mothers I met.

Later in the story, the main character will meet mothers in Germany. There, the small, courageous step taken by parents to protect their children following the Chernobyl disaster has received a lot of support, creating a renewable energy company that will revolutionize Germany's energy reform. When I visited the company for a documentary in 2015, I witnessed the strength of mothers who want to protect her child could fight against any barriers, the state, and the big companies. It was like a heroic success story, but I couldn't stop crying in the face of the truth that those mothers, who had little power, achieved it with their strength and love.

And that moment was the beginning of my strong motivation to start production of this film, with the story of the two mothers whose lives affected by two nuclear accidents.

Visual Concept

The style of the work will be mixture of documentary style and film setting, with casting of real life people and actors. The lighting is controlled impressively in two parts. In the first half of the series, I will emphasize the shading to symbolizes the Japanese people at the time of the loss of electricity and prosperity, and in the German part, I will induce the light of salvation. The images are based on the colors and lights of the film directed by KORE-EDA Hirokazu, who is also my master and a friend for 30 years.

I want to paint a true light that will not threaten anyone's life, not a false light that has given us enjoyment for many years. There is a limit to what you can do with the power of the movie, but it will be finished with a small light similar to my mother's warmth.



Profile

KANA Tomoko, Director

She became drawn to the world of documentaries during college when she was featured on the TV documentary program directed by KORE-EDA Hirokazu ("Shoplifters"). Her first narrative screenplay "Two by the River" (Tentative) won Sundance/NHK International Filmmakers Award at Sundance Film Festival. In 2009, she won Asia Cinema Fund Asian Network of Documentary Award at Busan International Film Festival (BIFF) for her third film "Beautiful Islands". Variety magazine praised the film "An extraordinarily eloquent synthesis of imagery and urgency". In 2016 "A Lullaby Under the Nuclear Sky" opened in theaters in Japan in 2016 and it has participated in numerous film festivals. Korea's KBS's international co-production film "The Two Directors: A Flame in Silence" was world premiered in BIFF 2015.

Background

Chernobyl and Fukushima nuclear accident

On April 26, 1986 Chernobyl nuclear accident occurred in the former Soviet Union (now Ukraine). It is the worst nuclear accident in history and the most serious level 7 accident. The area was blocked and people were forced to relocate. The number of direct deaths was 33, but cancer and leukemia cases increased. Fukushima disaster occurred due to the massive tsunami caused by the Great East Japan Earthquake on March 11, 2011, all 4 reactors were shut down and exploded one after another. It was a level 7 catastrophe, too. 20 kilometers of the plant was closed, and more than 160,000 people were evacuated from the prefecture. It is said that it will take more than 50 years to decommission the reactors.

Breast milk and radioactivity

After the 2011 accident at the Fukushima No.1 nuclear power plant, radioactive substances were detected in the milk of Japanese mothers one after another. At the time, radioactive substances were detected in food, water and air, and in children's urine. More than tens of thousands of mothers and children have left eastern Japan after deciding to evacuate or move.

Schönau Electric (EWS)

Germany's leading renewable power company in Schönau, located in a small town of 2,500 people in southwestern Germany. After the Chernobyl disaster, local mothers founded the company in 1996. The company currently has 200,000 customers. The success of the mothers in establishing the company involved the whole of Germany in advertising campaigns and sales of financial products for Schönau.

Wunderland Kalkar

A theme park in Kalkar, in northwestern Germany. It was originally built as a fast breeder reactor, but was shut down after the Chernobyl accident without operating. The site was bought by a businessman and opened as a theme park with a hotel. One of the symbols of Germany's abandonment of nuclear power. The annual number of tourists is 500,000, with about 550 employed in the region.



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