

Too Gay for Russia

by

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A Thesis Presented to the
FACULTY OF THE USC ANNENBERG
SCHOOL FOR COMMUNICATION AND JOURNALISM
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA
In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
MASTER OF ARTS
(SPECIALIZED JOURNALISM)

May 2023

Acknowledgements

I want to thank Professor Dan Birman. He shared with me so much wisdom and motivation, which helped me finish the documentary. I have been lucky to have an instructor with solid professionalism and a human heart. I also want to express gratitude and appreciation to Professor Sandy Tolan and Professor Larry P. Gross for being my thesis committee members. To everyone from the University of Southern California, including staff members Victor Figueroa, Megan Chao, and Susy Barkley, and my fellow students Andrew Dubbins and Jen Byers, thank you for all the practical work and advice to complete my documentary. Thank you to Aleksandr Ermoshkin and Miloslav Chemodanov, the documentary subjects, for being incredibly cooperative and generous with time and sharing your vulnerable experiences with me. Thanks to Professor Robert English and Olga Baranova for participating in the project with expert interviews. And most of all, thank you to my loving spouse Fedor Ilichev, for being who you are.

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Abstract

"Shut up or disappear!" This is the message that Russian lawmakers send to gender and sexual minorities. LGBTQ+ rights have deteriorated significantly in Russia during the last decade, and the country's invasion of Ukraine, beginning in February 2022, has accelerated propaganda against 'non-traditional sexual relations,' as described by the Russian state. "Too Gay For Russia" is a documentary that follows two Russian LGBTQ+ individuals who fled their home country because of the harassment and violence they had faced. On a broader scale, the documentary examines how the Russian government uses 'traditional values' and homophobia as part of its justification, to some extent, for the war of aggression in Ukraine.¹

¹ Edenberg, E. (2022) Putin's Anti-Gay War on Ukraine.

Introduction & Theoretical Background

LGBTQ+ rights have deteriorated significantly in Russia during the last decade.² The introduction of the Russian federal law "For the Purpose of Protecting Children from Information Advocating a Denial of Traditional Family Values" from 2013, or simply gay propaganda law as referred to widely in the media, and later restrictions on the rights of gender and sexual minorities have severely impacted the reality of LGBTQ+ life.³ For example, violence against LGBTQ+ individuals has grown considerably after the adoption of the gay propaganda law.⁴ As a consequence of the worsened attitudes toward 'non-traditional sexual relations,' as described by the Russian state, LGBTQ+ individuals are fleeing their home country.⁵

The tightened attitudes toward sexual minorities are linked with the rise of popular conservatism, which became more pronounced at the beginning of the 2010s.⁶ Scholars see this 'conservative turn' as a policy pursued by President Vladimir Putin's administration in response to widespread opposition protests in 2011 - 2012.⁷ The massive demonstrations began with opposition to parliamentary elections deemed fraudulent, then expanded to demands for Putin to step down.⁸ After these widespread protests demonstrated that the liberal middle class had abandoned its support for the authorities, the Kremlin sought to secure its position by allying itself more closely with the Orthodox Church.⁹ Thereafter, since Putin's move from prime minister back to the presidency in the spring of 2012, official Russia has elevated traditional,

² Morris, J., Garibyan, M. (2021) Russian Cultural Conservatism Critiqued: Translating the Tropes of 'Gayropa' and 'Juvenile Justice' in Everyday Life.

³ Kondakov, A., Shtorn, E. (2021) Sex, Alcohol, and Soul: Violent Reactions to Coming Out after the "Gay Propaganda" Law in Russian.

⁴ Sergey Katsuba (2023) The Decade of Violence: A Comprehensive Analysis of Hate Crimes Against LGBTQ in Russia in the Era of the "Gay Propaganda Law" (2010–2020), Victims & Offenders.

⁵ Novitskaya, Alexandra (2021). Russian-speaking LGBTQ communities in the West.

⁶ Shcherbak, A. (2022). Russia's "conservative turn" after 2012: evidence from the European Social Survey ORCID Icon.

⁷ Edenborg, E. (2021) 'Traditional values' and the narrative of gay rights as modernity: Sexual politics beyond polarization.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

religious values to the forefront of its rhetoric.¹⁰ Scherbak examines the European Social Survey 2010 - 2018 and concludes that the 'conservative turn' articulated by Putin's regime and promoted by the state media generated a significant value shift in Russian society.¹¹ According to Shcherbak, elements such as moral values, religiosity, loyalty to institutions of power, and conformity to government reached their conservative peak in 2014, the same year Russia annexed the Crimean Peninsula from Ukraine and began actively supporting the military operations in eastern Ukraine.

Researchers see the politics driven by conservative values broadly affecting the whole of Russia impacting the country's domestic and foreign policy as well as economic life.¹² However, at the center of Russian conservative populism is the idea of traditional values, which Russia claims to defend from Europe, and the wider West, which the authorities portrayed as having drifted into moral decay.¹³ In the narrative conveyed by official Russia, the Kremlin fights against 'decadent Western morality' by opposing the rights for gender and sexual minorities.¹⁴ This narrative is used both for distinguishing Russia from Europe to construct Russian national identity and for legitimizing the power in Russia to oppose the alleged external threat.¹⁵ Edenborg states that homophobia, exacerbated by the politics promoting traditional values, is also a geopolitical instrument and a means, among others, to justify Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine. The same conclusion is also reached in another earlier study, which examines the use of the derogatory term 'Gayropa' concerning Europe in the comments of Russian politicians and the country's media about the West's role in Ukraine's Maidan revolution in 2013 - 2014.¹⁶

¹⁰ Shcherbak, A. (2022). Russia's "conservative turn" after 2012: evidence from the European Social Survey ORCID Icon.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Wilkinson, C.. (2014) Putting "Traditional Values" Into Practice: The Rise and Contestation of Anti-Homopropaganda Laws in Russia.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Edenborg, E. (2022) Putin's Anti-Gay War on Ukraine.

¹⁶ Riabov, O., Riabova, T. (2014). The decline of Gayropa? How Russia intends to save the world.

Therefore, Russia uses the issues of gender and sexuality as tools of boundary-making in both national and international contexts.¹⁷ Opposing LGBTQ+ rights helps Russia define its place as a protector of 'traditional values' and a counter to the 'liberal West.'¹⁸ Official Russia claims that the West attempts to undermine Russia's sovereignty by supporting sexual and gender rights, whereas 'non-traditional sexuality' is framed as a threat to Russia's national harmony.¹⁹ Thus, promoting traditional values is an ideological framework for Russia's regime to pursue its military and security matters.²⁰

After Russia launched its major attack on Ukraine in February 2022 and as the war dragged on, the repression of sexual minorities in Russia has somewhat intensified.²¹ In December 2022, Russia introduced a new version of its gay propaganda law, in which the “promotion” of non-traditional sexual relations is now not only prohibited around minors but is also banned for all citizens in public spaces.²² Consequently, the new anti-LGBTQ+ law appears to be more homophobic and restrictive. However, the law's context is different: Russia claims more assertively that it is fighting not only Ukraine but also the West and its moral degradation as President Putin stated on the day when he began his larger war against Ukraine in 2022.²³

The documentary "Too Gay for Russia" follows two Russian LGBTQ+ individuals who fled their home country because of the homophobic politics driven by Putin's regime since the beginning of the 2010s. The purpose of the documentary is not only to illustrate what it is like to live in a country where the rights of gender and sexual minorities are trampled upon but also to describe those feelings that force a person to leave their home. On a broader scale, the documentary examines how the Russian government uses 'traditional values' and homophobia as

¹⁷ Edenborg, E. (2021) 'Traditional values' and the narrative of gay rights as modernity: Sexual politics beyond polarization.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Edenborg, E. (2022) Putin's Anti-Gay War on Ukraine.

²¹ Olga Baranova interviewed by Erkkä Mikkonen, 18 Oct 2022.

²² Professor Robert English interviewed by Erkkä Mikkonen, 12 Jan 2023.

²³ Address by the President of the Russian Federation. *The Kremlin*.

part of its justification of the war of aggression in Ukraine. It is worth noting that Russia's war in Ukraine and the fight against sexual minorities are both reasons that can motivate Russian citizens to leave the country.²⁴ In the interviews with both main characters, it became clear that Russia's military actions in Ukraine are also an important reason they do not want to stay in their country of birth. Furthermore, both main characters connected in their thoughts the worsened attitudes LGBTQ+ community and Putin's aggressive foreign policy. In addition, "Too Gay for Russia" shows how a regime that has become increasingly totalitarian uses homophobia to push its power. At the same time, it reminds us that oppressing the rights of minorities may lead to the weakening of democratic values in society as a whole.²⁵ This reminder is crucial in a time when LGBTQ+ rights have been under attack in many parts of the world, including the United States.

²⁴ Olga Baranova interviewed by Erkkä Mikkonen, 18 Oct 2022.

²⁵ Wilkinson, C.. (2014) Putting "Traditional Values" Into Practice: The Rise and Contestation of Anti-Homopropaganda Laws in Russia.

Chapter 1: Reflection

The concept to pursue a documentary of Russian LGBTQ+ refugees grew slowly during my many years in Russia. I witnessed the conservative turn and the degeneration of gender and sexual rights working in Russia as a foreign correspondent. I noticed this trend beginning in 2012, as I covered the legislative restrictions adopted in Russian regions and anti-gay oppression. However, as a member of the LGBTQ+ community, the topic also touched me, personally. As a gay man living in Russia, I experienced the worsening attitudes fueled by homophobic state propaganda. I saw how many of my friends and acquaintances decided to leave the country because of the abusive environment. Finally, Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine sealed the decision to pursue this documentary, "Too Gay for Russia." The war has brought the idea of Russia defending traditional values into the center of the Kremlin's narrative. Therefore, I feel that the topic is more relevant than ever.

After working for more than ten years as a foreign correspondent, I have some experience producing, filming, and editing short video content. Still, most of the time, I have worked with a videographer. However, I have never made such a long documentary, and this time I pursued it by myself and for the first time in English. I believe that my previous work experience was very helpful in making "Too Gay for Russia." Nevertheless, when I traveled to New York last fall, to film with a video camera I had only turned it on a couple of times, I felt worried. I did not have much experience in filming itself, but I had been preparing for months – this first videography trip was a real test. I familiarized myself with the topic by reading background literature about LGBTQ+ issues, carefully planning a story arc and shot list. The preparation paid off, as I was able to shoot almost all the needed footage in just two trips: one to New York and another to San Francisco. The relatively early filming of the footage had both advantages and disadvantages. On

one hand, I had time to process the interviews of the two main characters. Organizing the interview footage, in a total of nearly six hours, took a long time, not least because I had to use two foreign languages – Russian and English. On the other hand, I did not get as much instruction in videography as many others in my group because I had already finished filming by the beginning of the spring semester. In total, it took ten months to complete the documentary.

I aimed to draw as truthful and diverse a picture of the Russian LGBTQ community as possible. Although two individuals do not define the entire community, I consciously chose the subjects to represent regions of Russia where the reality of being gay varies fundamentally. In Moscow, the urban capital of Russia, LGBTQ+ life has always been freer than other parts of the country. I found it essential that both characters share different experiences of the rise of anti-gay attitudes. Aleksandr Ermoshkin was attacked on the street in Khabarovsk, Russian Far East, and was a target of a plot by Russia's Federal Secret Service (FSB). Meanwhile, Miloslav Chemodanov had not experienced physical violence or any other extreme harassment in Moscow. Chemodanov, however, chose to escape Russia on the same day the war of aggression in Ukraine began. His story ties in the Kremlin's narrative of fighting the 'decadent West' to the documentary.

While I made this documentary, both characters were in the process of applying for asylum, although Ermoshkin arrived in the United States in 2015. The Biden Administration suspended deportations to Russia in March 2022.²⁶ However, The Guardian exclusively reported in March 2023 that a young Russian citizen was abruptly deported from the U.S. back to Russia.²⁷ Currently, the future of deportations from the U.S. to Russia remains unclear. In my work, I wanted to focus mainly on Russia and not go into too much detail about the asylum

²⁶ Montoya-Galvez, C. (2022) U.S. suspends deportations to Ukraine, Russia and 7 other European countries, citing "humanitarian crisis".

²⁷ Bekiempis, V. (2023) Biden administration quietly resumes deportations to Russia.

process in the United States.

Initially, I wanted to bring more diversity to the story by interviewing journalist and author Masha Gessen and artist Nadya Tolokonnikova from Pussy Riot as my expert voices. However, both declined, so I interviewed Professor Robert English from USC and Olga Baranova from Moscow Community Center for LGBT+ Initiatives. Both experts were informative, and I am delighted with their contribution.

My understanding of a video documentary as a form of journalism developed significantly during the project. I have learned how essential pacing is in long-form audiovisual work. Pauses allow the viewer to rest and dive deeper into the story. I have also learned how the longer form of documentaries requires more planning to complete them efficiently. Despite the instructor's great help, I made the more than 30-minute documentary almost entirely alone. The most challenging part of the work was filming, in which I had less experience. Although I am somewhat satisfied with the footage, it could have ideally been improved. I believe that video shooting is a skill that needs to be developed for years to come, and I'm just at the beginning of my journey.

Watching the complete documentary, I am overall satisfied with it. I think "Too Gay for Russia" is both emotional and informative, while giving as truthful a picture of the state of the Russian LGBTQ+ community. Making such an exposed and forthcoming documentary concerning the Russian LGBTQ+ in today's Russia would be highly challenging. The expanded gay propaganda law would make the community members even more afraid to participate in a project like this. Moreover, as Russia continues its war in Ukraine, Putin's regime has tightened its grip on opponents of those in power.²⁸ Thus, any public speaking out against the Kremlin's politics is more likely to get punished than before. However, "Too Gay for Russia" does not talk only about Russia; it also deals more generally with the pressure that LGBTQ+ rights are under

²⁸ McCarthy, L.A., Rice, D., Lokhmutov, A. (2023). Four Months of "Discrediting the Military": Repressive Law in Wartime Russia.

today. According to the principles of The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, all human rights are indivisible and interdependent, meaning that one group of rights cannot be fully benefited without the other.²⁹ This also applies to gender and sexual rights.

²⁹ What are human rights? *OHCHR*.

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Documentary Script

PROLOGUE	
NAT Sound: Sewing machine (close up) Music from Storyblocks begins: https://www.storyblocks.com/audio/stock/chasing-a-criminal-346701664.html	
VO Aleksandr Ermoshkin (ERMOSHKIN3: 09:12) Ermoshkin showing the craft (closeup)	I was fired from the school and the university because of this law.
VO Professor Robert English (Clip0003: 19:30) Mobile phone on hand (close up) Chemodanov riding a bus	Ordinary people, they're subject to propaganda, state media. They hear how bad gay lifestyle is. They hear horror stories, diseases.
VO/SOT Miloslav Chemodanov (Clip0001: 27:12)	Gays are worse than drug addicts.
NAT Sound: People singing in a gay bar in Moscow (archival from Chemodanov) VO Miloslav Chemodanov (Clip0001:	People say that there's no gay community in Russia but I saw it.
TEXT CARD: In 2013, Russia adopts a nationwide anti-gay law. Source: Russia's Putin signs anti-gay measures into law. <i>AP News</i> . Published online 30 June 2013: https://apnews.com/article/039d47c28787483d94806968b1dd5d79	

<p>VO Professor Robert English (Clip0003: 19:30)</p> <p>A face of a plastic figure (closeup)</p> <p>Ermoshkin standing a garage.</p>	<p>There is no doubt that it has encouraged some anti-gay brutality.</p>
<p>SOT/VO Aleksandr Ermoshkin (ERMOSHKIN4: 12:50)</p> <p>Ermoshkin after the attack (archival from Radio Liberty)</p>	<p>They can fire me, beat me on the street, kill me - whatever.</p>
<p>VO/SOT Miloslav Chemodanov</p> <p>A flying missile (archival)</p>	<p>The war, militarization, a new battle against LGBT.</p>
<p>VO Professor Robert English (Clip0003: 20:45)</p> <p>Pro-Ukrainian protest in New York</p> <p>“Russia is a terrorist state” sign (closeup)</p>	<p>Putin has cast his invasion of Ukraine as a larger apocalyptic even confrontation with the west.</p>
<p>VO/SOT VLADIMIR PUTIN (archival material from the Kremlin 02/24/2022)</p>	<p>They sought to destroy our traditional values and force on us their false values that would destroy us.</p>
<p>VO Professor Robert English (Clip0003: 20:45)</p> <p>Make America gay again sign (closeup)</p> <p>Street view in New York gay district</p> <p>A mannequin in a wrestling suit (close up)</p>	<p>They are in a state of degradation. They have lost their moral compass, and we must fight against that.</p>
<p>TEXT CARD: Russia’s war in Ukraine has accelerated the oppression.</p> <p>LGBTQ+ individuals are fleeing Russia.</p> <p>Source: Ruck, I. (2023) Russians flee a hostile homeland. <i>Deutsche Welle</i>. Published online 14 March 2023:</p>	

https://www.dw.com/en/russians-flee-a-hostile-homeland/video-64880976	
VO Aleksandr Ermoshkin (ERMOSHKIN3: 34:28) Ermoshkin's face when sewing (closeup)	I chose a foreign land over prison or a grave.
VO/SOT VLADIMIR PUTIN (archival material from the Kremlin 02/24/2022)	Because it is contrary to human nature.
TEXT CARD: TOO GAY FOR RUSSIA Music fades out.	
VO Aleksandr Ermoshkin (ERMOSHKIN3: 51:04) (ERMOSHKIN3: 48:59) A tree (closeup) Relieving Ermoshkin in the forest Ermoshkin touching a tree (closeup) A tree	I grew up in the taiga. What I miss the most is probably work. I miss work. I miss the places I left, where I grew up, where I put down my roots.
VO/SOT Aleksandr Ermoshkin (ERMOSHKIN3: 48:32) Ermoshkin walking away from the tree. Ermoshkin walking (closeup on feet)	If there was no war. If there wasn't a war against LGBT people. If there wasn't a war against Ukraine, I would still live in Khabarovsk. I would teach at school and at the university.
SOT Aleksandr Ermoshkin (ERMOSHKIN3: 48:52)	I would collect a herbarium in the taiga.
TEXT CARD In 2013, Russia adopted its "gay propaganda law." It prohibits promoting to minors "non-traditional sexual relationships."	

<p>Source: Russia: Reject Discriminatory Bill. <i>Human Right Watch</i>. Last updated online 01 July 2013: https://www.hrw.org/news/2013/06/23/russia-reject-discriminatory-bill</p>	
<p>NAT Sound</p> <p>Oakland from the window of a train.</p>	
<p>VO Aleksandr Ermoshkin (ERMOSHKIN3: 09:13)</p> <p>Ermoshkin walking to his work place</p>	<p>I was fired from the school from the university because of the gay propaganda law.</p>
<p>VO Aleksandr Ermoshkin (ERMOSHKIN3: 11:22)</p> <p>Ermoshkin opening the door, entering a garage, and taking a piece of leather.</p> <p>A scissors and a trash bin (closeup) Ermoshkin cutting the leather (closeup) Ermoshkin cutting the leather</p>	<p>On June 23, this law was adopted. Summer is in full swing. I come home between botany trips and one of my roommates says: “They came to the bank to collect signatures for my dismissal.”</p>
<p>NAT Sound (Clip0079)</p> <p>Ermoshkin placing the cut leather to a table</p>	<p>A detail!</p>
<p>VO Aleksandr Ermoshkin (ERMOSHKIN3: 12:16)</p> <p>Ermoshkin folding leather</p>	<p>They began to collect signatures to send a letter of protest to the Ministry of Education of Khabarovsk complaining that openly gay people work at school and promote LGBT.</p>
<p>NAT sound (Clip0079)</p> <p>Ermoshkin showing leather</p>	<p>Sometimes when new leather arrives, you open it up and think, who was it?</p> <p>It was not a cow but a dinosaur.</p>

<p>VO Aleksandr Ermoshkin (ERMOSHKIN3: 01:04:09)</p> <p>A face of a plastic figure (closeup) Ermoshkin exiting the garage Balls of yarn (closeup) Ermoshkin sitting in front of the sewing machine Ermoshkin putting yarn to the machine</p>	<p>I work in a small business sewing accessories, costumes in the style of Burning man festivals or something like that.</p>
<p>NAT sound Ermoshkin sitting in front of the sewing machine Sewing machine (closeup)</p>	
<p>VO/SOT Professor Robert English (Clip0003: 20:45)</p>	<p>The original Russian law passed in 2013, this sort of law against propaganda, they called it, or promotion of homosexual lifestyle was aimed at minors. Right. So that's not so different than these so-called don't say gay laws passed in the state of Florida.</p>
<p>SOT Olga Baranova, Moscow Community Center for LGBT+ Initiatives (Clip0207: 03:45)</p>	<p>It was the most discriminatory law adopted. Afterward, everything kept spiraling downward, worse and worse.</p>
<p>VO Aleksandr Ermoshkin (ERMOSHKIN3: 00:12:45)</p> <p>Ermoshkin sitting in front of the sewing machine Ermoshkin sewing (closeup)</p>	<p>Back in 2012 the director of the school changed. I went to see her and said that I am an LGBT activist: We annually do a televised protest.</p>
<p>VO Aleksandr Ermoshkin (ERMOSHKIN3: 13:20)</p> <p>Balls of yarn (closeup) Ermoshkin sitting in front of the sewing machine</p>	<p>She told me that this is your personal life. "We value you as a teacher and we don't want you to quit."</p>
<p>NAT sound (Clip0075)</p> <p>Ermoshkin winding leather and placing it to box</p>	<p>A pancake!</p>

<p>VO Aleksandr Ermoshkin (ERMOSHKIN3: 14:12)</p> <p>(ERMOSHKIN3: 15:19)</p> <p>Ermoshkin touching balls of yarn (closeup)</p>	<p>But they began to put pressure on the director.</p> <p>Before the first of September she got a call from the department of education. They said to her in a very harsh form: either you fire this teacher, or we fire you.</p>
<p>NAT sound</p> <p>Ermoshkin trying an accessory</p> <p>Ermoshkin trying an accessory (close up)</p> <p>Cat</p>	
<p>VO Aleksandr Ermoshkin (ERMOSHKIN3: 22:16)</p> <p>Ermoshkin exiting the house</p>	<p>I did not discuss it at school. As a teacher of geography I didn't have any reasons to talk about LGBT issues with my pupils.</p>
<p>VO/SOT Professor Robert English (Clip0003: 10:55)</p> <p>Ermoshkin exiting the house (outside)</p>	<p>There may be a school teacher who is gay. And they get targeted and the parents are emboldened to file a case to, you know, drop a petition to demand the teacher be fired and people lose their jobs in that way.</p>
<p>Music from Storyblocks fading in: https://www.storyblocks.com/audio/stock/a-glimmer-of-hope-hufxipysrk2xlhq9b.html</p> <p>NAT sound</p> <p>Protest against homophobia in Russia (archival)</p>	
<p>TEXT CARD:</p> <p>In the Russian Far East, people released balloons on International Day Against Homophobia in 2015.</p> <p>Source: Armitage, S. (2015) Russian Activist Beaten En Route To LGBT Rights Protest. <i>Buzzfeed News</i>. Published online 17 May 2015: https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/susiearmitage/russian-activist-beaten-en-route-to-lgbt-rights-protest</p>	

<p>Music fading out. SOT/VO Aleksandr Ermoshkin (Clip0095: 35:49)</p> <p>Ermoshkin attacked at the protest against homophobia (archival)</p>	<p>I leave the car, take the balloons, and walk a few steps. From the next vehicle a person gets out.</p> <p>He has brass knuckles.</p>
<p>SOT/VO Aleksandr Ermoshkin (Clip0095: 36:46)</p> <p>(Clip0095: 37:02)</p> <p>(Clip0095: 37:36)</p> <p>Ermoshkin attacked at the protest (archival)</p>	<p>A blow to my head knocks me out. I lose consciousness, and he leaves.</p> <p>This happens in front of the city administration representatives and my friends.</p> <p>An ambulance comes for me, and the police arrive. They didn't find anyone. The purpose was not to find anyone.</p>
<p>VO/SOT Professor Robert English (Clip0003: 10:55)</p> <p>A man biking A man biking (closeup) A plant (closeup)</p> <p>Music from Storyblocks fading in: https://www.storyblocks.com/audio/stock/a-glimer-of-hope-hufxipysrk2x1hq9b.html</p>	<p>This law sends a signal to society in general that it's okay to discriminate, that we are against LGBT rights, that we're against anything nontraditional. There's no doubt that it has encouraged some anti-gay brutality.</p>
<p>NAT sound Ermoshkin picking nuts in the forest</p>	
<p>VO Aleksandr Ermoshkin (Clip0095: 15:45)</p> <p>(Clip0095: 16:55)</p> <p>(Clip0095: 19:40) Ermoshkin picking nuts Ermoshkin showing nuts (close up) 2 photos of young Ermoshkin (archival) Music fading out.</p>	<p>Imagine a teenager in an industrial city in the Russian Far East. And at one point, you suddenly realize that the most horrible thing happened to you.</p> <p>It was sixth grade. I think I was 12 years old.</p>

<p>NAT sound Ermoshkin showing nuts (Clip0030)</p> <p>Music from Storyblocks fading in: https://www.storyblocks.com/audio/stock/a-glimmer-of-hope-hufxipysrk2xlhq9b.html</p>	<p>What mushrooms are you finding? No, it's bay nut!</p>
<p>VO Aleksandr Ermoshkin (Clip0095: 18:05)</p> <p>A man bicycling. Ermoshkin picking nuts</p> <p>Music fading out.</p>	<p>I could say that I'm not homophobic but it's still there. It's poured into you. And you will fight it all your life.</p>
<p>NAT sound</p> <p>Picked nuts (closeup) Ermoshkin opening a nut.</p>	<p>The nut is inside. These halves are roasted. Then they are grinded into flour or granola. Creame, sugar and butter are added to make chocolate or nutella.</p>
<p>VO Aleksandr Ermoshkin (Clip0095: 01:40) (Clip0095: 02:30) (Clip0095: 03:31)</p> <p>Trees in the forest Ermoshkin picking nuts Nuts (closeup) A plant Ermohskin putting nuts to a plastic bag</p> <p>Music from Storyblocks fading in: https://www.storyblocks.com/audio/stock/a-glimmer-of-hope-hufxipysrk2xlhq9b.html</p>	<p>In 2009, I became a gay activist on International Day Against Homophobia.</p> <p>We came up with a very modest protest: releasing balloons.</p> <p>Back then we still thought about the future and that everything would only get better.</p>
<p>VO Aleksandr Ermoshkin (Clip0095: 11:12)</p> <p>(Clip0095: 25:33) Music fading in</p> <p>Plants Ermoshkin walking with plastic bags A nut bush Ermoshkin opening car's tailgate</p>	<p>In 2015, neo-Nazi groups said they would not let us organize the event. They threatened to attack us.</p> <p>I had long understood that these neo-fascist groups are linked with the cops.</p>

<p>NAT sound Driving a car</p> <p>Music fading in louder</p>	
<p>VO Aleksandr Ermoshkin (ERMOSHKIN4: 11:19)</p> <p>(ERMOSHKIN4: 12:30)</p> <p>Ermohskin stands next to the car on the top of the hill Ermohskin stands (closeup) The view from the hill (pan) The view from the hill (closeup) Ermoshkin walking to the edge</p>	<p>My government comes after me using articles of the Criminal and Administrative Codes.</p> <p>I feel that the state allows others to interpret this law in every possible way: Fire me, beat me on the street, kill me - whatever.</p>
<p>VO Aleksandr Ermoshkin (ERMOSHKIN4: 06:22)</p> <p>Ermoshkin standing (tilt)</p>	<p>There have already been acquittals for murders of gays.</p>
<p>SOT Aleksandr Ermoshkin (ERMOSHKIN4: 06:49)</p> <p>Music fading out.</p>	<p>It remains only to wait for the growth in numbers.</p>
<p>NAT sound</p> <p>Bridge in New York Bridge in New York (closeup)</p>	
<p>VO Miloslav Chemodanov (Clip0001: 00:06)</p> <p>Chemodanov walking on the street</p>	<p>I am Miloslav Chemodanov, journalist, DJ, gay activist, openly gay.</p>

<p>VO Miloslav Chemodanov (Clip0001: 01:24)</p> <p>(Clip0001: 05:17)</p> <p>Chemodanov walking on the street</p>	<p>I was afraid for a long time and didn't even tell my closest friends that I was gay, because I thought that everyone treats gays as a mistake of nature.</p> <p>And now they pump up it even more through the state television.</p> <p>They are trying harder to make it clear that LGBT is not the norm..</p>
<p>SOT Miloslav Chemodanov (Clip0001: 05:50)</p>	<p>..that gays should hide, and not stick out. Otherwise, they will punish you for the audacity to say you are gay.</p>
<p>NAT sound Chemodanov waiting for a bus</p>	
<p>SOT Miloslav Chemodanov (Clip0001: 25:40)</p> <p>Chemodanov waiting for a bus Bus coming</p>	<p>I came out to my mother when I was 39. Now I'm 43.</p>
<p>NAT sound Chemodanov entering the bus</p>	
<p>SOT Miloslav Chemodanov (Clip0001: 12:40)</p> <p>Miloslav sitting in the bus Miloslav holding mobile phone (closeup)</p>	<p>But I wasn't sure of my mother's reaction. Because she is an elderly person living in a small town in the Urals and she watches TV.</p>
<p>NAT sound</p> <p>Music from Storyblocks fading in: https://www.storyblocks.com/audio/stock/all-my-sadness-disappears-346809048.html</p> <p>A photo of Chemodanov and his mom (archival)</p>	

<p>SOT Miloslav Chemodanov (Clip0001: 17:48)</p> <p>Clip0001: 18:30)</p> <p>Chemodanov sitting in the bus Chemodanov sitting in the bus (closeup)</p>	<p>Mom’s reaction was strange. She answered something like: “I’m very worried. I don't know what to do.”</p> <p>“But I read on the Internet that people can be cured.”</p>
<p>NAT sound Chemodanov sitting in the bus</p> <p>Music fading in louder</p>	
<p>VO/SOT Miloslav Chemodanov (Clip0001: 18:48)</p> <p>Chemodanov sitting in the bus</p>	<p>I weighed everything and realized that there was nothing so directly negative in her letter. She is not ashamed of me, she does not refuse me.</p>
<p>NAT sound Chemodanov standing and walking in the center of NYC</p>	
<p>VO Miloslav Chemodanov (Clip0001: 23:44)</p> <p>(Clip0001: 23:52)</p> <p>Chemodanov walking in NYC. Chemodanov walking in NYC. (closeup)</p>	<p>She is, of course, a worried mother.</p> <p>But when it comes to my homosexuality she breathes a little easier now.</p>
<p>NAT sound Chemodanov walking in NYC. A detail of a bus</p> <p>Music fading out</p>	

<p>VO/SOT Miloslav Chemodanov (Clip0001: 26:06)</p> <p>(Clip0001: 26:31)</p> <p>(Clip0001: 27:16)</p> <p>Chemodanov walking in the rain. A street view. Chemodanov walking (closeup on feet) Rainbow flags (closeup) Chemodanov walking in the rain.</p> <p>Music from Storyblocks fading: https://www.storyblocks.com/audio/stock/all-my-sadness-disappears-346809048.html</p>	<p>I also have three sisters. As of now, I have told two of them.</p> <p>One of them took it very calmly. But the other did not. She still cannot accept it all.</p> <p>She says: “Gays are worse than drug addicts.” “You’re not like that. It’s because you went to Europe.” “Europe made you gay. In fact, you have always been a normal boy.”</p>
<p>VO/SOT Professor Robert English (Clip0003: 19:30)</p> <p>Music fading in louder</p> <p>NYC bridge by night NYC bridge by night (closeup, off focus)</p>	<p>And ordinary people, you know, they’re subject to propaganda, state media. They hear how bad gay lifestyle is. They hear horror stories of disease, of children destroyed from, you know, having gay parents.</p>
<p>SOT/VO Olga Baranova, Moscow community center for LGBTQ initiatives (Clip0207: 17:40)</p> <p>Buildings in a night time</p>	<p>For many people these concepts are mixed: They think that a pedophile and a homosexual are the same. It’s something connected with children and violence. Many don’t have the slightest desire to make sense of this topic.</p>
<p>NAT sound Chemodanov entering a friend’s flat</p>	
<p>VO Miloslav Chemodanov (Clip0001: 02:22)</p> <p>Drinks (closeup) People gathered in a flat Chemodanov chatting with friends Chemodanov chatting (closeup)</p>	<p>When I began to travel more from Russia to some other places, I was surprised to see that people can walk holding hands, kiss, and hug.</p> <p>Each time it was more difficult to return to Russia after experiencing freedom. That’s why every time, I opened up a bit more.</p>

<p>NAT sound Chemodanov chatting with a friend</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I love this song! • I played a lot at my parties. • When Russia invaded Ukraine I was playing..
<p>VO/SOT Miloslav Chemodanov (Clip0001: 03:12)</p> <p>A cat</p>	<p>Then I realized that I could help people open up and inspire them by organizing parties.</p>
<p>TEXT CARD: Miloslav Chemodanov ran a queer disco in Moscow from 2012 to 2022.</p>	
<p>NAT sound Chemodanov playing in a club in Moscow (archival)</p> <p>Music from Storyblocks: https://www.storyblocks.com/audio/stock/half-of-your-heart-347011580.html</p>	
<p>VO Miloslav Chemodanov (Clip0001: 49:00)</p> <p>(Clip0001: 54:57)</p> <p>Chemodanov playing in a club in Moscow (archival)</p> <p>People in a club (archival)</p>	<p>People say that there is no gay community in Russia, but I saw it. I saw how Britney Spears and dances create some kind of community for gays.</p> <p>I'm proud of my club. It was a place where people could feel secure.</p>
<p>NAT sound NYC bridge by night</p> <p>Chemodanov exiting friend's flat to the street</p>	
<p>VO/SOT Miloslav Chemodanov (Clip0001: 55:14)</p> <p>A street view of rainy NYC Chemodanov walking on the street with friends and entering a gay bar</p>	<p>I also began to provoke people a bit. I deejayed wearing a dress to show that you don't have to look like you're told, that even in Russia you can do it.</p> <p>And next time half a dozen guys came to the party wearing dresses. So gay propaganda work!</p>

<p>NAT sound</p> <p>Chemodanov inside the gay bar</p>	
<p>VO Miloslav Chemodanov (Clip0001: 55:14)</p> <p>Drag queens on the stage A mirror ball A drag queen performing</p> <p>Music from Storyblocks: https://www.storyblocks.com/audio/stock/come-dy-background-quirky-jazz-r0l5w5wi_knee1slc.html</p>	<p>But many of them live another life outside the club. They cannot admit being gay at work or introduce their boyfriends to their families. They have to go through a lot of things that I went through.</p>
<p>NAT sound</p> <p>A drag queen performing</p>	
<p>VO/SOT Professor Robert English (Clip0003: 20:05)</p> <p>(Clip0003: 14:10)</p> <p>Golden Gate Bridge in SF A fisherman on the beach The fisherman walking to the water A wave The fisherman walking from the water</p>	<p>So the first anti-gay laws back in 2013 //</p> <p>It's coming from national circles. It's coming from the Russian Orthodox Church.</p> <p>And Putin decided to take advantage of that. And he probably calculated: I can't resist this. It's a wave. Let me ride this wave and get in front of it, make it my issue, and make it part of my defense of traditional Russia against the decadent West because it fed into, of course, his larger foreign policy narrative as it developed over that decade.</p>
<p>TEXT CARD: In November 2013, Aleksandr Ermoshkin decides to flee Russia.</p> <p>Music from Storyblocks: https://www.storyblocks.com/audio/stock/a-glimmer-of-hope-hufxipysrk2xlhq9b.html</p>	

<p>SOT/VO Aleksandr Ermoshkin (ERMOSHKIN3: 30:48)</p> <p>(ERMOSHKIN3: 32:48)</p> <p>Train arriving to a station Ermoshkin's house Ermoshkin entering his house</p>	<p>Why did I decide to leave anyway?</p> <p>First, during 2013, I lost two of my favorite jobs. I was banned from teaching anywhere.</p> <p>Then there was persecution by neo-Nazi groups. All the walls in my yard were covered with graffiti like "Ermoshkin is a faggot" and so on.</p>
<p>NAT sound (Clip0072)</p> <p>Ermoshkin cooking crepes A crepe on the pan (closeup)</p>	<p>Comfort food. It is one of the first unnecessary words that I learned.</p>
<p>VO Aleksandr Ermoshkin (ERMOSHKIN3: 33:40)</p> <p>Ermoshkin cooking</p>	<p>Secondly, I knew that the Federal Security Service had a case against me. They were trying to gather evidence of espionage against me.</p> <p>If you are not a spy, how can they make up that you are one?</p>
<p>SOT Aleksandr Ermoshkin (ERMOSHKIN3: 34:08)</p>	<p>Excuse me, but in Russia it can certainly happen. I chose a foreign land over prison or a grave, and I made the decision in November.</p>
<p>NAT sound A kettle</p> <p>Music from Storyblocks: https://www.storyblocks.com/audio/stock/a-glitter-of-hope-hufxipysrk2xlhq9b.html</p>	
<p>VO Aleksandr Ermoshkin (ERMOSHKIN1: 38:00)</p> <p>(ERMOSHKIN1: 38:25)</p> <p>(ERMOSHKIN2: 06:35)</p> <p>Ermoshkin getting the kettle and pouring hot water. Sour cream (closeup)</p>	<p>There's one more very unpleasant moment I need to share:</p> <p>An organized TV shoot alleged that we were traitors and foreign agents, who attempted a revolution with balloons and colorful flags.</p>

<p>NAT sound Ermoshkin in the kitchen The house outside</p> <p>Music from Storyblocks fading in: https://www.storyblocks.com/audio/stock/a-glimer-of-hope-hufxipysrk2xlhq9b.html</p>	
<p>VO Aleksandr Ermoshkin (ERMOSHKIN1: 39:05)</p> <p>The house outside (closeup) Eroshkin climbing stairs and entering a room Shelves A teddy bear (closeup) Ermoshkin showing a book</p>	<p>I get a call from an unknown number. A woman tells me that she’s calling from the U.S. Embassy. “We know that you intend to leave, and therefore, you must urgently meet with us in Moscow.”</p>
<p>NAT sound</p> <p>Ermoshkin showing a rug he is sewing Balls of yarn (closeup)</p>	<p>In March, it will be two years since I sewed this. I don’t sew it everyday, of course.</p>
<p>VO Aleksandr Ermoshkin (ERMOSHKIN2: 11:24)</p> <p>(ERMOSHKIN2: 12:57)</p> <p>Ermoshkin sewing Ermoshkin sewing (closeup)</p> <p>Music from Storyblocks: https://www.storyblocks.com/audio/stock/a-glimer-of-hope-hufxipysrk2xlhq9b.html</p>	<p>I doubted from the very first call. Doubts, doubts, doubts. They began to use threats. They said that I would not be let out of the country without their help. She was able to convince me.</p>
<p>VO Aleksandr Ermoshkin (ERMOSHKIN1: 39:05)</p> <p>(ERMOSHKIN2: 02:00)</p> <p>(ERMOSHKIN2: 06:06)</p> <p>A scissors (closeup) Ermoshkin putting his work on table (closeup) Ermoshkin touching his work The sewed detail (closeup)</p>	<p>I accepted their proposal. They bought me a ticket and I flew to Moscow.</p> <p>I’m going to this meeting and I feel very tense. I see that they are going to film me.</p> <p>It was a plot by the Federal Security Service. They showed it on state TV.</p>

<p>NAT sound (Clip004)</p> <p>Ermoshkin getting and opening a file Ermoshkin showing documents Close up of the document</p> <p>Music from Storyblocks: https://www.storyblocks.com/audio/stock/a-glimmer-of-hope-hufxipysrk2xlhq9b.html</p>	<p>Let's see what is here in this file.</p> <p>This is what Amnesty International writes about me.</p>
<p>VO Aleksandr Ermoshkin (ERMOSHKIN2: 05:26)</p> <p>(ERMOSHKIN2: 07:48)</p> <p>(ERMOSHKIN2: 09:09)</p> <p>Books (closeup) Ermoshkin showing old news papers News article (closeup)</p>	<p>They made me out to be a fool, telling a story about how to recruit a person.</p> <p>Then they showed the country: "Here is what a gay man looks like!"</p> <p>"He chose to be gay. Now he wants to overthrow our government."</p>
<p>NAT sound</p> <p>A missile launched (archival)</p>	
<p>TEXT CARD:</p> <p>February 2022. Russia begins its war of aggression in Ukraine.</p> <p>Putin claims to battle among other things for traditional values.</p> <p>Address by the President of the Russian Federation. <i>The Kremlin</i>. Published online 24 Feb 2022: http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67843</p>	

<p>SOT/VO VLADIMIR PUTIN (archival material from the Kremlin 02/24/2022)</p> <p>People escaping shelling in Eastern Ukraine (archival)</p>	<p>They sought to destroy our traditional values and force on us their false values that would erode us. The attitudes they have been aggressively imposing on their countries, the attitudes that are directly leading to degradation and degeneration, are contrary to human nature.</p>
<p>VO Professor Robert English (Clip0003: 20:45)</p> <p>A pro-Ukrainian protest in New York A protester with Russia is a terrorist state sign. Protesters cover in Ukrainian flags A sign of Putin going to a trash bin</p>	<p>Putin has cast his invasion of Ukraine, his war, not just as a matter of security, something to defend against NATO's, something to defend Russian speakers in the Donbas or Crimea. But he's cast it as a larger apocalyptic, even confrontation with the West.</p>
<p>NAT sound Protesters singing the Ukrainian anthem Russia is a terrorist state sign (closeup) Singing protesters (closeup)</p>	
<p>VO/SOT Professor Robert English (Clip0003: 21:15)</p>	<p>That brings in this sense that they are declining, they are in a state of degradation. They have lost their moral compass, and we must fight against that.</p>
<p>NAT sound NYC by water</p>	
<p>SOT/VO Miloslav Chemodanov (Clip0001: 59:50)</p> <p>NYC street view Chemodanov's flat</p>	<p>I was sleeping and Arkasha woke me up early in the morning and said it had begun. The outbreak of war was a shock but, fortunately, we had already made a plan.</p>
<p>NAT sound Chemodanov packing clothes, boyfriend sitting on the bed.</p>	

<p>VO Miloslav Chemodanov (Clip0001: 56:50)</p> <p>(Clip0001: 57:21)</p> <p>Chemodanov packing clothes. Getting a handbag from a closet The handbag (closeup)</p>	<p>When we had been already for quite a long time together with Arkasha we began to discuss that we would like to leave the country.</p> <p>We wanted to leave the abusive environment and live somewhere where you can breathe more freely.</p>
<p>NAT sound Chemodanov showing a dress</p>	<p>I wore this to a club a couple of times. It is gay propaganda.</p>
<p>VO Miloslav Chemodanov (Clip0001: 42:58)</p> <p>Chemodanov and his boyfriend packing stuff. Bottles (close up) Arkasha with clothes hangers Chemodanov closing a suitcase</p>	<p>If before there were some hopes that your efforts could change something, when the war began, it became obvious that they are moving to a completely new level. It would not only be worse in the relations with Ukraine, but also with LGBT. They would tighten the screws on all fronts.</p>
<p>NAT sound A cat walking The cat (close up)</p>	
<p>VO/SOT Miloslav Chemodanov (Clip0001: 41:00)</p> <p>(Clip0001: 41:18)</p> <p>Chemodanov and his boyfriend packing stuff</p>	<p>It's like a war for traditional values</p> <p>We see now how, alongside military operations and failures on the front, more stringent anti-LGBT laws are being adopted and discussed in Russia.</p> <p>It's not a coincidence. It's a cleansing.</p>
<p>TEXT CARD: December 2022, Russia makes its gay propaganda law more severe.</p> <p>Source: Russian Federation, Events of 2022. <i>Human Right Watch</i>. Published online: https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/russian-federation</p>	

<p>VO Professor Robert English (Clip0003: 08:15)</p> <p>(Clip0003: 23:20)</p> <p>Rainbow accessories (closeup) A street view in NYC A mannequin in a wrestling suit (closeup) A street view Spread love, not bullets poster (closeup) A street view Make America gay again flag (closeup) A street view</p>	<p>It's no longer just protecting minors or protecting schoolchildren, but it's explicitly against promoting nontraditional sexual practices in public.</p> <p>So this new law becomes part of that. It's pulled into this war as a central necessary battle that must be fought and won. Otherwise, what is left of Russia, they say, some kind of strange, degraded copy of a western country that's lost its soul. That's how Putin, that's how his regime is justifying the new law.</p>
<p>NAT sound</p> <p>NYC subway in the station</p>	
<p>VO Miloslav Chemodanov (Clip0001: 01:00:57)</p> <p>Subway doors closing (closeup) Chemodanov riding a subway Train going on a bridge Shooting from the train to the river Chemodanov riding a subway Chemodanov riding a subway (closeup)</p>	<p>That same morning we bought flights and began our journey. We didn't have U.S. visas so we went to Mexico to seek asylum at the border. According to the law you can hand your passport to an officer at passport control and ask for asylum. They do not have the right to expel you, instead they are obliged to study your case.</p>
<p>NAT sound</p> <p>Outside an attorney's office.</p>	
<p>VO Miloslav Chemodanov (Clip0001: 01:05:12)</p> <p>Chemodanov entering the attorney's office Chemodanov entering a room with the attorney. A stand for mobile phone (closeup)</p>	<p>But it is not simple, because Trump dug up the so-called Title 42. It's a document from the 40s that allows officers to turn people away before the border, because they can be carriers of dangerous diseases.</p>

<p>TEXT CARD:</p> <p>Between 2020 and 2023, authorities used Title 42 to expel over two and a half million migrants at the Mexican border.</p> <p>Source: Nationwide Encounters. <i>U.S. Custom and Border Protection</i>. Last Modified 14 April 2023: https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/nationwide-encounters</p>	
<p>VO Miloslav Chemodanov (Clip0001: 01:06:00)</p> <p>(Clip0001: 01:06:32)</p> <p>(Clip0001: 01:06:50)</p> <p>Chemodanov setting the mobile stand A Russian doll Chemodanov and attorney chatting Law books (closeup) The attorney listening The attorney making notes (closeup) Chemodanov and attorney chatting The mobile in the stand</p>	<p>Officers check documents - like a driver's license, a green card, or a visa - at the border. And they can turn you back before you get to the passport control booth to ask for asylum.</p> <p>With a car, it's simpler, because you can wave random documents through the glass. There can be a sleepy officer, not paying attention to what's in your hands, or just letting you go.</p> <p>It happens very rarely, but it happens. That's what desperate people try to do.</p>
<p>NAT sound with MARINA SHEPELSKY, law attorney (Clip185)</p> <p>law books (closeup)</p>	<p>Why did you decide to run away on February 24? Why did you decide that now there will be a war on Western values?</p> <p>- Because there were already all the prerequisites for this.</p>
<p>VO/SOT Miloslav Chemodanov (Clip0001: 01:08:42)</p> <p>(Clip0001: 01:10:19)</p> <p>Chemodanov leaving the attorney's office The sign of the office (closeup) Street view</p>	<p>As a result, we made our way to this very booth for the tenth time. We spent three weeks in Tijuana. We had six different hotels. We collected all our things and drove to the border but they turned us around time and again.</p> <p>It was really scary. Without antidepressants I would have lost my mind.</p>

<p>NAT sound Sunset on NY river</p> <p>Music from Storyblocks: https://www.storyblocks.com/audio/stock/all-my-sadness-disappears-346809048.html</p>	
<p>VO Miloslav Chemodanov (Clip0001: 01:42:32)</p>	<p>I'm concerned about the mental health of gays in Russia now. Even before, we were living under constant threat in a very traumatic society. Now, with the war and the militarization there is a new round of fighting against LGBT, and departures. It is very difficult.</p>
<p>SOT Miloslav Chemodanov (Clip0001: 01:19:00)</p>	<p>I have seen Russia many times in my life and I think I can live without seeing it again</p>
<p>NAT sound Golden Gate SF</p>	
<p>TEXT CARD:</p> <p>Aleksandr Ermoshkin arrived in the U.S. to seek asylum in 2015.</p>	
<p>VO/SOT Aleksandr Ermoshkin (ERMOSHKIN3: 40:07)</p> <p>Golden Gate SF (closeup)</p>	<p>I remember the first time when we went with friends to a club in San Francisco. Imagine a gay club! Fun!</p>
<p>VO/SOT Aleksandr Ermoshkin (ERMOSHKIN3: 41:03)</p> <p>(ERMOSHKIN3: 41:40)</p> <p>(ERMOSHKIN3: 43:52)</p> <p>On Castro street (SF's queer neighborhood) Castro theater (closeup) Love over Hate sign (closeup) Street view People walking on the street LGBTQ+ flags</p>	<p>I arrived and realized that it wasn't my thing. I don't understand what's happening: loud music and people, and everything felt just strange to me. I remember how I couldn't be there, I needed to get on the sofa. I just lay face to the wall at least for a day.</p> <p>That was my first depression.</p> <p>Depressions seem to be returning, but they are more seasonal. It's still not easy.</p>

<p>VO Aleksandr Ermoshkin (ERMOSHKIN3: 57:02)</p> <p>(ERMOSHKIN3: 57:45)</p> <p>SF Bridge on sunset Sunset over SF</p> <p>Music from Storyblocks: https://www.storyblocks.com/audio/stock/gentle-documentary-piano-roi_-slywkcaio0x7.html</p>	<p>In Russia I had practically no personal life. I only had a public life. Here I have a lot going on in my personal life.</p> <p>It is like a different universe.</p>
<p>NAT sound</p> <p>Sunset over SF Ermoshkin exiting his house</p>	
<p>VO Aleksandr Ermoshkin (ERMOSHKIN3: 01:07:00)</p> <p>A tree (closeup) Ermoshkin walking in the park Leaves (closeup)</p>	<p>When I left Russia I said I'm going away for ten years. It's coming up on ten years since I arrived, but I have not seen any positive change in Russia.</p>
<p>NAT sound (Clip0008)</p> <p>Ermoshkin holding a leaf Ermoshkin holding a leaf (closeup) A tree (closeup) Ermoshkin walking towards a tree Leaves</p>	<p>Where has the sun gone? To the Russian Far East. I always think about it when I see the sunset.</p>
<p>VO/SOT Aleksandr Ermoshkin (ERMOSHKIN3: 01:07:55)</p> <p>Ermoshkin next to a tree (closeup) Ermoshkin next to a tree Ermoshkin walking (closeup on feet) Ermoshkin walking to the sunset</p>	<p>I want to return, but I have already fallen with California. At least I have plans to buy a house here, and that tells a lot.</p>

<p>TEXT CARD:</p> <p>As of April 2023, Aleksandr Ermoshkin and Miloslav Chemodanov were both in the process of applying for asylum.</p>	
<p>TEXT CARD:</p> <p>In March 2022, the U.S. suspended the deportations to Russia.</p> <p>The future of the deportations to Russia is unclear.</p> <p>Sources:</p> <p>Montoya-Galvez, C. (2022) U.S. suspends deportations to Ukraine, Russia and 7 other European countries, citing "humanitarian crisis". CBS News. Published online 03 March 2022: https://www.cbsnews.com/news/ukraine-russia-ice-deportations-suspended/</p> <p>Bekiempis, V. (2023) Biden administration quietly resumes deportations to Russia. <i>The Guardian</i>. Published online 18 March 2023: https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/mar/18/biden-administration-russia-deportations</p>	